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EDITORIAL

Preparing Well: Encouragements for Aspiring Pastors

— Brian J. Tabb —

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Abstract: In every generation and in every place, there is a need to identify, equip, and encourage new leaders for Christ's church. Where are these future pastors and teachers now? What sort of preparation and encouragement do they require to move from aspiration to faithful action? This column reflects on the need for leadership development in the church and offers encouragement for aspiring ministers.

"The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." (1 Tim 3:1)

In every generation and in every place, there is a need to raise up new leaders for Christ's church. The average evangelical pastor today is about 54 years old,[1] which means that for every congregation with a pastor in his 30s or 40s there's another with a pastor in his 60s or 70s. As a seminary president, I regularly hear from pastors nearing retirement and search committees who are looking for their next lead pastors and associates. While I happily recommend my institution's newly minted MDivs, I also recognize the tremendous need to identify, encourage, and equip the next generation of faithful ministers. While seminaries surely have an important part to play in preparing future leaders, so do pastors and their congregations. This column reflects on the need for raising up future pastors and offers encouragement for aspiring ministers to prepare well.

1. Encouragement for Pastors and Churches

Pastors face pressing deadlines and various demands—on a normal week (if there is such a thing), there's a sermon to prepare, hurting members to counsel, a staff meeting to lead, and a constant stream of emails and messages to answer. But wise pastors should also prioritize identifying and investing in younger men in the congregation who could be the next small group leaders and Sunday school teachers, church planters and pastors. Mark Dever counsels, "If you want to raise up leaders, you need to be on permanent lookout for more leaders.… Pastors should be profoundly opportunistic about

[1] "Pastors' Average Age Stable Over Past Decade," *Lifeway Research*, 30 August 2023, https://research.lifeway.com/2023/08/30/pastors-average-age-stable-over-past-decade/.

raising up more pastors. And the whole church should have a deep confidence that the Lord wants new leaders raised up."[2]

Marshall and Payne challenge pastors to be "talent scouts" for "people in leadership, communication and management; people with vision, energy, intelligence and entrepreneurial spirit; people who are good with people, and who can understand and articulate ideas persuasively. If these are also godly servants of Christ who long for his kingdom, then why not headhunt them for a life of 'recognised gospel ministry'?"[3] This is helpful counsel so long as the priority and emphasis is on a person's character and commitment to Christ more than their charismatic personality and professional accomplishments. The Bible includes various examples of God clearly calling people to extraordinary service who lacked impressive resumes and obvious talent. Amos recounts, "I was no prophet, nor a prophet's son, but I was a herdsman and a dresser of sycamore figs. But the Lord took me from following the flock, and the Lord said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel'" (Amos 7:14–15). Peter and John "were uneducated, common men" who "had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). And while Paul was educated by one of the Pharisees' leading lights, he identified himself as the worst of sinners and "the least of the apostles" because he formerly persecuted Jesus and his church (Acts 22:3; 1 Tim 1:12–15; 1 Cor 15:9). As M'Cheyne once said, "It is not great talents God blesses so much as great likeness to Jesus. A holy minister is an awful weapon in the hand of God."[4]

Where is the pipeline of faithful men who are preparing (or who need to be equipped) to preach God's word and pastor God's people? They may already be enrolled in MDiv programs and engaged in church internships. They may also be in the chemistry lab of a local university, driving a school bus, selling insurance, building websites, or working in some other field. But chances are, the next generation of pastors is showing up early on Sundays to set up chairs, rehearse with the worship team, greet visitors, and prepare Bible lessons for fifth graders. They are rising early to study the Scriptures and seek the Lord in prayer. They are growing as godly husbands and devoted dads. And they have meaty books of theology on their bedside tables and good sermons in their podcast feed. Wise pastors should recognize these men in their congregations and "seek to replicate their own lives and ministries with those they train."[5]

In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul charges young Timothy to "entrust" what he has received "to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." The word "entrust" (παρατίθημι) means to commit something for safekeeping or transmission to others. This deposit is "the gospel of the glory of the happy God," the precious news that Jesus Christ fulfilled all of God's promises through his righteous life, his saving death, and his victorious resurrection. Paul commits this gospel deposit to Timothy for safekeeping, exhorting him to "follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me" and "guard the good deposit entrusted to you" (2 Tim 1:13–14). The apostle also reflects a long-term vision for the church as he instructs his protégé to pass on this good deposit "to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also."

[2] Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 96.

[3] Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift that Changes Everything* (Kingsford: Matthias Media, 2009), 140.

[4] Iain H. Murray, "Robert Murray M'Cheyne," *Banner of Truth,* 12 November 2001, https://tinyurl.com/3dead-npc.

[5] Phil A. Newton, *The Mentoring Church: How Pastors and Congregations Cultivate Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2017), 23.

2. Encouragement for Aspiring Pastors

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer forcefully stated, "The matter of the proper education of preachers of the gospel is worthy of our ultimate commitment."[6] My previous column, "A Case for the Seminary Today," argued that such principled pastoral preparation involves entrusting sound doctrine, expounding God's book, and exemplifying a holy life.[7]

Here I offer counsel for those aspiring to the pastoral office or considering seminary training by answering three questions: What does it mean to *aspire* to pastoral ministry? What *attitudes* should mark men who aspire to eldership? And what *activities* will prepare them well for faithful and fruitful service to Christ's church?

2.1 Aspiration or Calling to Pastor

Many faithful Christians have wondered and sometimes wrestled with whether they have been *called* to ministry. According to John Newton, a proper call to pastoral ministry includes first "a warm and earnest desire to be employed in this service." In addition to this desire and readiness to preach "there must in due season appear some competent sufficiency as to gifts, knowledge, and utterance." Finally, the aspiring pastor needs "a correspondent opening in Providence, by a gradual train of circumstances pointing out the means, the time, the place—of actually entering upon the work of the ministry."[8] The Prince of Preachers famously counseled his students that "the first sign of the heavenly calling is *an intense, all-absorbing desire for the work*.... There must be an irresistible, overwhelming craving and raging thirst for telling others what God has done to our own souls." He reiterates the advice of another pastor: "Do not enter the ministry *if you can help it*."[9] Later, Spurgeon clarifies that he does *not* mean that men should pursue pastoral ministry only after trying and failing in other vocational pursuits, adding, "Jesus Christ deserves the best men to preach his cross."[10]

While there is much wisdom in these reflections, there is also some potential for confusion or presumption when discerning a "call" to ministry. Seminarians may question whether they really have an "intense, all-absorbing desire" for pastoral ministry when they get a C on their seminary Greek exam, and young pastors may be ready to update their resume on a Monday morning after receiving some criticism of their preaching. Bobby Jamieson also warns that the claim "I'm called to pastor" presumes that one is *qualified* for the office of elder and sufficiently *gifted* in ministry to receive a salary from a church.[11] He recommends speaking in terms of *aspiration* rather than *calling* to the pastoral office for biblical and practical reasons.[12]

The apostle Paul sets forth qualifications for those who oversee God's household in 1 Timothy 3:1–7. The list begins, perhaps surprisingly, with a holy *aspiration* for the work: "The saying is trustworthy:

[6] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Conspiracy and Imprisonment, 1940–1945*, ed. Mark S. Brocker, trans. Lisa E. Dahill, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works 16 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 265.

[7] Brian J. Tabb, "A Case for the Seminary Today," *Themelios* 50.1 (2025): 1–7.

[8] John Newton, "Letter I" (7 March 1765), *The Works of John Newton*, 6 vols., reprint ed. (Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1985), 2:44–46.

[9] C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), 26.

[10] Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students*, 38.

[11] Bobby Jamieson, *The Path to Being a Pastor: A Guide for the Aspiring*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 21–22.

[12] Jamieson, *The Path to Being a Pastor*, 28–30.

If anyone *aspires* to the office of overseer, he *desires* a noble task." David Mathis writes, "Christ grabs his pastors by the heart; he doesn't twist them by the arm."[13] In other words, you *want* to be a pastor. You *aspire* to meet the qualifications and carry out the duties of this worthy office. It's not enough to have a natural aptitude for learning ancient languages or an interest in theology and church history (though that can be helpful). Is there a holy *desire* in your heart to be an approved workman who wields God's Word well for the benefit of others? Pastoral ministry is hard, and seminary training is (or should be) rigorous, so it is wise to seek counsel from others and search your heart before jumping in.

2.2 Attitudes of Aspiring Pastors

It is truly a worthy aim to desire investing your life in service of Christ's bride. "It is a noble thing to aspire to congregational leadership.… Yet, aspiration alone is not a sufficient ground for appointment."[14] Before considering activities to prepare well for pastoring, let's focus on three attitudes that should mark would-be pastors in increasing measure.

First, *integrity*. The lists of elder qualifications in Titus 1 and 1 Timothy 3 begin with the summary terms "above reproach" (ἀνεπίλημπτον) and "blameless" (ἀνέγκλητος), which focus on one's personal integrity and proven character. The standard is not perfection but a godly pattern of life, a track record of faithfulness at home and in public. A man's management of his household is proving ground for oversight in God's household. His personal habits, lifestyle, and his relationships with others should likewise be respectable and above reproach. This includes, very specifically, fleeing youthful lusts and sexual sin, including pornography.[15] My school's admissions committee has sadly declined admission to many seminary applicants because of pornography addiction, and I have seen the devastating consequences for the family and the church when a pastor is ensnared in some form of sexual sin. So follow Paul's charge to "train yourself for godliness" (1 Tim 4:7).

Second, *humility*. Humility is in short supply in our world as many, like Diotrephes of old, like to put themselves first (3 John 9). Rather than being "puffed up with conceit" because of an inflated sense of your own gifts or the responsibilities and privileges of ministry, the aspiring pastor would do well to heed Isaiah 66:2: "But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word." The first step on the road to humility is not self-examination but contemplating our holy God.[16] Moses was the model of meekness because he had seen the glory of the Lord and regularly spoke with the living God face to face (Exod 33:11; Num 12:3). The path of humility is marked by prayerful dependence on God, regular confession of sin, and patient endurance of suffering.

Third, *teachability*. Overseers in the church must be "able to teach" (διδακτικός), "rightly handling the word of truth" (1 Tim 3:2; 2 Tim 2:15). But the best teachers are themselves able to be taught. Mature Christians are hungry for truth and recognize that God's word is sweeter than honey and more precious than gold. They are easily edified by the teaching of others; they are life-long learners who press on to know the Lord.

[13] David Mathis, *Workers for Your Joy: The Call of Christ on Christian Leaders* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 46–47.

[14] Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 190.

[15] One helpful resource to consult is Joe Rigney, *More Than a Battle: How to Experience Victory, Freedom, and Healing from Lust* (Nashville: B&H, 2021).

[16] Similarly David Mathis, *Humbled: Welcoming the Uncomfortable Work of God* (Nashville: B&H, 2021), 11.

2.3 Activities to Prepare Well for Pastoring

So if you have a willingness and a desire to serve, if you are growing in holiness, humility, and hunger for God's word, how can you prepare well for pastoral ministry? The most foundational activity for an aspiring pastor is what happens in your private study, not in the classroom or the pulpit: seeking the Lord through Bible meditation and prayer. John Newton once advised a divinity student that "the chief means for attaining wisdom, and suitable gifts for the ministry, are the holy Scriptures, and prayer. The one is the fountain of living water, the other the bucket with which we are to draw."[17] The great evangelist George Mueller recorded similar reflections in his journal,

> I saw more clearly than ever that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord.… Now, I saw that the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the word of God, and to meditation on it, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reproved, instructed; and that thus, by means of the word of God, whilst meditating on it, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord.[18]

Additionally, those aspiring to pastor should be active in the local church. Commit to meaningful membership at a doctrinally faithful church where you live. Attend Sunday services, prayer meetings, Bible studies, and church meals. Look for ways to serve, or ask a pastor where there is a need. You might start out setting up chairs, making coffee, or taking out the trash. You might be asked to serve in children's Sunday school or work in the sound booth or play bass with the worship team. In whatever assignment, serve with gladness and diligence "by the strength that God supplies" for his glory and the good of the church (1 Pet 4:11). When you have the opportunity, accept any invitations to teach—a children's Sunday School lesson, an outreach Bible study, a devotional at your small group, an exhortation at summer camp, a sermon at a small country church. Faithfully prepare, open God's Word with clarity and conviction, and invite feedback from trusted friends or mentors. I am so thankful that one of my pastors encouraged me to serve in children's ministry as I was beginning seminary studies, and over two decades later I still love teaching the Bible to fourth and fifth graders in my church.

Seek out mature mentors and look for ways to mentor younger believers in the church. This is what Paul has in mind when he writes, "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us" (Phil 3:17). Don Carson says, "We are called to emulate worthy Christian leaders. We are called to be worthy Christian leaders whom others will emulate. God help us."[19] So ask an elder if he's willing to meet with you regularly before work. Ask a pastor if you can join him for a hospital visit or a new member interview. Ask to observe an elder meeting or a service review meeting. These intentional relationships and hands-on experiences will challenge and encourage you and provide invaluable insights on the work of pastors.

When I was preparing for ministry, I asked a godly lay elder to mentor me. He agreed to meet me weekly at Starbucks before catching his 6:10 am train into Chicago. Those early morning meetings encouraged me in my relationship with Christ, prepared me to be a godly husband and father, and showed me what the elder qualifications look like in practice.

[17] John Newton, "Letter II: Extract of a Letter to a Student in Divinity," *The Works of John Newton* 1:141.

[18] "Get My Soul into a Happy State: George Mueller's Great Lesson," *Desiring God*, 1 October 2024, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/get-my-soul-into-a-happy-state.

[19] D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 95.

And finally, pursue the most rigorous seminary training available. If at all possible, enroll in a residential master of divinity program where you will enjoy face-to-face classes and rich relationships with your teachers and classmates.[20] Look for an excellent faculty who are not only accomplished scholars but also inspiring teachers and committed churchmen. Find a seminary that is committed to sound doctrine as defined by a detailed confession of faith that the leadership and teachers gladly embrace. And even though it seems daunting, take as many courses as possible in biblical Greek and Hebrew. One or two semesters will not suffice, because you want to spend decades exegeting the Scriptures in their original languages to expound their meaning for your congregation with clarity and conviction.

I am eager for humble, holy, hungry men to desire to teach God's word and shepherd Christ's church. I encourage you to prepare well for this "noble task."

[20] I have written elsewhere about the value of in-person seminary training, including "For the Education of Ministers," *World Opinions*, 2 May 2025, https://wng.org/opinions/for-the-education-of-ministers-1744774406.

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STRANGE TIMES

The Three R's

— Daniel Strange —

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The '3 R's': Reading. Writing. Arithmetic. Some say the grouping of these disciplines can be first found in Augustine's *Confessions*.[1] However, the phrase itself appears to have been coined at an after-dinner toast to the Board of Education in 1807 given by the English banker, alderman and Lord Mayor of London, Sir William Curtis. Known for his eccentric and absurd 'bulls',[2] there is one listed as 'The Three R's: "reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic"'.[3] Whatever its provenance, many of us are familiar with these three R's of education; and for pastors and theological students, reading and writing are essential—*foundational*—'tools of the trade'. This makes a few somewhat eclectic remarks on them apposite for a *Themelios* editorial. (But what about the maths I hear you say? Don't worry, we'll get to that in due course.)

1. On Reading

When it comes to reading on reading, there is no end.

I will just comment on one source. A. G. Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods* is often called a 'great book' or a 'classic'.[4] I think I'd heard of it but embarrassingly have only begun to engage with it in recent years. More fool me. I wish I'd read it thirty years ago. I was prompted to read it by Prof. Craig Bartholomew, who was leading some training on how to be a PhD supervisor. He began by saying that this little red book (no, not that one!) is the first book off his shelf to give to his doctoral candidates. For 'athletes of the mind',[5] Bartholomew believes it is the best book for the spirituality of academic work.[6]

[1] 'But why did I so much hate the Greek, which I studied as a boy? I do not yet fully know. For the Latin I loved; not what my first masters, but what the so-called grammarians taught me. For those first lessons, reading, writing and arithmetic [*legere et scribere et numerare discitur*], I thought as great a burden and penalty as any Greek.' Augustine, *Confessions* 13.1.

[2] An archaic term for a piece of nonsense.

[3] 'Reminiscences No. X', in *The Mirror of Literature, Amusement, and Instruction*, vol. 5 (January 29, 1825), https://tinyurl.com/jn2v93mf.

[4] A. G. Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life: Its Spirit, Conditions, Methods*, trans. Mary Ryan (1920; repr., Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 1987).

[5] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 4.

[6] Craig Bartholomew, 'Athletes of the Mind: The Intellectual Life *Coram Deo*', *Nuances in Public Theology* 2.2 (2021): 2–6.

(Note: weirdly enough, as I typed this last line, I was messaged, completely out of the blue, by a former student and now PhD candidate who wrote, 'Every line of *The Intellectual Life* is gold. Thanks for the recommendation. It's like he's looking into my soul and telling me what I need to hear, even though I didn't know I needed to hear it.' This interaction is somewhat ironic, as I know Sertillanges would certainly *not* have approved of me looking at a phone message while writing … *mea culpa*.)

Now, let's be honest, an Evangelical in 2025 coming to the work of Sertillanges has to do some critical thinking and contextualisation. First, the book was written in 1920 for the pre-digital age. Sertillanges was a French Dominican monk writing to those wishing to be Catholic intellectuals. In other words, it's very Catholic and shaped by *fin de siècle* French intellectual discussions: 'St. Thomas of Aquin' is ubiquitous. It also comes across as rather austere and idealistic in places. However, Sertillanges himself gives us permission to interact and read it critically when he argues that 'it is often necessary in the course of one's reading to filter what one reads so as to purify it.'[7] When we do this, there are, I suggest, great riches to be found. Although it is 'big C' Catholic, may feel somewhat intimidating and has goals that might seem unobtainable, it is in practice 'small c' catholic and has something to say to all kinds of people in differing life situations:

> You, young man who understand this language and to whom the heroes of the mind seem mysteriously to beckon, but who fear the lack of necessary means, listen to me. Have you two hours a day? Can you undertake to keep them jealously, to use them ardently, and then, being of those who have authority in the Kingdom of God, can you drink the chalice of which these pages would wish to make you savor the exquisite and bitter taste? If so, have confidence. Nay, rest in quiet certainty.… Many have declared that that two hours I postulate suffice for an intellectual career. Learn to make use of that limited time; plunge every day of your life into the spring which quenches and yet renews your thirst.[8]

Chapter 7 of *The Intellectual Life* is entitled 'Preparation for Work' and is devoted to reading, the 'universal means of learning'.[9] He starts by asking us to 'read little', meaning that we read intelligently with a plan and purpose in view, like a housekeeper who goes to the market with her menus already planned. Intelligent reading is contrasted with passionate reading which dulls the mind: 'this uncontrolled delight is an escape from self.'[10] He sums this section up thus: 'Never read when you can reflect; read only, except in moments of recreation, what concerns the purpose you are pursuing; and read little, so as not to eat up your interior silence.'[11]

We are to choose books and choose *in* books. Concerning the question of how we choose books, he suggests that we don't do this alone but instead 'have devoted and expert advisers. Go straight to the fountainhead to satisfy your thirst. Associate only with first-rate thinkers.… Read only those books in which the leading ideas are expressed first hand.'[12] Concerning the latter, our relationship to a book

[7] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 151.
[8] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 11. It's not lost on me that speaking exclusively to men is not inclusive!
[9] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 145.
[10] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 147.
[11] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 149.
[12] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 151.

is not that of a judge but rather a 'brother in truth', approaching it without pride whilst remaining responsible, 'hold back sufficiently to keep possession of your own soul and if need be defend it.'[13]

After giving this advice on how to choose what to read and what our posture should be when reading, Sertillanges goes on to distinguish between four types of reading: for formation, for information, for inspiration, for relaxation. Let's just unpack briefly what he says about each of these.

The first, *reading for formation*, is what he calls 'fundamental reading'. Here we sit at the feet of three or four of our intellectual fathers and mothers, treating them as trusted guides and giving them our respect, confidence, and faith. In this reading we are to be relatively docile and passive, 'no one is infallible, but the pupil is much less so than the master.'[14] The second type, *reading for information*, is what he calls 'accidental reading'. Here we read for a particular task. Rather than being like a pupil to a teacher, we read as a master to a servant, consulting and not studying. Instead of diving into this type of reading and being swept along in the current, it is as though we are standing on the side of a river, taking water from it and, as we do so, preserving our freedom of movement, confirming our own ideas, and following our own plan. The third type is *reading for inspiration*, or what he calls 'stimulating or edifying reading'. This reading is like medicine for the soul and to be pursued with earnestness: 'It is an immense resource in movements of intellectual or spiritual depression to have in this way your favourite authors, your inspiring pages; to keep them at hand, always ready to invigorate you.'[15] Finally, there is *reading for relaxation*, and what Sertillanges calls 'recreative reading'. This reading demands liberty, yet its purpose is not mere distraction or meaningless diversion (which can be a temptation) but precisely the opposite: these are servants to refresh and reinvigorate us as we return to the task at hand.

Sertillanges has more to say on reading in this chapter, and it is certainly worth your time, whether you read him for formation, information, inspiration, or relaxation.[16]

2. On 'Riting

When it comes to writing on writing, there is, once again, no end.

Again, I just want to mention one source of a much more recent vintage. Brad East is Professor of Theology at Abilene Christian University in West Texas. His 2023 reflection, 'Four Tiers of Christian / Theological Publishing', is an insightful reflection being referenced and used by many contemporary writers, editors, and publishers. For pastors and teachers who assign and recommend authors to students and church members, it is very helpful.[17] It's also a pretty sobering read and provides much food for thought. East's focus is not on the quality of writing but on issues of genre and audience, and he summarises these into four 'Tiers': Universal, Popular, Highbrow, and Scholarly. As we did with Sertillanges, let's look at each of these briefly.

[13] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 151.

[14] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 153.

[15] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 155.

[16] For your information, the later sections of this chapter are sub-titled, 'Contact with Writers of Genius', 'Reconciling instead of Accenting Opposites', 'Assimilating and Living by One's Reading'.

[17] Brad East, 'Four Tiers of Christian/Theological Publishing', 24 August 2023, https://www.bradeast.org/blog/tiers-theological-publishing. East focuses on Christian writing that are '(a) books, (b) composed in English, (c) published by Christian authors (d) about Christian matters, and (e) meant for a readership in North America.'

Tier 1in this taxonomy is '*Universal*'. It refers to books which are for anyone and everyone and found everywhere and, in East's estimation account, for 90% of Christian publishing sales.[18] In this tier, 'the content is usually geared toward *uplift*: the reader is meant to be inspired toward hope, courage, and personal change in his or her daily life. These books often contain practical advice. They're about how to love God and follow Jesus in the most ordinary life possible—in other words, the life available to 99% of us.'[19]

Tier 2 is '*Popular'* and aimed at 'college-educated Christians who enjoy reading to learn more about the faith.'[20] Once again they are accessible, often shorter and well written. Even when they are explaining theological concepts, they are completely free of theological jargon and use high-school level language.

Tier 3 is '*Highbrow*'[21]: 'This level includes authors who write for a wide audience of non-specialists who are otherwise interested in serious intellectual and academic Christian thought. Think of books in this group as a way of making the insights of academic scholarship available to folks who either are not academics or, being academics, do not belong to the field in question.'[22]

Finally, Tier 4 is '*Scholarly*'.[23] These are 'academics producing professional scholarship for their peers. They have an audience of one: people like them.' Over time, this writing can be disseminated down through the other tiers, but writing in this tier is not about book sales.

Having described these tiers, East now makes a number of astute observations only some of which I can mention here.[24] In his experience, when academics say they are writing at a 'popular' level they actually mean Tier 3. In other words, academic training 'seriously warps our ability to tell what kind of writing ordinary people—my term for non-academics—find accessible and engaging.' Jargon, complex syntax, lack of simple declarative statements, and presumption of background knowledge are the killers here. For an academic like East, who aspires to write accessibly, Tier 2 is his sweet spot but presents the most challenges:

> Why? Because I had to let go of all my crutches and shortcuts. I had to say in ten words what I'm used to saying in fifty. To say in four sentences what I want twelve for. To make a claim without a footnote defending me from attacks on all sides. To say something about God, Scripture, or the gospel that a Christian of any age who's never read another theological book in her life could understand without a problem. It's hard, y'all! And for that reason it's really nice to work with editors who get it.… Get yourself an editor, or at least honest friends, who will tell you exactly how unreadable your "popular" writing is. Then get revising.[25]

[18] East includes in this category writers such as Beth Moore, Max Lucado, T. D. Jakes, and Joel Osteen.

[19] East, 'Four Tiers of Christian / Theological Publishing'.

[20] His examples include: Tim Keller, John Mark Comer, Dane Ortlund, Tara Isabella Burton, John Piper.

[21] His examples include: Beth Felker Jones, Wendell Berry, Alan Jacobs, N. T. Wright, Miroslav Volf. (Keller, Piper, and N. T. Wright appear in both Tier 2 and Tier 3.)

[22] I think *Themelios* aims to be in the center of the Tier 3 category.

[23] His examples include: Kathryn Tanner, Justo L. González, David Bentley Hart, James Cone, Paul Griffiths, John Webster, Cornel West.

[24] I should point people to East's final reflection, which is a longer and admittedly 'delicate' one concerning 'the legitimate concern to create space, in scholarship as well as classroom syllabi', for women Christian writers and *living* Christian writers of color.

[25] East has written a subsequent reflection on 'Writing for a Tier 2 Audience', 29 September 2023, https://www.bradeast.org/blog/writing-for-a-tier-2-audience.

Commenting on East's original piece, Samuel James asks a question relevant to *Themelios* readers: 'What moral obligation (if any) does a Christian writer have to try and move their writing from the higher tiers to the lower tiers?'[26] James offers a number of related principles for considering this. Christian writing that bears witness to the truth of the gospel has weighty implications for those writers. It means that biblical 'teachers' have a heightened responsibility to handle it well. Teachers have a responsibility to teach and preach the word clearly so it can be understood by the church.[27] However, such communication is not straightforward given the diversity of the church and our mission to connect with people outside of the church, those who are not biblically literate or familiar with ecclesial language. How do we provide both milk *and* meat? This diversity means taking care to identify our audience and acknowledging that we can never address 'everyone':

> Speaking to everyone at the same time is both impossible and, I would argue, an implicit denial of the deeply contextual nature of being a Christian. There are no Platonic forms of Christians.… A recognition of God's design in turning local embodied humans into his sons and daughters means recognising that we are addressing some people at any given time, and not others.[28]

That said, a Christian writer who wants to communicate something that they presumably believe to be important does have an obligation to make this 'as accessible as reasonably possible for the identified audience'. Furthermore, do we not mishandle the Word if we claim our writing is essential for all Christians but then write in such a way that only a few can understand it? Finally, and in conclusion, James notes two errors in North American publishing culture. The first is to make what you deem to be 'essential' ideas 'needlessly complex, verbose, lengthy and challenging', even if you have the ability to be accessible but don't because you want to look good. The second assumes that 'evangelical Christian readers cannot understand a concept unless it is forced into a cliché or turned into a bad metaphor. Implicit in this error is the idea that the church should always be a translator rather than a teacher. As you can probably guess, it's both.'

3. On 'Rithmetic

So, there is much to reflect on about Readin' and 'Ritin'. What about the 'Rithmetic, I hear (some of) you say? Well, to be honest I hadn't come across much …

… until I came across the gift that is the *Course Workload Estimator* researched and designed by Betsy Barre, Allen Brown, and Justin Esarey! Originally conceived by Barre at the *Center for Teaching Excellence* at Rice University,[29] a newer Enhanced 2.0 version is now housed at the *Center for the Advancement of Teaching* at Wake Forest University,[30] where Barre is now Assistant Provost and

[26] Samuel James, 'What Do Christian Writers Owe Their Readers? Interacting with Brad East on the 4 Tiers of Christian Writing', *Digital Liturgies*, 2 October 2023, https://www.digitalliturgies.net/p/what-do-christian-writers-owe-their.

[27] I have made this point in a previous editorial, 'Selfish Preachers', *Themelios* 49.3 (2024): 531–35.

[28] James, 'What Do Christian Writers Owe Their Readers?'

[29] 'Course Workload Estimator', *Rice University*, https://cte.rice.edu/resources/workload-estimator.

[30] 'Workload Estimator 2.0', *Wake Forest University*, https://cat.wfu.edu/resources/workload2/. The Enhanced Workload Estimator 2.0 has additional estimations for video/podcasts, discussion posts, exams, other assignments, and class meetings which all give both independent and contact total workload estimates.

Executive Director.[31] Barre et al. attempt to answer an under-researched but very common question that all teachers and learners face: what amount of time does it take for average college students to complete common academic tasks? To arrive at these estimates (and they stress they are *estimates*[32]) Barre began with what was known from the literature 'and then filled in the gaps by making a few key assumptions.'[33] Most has been written on reading rates. The estimator assumes that reading rates depend on three factors, each with a variation of three levels: (1) *page density* (450, 600, and 750 words); (2) *text difficulty* (no new concepts, some new concepts, and many new concepts); and (3) *reading* purpose (survey, understand, and engage).

Now here's a health warning: once you start playing around with this thing you will be surprised and probably horrified. In my case it was the horror of over-estimating what I think students can read, mark, and inwardly digest. For example, a 450 page paperback I wanted students to survey—with no new concepts—amounts to about 500 wpm. This equates to the average student being able to read 67 pages per hour. Now compare that to a student who I want to understand some new concepts from a 600 page monograph. This amounts to 18 pages per hour. And finally, a student who I ask to engage with *many* new concepts in a 750 page textbook. This amounts to 5 pages per hour. Now take a breath (and pause in *homage* to Sertillanges) and consider the hundreds and even thousands of pages we are mandated to assign to modules and seminars, often without any instructions as to how we want the students to interact with the texts we assign. I can only speak for myself, but over the years, I think I have been overly-optimistic and even unfair to my students. Rather tellingly, Barre says in an interview about the Estimator that the difference between an 'expert' reader and a 'student' reader is that an expert reader will slow down when they don't know a word.[34] This means that we probably have many student readers who read swathes of text without ever slowing down and may have little understanding (but carry on regardless)—and, of course, other students who never make any progress because they are always slowing down.

When it comes to writing rates, Barre admits we know much less. Here estimations take into account page density: 250 words double spaced or 500 words single spaced; text genre (reflection/narrative, argument, or research); and drafting and revision (no drafting, minimal drafting, or extensive drafting). Again, let's compare writing 500 words single spaced. A Reflection/Narrative with no drafting is estimated at 1 hour 30 minutes per page. Argument with minimal drafting equates to 4 hours per page. Research with extensive drafting amounts to 10 hours per page. All in all a very helpful tool to enhance both teaching and learning. It may sound awkward coming from an Englishman, but we owe it to our students to 'do the math.'

The 3 R's: Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic. Let's work at using these foundational tools for learning and teaching with ever more skill and precision, without forgetting that they are tools, serving a greater, indeed the greatest, end. We'll let Sertillanges send us out, I hope, both inspired and resolved:

> Do you want to have a humble share in perpetuating wisdom among men, in gathering up the inheritance of the ages, in formulating the rules of the mind for the present time,

[31] Interestingly her academic areas of interest are moral philosophy, political theory, and the history of religion.

[32] And with the facility to manually adjust settings if you disagree with these estimates.

[33] 'Course Workload Estimator'. .

[34] 'How to Use a Course Workload Estimator' *Teaching in Higher Ed Podcast*, Episode 375, August 2021, https://teachinginhighered.com/podcast/how-to-use-a-course-workload-estimator/.

> in discovering facts and causes, in turning men's wandering eyes towards first causes and their hearts towards supreme ends, in reviving if necessary some dying flame, in organizing the propaganda of truth and goodness? That is the lot reserved for you. It is surely worth a little extra sacrifice; it is worth steadily pursuing with jealous passion.[35]

[35] Sertillanges, *The Intellectual Life*, 11.

Themelios 50.3 (2025): 445–57

The Unchained Word: A Public Theology of Free Speech

— Andrew T. Walker & Kristen Waggoner —

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Abstract: This essay develops a distinctly Christian theology of free speech in response to mounting threats of censorship across Western societies. We argue that freedom of speech is not merely a political concession of liberal democracies but arises from humanity's nature as rational agents made in the image of God, created to be seekers and speakers of truth. Speech is both a constitutive feature of human selfhood and an instrumental good through which individuals and communities pursue moral goods and the common good. After examining the biblical purposes of speech, the limits of civil government's authority, and the moral logic of human rights, we contend that a Christian account of free speech requires a dual affirmation: positively, that individuals have a duty to speak truthfully; and negatively, that governments bear a heavy burden of proof before restricting expression. Free speech thus serves as a shield against government overreach, a safeguard of human fallibility, and a vital condition for truth-seeking in a pluralistic world. While not absolute, free speech must enjoy a presumption of liberty if societies are to order themselves toward truth and resist the perennial temptation of tyranny.

The post-war liberal order was premised on the idea of the open society: that Western democracies would demonstrate their superiority by their commitment to openness, transparency, and the free exchange of information and ideas. Yet at present, we are witnessing a great closing of the very societies that once prided themselves on the free exchange of ideas. These regimes, which still see themselves as opposing totalitarianism and censorship, are falling prey to soft and hard forms of both.

New examples seem to emerge almost weekly. To name but a few:

- In the United Kingdom, pro-life advocates have been arrested and convicted of violating "buffer zone" laws for offering a consensual conversation, holding a sign, or silently praying outside abortion facilities.
- In Ireland, a teacher was arrested for refusing to use a student's opposite-sex pronouns. In the United States, public schools punished several teachers for using biologically correct

pronouns and forbade a 12-year-old student from wearing a t-shirt that said, "There are only two genders."

- In Finland, a longtime member of parliament, Paivi Räsänen, is on trial at the nation's highest court for merely expressing her Christian beliefs on marriage.
- According to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, the US government actively pressured social media companies to censor dissenting voices during the COVID-19 pandemic. Months later, Zuckerberg acknowledged that Meta's content moderators had been guilty of letting political biases influence their content moderation decisions.
- In August 2024, ahead of a planned X interview with then-candidate Donald Trump, the European Commission publicly warned Elon Musk to police content on X that "may incite violence, hate and racism." The Commission vowed to "make full use of our toolbox" under the Digital Services Act, a 2022 EU law that enables online censorship.
- In the media, it is not uncommon to see mainstream outlets like *The New York Times* or *Washington Post* run headlines questioning robust free speech protections—for example, "The First Amendment Is Out of Control" and "Why America Needs a Hate Speech Law."

Famed writer Walter Kirn, by no means a conservative, observed in September 2024,

> The last few days have seen an almost symphonic surge of attacks on our most fundamental rights, by officials, newspapers, politicians, celebrities, & academics. It's not rhetoric anymore, it's an organized massing of institutional forces prior to big moves which seem imminent.[1]

Americans often take for granted the value of free speech, viewing it not just as beneficial but essential to our political order. Meanwhile, a growing number of right-leaning thinkers are calling for increased restrictions on speech. But what does Christianity have to say on the matter? Do Christians, as Christians, have anything distinct to contribute to the conversation on free speech?

While Christian reflection on free speech as such has been admittedly thin, we contend that Christianity offers a rich foundation for grounding a modern concept of free speech.

The purpose of this essay is to explore the connections between Christian theology and free speech.[2] *Our thesis is that human beings, as rational agents made in God's image, are made to be truth-seekers and truth-speakers. These dual realities of man's nature and purpose ground a Christian theology of free speech. Obtaining the truth by receiving it through speech acts—and supremely, the speech act of God as revealed in Scripture—compels the Christian to speak faithfully in accordance with the truth.* We will also consider the effects of sin on society and its institutions, and how ideas like human fallibility and eschatology should caution us against granting the government too much authority over the boundaries of speech.

Our central task is to develop a "theology of free speech."[3] We do so by exploring (1) the relationship between the image of God and the purpose of freedom; (2) the purpose of human speech in Scripture; (3) the purpose of civil government and the jurisdictions it can claim rightful authority over; and (4)

[1] Walter Kirn (@walterkirn), X, 1 September 2024, https://x.com/walterkirn/status/1830375671279038572.

[2] The authors wish to stress that their aim is not to demonstrate the compatibility of free speech with Christian theology but to begin with Christian theology and to mine its vast resources for how Scripture, theology, and tradition bear on the subject of free speech.

[3] Free speech is ultimately cabined and intelligible in view of religious freedom. But religious freedom is not the subject of this paper; rather, speech itself is the focus. The attentive reader should, however, never stray too far

a Christian understanding of human rights. Once those areas are explored, a fifth section ties these reflections together to posit a theology of free speech. In this final section, we give sustained attention to defining free speech theologically in the context of human rights while considering the proper scope of free speech in the law.

1. Freedom and the Image of God

A central tenet of Christian theology is that human beings are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26–28). The Christian tradition has offered a rich and profound evaluation of the ontological worth of human beings. While theologians have differed on the precise meaning and scope of the *imago Dei*, there is broad agreement that bearing God's image involves at least three essential aspects: rationality, self-constitution (or agency), and freedom.

The first element, rationality, refers to the notion that God has made human beings unique in our cognitive powers. Unlike the rest of creation, we can deliberate and make choices. In addition, we can speak—that is, create meaning with the sounds of our mouths or the writing of our hands to reflect the deliberative judgments of human cognition. In this, we reflect our Creator, whose words correspond to his mind, will, and action.[4] Indeed, we cannot overlook the significance of God's creative agency in what the Bible refers to as the "Word," identified as Jesus Christ in John 1. The "Word" and "words" share a coterminous origin in creative and purposeful agency.

The second element, self-constitution, refers to human beings' capacity to live authentically according to the settled judgments of their conscience. How humans communicate is an emanation of our own willful choice to order our lives how we see fit. Humans exercise a God-like agency in their ability to create and name (Gen 1:3; 2:19). Indeed, central to the task of exercising dominion is "vice-regency"—a call to rule and reign on behalf of God—and this includes speaking as a constitutive element of being human.

A third element of bearing God's image is the freedom we possess. God grants us ontological freedom, ensuring that we are not automatons. We also possess moral freedom in how we choose to order our lives. Though constrained by the effects of sin, rationality and self-constitution require a corresponding catalyst for their fulfillment: freedom. Yet freedom, in the Christian view, is not merely a lack of constraint upon human decision-making. Rather, certain human choices will align with God's created order and purpose, and freedom exists precisely for this end.

Without freedom, a rational agent's self-constituting dynamism is extinguished, reducing him to a kind of robotic slavery or servitude. In Christian nomenclature, freedom is not merely the ability to pursue whatever desires well up inside us; freedom is constrained by the reality of order and purpose. Freedom as *wants* versus *oughts* is the decisive factor in understanding Christian liberty. Christian liberty, properly understood, is not synonymous with using one's agency however one wishes. Instead, true liberty is the ability for the moral agent to order his or her actions in conformity with God's will for

in their mind from associating speech with freedom of conscience and its broader conceptual category, namely, religious liberty.

[4] This paper focuses on spoken and written speech. However, the law should and does protect forms of human communication that are neither spoken nor written, including, but not limited to, abstract painting, drawing, sculpture, cake design, and flower arrangement. These acts of human creativity express and communicate messages and are due the highest standard of legal protection from government interference.

creation. Speech is an essential property, corollary, and outworking of our rationality and agency that seeks outward propulsion in bringing order to God's world.

2. The Biblical Purpose of Speech

Scripture is rich with moral instruction on the purpose of our speech. In Matthew 15, Jesus says that the character of our speech reflects the state of our relationship with God (Matt 15:17–19). It has a life-giving and preservative element (Col 4:6). Speech is assumed to be both the platform and method of interaction and coordination between individuals and entire societies. It is no exaggeration to say that the drama of Scripture unfolds primarily through speech acts.

Scripture implies that speech is creative, arising from a conscientious declaration of settled judgments (Gen 1:3, 2:19; Rom 14:5). Speech is likened to sustenance that nourishes (Prov 10:21). We are called to honor God in every area of life, including with our speech (1 Cor 10:31). Speech is a form of intellectual interrogation and expression through which to contend for Christianity's truthfulness (Col 2:8). Speech is critical to preaching and evangelism (Matt 28:19–20; Acts 17; 22–26; Eph 6:19–20). Indeed, if there is a *meta-telos* of free speech, we might locate it in 1 Thess 2:15–16. These verses highlight both the imperative of proclaiming the gospel and the severe consequences of losing free speech. Those who censor the gospel are described as "hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved."

In general, Scripture depicts speech as a powerful tool capable of bringing about great harm or great good (Jas 3:2–12). Words are likened to spears, swords, and arrows in their ability to affect emotional states (Ps 57:4; 64:3; Jer 9:8). There are also biblical injunctions on speech. Scripture forbids falsehood, obscenity, slander, and corrupting talk (Exod 20:7, 16; Lev 19:11; Eph 4:15, 25, 29; Col 3:8–9; Titus 3:2). Above all, we are called to "speak the truth in love" (Eph 4:15).

This paper focuses on "speech" through verbal and written utterances. Speech by itself is an instrumental good that serves the pursuit of moral goods. The value of any particular utterance will vary based on its content, but the human faculty to speak such utterances always reflects the creative agency of God as inscribed on the human being as made in God's image. Moral goods are self-evident and valuable ends of human action, reflecting human excellence by fulfilling our nature as human beings. Among these goods are life, play, practical reasonableness, knowledge, family, friendship, beauty, and religion.[5]

While the freedom to speak is an inherent, pre-political right, government recognizes this right by enshrining freedom of speech as a "negative" political and legal right, thus limiting state coercion in matters of expression. This negative right is intrinsically good because it safeguards the faculty of truth-seeking.

Fundamentally, utterances and expressions are not ends in themselves. A general "freedom of speech," taken out of its political context and understood as an absolute theological right to say whatever one wishes, is alien to Scripture. In Scripture, truth and virtue condition our speech toward the highest virtue of love (Eph 4:15). Yet "freedom of speech," as a negative political right, protects the faculty of truth-seeking. It is therefore a necessary means of securing an intrinsic human good.

[5] John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 85–89.

3. Speech and the Purpose of Government

Scripture and the overwhelming testimony of church history affirm a positive role for government within God's created order. For example, Romans 13:1–7 and 1 Peter 2:13–17 establish the government's authority, mandate, and competency to maintain order and administer justice in political communities. Government exists to punish evil and protect the creational context in which the dominion mandate can unfold. Since Scripture does not grant government unlimited authority, it follows that its authority is inherently limited.

Throughout history, Christians have debated the precise *spheres* in which government is competent to exercise its authority.[6] A helpful way to determine the proper scope of government authority and judgment is to consider three interrelated questions:[7]

tIn Christian theology, the government's authority to judge has traditionally been limited to external arenas and physical interactions, given the difficulty of discerning what lies within a person's heart and mind. Theologians have found in Matthew 22:15–22 a foundation for a broad distinction between man's interior life (private and subject to God) and exterior life (public and subject to governing authorities).[8] Admittedly, it is not always clear to which category speech belongs. While speech originates in the heart, it impinges on public order, which is doubtlessly within the purview of the government's interest. Compounding the difficulty of speech's exact domain, speech is a non-physical action that springs from an internal forum. Yet determining when and how speech-related issues may warrant government intervention is a highly volatile question, and Scripture gives no definitive guidance on the matter. On the surface, Scripture does not appear to grant the government explicit authority over speech. This absence is significant, especially given how deeply speech is tied to the interior life of the person. To place speech under government control, then, would be to cede tremendous authority over a fundamental liberty that implicates the soul.[9]

[6] For example, Christian theology is nearly unanimous in affirming government's authority to arrest persons who commit physical violence. It is not clear whether government should deliver healthcare.

[7] Richard Mouw, "Carl Henry Was Right," *Christianity Today*, 27 January 2010, http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2010/january/25.30.html.

[8] See, for example, John Calvin's commentary on Matthew 22, as well as Thomas Aquinas's statement that "human beings can judge only sensibly perceptible external acts, not hidden internal movements," *Summa Theologica* I–II.91.4. This distinction is reflected in international law, which distinguishes between the *forum internum* ("internal dimension of a person's religious or belief related conviction"), which receives absolute protection from state regulation, and *forum externum* ("worship, observance, practice and teaching"), which may be subject to limited and narrowly defined state regulation. See Article 18 of the *International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights*, United Nations General Assembly, 16 December 1966, https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights.

[9] The authors wish to clearly stipulate not that government is foreclosed from judging arenas on which speech touches or implicates, but only that Scripture places a high hurdle for government to clear for it to justifiably intrude into speech-related domains. For example: It is reasonable to conclude that it would not be permissible from Scripture for government to prohibit a citizen from saying scandalous things in the privacy of their own home. Once the scandalous language becomes public, though, a series of diagnostic questions would then arise as to whether the speech leads to threatening outcomes that invite the government's intervention to some prudential degree.

4. Christianity and Human Rights

"Rights" discourse always risks running afoul of the Bible's language, since "rights-talk" is ladened with modern concepts of individualism that are foreign to Scripture. Indeed, rights-talk is now so pervasive in the West that it is used to justify both goods and evils alike.[10] Still, Christian thought has reflected deeply on the relationship between Christian theology and natural political rights.[11] A consensus has emerged that "rights," as we know them, originate from moral duties that God commands of human subjects. Carl F. H. Henry states, "The Bible has a doctrine of divinely imposed duties; what moderns call human rights are the contingent flipside of those duties."[12] The Roman Catholic Church's 1963 *Pacem in Terris* also grounds rights in duties:

> The natural rights of which We have so far been speaking are inextricably bound up with as many duties, all applying to one and the same person. These rights and duties derive their origin, their sustenance, and their indestructibility from the natural law, which in conferring the one imposes the other.[13]

The encyclical explicitly cites free speech as a right: "The right to be free to seek out the truth [involves] the duty to devote oneself to an ever deeper and wider search for it."[14]

The moral logic of rights is as follows: A duty—for example, to speak truthfully—requires the ability to exercise the moral power of speech. If human beings are morally obligated to use their speech rightly—and if, in this case, that obligation includes seeking God with all one's heart, soul, strength, mind, and, by implication, with one's speech—then the ability to fulfill that duty is intrinsically tied to human dignity and rational capacity as created beings. It is in that sense that a "right" to speech can be said to correspond to the fulfillment of that obligation.

To fulfill these duties, people must have a protective horizon (of law) offering reasonable assurance that they can indeed speak. According to J. Daryl Charles, "rights and duties are reciprocal in nature. If I have a fundamental right to something, others have the duty to guard and protect that right."[15] That is where legal codification becomes essential. Human rights are "pre-legal moral entitlements" that accord with the nature God has given us as his image-bearers.[16]

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[10] On the obsession and abuse of rights talk, see Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008).

[11] See, for example, the influence of Christian thought on the Founders of the United States or on the drafting of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). In particular, see Jacques Maritain, *Christianity and Democracy, and The Rights of Man and Natural Law*, trans. Doris C. Anson (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1996).

[12] Carl F. H. Henry, *Twilight of a Great Civilization: The Drift Toward Neo-Paganism* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 148.

[13] John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* [Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty], The Holy See, 11 April 1963, sec. 28, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html.

[14] John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris*, sec. 29.

[15] J. Daryl Charles, *Natural Law and Religious Freedom: The Role of Moral First Things in Grounding and Protecting the First Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2018), 162.

[16] P. A. Marshall, "Human Rights," in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, ed. David J. Atkinson et al. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), 747.

We could deduce an intrinsic and natural right to free speech from the third and ninth commandments: If there is a negative duty not to misuse one's speech, there is also a positive duty—which would require a right—to seek to use one's speech correctly.

In sum, rights exist to protect the ability of individuals to fulfill moral duties consistent with a God-given human nature and God-defined human flourishing. Rights do not protect moral evil for its own sake. Giving space for humans to err in the pursuit of their moral duties should not be construed as suggesting that "error has rights," but rather that error may roam without coercion up to certain limits. Determining where those "limits" are is admittedly fact-specific and context-dependent. Those who err have a degree of immunity in proportion to the nature of their offending speech.

5. A Theology of Free Speech

In developing a theology of free speech, the first principle to note is that Scripture does not explicitly posit a theology of free speech. We should be cautious not to conform the Bible anachronistically to our modern notions of liberal democracy. The Bible posits a duty to speak truthfully as rational agents made in God's image. This duty is the foundation for developing a theology of free speech.

A Christian perspective on speech honors human beings' rational, relational, affective, psychosocial, and creative agency. Speech is an instrumental good in that speech helps realize human goods through acts of communication and coordination that require liberty for their attainment and expression.

Speech emanates from the wellspring of settled judgment through the individual conscience's grasp of truth. Speech is the instrumental good that allows human beings and political communities to search for the truth, utter the truth, correct falsehood, and refine truth with greater precision. The common good thus requires that members of society enjoy a right to use their speech in ways that allow them to order themselves, and the whole of society, toward truth.

The Lord commands us to use our speech to honor him and his creatures. The duty to fulfill this calling must be seen as a principle of justice tied to human nature's fulfillment. As such, it must come with some natural right of justice enacted through legal protection. Protecting one's moral faculties to pursue moral goods by law ensures human beings and communities reach their proper end, which is consistent with the idea of the common good in Christian social teaching. From this perspective, free speech is a matter of political justice, since speech allows us as created beings and citizens to obtain the goods necessary for our flourishing.

The government, therefore, has a rightful but limited role to play in protecting and facilitating the realization of truth through speech. This is why the Founding Fathers enshrined freedom of speech in the First Amendment and why the United Nations enshrined "freedom of opinion and expression" in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

5.1. The Purpose of Free Speech

A concern for freedom is not a grant for licentiousness. The possibility of a theology of free speech requires an even deeper question: What is freedom for? According to Christian thought, freedom is the ability to exercise one's total agency (will, conduct, and speech) toward a due and proper end. Free speech entails elements of moral freedom and political freedom. Paul Helm confirms this idea: "Two freedom-themes are given great prominence in the New Testament: the fact that Christ makes

his people free, and the fact that freedom is not lawlessness but results in conformity to moral law."[17] Christians are to use their speech in joyful conformity to God's moral law. To advocate a theology of free speech entails both a positive and negative dimension: (1) A positive freedom to do one's duty to speak truthfully, and (2) a negative liberty to be unmolested by arbitrary government infringement.

5.2. The Scope and Limits of Free Speech

Like any political right, free speech is not absolute. Limits on speech will be set against the explicit or implicit moral goods of a society. As Stanley Fish writes, "Speech, in short, is never a value in and of itself but is always produced within the precincts of some assumed conception of the good."[18] Defining the nature of those goods—and working to procure and secure them—is the essence of good and effective government.

As a general master principle, when speech violates the creation-order principles of the dominion mandate of Genesis 1–2 or natural law,[19] the government's interest at least heightens, and questions of restrictions become valid considerations. In general, when human goods are harmed (and defining "goods" and "harm" is critically important both in ethics and law), restrictions on speech become plausible, though not actionable without sufficient discernment. To give perhaps the clearest example: When speech rises to the level of imminent incitement to physical violence, virtually all recognize that government should be able to restrict that speech.

In general, speech enters a "danger zone" when people abandon the pursuit and expression of truth, allowing prurient (valueless), scandalous, malicious, and inciteful (physically animating) speech to predominate.[20] Traditional "time, place, and manner" restrictions on speech are inherently prudential and require legislative discernment.[21] The discerning of speech's value must be viewed in light of Scripture's command for the government to "punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good" (1 Pet 2:14). The ability to distinguish between the two is a function of natural law (Rom 2:14–15).

In today's context, one of the principal threats to free speech stems from governments adopting a misguided notion of harm, one that includes social stigma or feelings of offense as harms that government must remedy. This notion of harm, referred to in legal circles as "dignitary harm," is premised not on intrinsic dignity as an inherent reality of the *imago Dei* but on dignity as a social status conferred by the community. Hence, the goal of Europe's "hate speech" laws is to enforce social recognition of group identities, including self-constructed identities.[22]

[17] Paul Helm, "Freedom," in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, ed. David J. Atkinson et al. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1995), 394.

[18] Stanley Fish, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech and It's a Good Thing, Too* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 104.

[19] Space prevents further discussion on creation order and natural law. The authors have in view here threats to physical livelihood, family life, and public order. Those categories are admittedly broad, which reinforces the moral point of our analysis that, at some prudentially-decided point, restrictions will necessarily enter into discussion.

[20] It should be noted for reasons of audience and scope that the categories within purview are categories derived from American law.

[21] Thomas Aquinas argues in *Summa Theologica* I–II q.96 a.2 that law is best left to the domains that violate only the physical or material safety of other persons (violence) and the community (stealing).

[22] In the United States, certain courts have penalized creative professionals who conscientiously object to same-sex marriage and gender transition efforts for having caused "dignitary harm." Notably, such rulings fail to see that such penalties create their own stigma and offense to those who are penalized. When the law requires

Most recently, transgender-identifying individuals have claimed to suffer "dignitary harm" when others refuse to use their desired pronouns. This way of conceiving of harm has led to free-speech violations around the globe. In Mexico, for instance, when former congressman and presidential candidate Gabriel Quadri posted tweets on Twitter/X using biologically accurate pronouns for a transgender-identifying member of Congress, he was convicted of committing "gender-based political violence."[23]

Cases like these highlight the danger of expanding the definition of "harm" to justify government restrictions on expression. Protecting individuals from offense or disagreement cannot come at the cost of eroding the basic freedom to speak truthfully. Regulation of speech, when permissible, should always involve both government restraint and prudence. Not all sinful speech should invite government regulation. A Christian account of free speech must therefore account for forms of speech that are inherently valueless but may not be illegal. This raises the question: May sinful speech be restricted by anyone else besides the government?

At this point, the concept of "sphere sovereignty" is helpful in assessing the various spheres of authority that may restrict speech in ways appropriate to their moral jurisdictions. Because the family, church, and state have different moral purposes and legitimate realms of authority by God's design, these different authorities can restrict or punish speech in ways appropriate to their jurisdictions. Parents, for instance, will monitor the speech of their children with far greater authority than the government. A church may restrict the teaching of heresy or moral error in its midst. A ministry may hire employees based on a Christian code of conduct that includes speech provisions—and it may dismiss employees for not upholding such conduct.

But what of the government sphere? When sinful or erroneous speech escapes the rightful jurisdiction of other restraining authorities, such as the family or church, does government have any rightful restraining role?

The answer is that given the goods attendant to God's purpose for human speech, speech should enjoy the presumption of liberty. This will ensure human beings and political communities are not arbitrarily restricted from realizing the good.

To be sure, human beings are not *morally* entitled to intentionally speak falsehood—and when such speech creates direct and quantifiable harm to others (as in the case of false advertising, libel, etc.), governments may (and do) restrict it. But intentionally lying is different from earnestly stating what one thinks to be true but is not. For questions of government evaluation, the criterion should not be motive-seeking but criteria based on quantifiable and outward consequences on the common good.

We can adduce that human beings have a primary *theological* moral duty to use one's speech to honor God and advance truth. They have a secondary *political and legal* right to allow falsehood—not for falsehood's own sake, but because some error is inevitable as people misperceive and misunderstand in the search for truth. We allow false speech as a political concession in service of a deeper moral and theological right—the right to seek and speak the truth.[24]

"dignity as recognition," it protects some viewpoints and punishes others, twisting dignity into a mechanism for injustice.

[23] "International Body to Decide Case of Mexican Politician Censored for Gender Comments on 'X,'" *ADF International*, 16 May 2025, https://tinyurl.com/33kneewx

[24] The Roman Catholic Church arrives at the same conclusion. According to *Libertas*, "God Himself in His providence, though infinitely good and powerful, permits evil to exist in the world, partly that greater good may not be impeded, and partly that greater evil may not ensue.… But if, in such circumstances, for the sake of the

The scope of free speech protections has no precise biblical formula. It is, therefore, an issue of "adiaphora" and subject to prudential determinations. As previously mentioned, it is within the purview of the natural law for non-Christians to recognizably discern good speech from evil speech (1 Pet 2:14). There could be, in other words, a natural law reason to restrict the sorts of speech that breach the political community's self-understanding of its purpose. Prudential determinations on how best to do this ensure that even Christians of goodwill are apt to disagree on how best to secure the moral goods of their society. George Will argues to the same effect that good government rests on the ability of its decision-makers (and the country's citizens) to make critical distinctions, especially on matters of speech. He states,

> All government takes place on a slippery slope. The most important four words in politics are "up to a point." Are we in favor of free speech? Of course–up to a point.[25]

We should also consider the nature of words when deliberating about restricting speech. Because words are immaterial by nature, determining appropriate penalties for harmful speech is inherently more complex. Penology around theft is clear and concrete: If you steal someone's property, you will be incarcerated. Yet there are no clear, objective ways to measure offensiveness in speech that would automatically warrant a certain punishment. Given that censorship tends to expand once introduced, any penalties that restrict speech should be held to a significantly higher threshold.

Evil speech may condemn someone to perdition. Whether it should send them to jail or be restricted (and to what degree) is a question that Scripture does not directly address. Where the limits are drawn in what is deemed genuinely harmful for the common good is the very sum and substance of wise government. Legislators need deliberative space to make clear distinctions in speech that threaten the common good since there are no clear, biblically defined lines.

A political community may determine there are prudentially good reasons to permit undesirable speech. Such reasons may include the concern that allowing speech restrictions would empower bureaucrats to become invasive busybodies.[26] Americans are uniquely wary of government's tendency to abuse its power if it can make decisions about what speech is permitted. As a result, the First Amendment protects speech that is morally reprehensible.[27] As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes once said, "The proudest boast of our free speech jurisprudence is that we protect the freedom 'to express the thought that we hate.'"[28]

Another strong prudential reason for permitting some erroneous speech is that it ultimately serves the cause of truth-seeking. As a general rule, protecting the rights of others to express their settled judgments peacefully allows for the exchange of ideas, the interrogation of falsehood, the refinement of

common good (and this is the only legitimate reason), human law may or even should tolerate evil, it may not and should not approve or desire evil for its own sake; for evil of itself, being a privation of good, is opposed to the common welfare which every legislator is bound to desire and defend to the best of his ability." Leo XIII, *Libertas* [Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on the Nature of Human Liberty], The Holy See, 20 June 1888, sec. 33, https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_20061888_libertas.html.

[25] George F. Will, *Statecraft as Soulcraft: What Government Does* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 93.

[26] This has become increasingly common in the United Kingdom, where an entire segment of the police force now spends its time scouring social media for speech deemed offensive (Sky News [@SkyNews], Twitter/X, 7 August 2024, https://x.com/SkyNews/status/1821178852397477984).

[27] For example, in *National Socialist Party of America v. Skokie* (1977), the US Supreme Court upheld free-speech rights of participants in a Nazi parade through a town of Holocaust survivors.

[28] Id. at 246 (quoting United States v. Schwimmer, 279 U.S. 644, 655 [1929] [Holmes, J., dissenting]).

truth, and a firmer grasp of one's own convictions. Policing speech risks reducing our access to better understanding. In a fallen world, people will disagree about what is true. Free speech is a pragmatic necessity that is comparable to common grace. It helps de-escalate political tensions without immediate recourse to violence. For this reason, in the interest of reducing the prospect of arbitrary infringement, it is prudent to have an open society in which speech has a vast space to make its case and err for the sake of the greater good of truth.

As described earlier, almost all Western countries have adopted some form of "hate speech" laws that punish "dignitary harm." The United States has thus far resisted this move. Such laws are dangerous because: (1) it is virtually impossible to create objective standards that distinguish between "hate speech" and legitimate speech; (2) governments are not competent to draw these lines; and (3) if they attempt to do so, there is a high probability that government actors will play favorites.[29] Examples from Europe show increasingly expansive "hate speech" prohibitions.[30] Indeed, efforts to combat the spread of "hate" or "misinformation" through censorship create far greater problems than they solve. The best response to bad speech is almost always more speech. Limits on free speech should be based on measurable harms that can be objectively defined.

5.3. Free Speech as a Shield from Government Coercion

Scripture prescribes a positive yet limited role for the state. And history confirms that the temptation of governments is toward tyranny, not atrophy.

Freedom of speech, then, should be understood as part of a broader constitutional design aimed at limiting government overreach and preserving individual liberty.[31] Limiting the power of government regarding speech does not mean legislators should be agnostic about truth or indifferent to valueless speech. It stems from a simple recognition, borne out through history, that it is dangerous to make government the arbiter of truth and error in one's speech. Even still, this can be taken to absurd conclusions: Would we want the government to be unable to say that incitement to imminent violence is not within its purview to police all because we take a posture that the government must be totally agnostic to the truth? Of course not. Moral minimums of the natural law must guide the government's deliberations. In other words, we need the government to know the truth in certain circumstances.

5.4. Eschatology and Pluralism

We now come to a significant point in this paper's argument that deals with the storyline of redemptive history.

As we await the final consummation of history, we live in an interim period where Scripture assumes that assaults on truth will occur. In Revelation 22:11, Christ says, "Let the evildoer still do evil … and the righteous still do right." Similarly, in the parable of the weeds (Matt 13:24–30), he says we should let both good and evil continue, "lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them."

[29] Michael Farris and Paul Coleman, "First Principles on Human Rights: Freedom of Speech," The Heritage Foundation, 17 July 2020, https://www.heritage.org/civil-rights/report/first-principles-human-rights-freedom-speech.

[30] See Jonathan Turley in US Congress, House, Committee on Energy and Commerce, Subcommittee on Communications and Technology, *Fanning the Flames: Disinformation and Extremism in the Media*, 117th Cong., 1st sess., 2021, 24–47.

[31] Wayne Grudem, *Politics according to the Bible: A Comprehensive Resource for Understanding Modern Political Issues in Light of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 484–85.

Instead, we should "let both grow together until the harvest." Nowhere in the New Testament is there a command for either Christians or the government to police, punish, or expel *all* degrees of error and wrongdoing in this age. Of course, evil and error do not have unchecked reign. Free speech is a principle that finds expression in legal and political safeguards. We lament the misuse of speech and summon its adherents to repentance, but such abuses are to be expected in this fallen age.

Moreover, Christians have strong biblical reasons to believe free speech will lead to truth. God promises that the proclamation of his Word will achieve its goals (Isa 55:11) and that his sheep, who hear his voice, "will listen" (John 10:27; Acts 28:28). This promise gives the proclamation of the gospel an advantage in the marketplace of ideas. Indeed, God never makes any similar promise to bless government-backed coercion. This divine promise to bless even a needle of truth in a haystack of error offers a powerful rebuttal to those who say government must put its thumb on the scale by censoring lies. Free speech may not guarantee a consensus in favor of the truth, but God providentially uses truthful speech to accomplish his purposes.

Isaiah Berlin captures one of the most significant challenges and opportunities for liberal democracy, since its foundation assumes "the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual conflict with one another."[32] Rather than something to be overcome, this essay expects deeply incommensurable goals of society to remain in conflict until the consummation of history. Such conflict, then, is a tension alongside our insistence of conforming to God's natural law and awakens Christianity to the need for its own social space to persuade, preach, and proclaim. The liberty we want for ourselves is the same liberty we must impart to others.

In the end, everyone's future hinges on speech. The truth of Christ's kingship will finally be established when God judges every word we have spoken: "for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matt 12:37). Free speech is not absolute in the eternal state.

5.5. Epistemic Considerations

There is also an argument from fallibility for a theology of free speech. We should note here that fallibility is not a posture of skepticism. It is a posture of humility. Because human beings err and misperceive, it seems wise to create atmospheres of open debate and dialogue where interrogating one's ideas can refine one's grasp of the truth. As humans (and human institutions) are fallible, epistemic humility should call us to recognize the possibility of error and the need for others to challenge entrenched viewpoints.[33] At the same time, the Christian posture toward speech is not agnosticism about truth (as with the secular version of free speech) but openness to truth's refinement. Theologian Wayne Grudem expresses a similar insight in this regard:

> To protect the ability of individuals to think and decide issues for themselves … the Bible places a high value on respecting human freedom of choice. But protecting people's ability to think and decide issues freely for themselves means that they must be able to have access to arguments on all sides of an issue. This can only happen if freedom of

[32] Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), 171.

[33] One can imagine, for example, in the antebellum South, the need for Christians who were in favor of slave-holding due to certain biblical passages to be exposed to arguments and counter-interpretations of Scripture that advocate for human freedom.

> speech is permitted in a society and if all the different viewpoints on an issue are able to be freely expressed.[34]

Even if we are dogmatically certain of our convictions, it is beneficial for an arena of public exchange to exist to challenge others and, in turn, to refine the community's grasp of truth with greater clarity.

6. Conclusion

First, positively framed, truth-seeking and truth-speaking are moral and human goods related to human personality and human knowledge. In other words, speech is fundamental to our self-constitution. Truth-seeking and truth-speaking require freedom and, therefore, political rights for each natural right to be secured. The exercises of citizenship and capacities of human nature that free speech reflects are valuable not simply because we are citizens in a democracy. They are valuable because we are rational creatures made in the image of God, who is himself the ground for truth.

Second, negatively framed, all humans and human institutions are fallible and need to be reminded of their fallibility for fear of unchecked infallibility turning into authoritarianism and totalitarianism. In this sinful age, eradicating all vestiges of erroneous viewpoints is impossible and inconsistent with God's purpose for human government. However, applying that basic principle will be prudential and based on context and fact-specific realities. The burden should not be on citizens to prove their right to free speech. The burden should be on the government to prove under what conditions it could ever censor or compel speech.

Is this a blank check for all viewpoints to roam free under the rubric of absolute freedom? Of course not. Lines must be drawn everywhere, and the task of political theology aims to help us correctly draw those lines in concert with Scripture's storyline amid the inescapable reality of fallen social orders. There is no idyllic political community without moral strife. A utopian political theology that believes it can remediate all error according to its infallibility has its own problem: It paves over the very real and ineradicable effects of the fall in Genesis 3.

Political theology must accommodate the reality of Genesis 3's understanding of moral fracture within this age but do so without falling into moral relativism, while at the same time working to lessen the devastation of Genesis 3 without slipping into the equal and opposite error of tyranny. There is no perfect formula to do so, but moral relativism toward what constitutes the good and concentrated authoritarianism has a history of collateral damage, proving just how unworkable both are. To be sure, liberal democracy cannot prevent every evil and requires a moral system *underneath* it to make it work. No earthly system can or will ignore the ruins of Genesis 3, but free speech under our constitutional regime still affords mechanisms for the rule of law, the proper balance of freedom and restraint, and due process that are all preferable to inquisitions that censor, compel, banish, imprison, and kill.

[34] Grudem, *Politics according to the Bible*, 485.

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Leviticus 8–10 as Narrative

— John Goldingay —

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Abstract: Leviticus 8–10 is the one substantial narrative in Leviticus. The paper considers six contemporary approaches to the interpretation of narrative—setting, point of view, plot, theme, characters, and language—in order to see how they illumine the interpretation of these chapters. It thus further aims to see how their application to these chapters might suggest that these contemporary methods may be useful in biblical interpretation, not least in connection with narratives that might not seem to engage modern Western readers.[1]

The aim of this paper is twofold. It relates to Leviticus and it relates to narrative. The all-encompassing work that extends from Genesis to Kings is broadly narrative, but Leviticus stands out in being mostly direct instruction rather than narrative.[2] The bulk of Leviticus comprises manuals about how to offer sacrifice, about how to avoid taboo and live a proper life, and about the identity of Israel and how to maintain and express that identity. It instructs Moses, Aaron, Aaron's sons, and the Israelites in general about how to worship and how to live. However, its manuals do have some narrative features, notably in their picture of the offering of sacrifice and the process for dealing with taboo,[3] and the book incorporates two actual narratives. One of these pieces of 'narrative theology',[4] in Leviticus 24, is a brief account of an offense by a person of mixed race. It is a surprising, riveting, intriguing, disturbing, and mystifying short story. The other, the one substantial narrative in Leviticus, is the account in Leviticus 8–10 of Moses's inauguration of worship in the wilderness sanctuary. It tells the story of the inauguration of the priesthood, of Aaron's offering the first sacrifices, and of his sons offering outside incense, with the subsequent need in the chapter to consider several other questions. It, too, thus has its surprising, riveting, intriguing, disturbing, and mystifying aspects. But in any case, it deserves an approach appropriate to a narrative as opposed (for instance) to an approach appropriate to chapters of instruction or wise sayings or psalms. Now, over the past century a number of categories have featured in Western reflection on narrative interpretation, and as it happens, these categories do aid an

[1] This article is an expanded version of a paper presented to a meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship Old Testament Study Group at High Leigh, Hoddesdon, UK in July 2024. It was dedicated to the memory of Professor Alan Millard, long time senior member of the Tyndale Fellowship, who died a few weeks before the meeting.

[2] Though Andreas Ruwe notes that there is a sense in which it is a narrative text as a whole: see 'The Structure of the Book of Leviticus in the Narrative Outline of the Priestly Sinai Story (Exod 19:1–Num 10:10)', in *The Book of Leviticus: Composition and Reception*, ed. Rolf Rendtorff and Robert A. Kugler, VTSup 93 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 55–78.

[3] See Liane M. Feldman, *The Story of Sacrifice: Ritual and Narrative in the Priestly Source*, FAT 141 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020).

[4] Thomas Hieke, *Levitikus*, HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2014), 2:959.

understanding of Leviticus 8–10. The categories are: setting, point of view, plot, theme, character, and language. So the aim of this paper is to suggest ways of interpreting this atypical segment of Leviticus, and to illustrate ways in which approaches to narrative interpretation work.

1. Setting

Chapters 8–10 stand out from their context in Leviticus, as a narrative, and Leviticus in itself would more or less survive as a work if this narrative were not present. Yet Leviticus 8–10 has a vital place in its context in the Torah and the Former Prophets. In Exodus, Yahweh commissioned the building of a sanctuary and the inauguration of its priesthood, and Moses fulfilled the first commission. Leviticus 8–10 records the fulfilment of the second commission. Without it, the narrative in the book of Numbers could not proceed, and in some sense this narrative depends on the material in Exodus 29 and 40. Either the same narrator here continues the earlier account, or here another narrator adapts the work of an earlier one.[5]

One question about narrative illustrated by Leviticus 8–10, then, is how far a narrative is self-contained. The little story in chapter 24 is quite self-contained, though it links interestingly with three other stories in Numbers about something happening that seems not to be covered by directives that Moses has already given, about which the community therefore needs Yahweh's guidance (Num 9:8; 15:34; 27:5). Leviticus 8–10 is likewise more or less self-contained, and in a sense it could stand alone, though Leviticus 16 refers back to it and notes that in a sense the Day of Atonement provision only exists because of an action like that of Nadab and Abihu and its aftermath (see also Num 3:4; 26:61).[6] And the wider Torah narrative needs it. Part of the significance of a narrative may thus lie in its relationship to its setting in its wider narrative context.

To put it another way, a narrative is often answering a question, but there are varieties of questions that a narrative can be answering. Narratively, however, these chapters' question is easy to identify: it is, When is Moses going to fulfil the other aspect of Yahweh's commission, the inauguration of the priesthood? Narratively, it's been a long time since Yahweh gave the commission.

One may compare the nine works stretching from Genesis to Kings with the nine series of a television drama. Such dramas commonly conclude each series with some closure but leave some ends untied, and they may finish with a cliff-hanger. Series Two of the Torah drama, the book of Exodus, left the audience in some suspense over the fulfilment of that second commission. Again like a television series, Leviticus initially heightens suspense by undertaking a knight's move in the dynamic of the wider narrative. Instead of answering the question about fulfilment, Leviticus provides us with seven chapters of instructions about offering sacrifices. This fits in terms of subject, but it does not answer the question.

Historical-critical study focuses on another way of identifying the question a narrative answers, another way of thinking about its setting. It focuses on the narrative's historical or sociological setting in Israelite history. In the case of this narrative, it focuses on its setting in the history of Israelite priesthood. How did Israel actually come to have an Aaronic priesthood? Does the Aaronic priesthood really have

[5] Scholarly opinion varies on the direction of this interrelationship: see, e.g., Christoph Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, FAT 2.25 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 124–47.

[6] See further L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 37 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), chapter 5.

authority to operate? A subset of the question of historical context or setting is thus a question about ideology. Whose interests does the narrative serve?

It has been suggested that the Second Temple period saw conflict between priests who traced their line to Aaron and priests who traced their line to Zadoq and the chapters have been taken to support the priestly claims of one line or the other. A problem is that such hypotheses erect substantial theories on inference.[7] Leviticus 10 has been seen both as pro-Zadoqite and as pro-Aaronite, stressing either its critique of Aaron or its eventual support of Aaron. Yet the existence of both possibilities reflects how the narrative is not sufficiently precise to make clear its support for one group rather than another. In scholarly circles, discussion of historical setting and ideological implications in connection with this narrative is lively. But the debate is frustrating because it is dependent on reading the narrative in light of hypotheses about Second Temple history that have to build on little concrete evidence.

The Hellenistic period saw conflict between leaders committed to the Torah and people of more liberal inclination, and from the Hasmonean period the Pharisees began to exercise more influence than the priests in Judea. It is hard to imagine either context as the setting for the creation of the narrative in Leviticus 8–10, but one can imagine the story being significant then. This points to yet another way of thinking about the narrative's setting, by asking about the setting(s) in which the story was read, as opposed to the setting in which it was composed. Within the period covered by the Torah and the Former Prophets, one can imagine the account of Nadab and Abihu being significant in the context of the stories of Micah the priest in Judges 17—18, of Eli's sons and Samuel in 1 Samuel 1—3, of Ahab's altar in 1 Kings 16, and of the various deviant worship practices reported by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. In a variety of contexts in the period before the monarchy and during the monarchy, the account of Nadab and Abihu would make a telling story. While Western interest in narrative interpretation develops insights going back to Aristotle, more recent is the interest in reception history. Like narrative interpretation and historical-critical interpretation, this approach developed in connection with interpretation in general and was applied subsequently to the interpretation of the Scriptures. As is the case with other approaches to interpretation, then, one has to ask whether and how it fits with the nature of the Scriptures.

I assume that whatever was the process whereby the Torah developed from Moses's time onwards, it reached more or less the form in which we have it during the late Babylonian or early Persian period, so that it was available for Ezra to bring to Jerusalem. But the many slight differences between the Masoretic Text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Septuagint suggest that it continued to develop in small ways through the rest of the Second Temple period. While some of this development reflects accidental modification, some looks intentional. It reflects conscious clarification or application of the text, which was designed to make it more useful and more significant in the settings in which

[7] Alice Hunt, *Missing Priests: The Zadokites in Tradition and History*, LHBOTS 452 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 144, comments that 'the paucity of biblical evidence makes it nearly impossible to draw credible conclusions about Zadokites or a Zadokite priesthood'; cf. Lester L. Grabbe, 'Were the Pre-Maccabean High Priests "Zadokites,"' in *Reading from Right to Left: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honour of David J. A. Clines*, ed. J. Cheryl Exum and H. G. M. Williamson, JSOTSup 373 (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 205–15; Esaias E. Meyer, 'Getting Bad Publicity and Staying in Power: Leviticus 10 and Possible Priestly Power Struggles,' HTS 69 (2013): 1–7.

theologian-scribes and their people live.[8] It thus reflects and seeks to bring out the vitality of the text.[9] To put it in terms of a New Testament expression, it reflects the narrative being *theopneustos*, God-breathed, and profitable (2 Tim 3:16). Leviticus 8–10 thus had a setting in Second Temple history with its various contexts of crisis and conflict. And narrative interpretation can include imagining its being read in those settings.

The direct implication of the biddings in the narrative is that the community within the story should pay attention to what is said and what is going on here. But the indirect implication is that the community that subsequently listens to the Torah should pay attention to what is going on in the story. And asking how an audience might be impacted by the story that Leviticus tells might be a more feasible aim than aiming to see into the mind of its author. Interpretation often focuses more on this.

Alongside reception history, one could note the development of postcolonial criticism. Again like reception history, one has to ask how far this approach to interpretation fits the nature of the Scriptures, and some exercises in postcolonial interpretation stand in tension with the nature of the Scriptures. But others help modern readers put themselves in the position of people for whom God inspired the Scriptures and thus help readers to understand the Scriptures. At least by the time Leviticus reached its final form within the work that extends from Genesis to Kings, Israel and Judah were quasi-colonial entities living under the overlordship of an imperial power. Their possible freedom to serve Yahweh or the challenge to them to do so was then a significant feature of the setting in which the story would be read.

2. Point of View

The historical-critical version of the question about setting compares with a second classic category in narrative interpretation. What is the point of view from which the story is told? The general nature of Leviticus suggests that it was composed by Israelite theologian-scribes, who were committed to Yahweh and to Israel. They thought theologically, they wanted Israel to live Yahweh's way, and they believed that the priesthood had a key role in encouraging Israel's commitment. These theologians work in a way that could encourage the asking of questions such as, 'Who is trying to persuade whom of what here? Who is being addressed? Who is addressing them? And why?'[10]

What does the story suggest more specifically about its point of view? It speaks in the third person. This might or might not imply that someone other than Moses is the narrator; narrators can speak of themselves in the third person.[11] The situation parallels the one with the wider narrative in Genesis to Kings. The narrator speaks like someone who was there when the events happened. Indeed, beyond that, the narrator speaks of what Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron. Did Yahweh speak out loud, so that someone who was there could also report his words? If Moses is not the narrator, did Moses and Aaron

[8] Thus in 10:1, LXX has 'which the Lord had not commanded them', and in 10:15, for וּלְבָנֶיךָ, which might imply only 'for your sons', LXX has 'for your sons and for your daughters'.

[9] Cf. Hindy Najman, 'The Vitality of Scripture Within and Beyond the "Canon"', *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012): 497–518, esp. 515–18; and John Goldingay, *Joshua*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Historical Books (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023), 42–43.

[10] James W. Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus: From Sacrifice to Scripture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 101.

[11] Jay Sklar argues in works such as his Tyndale Old Testament Commentary *Leviticus* (Downers Gove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2014) that the content of Leviticus goes substantially back to Moses.

tell the narrator what Yahweh had said? Did Yahweh tell him or her what he said? Did the narrator imagine the kind of thing that Yahweh must have said? The narrative does not answer these questions, and readers likely answer them on the basis of their worldview, their general assumptions about the Scriptures and about God.

As one might compare Genesis to Kings with a sequence of television series, one could take the writers room, which may generate the script for a television series or movie, as a model for thinking about the origin of much of the Scriptures. Such a project likely begins with someone having an idea, and it ends with this person or someone else producing the final script. In between, a group of people sit around a table and discuss the idea, pool their thoughts, discuss them, argue about them, and eventually come to some agreement about them. With Leviticus, and with the Torah as a whole, the theologian-scribes in the writers room would likely be priests. Ezra gives us an idea of the kind of person who produces the final version.

To stretch the model, with the Torah the writers room likely reconvened a number of times over several centuries. It was by such an ongoing process that the Torah reached the form in which we know it. The current trend in study of Leviticus sees the writers room as undertaking much of its creative work well into the Second Temple period, but I would like to see more concrete evidence of this if I am to follow the trend. I rather picture Ezra showing up in Jerusalem with more or less the Torah that we know, though perhaps not yet divided into five books. That dividing, at some subsequent point, then sharpened the suspense raised by the narrative gap between Exodus and Leviticus.

I assume that the people in the writers room who became the authors of Leviticus knew the basic story of Yahweh and Israel. They knew there had been a promise to the ancestors, an exodus, a meeting at Sinai, a settlement in Canaan, an inauguration of the monarchy, a building of the temple, a split between Judah and Ephraim, and a destruction of the temple. They also had before them on the writers room table material such as the manuals about sacrifice and taboo In Leviticus 1–7 and 11–15. And they had in their heads stories that their parents had told them. For Leviticus 8–10, they then used their creative insight to imagine the kind of thing that Yahweh must have said to Moses and Aaron and the kind of thing that must have happened to inaugurate Israel's sanctuary worship.

That's my guess. But it is only a guess. What I am more sure about is that the work they produced commended itself to the leadership of the people of God in the Second Temple period. It commended itself as a portrait of the origin of Israel's worship that could continue to shape and stimulate the community's thinking about Yahweh and his people, and shape and stimulate their commitment. Jesus and the people who came to believe in him, and the people who wrote works that eventually comprised the New Testament, then also assumed that the Holy Spirit had been involved behind the scenes in the generation of the Tanak (the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings). It therefore counted as Holy Scriptures for congregations of people who believed in Jesus, Jewish or Gentile.

The theologian-scribes in the writers room do have priestly sympathies, though there is little concrete indication of an actual priestly viewpoint in their work. They do not write as if they support priests over against laypeople or support the priesthood right or wrong.

If their viewpoint is priestly, what specific priestly viewpoint is it? What aim does it have? It wants people to be confident that the Aaronic priesthood was put in place by Yahweh. It wants them to honour their senior priests and their regular priests. It wants the community to rejoice in the ministry that its priests can fulfil for it. It knows that priests can make mistakes. It shows no sign of thinking that the priesthood has a political position and exercises political power or should do so. It might be aware of

the reality of tension between political power or prophetic conviction (Moses) and priestly power or perspective (Aaron). It implies the assumption that both community and priesthood need to regard conformity to Yahweh's instructions as a principle not only for the priesthood's origins but for its ongoing life.

In its telling of Aaron's inauguration and the subsequent tension and conflict between Moses and Aaron, the question of point of view could have different intriguing implications at different points in Israel's history. The chapters could then make for varying suggestive readings. Samuel and the opening of 1 Kings tell of crises and conflicts over the priesthood and over the position of priests such as Zadoq and Abiathar. Subsequently, what would people think about legitimate priesthood in the context of the inauguration of the temple? Or of Jeroboam setting up an alternative worship arrangement in Ephraim? For the succeeding period, 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles give a mixed account of the faithfulness and unfaithfulness of priests. It parallels that of the monarchs and of prophets. What would the narrative then suggest in the contact of the Jerusalem priesthood's apostasy as 2 Kings and prophets such as Jeremiah and Ezekiel describe it? In the final decades before 587, the picture in Kings, Chronicles, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel is more unequivocally negative, though it is as a member of a priestly family that Ezekiel speaks so negatively, so one must allow for his hyperbole and that of Kings, Chronicles, and Jeremiah. While affirming the negative assessment, Lamentations grieves over what Yahweh has allowed to happen to the priests (Lam 1:4, 19; 2:6, 20; 4:13, 16).

How might the community see the status of the priesthood after 587, or after 537, or after 516? Leviticus 10 reminds priests and people of the need to pay heed to the danger that priests can bring on themselves through mistakes they make. It reminds them to attend to their vocation of discernment and teaching. The decades following 587 would be a time when this message was significant for people and priests, when priests might have wondered whether they would ever minister again. That could be so both before 537 and after (see Zech 3). Ezra and Nehemiah document tension and conflict between leaders who see themselves as standing for Moses and the Torah (Ezra being a priest) and priests whom these leaders see as opposed to Moses and the Torah. What might be the significance of this story in the context of conflicts between Judahites and Samaritans or between different groups in Jerusalem in subsequent times? The following decades would also challenge priests about their faithfulness and their responsibility for teaching and discernment (see Mal 1; Ezra-Nehemiah). Either side of Leviticus 8–10, the prominence of instruction in Leviticus 1–7 and 11–15, and in Leviticus as a whole, also invites the audience to take account of the way narrative may constitute implicit exhortation. To the community Leviticus 8–10 might then also say: do recognize and rejoice in the priests, but recognize that they are fallible. And to the priests it might say: do rejoice in your position but recognize the disaster you can bring on yourselves and on the community.

In the beginning of the last paragraph in the narrative we are considering, there emerges another sense in which thinking in terms of a point of view contributes to a reading of this story. Moses presses an inquiry about the offense-offering goat, but 'there, it was burned' (10:16). The 'there' is הִנֵּה, traditionally translated 'behold,' which is slightly misleading. 'Behold' is a verb and הִנֵּה is a particle, and 'behold' is an archaism in English, but otherwise it conveys the right impression. The narrative is encouraging the audience to look in its imagination in a certain direction. The narrative hints at the

same exhortation when it relates how the people 'saw' how fire had come out from Yahweh (9:24). It invites the audience to look with the community in the story.[12]

3. Plot

By its nature as a narrative, Leviticus 8–10 as a whole thus invites the audience to follow its plot and imagine the events it describes. While the dramatic, quasi-narrative portrayal of the sacrifices in Leviticus 1–7 draws the audience in its imagination into the process of making a sacrifice, this actual narrative draws the audience in more directly. In Leviticus 8 we take part as the community assembles. We watch Moses preparing, vesting, and anointing Aaron and his sons and watch Aaron and his sons offering the sacrifices. We wait patiently through the ordination week as Aaron and his sons stay in the sanctuary through the ordination retreat. In Leviticus 9 we watch again as they offer the first sacrifices and Aaron blesses us. We watch as Yahweh's magnificence appears and fire consumes the offering. We join in as the people roar and fall on their faces. Then in Leviticus 10 we watch with horror as Nadab and Abihu present their outside fire and are immolated, and we listen in a daze to the events and confrontations that follow.

Leviticus 8–9 is a straightforward narrative tracing a sequence of events. It answers the question, 'How did the initiation of the priesthood happen?' in an uncontentious fashion, and it comes to a satisfying conclusion. Leviticus 10 then turns the sequence into a drama when something unexpected happens that itself raises questions. Indeed, Leviticus 10 opens up questions that it only half-answers. To put it another way, Leviticus 8–9 is a story with some logic. It relates a sequence of events that follow one another intelligibly. Yahweh gives instructions and Moses and Aaron follow them. Leviticus 10 then begins in a way that suggests it will continue this straightforward story, as it relates how 'Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, each got his censer, put fire in it, laid incense on it'. But it continues with a jump that seems outlandish. It subsequently proceeds unpredictably, with some connection but without consistent logic, and walks around questions more than resolves them. Whereas Leviticus 8–9 makes sense, and does so as it goes along, Leviticus 10 challenges its audience to make sense of it. They can only do so, and only partially, when they get to the end.

In its distinctive fashion, however, Leviticus 8–10 thus follows the shape and dynamic of the 'classical plot'. The classical plot is characterised by economy: everything relates to the plot, and things that look irrelevant probably aren't. The jerkiness within Leviticus 10 is then part of the whole. Leviticus 10 is characterized by intricacy, including suspense. Retrospectively it turns the simple plot of Leviticus 8–9 into something systematically complex and suspenseful. Yet it is also characterized by transparency. Within its own framework it makes sense. It is self-contained in its worldview, it works within its own world, and it wants readers to believe it.[13]

For most of the way, then, Leviticus 8–10 answers the straightforward question left over from Exodus and gives a straightforward answer, and the audience of Series Three in the TV sequence relaxes.

[12] See Stephen K. Sherwood, *Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 44.

[13] My analysis in this paragraph was stimulated by N. J. Lowe, *The Classical Plot and the Invention of Western Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. 3–16, 61–78, with his reflections on E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (London: Arnold, 1927), and behind him on Aristotle, *Poetics.*

Or perhaps it doesn't. After all, the audience has watched Series One of this drama, where Yahweh set the story of the world going and things went wrong. And it has watched Series Two, when Yahweh set Israel's story going and things went wrong. So maybe the audience is waiting through Leviticus 8–9 for the other shoe to drop. This duly happens with the shocking statement that Aaron's sons, who had shared in the initiation of the priesthood, 'presented outside fire before Yahweh … and fire went out from before Yahweh and consumed them, and they died before Yahweh.'

Arguably, tension is essential to a narrative. Something has to happen that needs resolving, as one can see in the little narrative about the mestizo.[14] Whereas the medieval chapter division in English Bibles makes Leviticus 10 a new start (cf. the 'Now' in NRSV and NJPS), the 'chapter' actually begins with a straightforward *waw*-consecutive, and MT has no petuḥah or setumah to suggest a new section. LXX, Vg, and NIV thus carry straight on. In substance, however, there is indeed a move from the wonder of Leviticus 8–9 to the solemnity of Leviticus 10. It turns out that 'the appearance of the Lord to his people at the climax of the regular service [9:23–24] was ambiguous and equivocal', which with hindsight was perhaps also not surprising given that 'the holy God was a consuming fire' (Exod 24:7) and thus 'his presence was potentially lethal'.[15] However, subsequently Leviticus 10 'reestablishes the theme of compliance with divine instructions as it progresses,' and in the end the calling into question is only a 'momentary reversal' from Leviticus 8–9.[16]

To ask about a narrative's plot is not to make an assumption about whether it is more factual or more parabolic. In the Scriptures, God inspired factual stories, and inspired stories that are based on fact but are imaginatively elaborated, and inspired parabolic stories. And historical narratives use the techniques of fiction.[17] Indeed, 'there is no textual property, syntactical or semantic that will identify a text as a work of fiction'. The question is the nature of the author's intention.[18] The boundaries between these categories are fuzzy and it's usually hard to tell which category any given story belongs to.

I assume that the carefully-told and eyebrow-raising story in Leviticus 8–10 is like the Genesis creation story, a narrative that issued from a writer's divinely-inspired imagination. Or it is like one of Jesus's parables, stories that emerge from his divinely-inspired imagination. Paradoxically, if one was to call the story a parable, this need not imply that it makes no factual statements. A parabolic story such as Genesis 1 makes important factual, historical declarations—God actually did bring the world into being, the world he brought into being was good, he designed humanity to look after it, and so on. Leviticus 8–10 likewise makes important factual declarations—God actually did appoint the Aaronic priesthood, God did relate to his people through their ministry, God really was present to his people in the sanctuary, the priesthood did go wrong. The theologian-scribes who composed Genesis and

[14] Cf. Sherwood, *Leviticus*, 13.

[15] John W. Kleinig, *Leviticus*, ConcC (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2003), 235.

[16] Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric in Leviticus*, 107, 111.

[17] See Hayden White, e.g., 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', and 'The Question of Narrative in Contemporary Historical Theory', in *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 1–25, 26–57; also David P. Wright, 'Ritual Theory, Ritual Texts, and the Priestly-Holiness Writings of the Pentateuch', in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion: Essays in Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Sul M. Olyan, RBS 71 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 195–216, esp.198.

[18] John R. Searle, 'The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse', *New Literary History* 6 (1974–1975): 319–32, esp. 325; cf. Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 116. See further John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 67–76.

Leviticus describe these realities in concrete ways that would bring them home to people. Yet like any comment on the factuality or otherwise of narratives in the Torah, it is impossible to prove or disprove this assumption.

4. Theme

A narrative may have a theme, perhaps more than one. It may put into words the complexity of some aspect of truth that cannot be expressed in straightforward analytic formulations. The juxtaposition of contrasting narratives can thus do justice to the ambiguous and equivocal. Genesis 1 and 2 does so with the systematic or serendipitous nature of God's activity in creation. Exodus 4–14 does so with the relationship of divine sovereignty and human decision-making. Exodus 32–34 does so with the relationship of Yahweh's grace and severity. And Leviticus 8–10 does so with the obligation to conform to God's commands and the freedom to treat them with some flexibility.

The chapters are full of occurrences of the verb 'command'. The verb occurs twenty times, and suggests authority, urgency, and importance.[19] There is no comparable density of occurrences anywhere in the Tanak. Most occurrences in this story note that things happened 'as Yahweh commanded'. The frequency of that comment makes one also notice how some reports of things happening are not followed by 'as Yahweh commanded'. Yet this need not seem to be a problem (e.g., 9:1–4). Sometimes people decide for themselves what to do and that is fine. An implication might be that people listening to the story need not be obsessional about doing exactly as Yahweh commanded. Sometimes things happen, there is no 'as Yahweh commanded', and it leads to controversy, but the controversy is resolved. This might fit with there being differences between the five books of the Torah (and between Leviticus and Ezekiel, and Amos, and Jesus). Yahweh himself issues different commands at different times. It implies that there can be different ways in which he gives expression to ultimate principles. In Leviticus 8–9 he gives precise instructions to Moses in connection with the ordination, and the story keeps affirming that Moses did 'as Yahweh commanded,' yet in detail Moses's actions vary from the instructions (see 9:8–21), and the details of the offerings do not correspond to the general instructions for offerings in Leviticus 1–7. But in Leviticus 10, something happens 'as he did not command', the only occasion when the verb is negated, and it leads to catastrophe. This was an action going against what he commanded.

The chapters thus open up in changing and deepening fashion the way Yahweh sometimes gives instructions for simple obedience, but sometimes gives instructions that are more like guidelines than orders. Decision-makers in the community then have to handle the possible implications of Yahweh's commands, in discussion and argument with one another.[20] The main part of Leviticus 10 implies that the representatives of priesthood and theology need to be in that conversation with one another. Thus the people of God work out how to implement Yahweh's truth. The contrast between 10:1–5 and 10:16–20 leaves an audience with a tricky reality or a pair of tricky realities that they have to live with. Doing as Yahweh says can be a matter of life and death. Yet Leviticus 8–9 has already shown that Moses, Aaron, and Yahweh are not legalistic. Moses and Aaron do not do exactly as Yahweh says, and Yahweh is not troubled. Nadab and Abihu do not get away with doing something that Yahweh had not commanded. Aaron gets away with it. Deal with it. Or rather, think about it carefully. If the audience looks at Nadab

[19] Richard Ira Sugarman, *Levinas and the Torah: A Phenomenological Approach* (Albany: SUNY, 2019), 174.
[20] Feldman, *Story of Sacrifice*, 67–108.

and Abihu's non-compliance ('outside fire') it suggests overstepping priestly freedom. Moses's and Aaron's non-compliance did not contradict the principles of the Torah. Nadab's and Abihu's did.

Setting out the events in Leviticus 10 as a palistrophe, with an abcb'a' structure, makes it possible to explore the tension between the obligation to conform to Yahweh's commands and the freedom to treat them with some flexibility.

- 10:1–5: Two of Aaron's sons offer incense before Yahweh as Yahweh had not commanded, and fire from Yahweh consumes them. Aaron does nothing. Moses takes action and has their bodies taken out. The offering that goes against what Yahweh had commanded brings 'a tragic aftermath' to Leviticus 8–9.[21]
- 10:6–7: Moses gives biddings to Aaron and his other sons concerning what they are now to do. They are not to mourn the two brothers and not to leave the sanctuary. They do as Moses commanded.
- 10:8–11: At the chapter's highpoint, Yahweh speaks to Aaron for the only time in the chapters. He bids Aaron and his other sons to be wary of drink, and he defines their ongoing role in discernment and teaching.
- 10:12–15: Moses gives Aaron's remaining sons further instructions, about the rest of the cereal offering (cf. 9:17) and about the breast and thigh of the shared sacrifice, which vary slightly from Yahweh's previous instructions.
- 10:16–20: Moses enquires about further actions, in connection with the offense offering goat, that have gone against what Yahweh had commanded (cf. 9:15) He is disturbed that it has been burned rather than eaten, and he rebukes the sons, but Aaron gives an explanation defending them, which Moses accepts. The narrative ends happily.

The shocking nature of the brothers' action in 10:1–5 and the shocking nature of what follows suggests a second theme in this narrative. Sometimes Yahweh acts in ways that seem tough and may seem hard to explain. 'The report is so brief that it has prompted a wide range of reading-between-the-lines theories' about its significance.[22] Whenever the chapter had its origin, it gives priests and people things to think about, then and later. In this connection one might see its formulation, if not '*deliberately obscure*',[23] at least providentially obscure. It invites the audience to face the fact that Yahweh sometimes causes or allows catastrophes that might reflect priestly mistakes but might seem out of proportion as acts of chastisement. The priests have to deal with such events in light of what they know from the Torah, and to work out what to think and what Yahweh may expect when the Torah does not cover questions that arise (which takes us back to the story of the mestizo).

The refrain about the way Yahweh has 'commanded' Moses, running through Leviticus 8–9, eventually links in troubling fashion with the theme that runs through Leviticus 10, 'the problem of knowing how to comply with divine instructions'.[24] 'The story of Nadab and Abihu does not just have

[21] Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 595.

[22] Samuel E. Balentine, *Leviticus*, IBC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 84. Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Leviticum* (London: R. Milbourne, 1631), 180–209, already has an extensive survey.

[23] David Penchansky, *What Rough Beast: Images of God in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 61.

[24] James W. Watts, *Leviticus 1–10*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 505.

gaps. It is about gaps and how we deal with them.'[25] It does not imply that people need to be anxious about the vulnerability or unreliability of the entire worship system. But they do need to accept the fact that people make mistakes and that catastrophes happen. Yet in the end 'ritual functions … to allow for the negotiation of conflict.… The rituals do not resolve conflict as much as defer resolution of conflict in order to preserve the functioning social network.'[26] And if this enables people to live together, then actually one might see it as the resolution of conflict.

5. Characters

In narrative interpretation, it is customary to consider the characters in the story. In Leviticus 8–10, the characters are Yahweh, Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Itamar, and the community as a whole. And in a story, one can ask about the characters' thinking, motivation, and aims. One can ask about what they know and what power they have that will make it possible for them to pursue those aims.[27] Asking these questions highlights further the difference between Leviticus 8–9 and Leviticus 10. Humanly speaking, in Leviticus 8–9 Moses is manifestly in charge. Yahweh makes clear what he is to do, and Moses has no difficulty in doing it. At the beginning of Leviticus 10, Moses loses control of the narrative, though he quickly shows himself capable of regaining control. Then he loses it again, in two senses. At the centre of Leviticus 10, Yahweh speaks to Aaron, for that time only, about the role and power he has. And at the end of the chapter Moses discovers that Aaron's other sons have been explicitly ignoring their instructions. He engages in a confrontation with Aaron about this that leads into his recognizing that he himself might have been wrong in finding fault with them.

We learn little directly about the persons, thinking, or motivation of the characters in the narrative. It depicts Yahweh as someone who sets forth descriptions of himself, issues commands, issues prohibitions, and appears. At one point, Moses gets angry, with Eleazar and Itamar for not dealing with the flesh of the sacrifice in the correct way, Aaron presents Moses with the rationale for what happened, and then the action was 'good in his eyes' (10:16–20). The entire story in Leviticus 8–10 finishes here. To a modern reader it is remarkable that this is the one point at which the narrative tells its audience what someone was thinking or feeling. It does compare intriguingly with 2 Samuel 11, where the opposite expression closes the chapter: 'the thing that David had done was bad in Yahweh's eyes'. The narrative does not tell us why Nadab and Abihu made their illegitimate incense offering, nor does it tell us how Moses or Aaron reacted to it. It tells us what Moses says by way of Yahweh's comment. And it tells us that Aaron 'was still' or 'was silent' (10:3), if that is what וַיִּדֹּם means. But what does the stillness or silence of Aaron, the 'tragic hero',[28] signify?

Three contrasting implications emerge from the way the narrative speaks about its characters. The first is that characters are not very important in this narrative, as they are not in the Scriptures as

[25] Bryan D. Bibb, *Ritual Words and Narrative Worlds in the Book of Leviticus*, LHBOTS 480 (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 131.

[26] Bibb, *Ritual Words*, 111–12. See also Bibb, 'Nadab and Abihu Attempt to Fill a Gap: Law and Narrative in Leviticus 10.1–7,' *JSOT* 96 (2001): 83–99. This is not to imply that the story contains no implication of fault on Nadab and Abihu's part: see Joshua Pitman, 'Misunderstanding the Gaps: A Critique of Bryan Bibb's Interpretation of the Nadab and Abihu Episode,' *Themelios* 49.3 (2024): 579–88.

[27] Cf. Lowe, *Classical Plot*, 48.

[28] See Walter Houston, 'Tragedy in the Courts of the Lord: A Socio-Literary Reading of the Death of Nadab and Abihu,' *JSOT* 90 (2000): 31–39.

whole—human characters, anyway. In the Scriptures, Yahweh is the character who counts. Otherwise, plot is more important than character. Indeed, it has been suggested that the focus on character in modern narrative interpretation derives from the nature of the Victorian novel, and that character doesn't really exist.[29]

A second is that, in the classic formulation, the narrative is more inclined to show than to tell. It is more like a movie than a novel. It commonly relates someone's actions and leaves the audience to work out their motivation. This is another aspect of the paradoxical way in which narratives can function as inspired and useful. The audience is invited to draw the appropriate implications from (for instance) the way people did as Yahweh commanded, but not quite. The possibility that having to work out the implications of this for themselves will make it more likely that they take note of what they realize. The problem is that an audience can draw many implications from texts that do not make their implications explicit. This is a difficulty that lies behind ideological interpretations of texts.

A third is that sometimes the actions of characters are simply mysterious. A consequence is again that audiences and scholars can multiply interpretations of aspects of a narrative. The downside is that this issues in the proliferation of short notes in academic journals. The upside is again that it can make an audience wonder and think and learn things about itself and about God. In Leviticus 24, interpretation has to settle for the allusiveness implied by the list of questions about the mixed-race young man that the list might generate. It has to engage in the discussion that such allusiveness can foster, without its requiring that we think we have answers to the questions. This is one more connection in which the Scriptures show themselves capable of being profitable. Their openness, the equivocal and nebulous nature of a narrative, can make this possible.

6. Language

In an appreciation of the novelist Martin Amis, written after a memorial service for Amis at St Martin in the Fields in London, Tom Gatti suggested that what we truly value in a writer of fiction is not its plot or characters but its language, its words.[30] Gatti emphasizes the pleasure of language, and perhaps this applies to Leviticus 8–10, specifically to the pleasing nature of the palistrophe in chapter 10. I see it as applying to the pleasing nature of the poetic verse in the Tanak, of which there is more in Leviticus than translations recognize (see especially Lev 26).

But I focus here on the broader implications of his point than the way that language can cause pleasure. In suggesting that language is *the* aspect of narrative that we appreciate, Gatti speaks hyperbolically, though his comment may apply to some narrative writers and/or some readers. I had thought that the reason why I myself have not appreciated Amis was that he focused on theme more than character or plot, but I myself am a 'word child',[31] and I must go back and check out his use of words.

[29] See Alexandra Schwartz, '"I Don't Think Character Exists Anymore": A Conversation with Rachel Cusk,' *The New Yorker*, 18 November 2018.

[30] 'Martin Amis and the Pursuit of Pleasure', *The New Statesman*, 12 June 2024, https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2024/06/martin-amis-and-the-pursuit-of-pleasure.

[31] I refer to Iris Murdoch, *A Word Child* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), though I use the expression in a different way from Murdoch.

'The writers we love subtly get under our skin and shift our consciousness', Gatti quotes Ian McEwan as saying at the memorial service. 'They bend the flow of daily thought and speech.' They do this not with their 'views' or 'theories' but with their facility for language.' Gatti continues to speak hyperbolically; we might think in terms of 'not only … but also' rather than 'not … but'.

Gatti's comment applies to Leviticus 8–10, because Leviticus is a work of rhetoric.[32] It aims to persuade. That doesn't imply it is saying things that are only half-true or that it is being deceptive or trying to achieve an aim that is in its own interests but not really in the interests of the audience. It means it speaks out of passion, enthusiasm, and commitment. It aims to share its passion, enthusiasm, and commitment with its audience, as it has Yahweh encouraging Moses to share it with the congregation at Sinai, 'The entire community—assemble it at the Meeting Tent entrance area', Yahweh said. Moses did, and said to the community, 'This is the thing that Yahweh commanded to do' (Lev 8:3–5).

Occasionally Leviticus generates memorable phrases, like Amis or like a prophet. One of them comes at a key moment in Leviticus 8–10 (significantly, it is a poetic line):

> In the people near me I will show myself sacred,
> and to the face of the entire people I will show myself magnificent. (10:3)

There then follows that enigmatic, elusive phrase, 'Aaron was still' (10:3). And subsequently, a rhetorical question by Aaron almost closes the narrative: 'If today they have presented their offense offering and their burnt sacrifice before Yahweh, and things such as these have happened to me, and I ate the offense offering today, would it have been good in Yahweh's eyes?' (10:19).

As a work of rhetoric, Leviticus 8–10 is careful and effective in its use of words. The events in Leviticus 10 make for quite some contrast with Leviticus 8–9, but the chapters manifest many verbal links that both enhance the links between them and also enhance the contrast:

- Get (8:2), get (9:2), they got (10:1)
- Fire went out from before from Yahweh (9:24; 10:2)
- This is the thing that (8:5), this is the thing that (9:6), that is what (10:3)
- Brought forward (8:6), came forward/come forward (9:5, 7, 8), come forward/came forward (10:4, 5)
- From the Meeting Tent entrance area you will not go out … so that you do not die/lest you die (8:33, 35; 10:7)
- Offense offering (8:14), offense offering (9:8), no offense offering and thus death (10:1–3)
- Eat at the Meeting Tent entrance area (8:31), offer the shared sacrifice (9:4, 18, 22), eat in a sacred place (10:12–13)

Leviticus is also purposeful with the order in which it uses words. The most common Hebrew word order is verb, subject, object, but the Tanak varies word order much more frequently than English translations reflect. In 10:3, quoted above, English translations vary over whether or not they follow the Hebrew word order. We have noted Yahweh's bidding to Moses to assemble the community, and a feature of that bidding is the word order: 'The entire community—assemble it at the Meeting Tent entrance area' (8:3). The word order puts the emphasis on 'the entire community'. It might even be saying to the audience that listens to this narrative, 'This means you.' The narrative's audience overhears biddings given to a community with which it identifies, and allowing people to overhear can be a powerful means

[32] See Watts, *Ritual and Rhetoric*, and his commentary.

of communication.[33] Or the audience overhears biddings given to the priests, but the writers also have in mind that broader audience. They make this clear in their references to Moses making Yahweh's words known to Israel as a whole.

Something similar applies to the narrative order in Leviticus 8–9. As is commonly the case in the Tanak and elsewhere, the chapters' story lines are not entirely chronological. For the sake of communication, the narrator allows dramatic ordering to override chronological ordering. The announcement of Aaron's sons' presentation in 8:6 anticipates the same announcement in 8:13, and it seems likely that the announcement of the sons' washing in 8:6 is also anticipatory. Further, chronologically 8:6–9 and 12–13 would run more smoothly without the description of the sanctuary anointings and sprinklings in 8:10–11. If these happened first, the basin (8:11) would then be available as a source of water for the washing. The narrative's unfolding in dramatic rather than chronological order gives prominence to the actual ordinations, particularly Aaron's. Something similar is true with the account of the blessings in 9:22–23, where 'the blessing of the community in 22a offers a fitting conclusion to the offering of the first sacrifices on behalf of the people, whereas the blessing of 23a emphasizes the fact that Moses and Aaron were allowed for the first time into the tent.'[34]

7. Conclusion

One does not regularly think of Leviticus as a narrative book, though it does form part of works that have a narrative framework—Genesis to Deuteronomy, and more broadly Genesis to Kings. It also from time to time manifests narrative features in its portrayal of the process whereby people are to make offerings or to handle problems such as defects in one's skin, and it includes one miniature actual narrative about a fight between two men, in Leviticus 24. But it also has one extensive narrative that spreads over three chapters, Leviticus 8–10. It tells the important story of the ordination of the priests and the offering of the first sacrifices in fulfilment of Yahweh's directives in Exodus. It goes on to tell of a catastrophe that follows and of its aftermath. The presence of this important narrative in Leviticus opens up two possibilities. One is an enhanced understanding of these chapters in Leviticus through a consideration of approaches to interpreting narrative that help readers understand it. The other is an appreciation of approaches to interpretation that have been prominent in the study of narrative over recent decades, through seeing them applied to a particular text.

For all the importance of this narrative in Leviticus, it shares with the rest of the book a sense that it does not immediately engage modern Western readers, especially Christians, in the way that (say) Genesis or Jonah may. The background of this article was a hunch that these categories for the interpretation of narrative might open up aspects of the story in Leviticus 8–10 and that applying them to this narrative might enhance an appreciation of the methods. The article has sought to show that indeed this happens. Such categories are regularly worth bearing in mind as we seek to discern what the inspired scriptural narrative communicates, and what it does, even in what might seem less promising parts of the Scriptures.

[33] Cf. Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978).

[34] Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch*, 117–18.

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Achan and Annihilation? Hyperbolic Language and the Justice of Yahweh in Joshua 7

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Abstract: The conquest language of Joshua is often taken as hyperbolic, particularly in chapters 6–10. This essay attempts to apply a hyperbolic reading to Joshua 7 and the Achan account, proposing that such a reading deals best with the larger context as well as the textual details. This interpretation suggests that by making himself an enemy of Yahweh, Achan suffered the same fate as the pagan Canaanite nations: Achan, as the enemy combatant, was executed, his livestock killed, his possessions destroyed, and his family dispossessed from their inheritance in the land.

In recent years, a number of scholars have suggested that the dramatic language regarding complete annihilation in Joshua should be understood as hyperbolic or as intentionally exaggerated. Although often differing in the details, scholars such as Wolterstorff,[1] Walton,[2] Zehnder,[3] Copan and

[1] Nicholas Wolterstorff, "Reading Joshua," in *Divine Evil? The Moral Character of the God of Abraham*, ed. Michael Bergmann, Michael J. Murray, and Michael C. Rea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

[2] John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017); John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

[3] Markus Zehnder, "The Annihilation of the Canaanites: Reassessing the Brutality of the Biblical Witness," in *Encountering Violence in the Bible*, ed. Markus Zehnder and Hallvard Hagelia (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2011), 263–91.

Flannagan,[4] Howard,[5] Kitchen,[6] Hoffmeier,[7] and others have argued that the focus of Joshua's conquest is on the displacement of Yahweh's enemies rather than their extermination.[8] This essay builds upon this suggestion by proposing that a similar interpretive approach be applied to the supposed slaughter of Achan's family in Joshua 7:22–26. In this view, Achan's judgment is intentionally hyperbolic: Achan himself is executed, his livestock killed, his possessions destroyed, and his family dispossessed.[9]

This essay considers the evidence in three sections: (1) annihilation language in Joshua is best taken as hyperbolic to indicate discriminate killing as well as exile and mass displacements; (2) Joshua 7 describes the judgment of Achan—who makes himself an enemy of Yahweh, much like the Canaanites—with annihilation language, resulting in the displacement of Achan's family; and (3) this aligns well with the Korah account in Numbers 16. If the annihilation of Israel's enemies is described with hyperbolic rhetoric, then perhaps the annihilation of Achan—an Israelite turned enemy of Yahweh—should likewise be taken as hyperbolic.[10]

1. Annihilation Language as Hyperbolic

The main premise of the argument for hyperbolic language in Joshua (particularly chapters 6–11) is quite straightforward. It essentially goes as follows:

1. The commands of Deuteronomy and Joshua appear to demand complete extermination of Israel's enemies ("You shall save nothing that breathes," Deut 20:16).
2. These commands are not literally fulfilled. (A comparison of passages between Joshua and Judges indicates that complete extermination did not occur.)
3. Israel is presented as honoring these commands. ("The Lord gave them rest on every side.… Not one of all their enemies had withstood them," Josh 21:44.)

[4] Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); Paul Copan and Matthew Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014). Among other works by Copan and Flannagan, see "The Ethics of 'Holy War' for Christian Morality and Theology," in *Holy War in the Bible: Christian Morality and an Old Testament Problem*, ed. Jeremy Evans, Heath Thomas, and Paul Copan (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013).

[5] David M. Howard, Jr., "Destruction and Dispossession of the Canaanites in the Book of Joshua," *Themelios* 49.3 (2024): 589–605.

[6] K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), especially chapter 5, "Humble Beginnings—Around and in Canaan," 159–239.

[7] James Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 33–43.

[8] For a helpful resource that presents differing perspectives on the conquest, see *Show Them No Mercy: Four Views on God and Canaanite Genocide*, ed. Stanley N. Gundry, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) and Charlie Trimm, *The Destruction of the Canaanites: God, Genocide, and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022).

[9] The contention that Joshua 7:22–26 is hyperbolic should not be understood as a theodicy but as an attempt to consider the textual particulars of the passage.

[10] By hyperbolic, we do not mean entirely symbolic or figurative. In both cases, with the Canaanites and with Achan, people are *literally* killed. The hyperbolic reading relates to *who* is killed. In this understanding, enemy combatants are slaughtered; Achan is executed. The point is that some—non-combatants, women and children, etc.—survive.

As Copan and Flannagan summarize, "On the surface Joshua appears to affirm that all the land was conquered, yet Judges proceeds on the assumption that it has not been and still needs to be."[11] This is especially evident when passages are compared, such as Joshua 10 and Judges 1.

Table 1: Complete Extermination and Survivors

Appearance of Complete Extermination	Description of Survivors
"They fought against [Hebron] and captured it and struck it with the edge of the sword, and its king and its towns, and every person in it. He left none remaining … and devoted it to destruction and every person in it." (Josh 10:36)	"And Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in Hebron." (Judg 1:10)
"He captured [Debir] with its king and all its towns. And they struck them with the edge of the sword and devoted to destruction every person in it; he left none remaining." (Josh 10:39)	"From there they went against the inhabitants of Debir.… And Othniel the son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother, captured it." (Judg 1:11, 13)
"Joshua struck the whole land, the hill country and the Negeb and the lowland and the slopes, and all their kings. He left none remaining, but devoted to destruction all that breathed, just as the Lord God of Israel commanded." (Josh 10:40)	"Afterward the men of Judah went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the Negeb, and in the lowland." (Judg 1:9)

On the one hand, Joshua seems to indicate complete extermination: "he left none remaining," they struck "every person in it," "all that breathed." Yet on the other hand, Judges indicates that these specific cities and regions were unconquered. K. A. Kitchen suggests that Joshua presents "disabling raids,"[12] not complete conquest. Kitchen comments that this "upbeat, rhetorical element present in Joshua" is "a persistent feature of most war reports in ancient Near Eastern sources."[13]

About the conquest, Wolterstorff asserts, "A careful reading of the text in its literary context makes it implausible to interpret it as claiming that Yahweh ordered extermination."[14] John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton argue that the focus of the conquest is on toppling the leadership and defeating the defenders of the various cities, not on the general population.[15] They summarize, "These accounts tend

[11] Copan and Flannagan, *Did God Really Command Genocide?*, 85. Copan and Flannagan continue, "Joshua as we have it today, then, occurs in a literary context in which the language of 'killing all who breathed,' 'putting all inhabitants to the sword,' and 'leaving no survivors' is followed up by a narrative that affirms straight-forwardly that the Canaanites were not literally wiped out or exterminated in this manner" (p. 90).

[12] Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 162. Kitchen comments, "This is *not* the sweeping, instant conquest-with-occupation that some hasty scholars would foist upon the text of Joshua, without any factual justification" (p. 163).

[13] Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, 163, 174. For a number of examples, see K. Lawson Younger, *Ancient Conquest Accounts*, JSOTSup 98 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1990), 242–66.

[14] Wolterstorff, "Reading Joshua," 249.

[15] Walton and Walton, *Israelite Conquest*, 171–72. They provide the helpful illustration regarding the concept of *ḥerem*, "After World War II, when the Allies destroyed the Third Reich, they did not kill every individual German soldier and citizen; they killed the leaders specifically and deliberately (compare to the litany of kings put to

to exaggerate the magnitude of the victory and the scale of the slaughter inflicted on the enemies.… Both author and audience understand the genre, so there is no intention to deceive."[16] Although the hyperbolic view is not without its detractors,[17] we suggest it is the most viable interpretation for Joshua, particularly chapters 6–11.[18]

In this approach, when annihilation or extermination language is employed, the original audience would have understood it in warfare terms to indicate a significant victory. This is evident, for example, in Joshua 10:20, where the armies of the five kings of the Amorites "were wiped out" (תמם), yet the text continues by noting that "the remnant" that survived entered fortified cities. Another example is Exodus 23:23, where Yahweh informs Moses that he will "blot out" (כחד) the foreign nations yet, a few verses later, describes an incremental dispossession: "Little by little I will drive them out from before you" (23:30). This juxtaposition of annihilation language with national displacement occurs quite frequently (Num 21:31–35; Deut 12:29–30; Josh 13:1–6).

The focus throughout Joshua is, as Howard notes, "displacing the Canaanites, not annihilating them."[19] The goal of these "mass displacements"[20] is that Israel might dwell in the land without the enemies of Yahweh instigating pagan worship (e.g., Exod 34:11–13; Num 18:1–5; 20:22–24; Deut 12:29–31). As Howard summarizes, those "not committed to Yahweh [were] driven out, so as to render the land 'clean' for Israelite religion to take root."[21]

Following this approach, the formulaic statements regarding "devote to destruction" (Josh 10:29–40) are perhaps best taken as describing general military victory, as in "disabling raids." In this view, annihilation language indicates the discriminate killing of foreign kings and enemy combatants, the exile and mass displacement of pagan civilians, as well as the eradication of idolatry and worship of foreign gods.

2. Annihilation Language in Joshua 7

Joshua 7:1–26 recounts the transgression of Achan and the resultant consequence on corporate Israel: Achan "took some of the devoted things. And the anger of the Lord burned against the people of

the sword in Josh 10–13) and also burned the flags, topped the monuments, dismantled the government and chain of command, disarmed the military, occupied the cities, banned the symbols, vilified the ideology, and persecuted any attempt to resurrect it—but most of the people were left alone, and most of those who weren't were casualties of war" (p. 176).

[16] Walton and Walton, *Israelite Conquest*, 178.

[17] This view is certainly not without its detractors, both from a confessional and non-confessional perspective. From a confessional view, see G. K. Beale, *The Morality of the God of the Old Testament*, Christian Answers (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013). From a non-confessional view, see Joshua Bowen, "'Your Eye Shall Have No Pity': Old Testament Violence and Modern Evangelical Morality," in *Misusing Scripture: What Are Evangelicals Doing with the Bible?*, ed. M. Elliott, K. Atkinson, and R. Rezetko, Routledge New Critical Thinking (London: Routledge, 2023), 177–99.

[18] A frequently used illustration for English speakers is when one sports team, basketball for instance, "destroyed," "slaughtered," or even "annihilated" another team. This, of course, is not to be taken literally. It is hyperbole used to indicate that one team won by a significant point advantage.

[19] Howard, "Destruction and Dispossession," 591.

[20] Howard, "Destruction and Dispossession," 605.

[21] Howard, "Destruction and Dispossession," 594.

Israel" (7:1). In response, the Lord does not fight against Israel's enemies, as has been expected.[22] Israel experiences defeat as thirty-six Israelites fall to the men of Ai (7:5). The Lord confronts Joshua (7:10), lots are cast (7:14, 18), Achan confesses his guilt (7:20–21), and Achan—along with all his family and possessions—is judged (7:24–26).

It is almost unanimously accepted that Achan's family is killed along with Achan. For example, when writing of Achan's sons and daughters, Richard S. Hess notes, "the victims were stoned to death."[23] Leonard J. Greenspoon states, "Achan's family … suffered the same punishment as their leader."[24] Trent C. Butler agrees, "The Lord instructed that all which belonged to the guilty party must be destroyed. This is now interpreted as meaning his family and possessions."[25] J. Alberto Soggin states that the "stoning [or] execution of the guilty person by the community" included "the whole clan of the condemned man, even if it was not considered directly responsible."[26] E. John Hamlin notes that, according to Joshua, "It was necessary that Achan and his family should die."[27] This interpretation is also found in the church fathers, for instance, where Jerome comments, "Achan, and his sons and daughters … are killed; his tent and all his possessions are destroyed by fire."[28]

Given the difficult nature of the text—and its implications for Yahweh's justice—Adolph L. Harstad poses an unanswered question, "Were Achan's 'sons' and 'daughters' (Josh 7:24) executed along with Achan and his livestock?"[29] Donald H. Madvig attempts to provide an answer to remedy the theological difficulties: "The punishment of children for the sin of their father is an offense to our sense of justice. Achan's family was implicated in his crime because he could not have hidden his loot in the ground under his tent without their knowing it."[30] Here, Madvig presupposes the death of Achan's children and assumes their guilt even though the text is silent on this point.

Although Achan's account is located in the middle of Joshua, conclusions regarding the hyperbolic language of the book have not yet been applied to this account. One example is Howard, who as above, argues extensively for a hyperbolic reading of the conquest in Joshua. Howard comments, "Because he had violated God's command concerning the loot from Jericho, Achan found himself in the position of the inhabitants of Jericho: he himself was set apart for destruction."[31] Yet, ironically, Howard assumes that

[22] When Israel was to fight, she was always to do so as the weaker party, giving credit to Yahweh for victory. In cases where Israel was the superior fighting force, the army was to handicap itself and thereby demonstrate that Yahweh alone achieved victory. A few examples will suffice. Pharaoh's army is destroyed by the returning waters (Exod 14:28–31). Jericho falls as Israel marches around the wall (Josh 6:1–27). Under Gideon, an army of thirty-two thousand is limited to three hundred fighting men (Judg 7:1–25) "lest Israel boast" (7:2). Sennacherib's Assyrian army is repelled, and 185,000 are struck down by the angel of the Lord (2 Kgs 19:32–37). Israel's king was not to develop a standing army, at least not in the traditional sense (Deut 17:15–17). In all these cases, the point is that "the Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent" (Exod 14:14; cf. Josh 3:5; 4:24; 6:2, 27).

[23] Richard S. Hess, *Joshua*, TOTC 6 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1996), 171.

[24] Leonard J. Greenspoon, "Achan," in *ABD* 1:54.

[25] Trent C. Butler, *Joshua*, WBC 7 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 86.

[26] J. Alberto Soggin, *Joshua*, trans. R. A. Wilson, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 105.

[27] E. John Hamlin, *Joshua: Inheriting the Land*, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 64.

[28] Jerome, "Defense Against the Pelagians" 1.37, in John R. Franke, ed. *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament IV* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2005), 44

[29] Adolph L. Harstad, *Joshua*, ConC, ed. Dean O. Wenthe (St. Louis: Concordia, 2004), 328.

[30] Donald M. Madvig, "Joshua," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 288.

[31] Howard, "Destruction and Dispossession," 600.

when Achan was found out, "he and his family were stoned and burned (7:16–26)."[32] If the Canaanites are described with annihilation language when the focus is on killing enemy combatants and displacing the general populace, could this not also be the case with Achan and his "sons and daughters" (7:24)?

If we were to apply the concept of hyperbolic annihilation language to Achan's account, we would suggest that, as an enemy of Yahweh, Achan is treated much like the Canaanites: (a) Achan himself, as the offending leader/enemy combatant is executed, (b) his livestock are killed and his possessions destroyed, and (c) his family is dispossessed from the land. Each point is discussed below.

2.1. Achan Was Executed

Yahweh had commanded the people of Israel to keep themselves from coveting anything in the city of Jericho since all of it was under the ban (Josh 6:17, חֵרֶם). Anyone who coveted and took the devoted things would bring trouble upon the whole camp of Israel (6:18). In direct disobedience to Yahweh's command, Achan covets and takes some of the devoted things (7:1) and thereby brings trouble to all Israel (7:2–12). Yahweh then commands, "It shall be that the one who is taken with the things under the ban shall be burned with fire, he and all that belongs to him, because he has transgressed the covenant of Yahweh, and because he has committed a disgraceful thing in Israel" (7:15). Eventually, Joshua discovers Achan's sin (7:19), and messengers retrieve the stolen items from Achan's tent and pour them out before Yahweh (7:22–23).[33] Achan, along with "all that belonged to him" (וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ), is brought to the Valley of Achor, where all Israel stones him (7:25).

This account raises an important reminder for Israel, namely, that Yahweh brings trouble upon those who trouble Israel, a reality consistent with much of the OT. For example, Genesis 12:3, "whoever curses you I will curse" (cf. Gen 27:29; Deut 30:7; Jer 30:20).[34] The text focuses on Achan to draw the audience's attention to the serious consequence of failing to heed Yahweh's commands. Achan's example therefore articulates with clarity: *Those who make themselves enemies of Yahweh will be treated just as the Canaanites.*

Contrary to the confident remarks of many commentators, we would suggest that a careful reading of Joshua 7 allows the reader to be certain *only* of Achan's death and not of the death of his sons and daughters. Of the commentators mentioned in this article, only Harstad appropriately points out the ambiguity of the text.[35] The primary cause of this ambiguity is the alternating suffixes in 7:25–26. Initially, the text states that all of Israel stoned "him," that is, Achan with stones (7:25). The direct object of the verb וַיִּרְגְּמוּ ("they stoned") is masculine singular in Hebrew, אֹתוֹ ("him"), suggesting the referent is Achan *alone*, not his family.[36] The direct object of וַיִּסְקְלוּ ("they stoned") in the final clause of 7:25 is masculine plural, אֹתָם ("them"), yet it is ambiguous to whom this refers. Does it refer to Achan's "sons and daughters"? To his "oxen and donkeys and sheep"? To "all that he had"? If he is treated as the

[32] Howard, "Destruction and Dispossession," 600. Emphasis added. Also by David M. Howard, Jr., see *Joshua*, NAC 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998). Howard writes, "Achan was brought out to be stoned … with all his possessions and his entire household, including his children" (p. 198). And again, "The punishment for Achan and his household was stoning and burning" (p. 198).

[33] Most likely, before the ark of Yahweh. See Harstad, *Joshua*, 322.

[34] This comes primarily from 7:25, where Joshua says, "Why have you brought trouble [עכר] on us? Yahweh will bring trouble [עכר] upon you this day."

[35] Harstad, *Joshua*, 323–24.

[36] The NASB95 does a disservice here when it replaces the masculine singular suffix of 7:25 with "them." The ESV, NET, NIV, NRSV, and KJV, however, all keep the masculine singular suffix, as seen in the Masoretic Text.

Canaanites had been, we would suggest that, again, (a) Achan himself, as the offending leader/enemy combatant is executed, (b) his livestock are killed and his possessions destroyed, and (c) his family is dispossessed from the land. Joshua 7:25 does not preclude such a reading.

Further, subsequent to the plural "stoning them," the text switches back to a masculine singular pronoun when it describes the people of Israel raising a heap of stones "over him" (עָלָיו),

that is, over *Achan's* body (7:26). Harstad appropriately concludes, "The author's focus is on Achan, whether or not other members of his family were executed."[37]

It is striking that the LXX omits this clause in its entirety: Joshua 7:25 reads as follows: καὶ εἶπεν Ἰησοῦς τῷ Αχαρ Τί ὠλέθρευσας ἡμᾶς; ἐξολεθρεύσαι σε κύριος καθὰ καὶ σήμερον. καὶ ἐλιθοβόλησαν αὐτὸν λίθοις πᾶς Ισραηλ.[38] This raises the possibility that the final statement, "stoned them," was a later scribal addition. At the very least, it adds to the ambiguity of the passage.

Based on the ambiguity of the text—perhaps even the *intentional* ambiguity—the reader should question the hasty assumption that Achan was executed along with the rest of his family.[39] It should not be automatically presupposed that "the whole family and the relevant possessions are included" in the execution.[40]

2.2. Achan's Livestock Were Killed and Possessions Destroyed

If the final clause at the end of 7:25 containing the masculine plural suffix is original, as reflected in the Masoretic Text, then the ambiguity leads to a significant question: to who or what does "them" refer? Butler draws our attention to the clause in 7:15 ("all that belongs to him") and claims verse 24 interprets that phrase "as meaning his family and possessions."[41] While the preposition (לְ) before the masculine singular pronoun in the phrase וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ certainly shows possession, it cannot be certain what is being possessed.[42] Harstad suggests the phrase means "and all (possessions) that belong to him" or "and all (family members) who are his."[43] The difficulty of determining the referent lies in the fact that the phrase "stands closer to the list of Achan's possessions ('his ox and his donkey and his flock and his tent') than to 'his sons and his daughters.'"[44] Even if "all that belongs to him" refers to the whole list, the text says nothing about stoning them. At most, one can only be sure that Joshua and Israel brought all the items, including his sons and daughters, to the Valley of Achor.

The most significant clue to the referent of "them" is the order of events in verses 25–26: (1) Israel stoned only Achan, (2) burned them with fire, (3) stoned them with stones, and (4) erected a heap of stones over Achan. Both Soggin and Hess suggest that the second instance of stoning refers not to

[37] Harstad, *Joshua*, 324.

[38] Translation: "And Joshua said to Achan, 'Why have you destroyed us? May the Lord utterly destroy you even today in the same way.' And they stoned him with stones, all Israel" (7:25).

[39] A few in church history, except for Jerome, mention the stoning of Achan and concur with the above conclusion. Unlike Jerome, Athanasius and John Cassian understood that the narrative focuses on Achan, so neither mentions anything about Achan's family being stoned. Based on the ambiguity of the text, such a focus is correct. See Athanasius, *Epistle to the Bishops of Egypt* 11, and John Cassian, *The Conferences* 1.1.20.

[40] Pekka M. A. Pitkänen, *Joshua*, ApOTC (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 178.

[41] Butler, *Joshua*, 86.

[42] For לְ functioning to demonstrate possession, see Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew and Syntax*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 126.

[43] Harstad, *Joshua*, 313, 322.

[44] Harstad, *Joshua*, 322.

another execution, but rather to the act of covering the charred remains with stones after burning them, "since a double stoning is improbable."[45] Therefore, a more likely order is as follows: (1) Israel stoned only Achan, (2) burned them with fire, (3) covered the burned remains with stones, and (4) erected a heap of stones over Achan. Based on this order, Israel stoned Achan alone and burned (not stoned) the referent of "them." The likelihood of Israel burning the family of Achan alive without stoning them first (as they had with Achan) is improbable since the normal method of execution was stoning. Therefore, "them" most likely refers to Achan's cattle and possessions, all of which are the closest antecedent to "and all that belongs to him" in verse 24.

To summarize, if the final phrase of 7:25 in the Hebrew is to be accepted (contra the LXX), it is reasonable to conclude that Achan and his livestock are burned and the stolen possessions found in the tent destroyed by fire. Similar to Israel's treatment of several Canaanite cities (6:24; 8:28; 11:6, 9, 11, 13), in this view they burn Achan's body along with all that belonged to him according to the command of Yahweh (7:15).

2.3. Achan's Family Dispossessed

The above points reveal potentially helpful implications for what happens to Achan's family in 7:22–26. First, the text focuses primarily (or perhaps exclusively, if we accept the LXX reading) on Achan and does not provide a clear answer about the involvement of Achan's children.[46] Harstad suggests Achan's sons and daughters could have been brought up to the Valley of Achor to witness their father's execution or be executed themselves, but "the text does not spell out which."[47] Based on the ambiguity of the text—specifically the uncertain referent of "all that belongs to him" and the alternating pronominal suffixes—the reader should avoid firm conclusions about the execution of Achan's family.[48]

Common among commentators who suggest Joshua contains hyperbolic language is the assumption that "all" (כֹּל) does not always mean "all" in the literal sense, at least not when there are specific textual indicators present. The writer of Joshua writes of Israel "utterly destroying all" the inhabitants of several cities (6:21; cf. 8:26; 10:28, 30, 32, 35, 37, 39, 40; 11:11, 12, 14, 17), killing "all the inhabitants of Ai" (8:24), and killing "all the kings who were beyond the Jordan" (9:1; 10:43). Despite this language, the beginning of Judges pushes against the idea that Israel had truly wiped out all the inhabitants of the land. This suggests that like other second-millennium writings, the author of Joshua uses intentionally hyperbolic language to articulate the dispossession of the foreign nations from the land.[49] The relationship between the destruction of the Canaanites and the destruction of Achan suggests hyperbole may be at play in Joshua 7:22–26, particularly when it says, "Then Joshua and all Israel with him, took Achan the son of Zerah … and all that belonged to him." This is not to say that every individual Israelite participates, but that the group consensus is unanimous. Due to the ambiguity of the referent of the statement "and all that belonged to him," and the frequent hyperbolic use of "all" in Joshua, perhaps the statement "and all that belonged to him" should be taken hyperbolically.

[45] Soggin, *Joshua*, 94. See also Hess, *Joshua*, 171. Contra NASB95, which places the burning "after they had stoned them with stones." A literal translation of 7:25 places the burning before the stoning.

[46] It should also be noted that Achan's wife is not mentioned, which may or may not be significant. See Butler, *Joshua*, 86.

[47] Harstad, *Joshua*, 322.

[48] Although this essay does suggest the particular referent is Achan's cattle, the main thrust of the argument is to highlight the ambiguity of the text.

[49] Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "Joshua and Ancient Near Eastern Warfare," *JETS* 31, no.1 (1988): 37–50.

Further, a probable case can be made for the hyperbolic use of the verb "to take" (לקח) as seen in 7:24. In Joshua 11, the verb is used three times (11:16, 19, 23) in combination with "all" (כֹּל), which is similar to what we see in 7:24, "Then Joshua and all Israel with him took [וַיִּקַּח] Achan … and all (כֹּל) that belonged to him." In Joshua 11, each of the usages of לקח with "all" appear to be hyperbolic, especially considering comparable passages in Judges. Perhaps this is the same with Joshua 7:25.

The ambiguity of the text, the focus on Achan, the similarity between Israel's treatment of Achan and their treatment of the Canaanites, as well as the usage of hyperbolic language lend support to the possibility that Achan's sons and daughters are not stoned along with him in the Valley of Achor. Rather, like the Canaanites elsewhere in Joshua, Achan's family is dispossessed from the land. To summarize, through his disobedience, Achan becomes an enemy of Yahweh and is treated as such by Israel.

3. Comparable Biblical Passage

Comparable to Joshua 7 is Numbers 16, which recounts Korah's rebellion and the subsequent consequence. Korah, evidently out of greed and pride, complained about the special place of Aaron and his sons as priests (16:3). According to Korah, since all Israel is holy, Moses, Aaron, and Aaron's sons have wrongfully exalted themselves above the rest of Israel.[50] In response to his complaint, Moses challenges Korah, Dathan, and Abiram to present an incense offering before Yahweh so he can choose who is priest: Aaron (and his sons) or Korah (along with Dathan and Abiram). Yahweh's anger is kindled against Korah and the others, and he causes the ground to open up and swallow "all that is theirs" (16:30, 32, 33). Notice the language similarity to Joshua 7:15, 25. Just as in Joshua 7 with Achan, a strictly literal reading would suggest the total and complete annihilation of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Yet that does not happen. In both cases, hyperbolic language appears to be used.

Commentators are in agreement that according to Numbers 26:11 and several Psalms (Pss 42–49; 84; 85; 87; 88), God does not completely cut off the line of Korah.[51] Although Numbers 16:32–33 indicates that the earth opened up and swallowed "all that belonged" (16:30, 32, 33) to Korah, Numbers 26:11 succinctly states, "The sons of Korah, however, did not die." The text notes that the 250 who died along with Korah, "became a warning" (26:10). According to 1 Chronicles, sons of Korah ministered at the tabernacle (1 Chron 6:31–38; 9:19–21).

It is best to suggest that Numbers 16:30–33 includes hyperbolic phrases just as are found in Joshua 7:22–26. Nearly identical to Joshua 7:15 and 24, Numbers 16:30 uses the phrase, "and all that belongs to them" (וְאֶת־כָּל־אֲשֶׁר לָהֶם).[52] Due to the similarities between the two texts, it is reasonable to suggest that if the sons of Korah survive despite appearances to the contrary, then perhaps the sons and daughters of Achan also survive. It illustrates an example of discriminate killing, where the opposing leaders / enemy combatants are judged.

[50] Timothy Ashley rightly notes that, in some sense, Korah is correct. According to Exod 19:6 and 29:45, the whole congregation is set apart, and God is in their midst. However, based on Moses's response (16:4–11), Korah pridefully wanted the privileges of the Aaronic priesthood for the other Levites. See Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 305.

[51] Ashley, *Numbers*, 535; Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, WBC 5 (Waco, TX: Word, 1984), 292; David L. Stubbs, *Numbers*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2009), 206.

[52] The phrase is nearly identical, as Num 16:30 uses a masculine plural suffix with the preposition rather than a masculine singular suffix. Num 16:32 and 33 also use a similar phrase.

4. Conclusion

This essay has sought to apply a hyperbolic reading—often accepted for Joshua 6–10—to Joshua 7 and the Achan account. We propose that this hyperbolic reading best deals with the textual details of Joshua 7:22–26, located as it is in its specific context. In this view, Achan makes himself an enemy of Yahweh and therefore suffers the same fate as the pagan Canaanite nations. As the offending enemy combatant, Achan himself is executed, his livestock killed, his possessions destroyed, and his family dispossessed from their inheritance in the land.

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The Right-Side-Up Kingdom: A Lexical, Contextual, and Theological Study of Acts 17:6 and Its Implications

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Abstract: The kingdom of God is sometimes referred to as an upside-down kingdom. This descriptor originates from translating ἀναστατόω in Acts 17:6 as, "to turn the world upside down." A lexical study will show that such a translation is misguided. A contextual study will show that using the phrase "upside down" to describe the kingdom is similarly problematic. Finally, a theological case will be made for prioritizing "right-side-up" over "upside-down" language for the kingdom of God. When God empowers success in our efforts to reconcile, redeem, and transform that which is upside-down, the kingdom of God is actualized in the world, and "right-side-up" is more appropriate in describing such realities.

In the first pericope of Acts 17, Luke describes the evangelistic teaching efforts of Paul and Silas in the Thessalonian synagogue.[1] A mixed group of Jews and Gentiles came to faith, which infuriated the unbelieving Jews in the town. They gathered a mob, stormed Jason's house—wherein Paul and Silas were presumably staying—and dragged him and others before the city officials. Among the accusations levied against them, these irate Jews shouted, "These men who have turned the world upside down, have come here also…" (Acts 17:6 ESV). Fast forward twenty centuries, and we find that this derogatory, inflammatory accusation has not only been embraced by many sectors of the church but has been developed into a paradigm for Christian worldview analysis and cultural engagement. A few published examples will substantiate the claim, but such upside-down-kingdom language is found in many sermons, lectures, podcasts, and other venues.

Donald Kraybill published the first edition of his influential study of Jesus's life and parables, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, in 1978.[2] In his preface to the 25th anniversary revised edition, he restates the

[1] A preliminary version of our case can be found here, "The Right-Side-Up Kingdom," *The Good Book Blog*, 9 September, 2022, https://www.biola.edu/blogs/good-book-blog/2022/the-right-side-kingdom1.

[2] Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, 25th anniversary rev. ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 2003).

main argument of his study, "The kingdom of God announced by Jesus was a new order of things that looked upside-down in the midst of Palestinian culture in the first century. Moreover, the kingdom of God continues to have upside-down features as it breaks into diverse cultures around the world today."[3] While emphasizing that Jesus's radical teachings promote love, grace, and compassion, he affirms that "the kingdom of God points to an inverted, upside-down way of life that challenges the prevailing social order."[4] As he closes out the charge to his readers at the end of his first chapter, Kraybill clarifies the dichotomy between the way of Jesus and the way of the world: "We want to understand the Kingdom of God, examine it, and analyze it. But God enjoins us to enter it. God calls us to turn our backs on the kingdoms of this world and embrace an upside-down world."[5] We will return to the rationale for Kraybill's language at the close of the article, but these quotations are adequate to illustrate how wholeheartedly he has embraced upside-down language to describe the kingdom of God.

In his recent work of biblical-political theology Preston Sprinkle consistently frames the posture of the people of God toward the world as upside-down.[6] He opens his book, *Exiles*, noting how important it is for our theologizing today that we grasp the very political nature of the Christian message in the first century Greco-Roman context. "Before we address today's political environment, we need to understand why a peace-preaching Jew living on the fringes of the Roman Empire was crucified for treason and how a Jew from Tarsus could be accused of turning the world upside down by telling people about Jesus."[7] As one would expect, he addresses both Jesus's countercultural message,[8] as well as Paul's political confrontations, including the upside-down charge by the anti-Jesus Jewish mob in Thessalonica.[9] Interestingly, he also projects the upside-down nature of God's program backward onto Old Testament Israel and the countercultural nature of the Mosaic Law in its ancient Near Eastern context. He goes so far as to designate ancient Near Eastern culture as right-side-up. In terms of armies and warfare, Sprinkle states, "Militarism makes sense from a right-side-up kingdom perspective.… It's logical to fight power with more of the same power. But in God's upside-down kingdom, things aren't always what they seem. Lions rule the land. But sometimes lambs are more powerful than lions."[10] The sharp contrast between the way of Jesus and the way of the world is clear and compelling in Sprinkle's

[3] Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 9.

[4] Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 16.

[5] Kraybill, *Upside-Down Kingdom*, 32, italics added.

[6] Preston Sprinkle, *Exiles: The Church in the Shadow of Empire* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook, 2024), 12 (x2), 13, 25, 27, 28 (x2), 30, 31 (x2), 36, 39, 41–44, 55 (x2), 57, 65, 69–71, 77–78, 86, 93, 106–8, 115, 122, 133, 136, 139, 156, 158–59, 165, 176, 188 (x2), 208 n. 26. Actual citations of Acts 17:6, as well as section and chapter headings featuring the phrase are not included in this count.

[7] Sprinkle, *Exiles*, 13.

[8] Chapter 4 is titled, "Jesus, the New Israel, and the Kingdom Not of This World" (Sprinkle, *Exiles*, 67–78), and Chapter 5 is titled, "Jesus and the Subversion of Empire" (pp. 79–96).

[9] Sprinkle, *Exiles*, 107–9.

[10] Sprinkle, *Exiles*, 36–37. David W. Bercot refers to Old Testament Israel as the right-side-up kingdom in his *The Kingdom That Turned the World Upside Down* (Amberson, PA: Scroll, 2003), 7–9. In contrast to Sprinkle, Bercot claims that Israel's sole uniqueness from her neighboring countries is the God whom they worshiped. The preoccupation of both Israel and the rest of the nations in the ancient Near East with land, political power and influence, and material/physical prosperity are all right side up for Bercot. The upside-down aspect of the new covenant is that God is no longer working through these means or for these ends. Sprinkle's emphasis on the many contrasts between Israel's intended way of life and the way of life of ancient Near Eastern cultures is more biblically faithful and historically nuanced, as we see it, although we would prefer neither Old Testament Israel nor ancient Near Eastern culture to be described as "right side up."

book. The question is which side should bear the moniker "upside-down," and which should bear the moniker "right-side-up."

Moving into the realm of practical theology, church ministry consultant, Reggie McNeal,[11] offers many helpful principles for Christian leaders in all contexts and professions, whom he calls kingdom collaborators, which is the name of his book.[12] In calling the church away from an "institutional" mindset and toward a "movement" mindset, McNeal challenges us to see the kingdom-impact potential in leaders across all sectors of society, including business, healthcare, government, and more.[13] A "church as movement" mindset will focus on equipping and empowering such kingdom collaborators to advance God's work in the world in the specific spheres where God has placed them. The subtitle of the book is what intersects McNeal's important work with our study: *Eight Signature Practices of Leaders Who Turn the World Upside Down*. "Wreak havoc"[14] "foment dissatisfaction,"[15] "agitate,"[16] and "disrupt,"[17] are all terms used to describe the actions of kingdom collaborators that foster change. The ends are all rightly framed as bringing people to the feet of Jesus where they can find the good news of "real life—life as God intends."[18] But as both the subtitle and the action verbs attest, McNeal has embraced Acts 17:6 as paradigmatic for the church. His conclusion makes the case plainly.

> In the early days of church-as-movement, Paul and Silas journeyed to Thessalonica to preach the good news of Jesus. They enjoyed early success that threatened resident religious leaders, who promptly incited a street riot. The mob dragged some of the new believers to court, charging them with disturbing the peace. In their opening remarks, the plaintiffs characterized the situation as follows: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here too" (Acts 17:6 NKJV). Kingdom collaborators welcome the accusation. They see it as a badge of honor, and wear it proudly.[19]

Many other examples could be presented to evidence the widespread use of upside-down language both in the church and the academy.[20] But now that the relevant Acts episode has been briefly rehearsed—twice—we turn to lexical, contextual, and theological analysis in order to assess the propriety of such a thorough and programmatic attribution of "upside down" to the kingdom of God and the posture that exemplifies that kingdom.

[11] McNeal is also recognized as an author, speaker, leadership coach, denominational executive, and founding pastor at http://reggiemcneal.org/.

[12] Reggie McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators: Eight Signature Practices of Leaders Who Turn the World Upside Down* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

[13] McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 4–5.

[14] McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 6.

[15] McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 29.

[16] McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 30.

[17] McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 30.

[18] McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 4, italics original.

[19] McNeal, *Kingdom Collaborators*, 169.

[20] Chris Castaldo, *The Upside Down Kingdom: Wisdom for Life from the Beatitudes* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023); Greg Laurie, *Upside Down Living: A Template for Changing the World and Ourselves from the Book of Acts* (Dana Point, CA: Kerygma, 2009); *Upside Down Living Bible Study: A Study from the Book of Acts* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014);; Preston Sprinkle, ed., *NIV Upside-Down Kingdom Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2025).

1. Lexical

Starting with the earliest Bible translation to contain the phrase—the King James Bible, authorized in 1604 and published in 1611—Acts 17:6 reads, "And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, 'These that have *turned the world upside down* are come hither also.'"[21] Predating the KJV, however, the earliest confirmed usage of the phrase, "turned the world upside down," appears as "The wourld is tournyd almost up so doun," used by John Lydgate (ca. 1370–ca. 1450), a Benedictine monk, in his poem, "The Cok hath Lowe Shoone," found in *Minor Poems*, a ca. 1430 collection of poems.[22]

In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, ballads were written on a topic subject, printed on broadsides (a printed advertising circular), and sung in public (as on a street corner) by a professional balladeer. In 1646, and in closer proximity to the printing of the KJV, "The world turn'd upside down" appears as the title of an English ballad first published on a broadside for a "John Smith." It was created to protest Parliament's position that the Christmas holiday should be a solemn occasion and its outlawing of traditional English Christmas celebrations. This usage reveals the disruptive nature of the phrase.


THE
World turn'd upside down:
OR,
A briefe description of the ridiculous Fashions of these distracted Times.
By T. J. a well-willer to King, Parliament and Kingdom.
London: Printed for John Smith. 1646 1647.

[21] Italics added.

[22] John Lydgate, *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate: Part II Secular Poems*, eds. H. N. MacCracken and Merriam Sherwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934), 814.

A number of modern Bible translations follow the King James Version in their renderings of Acts 17:6. These translations are listed alphabetically and with the phrase italicized for emphasis:

- Christian Standard Bible (CSB): "When they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city officials, shouting, 'These men who *have turned the world upside down* have come here too."
- English Standard Version (ESV): "And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brothers before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who *have turned the world upside down* have come here also.'"
- Jerusalem Bible (JB): "However, they found only Jason and some of the brothers, and these they dragged before the city council, shouting, 'The people who *have been turning the whole world upside down* have come here now.'"
- Revised Standard Version (RSV): "And when they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some of the brethren before the city authorities, crying, 'These men who *have turned the world upside down* have come here also.'"

In the Nestle-Aland Greek-English New Testament (8th ed.), we read ἀναστατόω in Acts 17:6, which can be translated, "cause trouble or disturb." The English translation in this work is the RSV, which, as mentioned above, maintains the KJV wording, "turned the world upside down."[23] Given its high scholarly regard, the Nestle-Aland Greek and English translation's use of the phrase has had and may still have influence on other Bible translations. This shows how the KJV's veering from "formal equivalency" or "literal" translation to include this English idiomatic neologism is perpetuated.

Approximately 50 years prior, Acts 17:6 in the Geneva Bible (AD 1560) reads, "But when they found them not, they drewe Jason & certeine brethren unto the heads of the citie, crying, These are they which have subverted the state of the worlde, and here they are." So, while a number of translations follow the KJV wording, many others do not. The following Bible translations do not follow the KJV wording, rendering the phrase differently:

- Common English Bible (CEB): "When they didn't find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city officials. They were shouting, 'These people who *have been disturbing the peace throughout the empire* have also come here.'"
- Today's English Version (TEV): "But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city authorities and shouted, 'These men *have caused trouble everywhere*! Now they have come to our city.'"
- New American Standard Bible (NASB): "When they did not find them, they began dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, 'These men who *have upset the world* have come here also.'"
- New International Version (NIV): But when they did not find them, they dragged Jason and some other believers before the city officials, shouting: 'These men who *have caused trouble all over the world* have now come here.'"
- New Living Translation (NLT): "Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council. 'Paul and Silas *have*

[23] The 8th edition of the Greek-English New Testament uses the NA27. Interestingly, the Zondervan Greek-English New Testament, which uses the UBS5 edition of the Greek New Testament, includes the NIV for its English version, and thus reads, "caused trouble all over the world."

> *caused trouble all over the world',* they shouted, 'and now they are here disturbing our city, too.'"

BDAG defines ἀναστατόω as "to upset the stability of a person or group, disturb, trouble, upset τὴν οἰκουμένην (the inhabited world) Acts 17:6."[24] Danker and Krug expand to add "agitate, disturb, excite, unsettle" as used in Acts 17:6.[25] The NIDNTTE agrees, noting a negative nuance, "to disturb" (Acts 17:6; Gal 5:12), or even "to cause a revolt" (Acts 21:38).[26]

In a case of mistaken identity, Paul is suspected of being the escaped Egyptian rebel, a messianic pretender, who tried to coordinate an attack on Jerusalem in AD 54 (Acts 21:38 ESV), "Are you not the Egyptian, then, who recently *stirred up* a revolt [ἀναστατώσας] and led the four thousand men of the Assassins out into the wilderness?" The riot that had ensued was incited by the mob believing Paul had violated the temple by bringing Greeks into it.

In Galatians 5:12, ἀναστατοῦντες is used of the Jewish leaders who opposed Paul's message and sought to cause confusion among the Galatian Christians. The apostle entreats, "I wish those who "are *disturbing* you might also get themselves castrated!" (CSB)

Balz and Schneider's definitions for ἀναστατόω are consistent with other lexicons (incite, disturb, and mislead) yet word its use in Acts 17:6 as "turned the whole world upside down," as found in the KJV.[27]

Thus, we conclude that "turn the world upside down" is a less than accurate translation of ἀναστατόω from the original Koine Greek and an unfortunate stretch from its lexical bearings. While it may represent the hyperbolic tone of the charge against Paul and others, its exaggeration does not help in establishing a more accurate tone of the event. And yet, it has found a following that has been and continues to be perpetuated via a certain lexicon, the KJV, and subsequent other translations of the Bible. The simpler translation, "upset the world" (NASB), addresses both the political urgency and the exaggeration of the accusation against Paul and his team.[28] "Upside down" may be a catchy phrase to which many have latched, but its use is a distortion of what is recorded and unfortunately implies a behavior contrary to Luke's description and message.

Careful consideration is a must before claiming that because Paul and his followers "turned the world upside down" Christians today should do likewise. Revisiting the context of this incident in Thessalonica lends further support in clarifying who said what and why in Acts 17:6.

2. Contextual

Luke's purpose in his Gospel and the Book of Acts was to demonstrate that the universal kingdom of God was offered to Jews and Gentiles by Jesus's completed work on the cross. The salvation Jesus offers crosses all geographical, ethnic, and social boundaries, and its kingdom citizens are to give evidence

[24] BDAG 72.

[25] Frederick W. Danker, with Kathryn Krug, *The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 28.

[26] "ἀνίστημι, ἀνάστασις, ἀναστατόω," *NIDNTTE* 1:323.

[27] Horst Balz, "ἀναστατόω," *EDNT* 1:92.

[28] We thank our former colleague, Dr. Doug Huffman, for offering insight on the Greek nuances of this passage.

of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence and power as identifying marks of that kingdom. These were contrary to the deeply held, identifying marks—circumcision and law observance—of Judaism.

Paul powerfully preached the gospel message in synagogues of major cities in Asia Minor and Europe. Philippi of Macedonia, on his itinerary before arriving in Thessalonica, was one such city. Many Jewish and Gentile hearers were convinced of its truth and became followers of Christ, and of these, some ministered alongside Paul. Paul's time in Philippi was met with a flogging and jail time for casting out a demonic spirit from a slave girl that resulted in a loss of income for those who profited from her powers. After suffering an illegal beating, being denied a trial as a Roman citizen, and undergoing wrongful imprisonment, Paul insisted his release from prison be public as a clear vindication of the gospel message, the church, and himself, so as to avoid any characterization as a troublemaker or lawbreaker.

Known for its ports, trade centers, and large population, the strategic city of Thessalonica was Paul's next destination. As was Paul's customary practice when entering a city, he went first to the Jewish synagogues. For three Sabbaths, he reasoned with them from their own Scriptures and proclaimed the gospel truth, as evidenced by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus's completed work proved that he is the promised, anticipated, and expected Messiah. Among those who believed his message were Jewish listeners, Greeks, and a significant number of influential women. The non-believing Jews became furious at Paul's approach since his converts were from among the Jews themselves or potential proselytes. The two-part execution of their plan publicly revealed their snap judgment, and disapproving envy and anger. They experienced a disruption to their religious status quo and took to the streets.

First, these Jewish opponents knew exactly where to go and to whom their quest for a mob-for-hire to stir up unrest would be actualized. Riots were not uncommon as a form of protest against any number of social ills—poverty, overcrowding, high unemployment, and more. These marketplace rabble-rousers may not have even known the reason behind the riot; they were on-call to riot for any reason. This disturbance was instigated and engineered by the Thessalonian Jews themselves, who were responsible for the riot and the negative bad press against Paul and his associates. A repeat performance occurred when these Jewish instigators traveled to Berea, Paul's next destination (Acts 17:13).

Second, their plan of action involved invading the home of Jason, a Jewish convert to Christ, who extended hospitality to Paul and Silas. Perhaps hidden by the small band of believers, Paul and Silas were nowhere to be found at the time of the raid. So as to not leave empty-handed, the Jews dragged Jason and friends from his home to the city officials with two charges that sought to appeal to the Gentile leaders and the culture's status quo.

The first of two deliberate yet fabricated charges sought to connect the Jesus followers with the crime that by preaching a *religio illicita* they instigated a disturbance, "upsetting the world" wherever this message was delivered.[29] In the shadows of recent history, Claudius's edict (AD 49–50) had expelled the Jews from Rome for the "constant riots at the instigation of *Chrēstus*."[30] In Thessalonica, the investigation determined the actual architects who disturbed the highly prized Pax Romana were the non-believing Jewish accusers. Subsumed in this charge was the accusation against Jason for harboring the alleged disturbers of peace.

[29] Richard N. Longenecker, "Acts," in *Luke-Acts*, EBC 10, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 975.

[30] Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4, cited in William J. Larkin, Jr., *Acts*, IVPNTC 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 248.

The second charge was the more serious of the two: claiming allegiance to another king meant treason against Caesar. Disloyalty on any level was unacceptable. Perhaps this was grounded in Paul's preaching of the kingdom of God that inferred allegiance to a new and different king, though one who had clearly suffered death by crucifixion at the hands of the Romans.

It did not take much to determine the guiltlessness of the wrongly-charged friends of Paul and the bitter jealousy of the non-believing Jews. The resulting issue of a security bond, designed to protect the people and discourage further chaos, was paid by the innocent accused, placating the crowd and officials. Though Jason and others were released, this unprovoked incident was enough for Paul to shorten his ministry time in this key city. Yet his concern for the new believers' perseverance persisted as evidenced by his continuing correspondence with them amid persecution in his absence (1 Thess 3:2–5).

Luke records the stark contrast between the non-believing Jews—who feared and thus overreacted to the disruption of their current state of affairs—and those who modeled the kingship of Christ's rule in a Spirit-led life. Kavin Rowe asserts that neither sedition nor a coup was the missionaries' agenda but rather bearing witness to the reality of Jesus's resurrection.[31] Their newly transformed kingdom culture was living evidence directed toward a world that is upside down. He maintains that the normative behavior of Christ followers is as those whose "culture and its set of practices are instantiations of a world turned right side up."[32]

3. Theological

If our case is anywhere close to correct that the descriptor, "turned the world upside down," is a less than desirable translation of ἀναστατόω in Acts 17:6 and that, contextually—even if we continue to use that translation—the early Christians should appropriately, from God's perspective, be referred to as engaging in right-side-up activity, what are the theological consequences? Are we merely meddling in semantics when we could be making a concrete impact in the world for Jesus? Our claim is that the theological import of using right-side-up language, and having a right-side-up mind and heart posture that undergirds such language, is significant indeed. We hope to show this by addressing an argument against right-side-up language, considering an oft-used framework adjacent to upside-down, and reflecting on the implications of a number of relevant New Testament passages.

3.1. An Argument against Right-Side-Up Kingdom Language

Returning to Donald Kraybill's work, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, we note that he does not merely grab the term from Acts 17:6 and use it throughout. At one point, he actually acknowledges that "the kingdom portrays God's blueprint for our lives,"[33] and because it does, we could possibly choose right-side-up language to refer to the kingdom of God. Here is a summary of the reasons he decidedly and intentionally chooses not to do so:

- Social stratification is vertical, not horizontal. Some are lower and some are higher in the social hierarchy. Using upside-down language reminds us of such inequalities.

[31] C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 88.

[32] Rowe, *World Upside Down*, 6.

[33] Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, 20.

- We naturally accept "the way things are." We thus fail to ask questions about the world. Upside-down language reminds us to challenge what we otherwise take for granted.
- Jesus regularly used paradox, irony, and reversal to surprise his hearers and shatter their assumptions. Upside-down language is thus quite in line with Jesus's form of pedagogy.[34]

Kraybill's points are compelling to a degree but in our estimation fall short in some key ways when compared to a right-side-up paradigm. We offer these counterpoints to Kraybill's case against right-side-up language:

- True, our social strata are varied, and hierarchical relationships exist. But according to Scripture, not every stratum is an inequity that needs to be equalized. If upside-down language is intended to convey that all hierarchies are to be overturned, then it is misguided. Right-side-up language allows us to recognize those strata that are naturally in alignment with God's desires, while encouraging us to right the wrongs that do exist.
- Perhaps it is human to accept "the way things are." But as citizens of God's kingdom, we know that since Genesis 3, the world is by and large in an upside-down state. Thus, rather than looking at those things that seem overtly and obviously out of sync with God's kingdom and turning them upside-down from the world's perspective, we propose viewing the world as primarily upside-side down, i.e., out of sync with God's kingdom, and turning any and all upside-down elements right-side up from God's perspective.
- Yes, Jesus's language shocked his hearers, causing them to reflect on his words and reevaluate their approach to life and understanding of reality. But for those who reflect, reevaluate, and ultimately realign their lives with true kingdom life, they are now living as God has always wanted his people to live. They were upside down, but by following Jesus's seemingly odd and paradoxical call, they are now right side up. The surprising language is the same, but the teleological aim is more theologically apt.

The semantic decision to refer to God's kingdom as right side up carries with it the deep desire to convey the work of that kingdom as obedient and restorative, rather than unruly and destructive. This does not dilute or detract from the radical nature of Jesus's words or work; rather, it more appropriately frames what it is that he came to do. In his last words on the opening section of the Sermon on the Mount, Dallas Willard captures the intent as we desire to capture it.

> Surely it is this radically revolutionary outlook that explains why Jesus, in completing his statement … in Matthew 5, finds it necessary to caution, "Don't think I have come to abolish the Law and the Prophets"—that is, to abolish the entire established order as far as his hearers were concerned. Obviously he had to say this because this is precisely what his hearers were thinking. They could think nothing else! They had not heard just another powerless list of legalisms, however pretty, and they knew it. They had heard an upside down world being set right side up.[35]

[34] Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, 20–21.

[35] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998), 126.

3.2. An Adjacent Upside-Down Kingdom Framework?

Obviously, there are other ways to refer to the kingdom of God that accentuate the contrast between God's kingdom and the world but that avoid the right-side-up and upside-down linguistic dilemma. "Subversive" has found purchase among a number of recent Christian authors. Ed Stetzer wrote *Subversive Kingdom*[36] just over a decade ago. Here's one of his many provocative descriptions.

> It's here. It's happening. It's right there in the room with you. It has broken into time and space and is subversively working to overcome the darkness of our age. The kingdom of God is a *radical* rejection of every value or point of view that keeps people in bondage to untruth, blinded to Christ's mercy. It is a refusal to classify any person as being expendable or beyond reach, an unwillingness to view any situation as something that cannot be transformed and infused with hope. It means knowing that while not everything will be made perfectly right on this earth or in this era, we have opportunities to witness the kingdom's reality this week on every street, in every neighborhood, in every nation of the world.[37]

Stetzer emphasizes that the enemy of the kingdom of God, and hence the one whose efforts we are aiming to subvert, is Satan and his kingdom of darkness.[38]

Other accounts of subversion cast the contrast in kingdoms differently. In his thoroughly compelling articulation of the political nature of Christian commitment, *Political Gospel*, Patrick Schreiner balances what he calls the way of subversion and the way of submission.[39] Commenting on Acts 17:6, wherein he affirms that he "loves" the "turned the world upside down" translation of ἀναστατόω, Schreiner states, "It fits seamlessly with the idea that the Christian message is not only political but politically subversive.… The word … literally means 'to subvert, agitate, overthrow, or disturb.'"[40] And yet, pages later, he states, "The church is a political assembly, but that does not mean we are to overthrow the government. We

[36] Ed Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom: Living as Agents of Gospel Transformation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012). We are in hearty agreement with the main thrust of Stetzer's book, as well as his many bold exhortations to true kingdom living. We merely question whether subversion is the appropriate descriptor for the radical life we are called to as God's kingdom citizens.

[37] Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom*, 8, italics original.

[38] "This is the condition we were each born into—an oppressive, deceptive kingdom that kept us buried in lies, spiritual laziness, and pointless activities disguised to look meaningful. But Jesus subversively came into the world to destroy Satan and his schemes, to set free those who suffered under his enslaving rule." Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom*, 18. "Our new kingdom citizenship with its transferred loyalties compels us into becoming agents of 'rebellion against the rebellion,' working intentionally to subvert the devil's claim to authority over our and others' individual lives." *Subversive Kingdom*, 21. Despite these important insights, it is unknown whether Jesus coming into the world was subversive from Satan's perspective, given the "secretive" and "indirect" connotations of the term. The words and actions of Satan's demons during Jesus's ministry appear to imply that they were fully aware of the intent of the incarnation.

[39] Patrick Schreiner, *Political Gospel: Public Witness in a Politically Crazy World* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2022). The emphasis on the subversion/submission relationship is primarily found in chapters 4–6.

[40] Schreiner, *Political Gospel*, 83. Preston Sprinkle, toward the end of *Exiles*, actually construes Acts 17:6 as a command for followers of Jesus. "Christians are to be good citizens by being subversive citizens, political prophets, strangers and foreigners who '[turn] the world upside down' by 'acting contrary to Caesar's decrees, saying that there is another king—Jesus.'" *Exiles*, 177. The rhetorical flourish is moving, but we hope we have shown that the verse does not carry imperative intent.

submit to it. It does not mean lashing out at those who persecute us but doing good to our enemies."[41] Acknowledging the obvious tension, he closes by stating, "The church's political posture is no different from that of Jesus. The way of subversion and the way of submission collide.… This is the paradox of our political lives."[42]

So, are we subverting Satan and his plans, à la Stetzer, or figuring out whether to subvert or submit to political powers, à la Schreiner? And how does either articulation of kingdom subversion affect how we deal with the women and men whose lives are tangled up in the webs of demonic or political powers? If our driving motivation is to undermine, disturb, and overthrow, how do we do so without harming the individuals who are so entangled in these systems? Given the contextual fact that the agitate-subvert-turn-upside-down paradigm was an accusation against the early church by hostile agitators and not a descriptor of what she was truly all about, and given the fact that there is confusion about what we ought to subvert and how we could do so without victimizing the very people who need to experience the gospel of the kingdom, we do not agree that "subversion" is the best way to frame the kingdom task. To fix what is broken, to reconcile that which has been separated, to heal that which is wounded, to build up that which has been torn down, to redeem that which has been lost—these phrases better describe the renewing, restorative posture of a kingdom that is turning the world right side up. And, undoubtedly, each and every right-side-up kingdom act that draws people to Jesus and realizes God's will on earth is a frustrating and infuriating strike against Satan and his minions.

3.3. Three New Testament Texts on Turning the World Right Side Up

We have explored the nuances of Acts 17:6 and its language. And we have argued that right-side-up thinking is preferable to upside-down-thinking. But does our claim measure up with New Testament teaching more broadly? Below we explore teaching from Jesus, Paul, and Peter that not only corroborates the case we've been building, but expounds and expands it.

Matthew 5:16: "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (NASB). It is the very nature of light to dispel darkness. And this darkness-dispelling quality of God, who is light, and by extension God's kingdom citizens, who are also light, is a clear biblical theme.[43] In this passage, Jesus further clarifies that the way we shine as God's light in the dark world around us is not merely by doing good works but by doing them in a way that points those who experience our good works to God as their source. Contextually, this kingdom way of doing good works is characterized by the Beatitudes: poverty of spirit, gentleness, righteousness, mercy, purity of heart, peace, etc. Those in the dark, those truly in the upside-down kingdom, may not experience our good works as we, or God, intend. But according to Jesus, some should see the light of our works as coming from our light, and our light, as coming from the very light of God, dispelling the

[41] Schreiner, *Political Gospel*, 116.

[42] Schreiner, *Political Gospel*, 122. In *Exiles*, Sprinkle presses Schreiner's contrast, seeking to remove the tension and bring cohesion. "Instead of subversion and submission existing in tension like two sides of the same coin, what if it's more accurate to speak of subversion through submission? Here the two concepts are not opposites, nor do they exist in tension. Rather, in God's upside-down kingdom, submitting to the state is a way we subvert the authoritative power of the state, similar to the way Christ defeated the dragon by submitting to the cross." *Exiles*, 208 n. 26, italics original.

[43] Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 214–16.

darkness by which they are enveloped.[44] Turning the world right side up seems much more in step with this metaphor of light driving away the darkness.[45]

First Thessalonians 4:11–12: "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need" (NASB). Recall that it was the Thessalonian Jews who charged that Paul and company were "turning the world upside down," implying societal upheaval and violations of law. But as is the case throughout Acts, Paul is declared innocent of these kinds of charges.[46] This legal reality aligns with his instructions to the Thessalonian church, wherein Paul delivers this message of respectful, social behavior. Summarizing this passage, D. Michael Martin states,

> It was not Paul's intent that the church disrupt society or overthrow governments. Rather, he encourages Christians to be good citizens and exemplary members of their families and of their society … in a manner consistent with the teachings of Christ. People who live in such a way that they are counted as respectable members of society, who engage in respectable pursuits, are living *euschēmonōs* [properly/worthily].[47]

"'Subvert, agitate, overthrow, or disturb,'"[48] all claimed characteristic actions of the upside-down kingdom, seem far from what Paul has in mind here for Christians living their day-to-day lives. Living Christianly, but in a winsome, contagious manner, is the right-side-up kingdom way.[49]

First Peter 2:13–15:[50] "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right. For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men" (NASB). It goes without saying that Peter wrote these instructions when the church was in the minority. And while there is debate over when the letter was written and which emperor was in charge when he wrote,[51] there is no doubt that the church faced hostility in the form

[44] Colin J. Smothers argues that Jesus's intent, as well as Matthew's intent in recording Jesus's words, in Matthew 5, is to allude to the "light of the nations" emphasis in the Book of Isaiah, specifically 42:6. Such an allusion is meant to call out Jesus's disciples as the new Israel carrying out a new covenant function. Whether one agrees with Smothers's "canonical" connection or holds that Jesus is using light as a broader-yet-still-biblical metaphor, the shared conclusion still stands: "Jesus's disciples are those whose light will shine forth to attract the nations." "Salt and Light: A Canonical Reading of Matthew 5:13–16 and Isaiah 42:6," *JETS* 67 (2024): 249.

[45] Wilkins continues, "It is a real temptation for humans …, for fallen creatures [to] want to impose their way on others. But Jesus brought the kingdom of God in a very different way. It is the way of regeneration and renewal by the Spirit." Wilkins, *Matthew*, 224.

[46] Schreiner, *Political Gospel*, 110–12.

[47] D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, NAC 33 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 138–39.

[48] Schreiner, *Political Gospel*, 83.

[49] Gary Shogren's comments provide appropriate nuance regarding this passage, "Some suggest that [Paul] promote[s] mere respectability, that rather than turn the world upside down with the gospel, Christians are to stay home, be quiet and dignified, and obey the government (e.g., 1 Tim 2:2). Nevertheless, 'quiet' does not necessarily mean passivity; 1 Thessalonians combines a radical commitment to the gospel … with a conventional manner of living.… It was always Paul's desire that Christians make a sincere and positive impression on non-Christians." *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 171–72.

[50] We note that the previous two verses of 1 Peter 2 call Christians to the same kinds of behavior as do Matthew 5:16 and 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12, and for the same reasons.

[51] See Scot McKnight, *1 Peter*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 29, 145, for Nero; and Karen Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 32–48, 247, who leans more toward Claudius.

of slanderous accusations and, at least, sporadic persecution. Under these circumstances, Peter does not call his readers to agitate, disturb, cause trouble, or overthrow, but to submit and do right. This instruction coheres with Jesus's words in Matthew 5:16, and Paul's in 1 Thessalonians 4:11–12, but the purpose directly addresses the negative and untrue charges levied against them. The behavior of the early Christians was to be politically and morally above reproach so that, when an angry critic publicly raises a charge that they were "turning the world upside down," the Christians' words and actions would prove the accusations false and thus, in the words of Karen Jobes, "silence the slander."[52] Our political structures may be different today, but the attitude of the culture toward the church is in some ways the same. So, Christians ought to heed Peter's words and wisely and contextually apply them. However that might work out in our various communities, these admonitions appear to us to be better described as right side up (with connotations to build up) than upside down (with connotations to tear down).[53]

4. Conclusion

The lexical, contextual, and theological analysis of Acts 17:6 reveals (to us, at least) that a correction is in order concerning the use of the phrase, "turn the world upside down." The fallen, broken, sinful world we live in is already, truly upside down. God's kingdom purposes are to penetrate our lives and thus impact as much of the world as possible with God's kingdom values, i.e., to turn it right side up.

When our heart, mind, and will align with the kingdom of God, we are right side up. How we live out this truth should reflect God's kingdom. It starts with a change in perspective, a prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit to lead us in observing the opportunities to manifest right-side-up kingdom realities. He will guide us to act and speak in redemptive ways as in, e.g., caring for creation, being present with the elderly in and beyond our families, extending friendship to a stranger, or forgiving the unforgivable. It is not just doing the right thing; it is doing the right thing in the right way. In other words, it is doing the right-side-up kingdom thing. It will not always be easy or convenient. It is not supposed to be. Otherwise, we would not need the Holy Spirit's empowerment. To align with kingdom values bears witness with and through observable differences, and it pleases the King of the kingdom. We firmly believe that our call as citizens of God's right-side-up kingdom is to do as Jesus, the announcer and fulfillment of that kingdom, did, and work to turn our upside-down world right side up, as well.

[52] Jobes, *1 Peter*, 246.

[53] McKnight's commentary has an extended section discussing how the differences between the context of the first century and the twenty-first century require a more idealizing application of Peter's instructions. *1 Peter*, 155–62.

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The Pastors and Teachers in Ephesians 4:11

— Jonathan D. Worthington —

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Abstract: Paul's reference to "the pastors and teachers" in Ephesians 4:11 is regularly discussed and often misunderstood. In conversation with some key voices in the debate, I argue this double-sided thesis: (1) Paul's grammar portrays pastors and teachers as two recognizably distinct groups—i.e., in general, pastors are not teachers and teachers are not pastors—and (2) they nevertheless must serve the saints in closer connection together than the other groups of leaders mentioned. On this sound foundation, I offer constructive possibilities with reference to the connected Greco-Roman systems of home and education for who within Pauline circles the pastors likely were, who the teachers likely were, and how they were likely meant to work together.

Nearly 30 years ago, I was sipping cheap coffee with school friends home from their first year of Bible college. "Paul's phrase 'the pastors and teachers' in Ephesians 4:11," they explained, "should not be considered two offices, but one: something like pastor-teachers."

Like a good Berean, I opened my heavily highlighted NIV 1985 Study Bible and read:

> It was [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up. (Eph. 4:11–12)

"Yeah," they said knowingly, "our professor showed us the Greek." Impressed, I then read the NIV note at 4:11:

> Because of the Greek grammatical construction … it is clear that these groups of gifted people are closely related. Those who have pastoral care for God's people (the image is that of shepherding) will naturally provide "food" from the Scriptures (teaching). They will be especially gifted as teachers (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2).[1]

Since then, I've seen many established pastors and theologians claim "the pastors and teachers" in Ephesians 4:11 are one role (many say "office"),[2] Paul's grammar supposedly expressing "dual

[1] Walter Liefeld, "Ephesians," in *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), *ad loc*.

[2] Kevin DeYoung, "Why the Ascension?" *Christ Covenant*, 22 May 2022, https://christcovenant.org/sermons/why-the-ascension/); John MacArthur, *Bible Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 757; Doug Wilson, "The Difference Between Pastors and Teachers," *Blog & Mablog*, 26 May 2014, https://dougwils.com/the-church/the-difference-between-pastors-and-teachers.html; Jeramie Rinne, *Church El-*

responsibilities of the same people."[3] Hence popular glosses like "pastor-teachers" or "teaching pastors." Some argue Paul's Greek construction actually shows that the *main* way pastors are *to pastor* is *by teaching*.[4]

This exegetical-theological claim has implications for whom we call, appoint, or ordain as "pastors" and exactly what pastoral training programs should include. But what if "pastors" are *not* usually meant to teach? What if "teachers" are *not* usually meant to pastor? What if Christ has provided *two differently gifted groups of people* and intends them to serve the saints *in partnership*?[5]

Here is this article's double-sided thesis:

1. Paul's grammar in Ephesians 4:11 portrays "pastors" and "teachers" as *two recognizably distinct groups*—i.e., in general, pastors are not teachers and teachers are not pastors—
2. who nevertheless must serve the saints *in closer connection together* than the other leaders mentioned.

Elements of this are not new.

Yet two significant points tend to be uncritically mixed in. First, Daniel Wallace masterfully argues that the Greek of Ephesians 4:11 does *not* suggest pastors and teachers are identical (so not "pastor-teachers"). Yet Wallace includes theological and exegetical reasoning that perpetuates confusion. Second, some theologians *admit in their exegesis* that pastors and teachers are *not* identical,[6] but this does not then affect their *general theological constructions* (e.g., Benjamin Merkle, Constantine Campbell, Harold Hoehner). I believe this confuses laymen, students, pastors, and professors. Section 7 directly addresses both after analyzing the data in §§1–6. Sections 8–9 then presents a better way forward.

1. Paul's Basic Grammar: "The Pastors and Teachers"

Paul does *connect* "teachers" to "pastors" in two ways, *not* so for the other three types of leaders.[7]

1.1. "And": Paul's καί Somewhat Connects Pastors and Teachers in Ephesians 4:11

Paul uses a μὲν … δέ … construction for this list of leaders: "on the one hand [μὲν] … on the other [δέ]…" It's like Paul is placing each set of leaders into its own place: "On the one hand, Christ gave the

ders, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 46; Ligon Duncan, "What Elders Are and Do," LigonDuncan.com, 7 September 2008, https://ligonduncan.com/what-elder-are-and-do-728/.

[3] Craig Keener, "Ephesians," in *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible,* ed. John Walton and Craig Keener (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 2062.

[4] Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1959), 3:117, followed by John Piper, "Elders, Pastors, Bishops, and Bethlehem," *Desiring God*, 2 March 1987, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/elders-pastors-bishops-and-bethlehem); cf. Benjamin Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 86.

[5] By focusing on "the pastors and teachers," I am not making any claim about the continued activity of apostles, prophets, and evangelists. That issue is beside the point here and would be distracting.

[6] E.g., Constantine Campbell, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 177–79; Darrell Bock, *Ephesians*, TNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 126; Clinton Arnold, *Ephesians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 260–62; Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 543–44; Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, CEC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 393; Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 250.

[7] Arnold, *Ephesians*, 260; cf. Markus Barth, *Ephesians*, AB 34 (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 2:438.

apostles—over there. On the other hand, Christ gave the prophets—over here. On another hand, Christ gave the evangelists—over there. On still another hand, Christ gave the pastors and teachers—over here."

Paul breaks the μὲν … δὲ … δὲ … δέ … construction with a καί between pastors *and* teachers. This subtly implies that he is *not* considering five equidistant groups—five groups, yes (see below), but not equidistant in the context. The fifth plural noun (teachers) is *somewhat connected* to the fourth (pastors) in a way that *is* different from the first three.[8]

1.2. "The": Paul's τούς Somewhat Connects Pastors and Teachers in Ephesians 4:11

Paul uses the definite article for *the* apostles, *the* prophets, *the* evangelists, and *the* pastors, but not for teachers. *The* pastors and teachers share one article. This feature also *somewhat connects* pastors and teachers to each other slightly differently from the other groups. So, *is* Paul presenting pastors and teachers as the same? No.

2. A Little More Detail on the Grammar

Many people (like myself formerly) treat Paul's grammatical technique with plural nouns in Ephesians 4:11 differently from its uses virtually everywhere else. The hyphenated claim of "pastor-teachers" (or "teaching pastors") has gained popularity in Reformed circles over the past number of decades.[9] Calvin, the Westminster Directory, and the New England Puritans promoted a *distinction* between pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4:11; Charles Hodge called their view "a false interpretation of Scripture."[10]

But the hyphen is eisegeted (see §§3–6 below for textual substantiation). The hyphenated mis-reading of Paul's grammar largely stems from a mis-understanding and mis-application of rule one of six by Granville Sharp (1735–1813), a British abolitionist and amateur grammarian.

Ancient Greek writers often connected two or more substantives in the same case (e.g., accusative or dative) and same number (i.e., singular or plural) by (1) joining both/all with "and" and (2) placing them under one "the." The basic grammatical construction can involve substantival *adjectives*, substantival *participles*, *singular nouns*, and *plural nouns*, so I will use the label A-S-K-S (article-substantive-kai-substantive).[11]

Sharp's first rule described a New Testament (NT) pattern wherein multiple *singular substantives* (not plurals as in Eph 4:11) were united under one "the" and with "and."[12] Sharp argued that the singular substantives tended to be attributed to the same referent, functioning adjectivally. His classic example is Titus 2:13: "*the* great God *and* savior [τοῦ μεγάλου θεοῦ καὶ σωτῆρος] of us Jesus Christ." Sharp argued that Paul is not talking about "the great God" the Father and "our savior Jesus Christ"; the two singular substantives (God, savior) function as co-descriptors of the one referent (Jesus).

[8] "Somewhat" is nebulous, I know, but is meant to create pause and prompt consideration of what "*somewhat* connected" might mean—which will be explored later.

[9] See footnote 2 above for a sample of popular-level sources.

[10] Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1856), 161–62.

[11] See Daniel Wallace, *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin: Semantics and Significance* (New York: Lang, 2009), 7n. 21 for the nomenclature.

[12] Granville Sharp, *Remarks on the Definitive Article in the Greek Text of the New Testament*, 1st American edition (Philadelphia: Hopkins, 1807), 3.

Sharp did not intend his "rule" to be applied to plural groups.[13] If he had, he would have misinterpreted myriad passages in the NT, early Judaism, and the Greek OT. See §§3–6. First, some general orientation will help: A-S-K-S constructions do not all function alike.

Focus first on *adjectives* and *participles*, whether singular or plural. When authors use adjectives or participles or a mix in an A-S-K-S construction, they tend to carry an adjectival (descriptive) force even though they are substantival (thus like nouns).[14] For example, Paul describes "the saints" (the referent) of Ephesus with a plural participle and a plural adjective in the A-S-K-S construction: "to the saints—*the ones* being in Ephesus *and* believing" (τοῖς ἁγίοις τοῖς οὖσιν [ἐν Ἐφέσῳ] καὶ πιστοῖς; Eph 1:1; cf. Col 1:2 and 1 Pet 2:18). Likewise, Paul writes to Titus: "to *the ones* who are stained *and* unbelieving, nothing is clean" (τοῖς δὲ μεμιαμμένοις καὶ ἀπίστοις; Titus 1:15), in which Paul links a plural substantival participle (stained) and a plural substantival adjective (unbelieving) under one "the" and with "and"—an A-S-K-S construction—carrying a descriptive or adjectival force.

Focus next on *singular nouns*, or on a combination of singular nouns with singular participles or adjectives. They *can* carry something of an adjectival sense in A-S-K-S constructions when attributed to a referent: e.g., Sharp's reading of Titus 2:13 above. Singular nouns, however, are also used in their strictly nominal sense as *distinct beings* that are *somehow connected* in a given context. "*The* vulture *and* kite" in Leviticus 11:13–14 are not a vulture-kite bird. "*The* camel *and* hare *and* coney" in Deuteronomy 14:7 are not a camel-hare-coney animal.

Regarding *plural nouns* in A-S-K-S constructions (as in Eph 4:11), we do *not* seem to have *any* examples of NT authors (§5), other early Jewish authors (§4), or Greek OT translators (§3) using A-S-K-S to conflate *plural nouns* into one group with multiple descriptors.[15] *Plural nouns* in the A-S-K-S construction are simply *not* blended or hyphenated. Let us look at the data.

3. Greek OT A-S-K-S Plural Nouns

Greek translators of the OT used the same plural noun A-S-K-S construction (around 40 times) that Paul later used. Many instances are in lists of groups such as "*the* Canaanites *and* Hittites *and* Amorites *and* Perizzites *and* Gergasites *and* Jebusites" (e.g., Exod 3:8, 17; 13:5; cf. 1 Chron 5:19; 2 Chron 1:17; 16:8; 36:5; Neh 9:8; 1 Esth 5:20; 5:53b), or "*the* priests *and* Levites" (2 Chron 35:8; Ezek 10:5 [cf. 1 Esth 1:7; 8:5, 92]; etc.). The plural nouns clearly refer to *distinguishable groups*, not a single group with hyphenated descriptors. Indeed, if you hyphenate into one group the priests with non-priest Levites (which is what "Levites" means in such contexts) and push the latter into the sacrificial work in the temple, you would condemn them to death—literally.

Likewise, the translator of Daniel uses A-S-K-S[-K-S-K-S] to describe "*the* enchanters *and* magicians *and* Chaldeans *and* astrologers" coming together to interpret the writing on the wall (Dan 5:7 LXX). The grammar is *not* used to express four "responsibilities of the same people" (as some posit about

[13] See Daniel Wallace, "The Semantic Range of the Article-Noun-Kai-Noun Plural Construction in the New Testament," *Grace Theological Journal* 4.1 (1983): 59–84; *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 270–90; *Granville Sharp's Canon and Its Kin* (New York: Lang, 2009).

[14] See Wallace, "Semantic Range," 73–79.

[15] See Wallace, "Semantic Range," 78–79.

the pastors and teachers). Rather, "each title technically represents a different expertise"[16] or "class"[17] or "category"[18] or "guild."[19] These were *distinguishable groups* that could be summoned in different combinations at different times (and expressed with different Greek constructions)[20]—*connected* by the Greek translator with A-S-K-S for a particular *contextual* reason.

Pause. A question from messy reality may come up here. (I will mention it again to critique Wallace's otherwise stellar studies of A-S-K-S.) Could it be that a "magician" was also an "astrologer"? Perhaps not in that ancient Near East setting, but let's suppose so for argument's sake. Would such happenstance imply that the author is *trying to tell us by the A-S-K-S construction* that there is *overlap* between the groups? No. Imagine going to a conference to meet with "the professors and administrators" of various seminaries. A few professors happen to be administrators too, and vice versa. But the plural noun A-S-K-S construction I just used—*the* professors *and* administrators—is portraying *recognizably distinct groups* (regardless of whether here or there they might or might not happen to contain some overlappers) who are *working together* or at least *viewed in conjunction* in this *situation*. Any happenstantial overlap is *not* the author's *point* with plural noun A-S-K-S, which conveys *distinction* in *partnership*.

4. Early Jewish A-S-K-S Plural Nouns

Other Jewish authors writing in Greek used plural nouns A-S-K-S. They also subtly *connect* multiple *recognizably distinct groups* for some *contextual* reason.

Tobit instructs his son: "do not be arrogant in your heart against your brothers and *the* sons *and* daughters of your people" (4:13). Is Tobit suggesting there are son-daughters out there?! So also Tobit conveys "*the* paths *and* plans" in A-S-K-S as *distinct* things *contextually connected* in needing God's blessings to prosper.[21]

In 1 Maccabees, "All the feasts and *the* sabbaths *and* new moons *and* recognized days" are four distinct groups, not two (10:34). The *distinct* appointed days (sabbaths, new moons, recognized days) are similar *together* apart from the feasts (e.g., Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles),[22] which is not the

[16] According to Wendy Widder, *Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023), Chaldeans (as a technical term, not a general reference to people from that area) were "a special class of priest-scholars" and "experts in astrology"; magicians were experts in "the occultic arts, including astrology, sorcery, and exorcism"; enchanters may have been "priests who communicated with the spirit world (including the dead) via magic spells and incantations"; and sorcerers specialized in "witchcraft: using charms, incantations, and spells to manipulate supernatural powers for good or evil" (89, and see nn.13–14). Cf. Cornelius Van Dam, "Divination, Magic," *Dictionary of Old Testament Prophets* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 159–62. Cf. Carol Newsom, *Daniel: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 67–68 and John Goldingay, *Daniel*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1989), 46, who is not as careful with the nuances.

[17] John Collins, *Daniel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 137–39.

[18] Collins, *Daniel*, 155–56.

[19] Goldingay, *Daniel*, 45–46; cf. James Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1927), 142–44, 252–53; Collins, *Daniel*, 138.

[20] Cf. Daniel 1:20 and 2:2 (each group with own article); 2:10 and 27 (no group with article); 4:7 and 5:15 (one article governs all, none joined with καί); 5:11 (no articles, no καί).

[21] The A-S-K-S in Tobit is straightforward, not meriting mention in Robert Littman, *Tobit: The Book of Tobit in Codex Sinaiticus* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 92–95, or Michele Murray, *Tobit* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2023), 100 and 104–5.

[22] Jonathan Goldstein, *1 Maccabees* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 409. John Bartlett draws no attention to the ordinary A-S-K-S in *The First and Second Books of the Maccabees* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,

same as intending to blend them in a way that loses their distinctions. (Cf. 1 Macc 13:6, 42; 3 Macc 1:4). In 4 Maccabees—a more philosophical-ethical text than the other Maccabee books[23]—we read of "the jungle of *the* habits *and* passions" (1:29), mastering "all *the* enjoyments *and* passions" (5:23), and even "the digits of *the* feet *and* hands" (15:15). All are *distinct* yet set in *connection* for a particular *contextual* purpose. God doesn't usually create "foot-hands" (see §10 below).

In Psalms of Solomon, "king-ruler-persons" is not a fitting descriptor of "*the* kings *and* rulers *and* peoples" (5:11).[24] In 1 Esdras, "*the* treasurers *and* toparchs *and* governors *and* satraps" (4:47; cf. 3:2) are *recognizably distinct groups* of "*associated* administrators."[25] Hence the grammar. Compare 1 Esdras 8:22 wherein "all the priests and *the* Levites *and* temple-singers *and* gate-keepers *and* temple-servants *and* businessmen of this temple" are in A-S-K-S[-K-S-K-S-K-S] likely because the first group (the priests) is the only group with duties in the sacrificial system while all other groups, though *recognizably distinct* from each other, are nevertheless *connected* in this *context* as those diverse non-priests who variously minister with their distinct duties around the temple precincts.

Finally, in Judith 14:12 the Assyrians "sent word to their superiors, and they came to *the* generals *and* commanders of thousands and all the officers of them" (14:12; cf. 2:14).[26] The two middle groups of the four are connected by A-S-K-S, but not the first or last. It seems the superiors (the first group) were alerted directly by the Assyrians; the superiors then approached the two *distinct* higher-ranking sets of commanders *together*—i.e., *the* generals *and* commanders of thousands—who finally alerted *all* the officers.[27]

A definite pattern has emerged. In all these Jewish texts (and beyond),[28] plural nouns in A-S-K-S have a consistent intent:

1. The grammar portrays two or more *recognizably distinct groups*
2. who nevertheless are seen *in some sort of connection together* in the given *context*.

Does this pattern continue into the NT (§5), and Ephesians in particular (§6)? Yes.

5. Gospels and Acts A-S-K-S Plural Nouns

The NT follows the plural noun A-S-K-S pattern from the Greek OT and early Jewish sources.

1973).

[23] See David DeSilva, *4 Maccabees: Introduction and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Sinaiticus* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

[24] R. B. Wright simply cuts out the definite article because these are so clearly distinct: "Psalms of Solomon (First Century B.C.)," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, ed. James Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 657.

[25] See Michael Bird, *1 Esdras: Intro and Commentary on the Greek Text in Codex Vaticanus* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 182–83 (emphasis added).

[26] For navigation through Judith 2:14, see Carey Moore, *Judith: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, *AB* 40B (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 135, 137; Jennifer Koosed and Robert Paul Seesengood, *Judith*, Wisdom Commentary 16 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2022), 12 and cf. "rulers" in Wis 5:23; Sir 4:27; 2 Macc 9:25; 3 Macc 6:4.

[27] See Koosted and Seesengood, *Judith*, who insert the word "all their *other* officers" (143); cf. Moore, *Judith*, 238–39.

[28] S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, points out some statements from Plutarch (c. 46–119 CE) using plural nouns A-S-K-S to describe two clearly different groups that are functioning together in some way (335 n. 72).

5.1. General Meaning: Recognizably Distinct Groups Connected in Context

Matthew writes about "*the* Pharisees *and* Sadducees" (Matt 3:7). These two *recognizably distinct groups* tend to hate each other. In this particular *context*, though, they are *connected* in their approach toward John the baptizer (cf. Matt 16:1, 6, 11, 12.) Imagine saying to *the* Pharisees *and* Sadducees, "Because you are connected under one *the* and with *and*, you each are a 'Pharisee-Sadducee.'" They might just stone you!

Similarly, there were no "chief priest-Pharisees" (John 7:45), even though John's grammar is like Paul's in Ephesians 4:11.[29] Nor were there "Grecian woman-men," even though Luke sets plural nouns in A-S-K-S in Acts 17:12. The rhetorical point of the plural noun A-S-K-S grammar in the NT continues to function like the Greek OT and early Judaism. That said, messy reality has confused some otherwise great studies of this grammar.

5.2. Groups Overlapping Misses the Point of A-S-K-S

Daniel Wallace robustly demonstrates that *plural nouns* in the A-S-K-S construction in the NT do *not* communicate *identity* between the nouns. But Wallace then confuses *occasional messy happenstance* drawn from elsewhere with what *the author intends to convey* by A-S-K-S plural nouns.

A great example is his treatment of four plural substantival adjectives in A-S-K-S in Jesus's parable. These are not plural nouns, and my point is even *more* applicable with them. The master told the slave to bring "*the* poor people *and* crippled people *and* blind people *and* lame people" (Luke 14:21). In historical reality, surely *some* people fit different combinations of these maladies: e.g., some poor people might also be blind, a few were likely all four. Because of occasional blurry boundaries between generally recognizably distinct groups, Wallace concludes "an overlap of categories is obviously the nuance *intended by the author*."[30] This is a mistake.

Imagine the master saying, "Bring in the poor people." The servant obediently returns with a crowd of poor people. The master says, "Now, bring in blind people." The servant, understanding whom the master means, returns with blind people, never considering that he could point out that some of the poor people he brought in earlier were also blind. He knew his master's point. The rhetoric was clear. (Remember "the professors and administrators" above.) The *point* of the Greek construction *intended by the author* is that the Lord is welcoming people from those four generally *recognizably distinct groups* who are *connected* in *this context* as marginalized groups of sufferers who are all invited *together*, whether there may or may not be someone here or there who happens to fit multiple categories.

5.3. Groups as Subsets Misses the Point of A-S-K-S

Another NT professor told me in a personal email that Wallace "concludes that the Greek construction in Eph. 4 means that *all* pastors are teachers but that *not* all teachers are pastors"—as if pastors are a *subset* of teachers. This subset idea *is* what Wallace concludes *theologically* about the relationship between pastors and teachers. I will challenge this below. But regardless, the Greek construction itself doesn't *mean* this.

[29] S. M. Baugh, *Ephesians*, 335 n. 72.

[30] Wallace, "Semantic Range," 73 (emphasis added); cf. 73–75; Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 279–81.

Compare "*the* scribes *and* Pharisees" (Matt 5:20; cf. 12:38). Wallace includes this as a clear example of one of the plural nouns in A-S-K-S (scribes) being a *subset* of the other (Pharisees). That may or may not be historically true in this particular instance; *the grammar* doesn't say so. But what does that mean?

Scribes in general were *not* a subset of the Pharisees. Wallace agrees with this.[31] "Scribes," which was their job, could associate with various political, theological, or cultic parties (e.g., Sadducees, Pharisees, priests) according to their bent beyond their scribal work.[32] *Historically* speaking, some scribes did associate themselves with the Pharisee party: cf. the scribes "of the Pharisees" (Mark 2:16); the Pharisees "and their scribes" (Luke 5:30); the scribes "of the Pharisees' party" (Acts 23:9). But scribes were associated with other groups too: e.g., "*the* chief priests *and* scribes of the people" (Matt 2:4; cf. 20:18) and "*the* elders *and* chief priests *and* scribes (16:21; cf. 27:41; Mark 15:1). In the context of Matthew 5, the scribes—of whatever religio-political persuasion; sure, maybe the Pharisees, but maybe not—and the *recognizably distinct group* of non-scribe Pharisees are being *linked together* by Jesus as the low-bar of righteousness. Hence the grammar. *Some sort of possible subset-ness* would need to be discerned and imported from elsewhere; it *is not the rhetorical point of A-S-K-S.*

5.4. Portrayal and Reality

Wallace describes "portrayal vs. reality" in linguistics. He observes (about the aorist tense, but it is conceptually applicable) that "the aorist takes something of a snapshot of the action. The action itself may be iterative, durative, progressive, etc., but the aorist refrains from describing such intricacies."[33] *The grammatical feature is capturing something importantly true that is not necessarily nailing down the messiness of reality.* So too is the rhetorical function of plural nouns in the A-S-K-S construction:

1. Within the messiness of real life, there may well be occasional overlap here or there between generally *recognizably distinct groups*.
2. The A-S-K-S grammatical construction is *not attempting* to communicate the nuances of that messiness.
3. The *point* in using an A-S-K-S construction remains this: the author views ultimately or generally *recognizably distinct groups* as somewhat *connected* for a *contextual* reason.

Paul uses A-S-K-S plural nouns in just such a common, ordinary, all-over-the-place way in Ephesians.

[31] Wallace, "Semantic Range," 73 n. 32. Cf. Michelle Lee-Barnewall, "Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes," pages 217–27 in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 218. Contra Albert Bell, *Exploring the New Testament World* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998), 34–35.

[32] Cf. Graham Twelftree, "Scribes," pages 1086–89 in *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, ed. Craig Evans and Stanley Porter (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 1087; Julius Scott, *Jewish Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 168 n. 5; Gregory Thellman, "Scribes," pages 840–45 in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel Green (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 841. For some blurring between priestly and scribal identities from the Maccabean era to the NT, see 4 Macc 5:4; Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities* 11.128; 12.142; and *Jewish War* 5.532; *Testament of Levi* 8:17; Thellman, "Scribes," 841; cf. C. T. R. Hayward, "Some Notes on Scribes and Priests in the Targum of the Prophets," *JJS* 36 (1985): 210–21.

[33] Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 11.

6. Ephesians A-S-K-S Plural Nouns

Paul uses the *general* A-S-K-S construction (i.e., with plural substantives other than nouns) in Ephesians in various ways before 4:11 (1:1, 3; 2:20; 3:5, 12, 18). A few were mentioned above in §2. In Ephesians 2:20, 3:5, and 4:11, though, Paul uses *plural nouns* in A-S-K-S. In the grammar's ordinary sense in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5, "*the* apostles *and* prophets" are *not* a group of "apostle-prophets."[34] True, in messy reality (governed by God's providence) most or all apostles did prophesy. But for Paul, "the apostles, *on the one hand*" and "the prophets *on the other*" in 4:11 clearly refer to *recognizably distinct groups*. Compare 1 Corinthians 12:28 wherein apostles are "first" in the church with prophets "second"—i.e., different groups—and teachers "third." Indeed, the common grammatical argument that in Ephesians 4:11 Paul is blending pastors and teachers into "one order" of ministry necessarily assumes "the apostles" and "the prophets" are obviously *distinct* groups; for only through Paul's *shift* in grammar should we (supposedly) see the pastors and teachers as one group!

Paul's use of A-S-K-S plural nouns in Ephesians 2:20 and 3:5 makes perfect sense in its ordinary use: *recognizably distinct groups* are *viewed together* for a *contextual* reason—i.e., co-foundation of God's church (2:20), co-revealers of God's mystery (3:5). But in the context of 4:11, Paul apparently feels no reason to connect the apostles and prophets in such a way, so he relates them to each other with different grammar (cf. LXX Daniel noted in §3 and footnotes above).

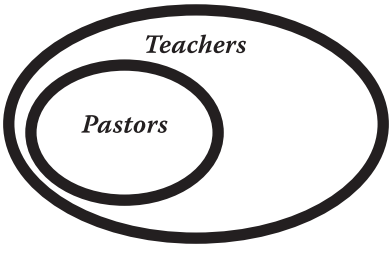
Notice an implication. Paul expressed apostles and prophets as grammatically distinct in 4:11 but as contextually connected via A-S-K-S in 2:20 and 3:5. Could he do that with pastors and teachers too? We have *no grammatical reason* to assume Paul could not or would not likewise grammatically separate the *recognizably distinct groups* of pastors and teachers in a different context. That said, people have imported ill-fitted ecclesiological reasons into the text to keep them united more closely than Paul's grammar allows.

7. Exegesis and Ecclesiology

Daniel Wallace is "emphatic" that *identifying* pastors and teachers "has *no* grammatical basis" in Ephesians 4:11.[35] Good, and this is helpfully affecting some otherwise avid "pastor-teachers" proponents. But his attempt to figure out *how* Paul contextually connects them confuses some issues.

7.1 Daniel Wallace's Attempt to Relate Pastors to Teachers

Wallace ecclesially claims: "all pastors are teachers" but "not all teachers are pastors."[36] Thus:



[34] Contra Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 330. Commentaries that recognize the distinction are legion.

[35] Wallace, "Semantic Range," 83.

[36] Wallace, "Semantic," 83; followed by Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 544.

Per §§3 and 5.2–4 above, Paul's plural noun A-S-K-S portrays *recognizably distinct groups* and thus does not *mean* this.

To get this ecclesiology, Wallace imports two elements, the second being ill-fitting:

1. Wallace imports from elsewhere in Paul (and Peter) the idea that pastors *are the same people* as overseers and elders.[37]

He reasons that "elders and pastors had similar functions in the NT,"[38] so whatever Paul says of elders or overseers must be applicable to pastors. Then:

2. Wallace imports (a) a theological over-extension of (b) a certain common (but I think mistaken) reading of διδακτικός about overseers from 1 Timothy 3:2 into Ephesians 4:11.

Regarding (2a), Wallace over-extends διδακτικός, even when traditionally interpreted as "able to teach," morphing "able" into identity: i.e., "all pastors *are* teachers," and "since elders were *to be* teachers, the pastors were also *to be* teachers."[39] Regarding (2b), ability is the wrong category for διδακτικός anyway (whether to teach or be taught);[40] rather, it concerns *having a character* that is *oriented toward the teaching that was happening in the community* (even if doing none of it themselves).[41]

Positively, Wallace steers theologians and commentators *away from identifying teachers as pastors*. Negatively, he leads them *toward thinking of pastors as teachers*, which is foreign to Ephesians 4:11 (and elsewhere in Paul). Here are two examples of Wallace's affect on others..

7.2. Benjamin Merkle's and Constantine Campbell's Attempts to Relate Pastors to Teachers Based on Wallace

In 2003 and 2008, Merkle explained from Ephesians 4:11 that "the pastors and teachers" are "only one group," "one order of ministry" to label "pastor-teachers" or "shepherd teachers."[42] According to Merkle then, Paul's language means "a two-fold designation referring to one group (the pastor-teacher)."[43] He repeated this in 2014 (in the book's body), and (oddly) in 2019.

In a footnote in 2014 and in 2016, 2018, and 2022 (hence 2019 being odd), Merkle removed those claims, citing Wallace, and explicitly *criticized* "Barth (2:438–9) and Bruce (348) who view [pastors

[37] I think this is probable though not air-tight regarding the data. Regardless, it does not necessarily affect how pastors and teachers are meant to be connected in Eph. 4:11.

[38] Wallace, "Semantic Range," 83.

[39] Wallace, "Semantic Range," 83 (italics added).

[40] Paul Himes, "Rethinking the Translation of διδακτικός in 1 Tim. 3:2 and 2 Tim. 2:24," *BT* 68.2 (2017): 189–208.

[41] See Jonathan Worthington, "Overseers Must be Didactic, not 'Able to Teach,'" *Journal of Global Christianity* 9 (2025): 23–40.

[42] Benjamin Merkle, "Hierarchy in the Church? Instruction from the Pastoral Epistles concerning Elders and Overseers," *SBJT* 7.3 (2003): 39 n. 3 (emphasis added); *40 Questions*, 55–56 and fn.2, 86; *Shepherding God's Flock*, ed. Benjamin Merkle and Thomas Schreiner (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 84; *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 118.

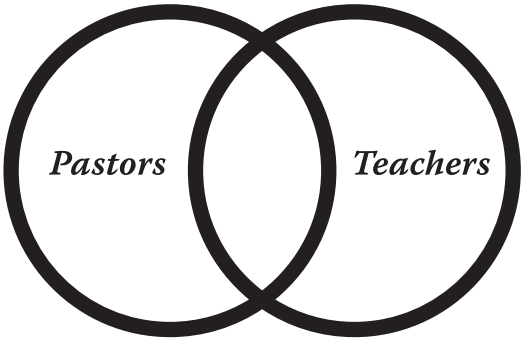
[43] Merkle, *40 Questions*, 55–56 n. 2.

and teachers] as *only one group*."[44] Merkle now more carefully states that pastors and teachers are *not* identical.[45]

Yet Merkle also adopts Wallace's idea that pastors are a *subset* of teachers.[46] Like Wallace, Merkle thinks 1 Timothy 3:2 says overseers (and therefore pastors) must be "able" to teach, though he also oversteps the data with "all pastors teach." Being able to teach and actually teaching are not the same. Merkle also agrees that "not all teachers are also pastors,"[47] which is a step in a more exegetically sound, Pauline direction.

Constantine Campbell also agrees with Wallace's explanation that pastors and teachers are *not* identical. Even so, like Merkle, Campbell sometimes still uses the hyphenated "pastor-teachers" as theological shorthand—even though it doesn't match the admitted exegesis.

But Campbell does *not* agree with Wallace's and Merkle's sub-set idea. Also from sources external to Ephesians 4:11, Campbell chooses a Venn relationship for pastors and teachers:



For Campbell:

1. some teachers are *not* also pastors;
2. some pastors are *not* also teachers;
3. some people are simultaneously a pastor *and* a teacher.[48]

For Merkle and Wallace:

1. some teachers are *not* also pastors;
2. *all* pastors "teach" (Merkle) or "are teachers" (Wallace).

[44] Merkle, *Ephesians: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 128 (emphasis added).

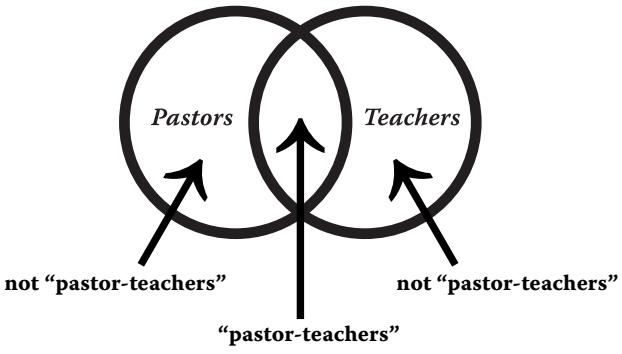
[45] Merkle, *Ephesians*, 128; "Ephesians," in *Ephesians–Philemon*, ESV Expository Commentary 11 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 74; *United to Christ, Walking in the Spirit: A Theology of Ephesians*, NTT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 106.

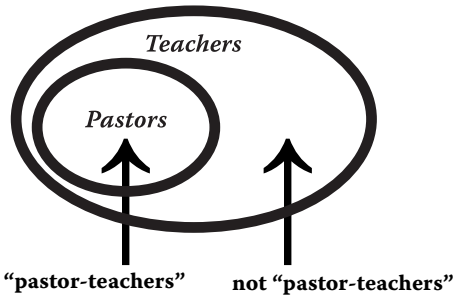
[46] Sherrelle Wright agrees with the subset idea and actually takes this as her sole reason for taking pastors and teachers as separate from each other! See Wright, "The Authority of Scripture: A Biblical Exegesis of Ephesians 4:11–16, *Diligence* 6 (2020), article 6, page 4.

[47] Merkle, *Ephesians*, 128; "Ephesians," 74; *United to Christ*, 106.

[48] Campbell, *Ephesians*, 177–79, and 179 n. 80.

Yet *none* of this comes from the A-S-K-S grammar of Ephesians 4:11 itself. Also, *both* perspectives actually render the language of "pastor-teachers" or "teaching pastors" (and the like) *inappropriate as short-hand for what Paul is getting at in Ephesians 4:11*—as these images show:



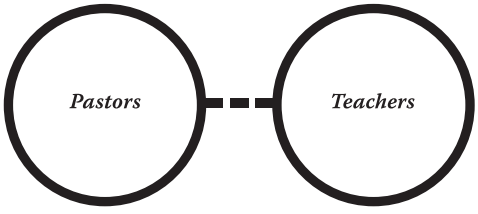


The hyphenated amalgam does *not* apply to three-fifths of Wallace's, Merkle's, and Campbell's theological schemes.[49] And their theological schemes do *not* match *what Paul means* in Ephesians 4:11 on grammatical and historical grounds wherein *the* pastors *and* teachers are *recognizably distinct groups*.

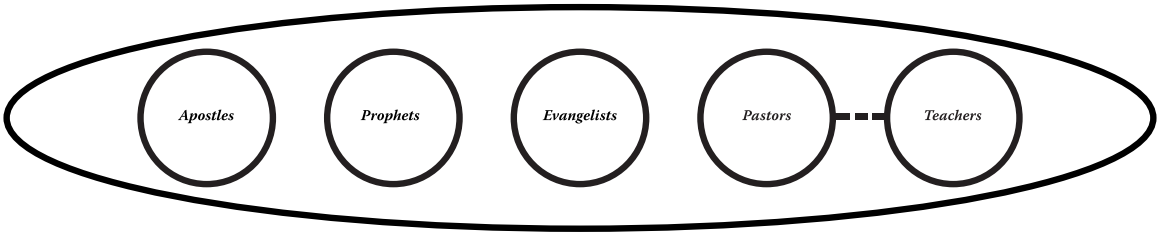
But who *is* each group for Paul (§8)? And how does he envision them related (§9)?

8. Paul's "Pastors" and Paul's "Teachers"

This image better reflects Paul's *intended meaning* in linking pastors with teachers by A-S-K-S:



This image captures the fuller picture of Eph. 4:11 of five *recognizably distinct groups* with the final two *somewhat connected* for a *contextual* reason:



[49] Cf. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, who uses the theological short-hand "pastor-teachers" (112) while his exegesis of 4:11 undercuts this when he observes: "one article used for two plural nouns does *not* necessarily denote identity, as seen in 2:20 where there is one article for apostles and prophets"; rather "it *does* indicate that 'groups more or less *distinct* are treated *as one* for *the purpose in hand*'" (543–44).

But who *are* they and *how* are they connected?

This article's main point is to interpret A-S-K-S data. Dogmatism beyond that would be foolish here. But to stimulate further research, here are some historical and cultural remarks.

8.1. "Pastors"/"Shepherds"

In ancient Sumerian, Akkadian, Egyptian, and Greek sources, pastor/shepherd metaphors are repeatedly associated with *ruling*, *leading*, and *caring* (or at least *taking care* of).[50] The OT is similar: e.g., King David (2 Sam 5:1–2), the judges before him (2 Sam 7:7), and other community leaders (cf. Jer 2:8; 3:15; 24:4; Zech 11:16–17). Have you noticed that *teaching terms* were rarely (if ever) connected.

Jesus arrived as the pastor (Matt 26:31; Mark 14:27), even "the good pastor" (John 10:11–18). While he certainly taught a lot (!), he cast his *pastoral* goodness in terms of (1) *laying his life down* for the sheep; (2) *caring* for them; (3) *staying* with them in danger; (4) *protecting* them by taking on the attackers, even at cost to himself; and (5) *knowing* them and they him (John 10:11–18).

Jesus commissioned Peter in pastoral language: "feed [βόσκε] my lambs" (John 21:15), "pastor [ποίμαινε] my sheep" (v.16), "feed [βόσκε] my sheep" (v.17). Some people too narrowly simply assume "feeding" *is* teaching (e.g., the NIV note from the introduction), though Peter later focuses on *leadership* (not teaching) aspects of *pastoring* under *the* Pastor:

So I exhort *the elders* (πρεσβυτέρους) among you … *pastor* (ποιμάνατε) the flock of God that is among you by *over-seeing/super-vising* (ἐπισκοποῦντες) … *not as dominating/lording over* (κατακυριεύοντες) those in your charge, but *being examples* to the flock. And when the chief Pastor appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Pet 5:1–4)

Paul (through Luke) expresses a similar *leadership* understanding of "the elders" (τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους) of Ephesus: "*pay attention* [προσέχετε] to yourselves and the whole flock [παντὶ τῷ ποιμνίῳ] among whom the Holy Spirit established you *over-seers/super-visors* [ἐπισκόπους] *to pastor* [ποιμαίνειν] God's church" (Acts 20:28). These leaders may very well have been "the pastors" Paul mentions in Ephesians 4:11. In that passage, Paul gave them no commission to do any teaching. That said, given a type of protection Paul *does* clarify for the Ephesian elders—i.e., from people (wolves) speaking distorted things (20:29–31)—the *teaching that was happening* within the community of faith *must certainly* be under their careful "overseeing" or "supervising" attention (see below).

Interestingly, "over-seers" or "super-visors" (ἐπί-σκοποι) were well known in the Greco-Roman world among Gentiles and Jews. Within broader Greco-Roman society (and compare the Septuagint), ἐπίσκοποι supervised/oversaw various groups and activities: e.g., military bodies (cf. LXX Num 31:14; 2 Kgs 11:15); building initiatives (cf. LXX Num 4:16; 2 Chr 34:11–12); voluntary associations, including cultic ones; legal and financial matters (cf. LXX 2 Chr 34:14–17); even cities, including Ephesus (cf. the ἐπίσκοποι over Judah in 1 Macc 1:51).[51]

[50] See the data compiled in Piotr Swiercz, "The Idea of Shepherd Rule in the Ancient Mediterranean Region: Searching for the Context of the Idea of Orpheus the Shepherd," *Colloquia Orphica IX Conference* (2014).

[51] Korinna Zamfir "Once More About the Origins and Background of the New Testament *Episkopos*," *Sacra Scripta* 10.2 (2012): 202–22. Cf. Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 47–48; Merkle, *Elder and Overseer*, 59–61; Raymond Collins, *I and II Timothy and Titus*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 329.

Paul connects "overseers" with προΐστημι: *stand out in front, lead, be in charge of, preside over, manage, govern, rule, direct*, even *care for*.[52] Within this realm of supervisory leadership, Paul inserts "fathers" (and "household-managers").[53] The overseer/supervisor "must lead/manage/direct [προϊστάμενον] his own house, having children in submission … take care of [ἐπιμελήσεται] God's church" (1 Tim 3:4–5; cf. Titus 1:5–7). Paul's ecclesial pattern regarding overseers may even have been "directly dependent on the structure of the ancient family, in which the head of the household had *oversight* responsibilities."[54]

This last detail—fathers—will help us explore how the *recognizably distinct group* of "pastors" were likely meant to be *somehow connected* with the other *recognizably distinct group* of "teachers" (§9). Before that, though, who might the "teachers" be?

8.2. "Teachers"

Most basically, it's important to Paul's mission that *all saints* "teach" each other so the word of Christ dwells richly among them (Col 3:16).[55] *Numerous unnamed people* were "teaching" in Ephesus (Eph 4:14; 1 Tim 6:3): Paul condemns those who taught *falsely*, while teaching *per se* seems acceptable.[56] *Many* (including Paul) were "teaching and evangelizing" in Antioch (Acts 15:35).

Getting more personal, Paul delights that Timothy "learned" scripture from *his grandmother and mother* (2 Tim 3:14–15; cf. 1:5). *Older Christian women* in Crete were commendable for giving "good teaching" to younger women (Titus 2:3). . Paul's dear co-worker *Priscilla, with her husband Aquila*, theologically educated Apollos in Ephesus (Acts 18:26); whether she was gifted by the Spirit like some in the church (1 Cor 14:6; Rom 12:6–8) or she simply took seriously her (and her husband's) general Christian responsibility we do not know.

(NB: I *assume* Priscilla and Aquila agreed with Paul's words in 1 Tim 2:11–12. Thus, I *assume* they would have carefully arranged *how* their biblical and theological training of Apollos—and other young leaders?—took place while maintaining gendered propriety.)

Timothy is meant to entrust what he learned from Paul "to *faithful people*, whoever will be suitable even to *teach* others" (2 Tim 2:2). This could refer to more formal "teachers," though it's likely more general, perhaps including many of those mentioned above.[57] Paul also describes (not necessarily

[52] Cf. William Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 178; Andreas Köstenberger, *1–2 Timothy and Titus*, EBTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 130; Stanley Porter, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 280–81; Collins, *I and II Timothy and Titus*, 329–30.

[53] The Septuagint used προΐστημι regarding households: cf. 2 Sam 13:17; Amos 6:10.

[54] Porter, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 281.

[55] Cf. Jonathan Worthington, "'You' and 'Y'all' in the Culture of the New Testament," *9Marks*, 7 Oct 2024: https://www.9marks.org/article/you-and-yall-in-the-culture-of-the-new-testament/; "Mature Together: The Task of Teaching in Missions," *Desiring God*, 22 March, 2022: https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/mature-together.

[56] A Thyatiran woman ("Jezabel") was condemned for false teaching and leading Christians astray (Rev 2:20), and her condemnation explicitly rests on her sexual immorality and falseness (2:20–21) without hinting that her teaching *per se* was inappropriate. Perhaps her teaching was not in public worship but more like Prisca's more private tutoring, which made the act itself not worth commenting on even while condemning its falseness and associated sexual immorality.

[57] In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul tends to use ἀνήρ when referring specifically to men. Every use of ἄνθρωπος in 1 Timothy and Titus (except *maybe* 1 Tim 6:11) is most likely about humans in general (1 Tim 2:1, 4, 5; 4:10; 5:26; 6:5, 9, 16; Titus 1:14; 2:11; 3:2, 8, 10). In 2 Timothy, two of five *clearly* refer to generic humans (3:2, 13); one refers to two men as corrupt *humans* and not just corrupt males (3:8); and "God's human" equipped by Scripture in 3:17 *could* refer to the effect of Scripture on any human belonging to God, though it *could* refer to Timothy in

prescribes) how *some of "the elders"* in Ephesus (at least) also labored "in word and teaching" (1 Tim 5:17).[58] Paul mentions "*teachers*" as third in the church behind apostles and prophets (1 Cor 12:28–29). And Paul himself was one among *the cluster* of "prophets and teachers" in Antioch (Acts 13:1).

"Teachers" and many people "teaching" were ubiquitous in Paul's circles. What is more, Paul's many *teachers* and people *teaching*, on the one hand, alongside his cluster of supervisory leadership ideas associated with *pastoring* on the other, both make great sense within the *household and educational culture* of the Greco-Roman world.

9. The Relationship Between the Pastors and Teachers within the Greco-Roman System of Household and Education

Christopher Hutson observes that "a primary responsibility of a father" in the Greco-Roman era "was to *attend to the education* of his children."[59] "Attend to" is helpful language, though Hutson means *teach*, which actually gets away from Paul's Greco-Roman context.

In his early first century CE exposition of the Pentateuch, Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BCE–50 CE)[60] explains:

Parents have received not only the power of a ruler [ἀρχὴν] and governor [ἡγεμονίαν] over their children, but also that of a master [δεσποτείαν] … for [the parents] expend a price many times greater than their real value on their children [εἴς τε παῖδας] and for the sake of their children [ὑπὲρ παίδων], in wages to nurses [τιτθαῖς], and pedagogues [παιδαγωγοῖς], and teachers [διδασκάλοις], besides all the expenses which they incur for their dress and their food, and their other care of them when well and when sick, from their earliest infancy till the time that they are full grown. (*Special Laws* 2.233)[61]

particular (like 1 Tim 6:11 might be). My conclusion: it is *likely* (though not airtight) that Paul's language of "faithful people" instead of "faithful men" in 2 Tim 2:2 is more general, perhaps including people like Apollos, Priscilla, nameless people teaching, and the old women in Crete. See Porter, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 560; Osvaldo Padilla, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022), 174 n. 20; Walter Liefeld, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Timothy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 246–47, 246 n. 2; contra George Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 391; I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London: T&T Clark, 1999), 176, 726; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 506–7.

[58] Some commentators mention it is "possible" (though not necessarily favorable) to translate μάλιστα ("especially") as "that is," which would imply *the* way to "lead well" is *by* laboring in word and teaching: e.g., Philip Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 125; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 306; Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*, 612. They base this on T. C. Skeat, "'Especially the Parchments': A Note on 2 Timothy IV.13," *JTS* 30.1 (1979): 173–77. But Skeat launches his article with confessed inability to understand how Paul could want additional "books" to the parchments he "especially" wants. I find this natural to imagine. Skeat then explores data in the NT and second and third century Greco-Roman letters he believes make more sense with μάλιστα as "that is" rather than its normal "especially." In my reading, *every* instance Skeat posits makes better sense with "especially."

[59] Christopher Hutson, *First and Second Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 93; cf. Porter, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 281.

[60] For orientation to Philo and his various types of commentaries, see Jonathan Worthington, "Philo (1): Use of the OT," in *Dictionary of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, B. Gladd, A. Naselli (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 603–11.

[61] See also Christian Laes, "Educators in the Late Ancient City of Rome (300–700 CE), *Revue belge de Philologie et d'Histoire* 94.1 (2016): 183–207. Although this study is about Late Ancient Rome, Laes's and others' work shows its relative stability and therefore applicability to pre-NT and NT times. Cf. Mark Joyal, "Education

Philo distinguishes "fathers" from "guardians and teachers and pedagogues" (ἐπιτρόπων καὶ διδασκάλων καὶ παιδαγωγῶν) whom the parents give to children to train and educate them (*Embassy to Gaius* 26–27, 53, 115). Philo never insinuates that the fathers (or mothers) are thereby alleviated of their duties to raise their children well. Indeed, he posits that parents, nurses, pedagogues, and teachers all *work together* to raise and train the children,[62] though he does *not* thereby conflate the various parties into each other. He submits all educators (e.g., pedagogues and teachers) to the parents' authority, rule, governance.

Paul himself discusses this system, with children being put under the παιδαγωγός, "child-leader," custodian, guardian (Gal 3:24–25). The pedagogue was supplied by a father (or by a house-manager charged by the *pater familias*) who cared about and was thereby "attending to" the son's education.[63] Pedagogues would generally care for the children's moral development—as Philo points out, "foolish children hate their teachers and pedagogues [τοὺς διδασκάλους καὶ παιδαγωγοὺς], even everyone who reproves them or corrects them or would lead them to virtue" (*On the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel* 51)—as well as for their physical and sometimes linguistic development, even escorting the sons to school and over-seeing or super-vising them receiving instruction from their "teachers."[64]

Consider Paul's charge for the overseer (as father) to be "didactic" in his Greco-Roman context: an overseer/father with the community continuously engages in selecting, vetting, and supplying (and removing and finding new) pedagogues and schools and teachers—though not himself doing the teaching. I have more fully argued elsewhere how Paul's adjective διδακτικός in 1 Timothy 3:2 has nothing to do with "ability" but is understood best in its ancient context like this: the overseer *has a character oriented toward the teaching that is happening* in the community *even if doing none of it himself*.[65] The "teachers," and more generally those "teaching," would thus do what *they* are called and gifted to do under the supervision, oversight, care, and watch of the "fathers" of God's household—the elders who were overseers meant to pastor/shepherd God's people.

One final point will help, for some readers will likely trip here. In messy reality—even governed as it is by God's mysterious providence—there may occasionally happen to be some pastor here or there to whom God has *also* given a gift in teaching—like some of those in Ephesus. This is not the norm to

in Greek and Roman Antiquity," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Education* , ed. John Rury and Eileen Tamura (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 82–97. (See subsequent notes.)

[62] Cf. Philo's *Mig*. 116; *Her*. 295; *Mut*. 217; *Virt*. 178.

[63] Regarding pedagogues, see Plutarch, *Moralia* 4A–B; Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.19.5–6; Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 3.1—the latter helpfully put in conversation with Gal 3:24 by Eugene Boring, Klaus Berger, and Carsten Colpe (eds), *Hellenistic Commentary to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 466. So David de Silva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, 2018), 327–30. Cf. Norman Young, "Paidagogos: The Social Setting of a Pauline Metaphor," *Novum Testamentum* 29.2 (1987): 150–76; A.V. Yannicopoulos, "The Pedagogue in Antiquity," *British Journal of Educational Studies* 32.2 (1985): 173–79; Stanley Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome: From the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny* (London: Routledge, 1977), 38–46.

[64] Christian Laes, "Pedagogues in Greek Inscriptions in Hellenistic and Roman Antiquity," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 171 (2009): 113–22; Michael Smith, "The Role of the Pedagogue in Galatians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (2006): 197–214; Norman Young, "*Paidagogos:* The Social Setting of a Pauline Metaphor," *NovT* 29 (1987): 150. Cf. Matthew Harmon, *Galatians*, EBTC (Bellingham: Lexham, 2021), 196–97; Ralph Martin and Julie Wu, "Galatians," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. Clinton Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 284; Richard Longenecker, "The Pedagogical Nature of the Law in Galatians 3:19–4:7," *JETS* 25 (1982): 53, though Longenecker downplays the tutoring role too much: see Laes, "Educators," 183–84.

[65] Worthington, "Overseers Must be Didactic, not 'Able to Teach,'" 23–40.

strive toward, for in general Paul's language shows that the pastors and teachers are *recognizably distinct groups* who are nevertheless meant to *work closely together*—like the *pater familias* would work closely with the pedagogues and teachers—to equip the saints to help each other mature in Christ as each of the saints also uses their *distinctive* gifts in *concert* (Eph 4:11–16).

10. Conclusions

In this article I have provided data, navigation, and a few practical ideas from Pauline circles within their Greco-Roman (including Jewish) context regarding how "the pastors and teachers" are mentioned in Ephesians 4:11. In conclusion, here are a few points about culture and character to stimulate your community's practical thinking regarding ecclesiology in general, your church or denomination in particular, your ordination practices, seminary training, etc.

10.1. Culture

Guard against pushing an individual person to be both a pastor and a teacher. That will most likely place on his shoulders a moral (supposed scriptural) weight to be and do two roles that God has made *recognizably distinct*. We (especially Americans) may convert (or continue converting) God's "body" economy into something too individualistic, pushing one of God's "hands" to be a "hand-foot" that he was *not* designed to be. This will simultaneously deprive the church of those whom God has actually designed to be "feet" and to work closely with the "hands" for the upbuilding of the body.

But take care. Blending "pastor" and "teacher" *in your context* might not be as simple as ecclesiology out of step with Ephesians 4:11 (and other passages). Zulu, Ndebele, and Shona peoples tend to call the pastor "teacher" as well, but this is because missionary pastors tended to bring education and be the schoolteachers—not because of a misreading of Ephesians 4:11.[66]

10.2. Character

Know yourself with humility and *others with openness*. Suppose you are a gifted *pastor* (shepherd), and suppose that is identified with "overseer" and "elder" in your ecclesial tradition. This means that like a father you are gifted at caring for and leading, overseeing, and directing God's household family (1 Tim 3:4–5; cf. Titus 1:5–7). Know with *humility* that God did *not* design you to do everything, and most likely not even to be a teacher. Therefore, look diligently with *openness* for gifted *teachers* in your community or communities of faith to join you and supplement your caring and leading with their teaching strengths.

Alternatively, suppose you are aware (and confirmed by others) that God has made you a *teacher* beyond what is necessary for all Christians, perhaps even a gifted one. Diligently look for gifted *pastors* to partner with you, even to oversee and lead and direct and care for you, and to compensate for your weaknesses with their strengths. Neither of you are meant to do it *all* or to do it *alone*.

King Jesus intentionally gave to the church the pastors and teachers as *recognizably distinct groups* meant to *work closely together*. God does *not* tend to create hand-feet. He tends to connect (in an A-S-K-S fashion) *the* hands *and* feet to serve closely together for the sake of equipping the saints to help each other mature in Christ as each of them uses their own *distinct* gifts in *concert together*.

[66] Rabson Hove, "The Pastor as the Primary Teacher in the Church: The Meaning and Expectations of Pastoral Ministry Within the Mainline Denominations," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104.5 (2023): 1–15.

Themelios 50.3 (2025): 512–26

Transposing Genre: Reading Hebrews 12:4–13 as Proverbial Wisdom

— Adam Ch'ng —

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Abstract: By citing Proverbs 3:11–12 (LXX) in Hebrews 12:5–6, the author of Hebrews transposes the wisdom genre of the proverb into his broader exposition (12:4–13). This article integrates and applies the theories of John Frow and Tremper Longman III, and argues that the strong literary connections between the proverb and Hebrews 12:4–13 indicate the incorporation of the wisdom genre. Accordingly, Hebrews 12:4–13 should be read as proverbial wisdom, and its characterisation of human suffering as divine discipline should be understood not as a universal theodicy but as a circumstantial truth.

In a 2009 article, Matthew Thiessen identifies Israel's wilderness wanderings as the primary motif that pervades Hebrews 12:5–13.[1] While the wilderness motif is undoubtedly present, this article argues that ancient Israelite wisdom is a more prominent theme in the pericope. Indeed, by citing Proverbs 3:11–12, the author transposes not only the text of the proverb but also its genre into this paraenetic section of his epistle. Accordingly, Hebrews 12:4–13 should be read as proverbial wisdom with its associated interpretive rules, social conventions, and theological values.[2] When this pericope is read as wisdom, the author's characterisation of human suffering as divine discipline is rightly understood not as a universal theodicy but as a circumstantial truth.

Underlying this hypothesis is the hermeneutical question regarding the extent to which an NT citation of an OT text incorporates its genre. Further, if the genre of the OT text is indeed transposed into its new literary environment, what impact does this have on the interpretation of the NT passage?

In order to identify the transposition of the wisdom genre into Hebrews 12:4–13, I combine a theory of prototypes advanced by John Frow with the literary method of Tremper Longman III.[3] According to this integrated approach, a text ('secondary framework') incorporates the genre of a cited text ('generic prototype') to the extent that it shares the literary features of the generic prototype. In this

[1] Matthew Thiessen, 'Hebrews 12.5–13, the Wilderness Period, and Israel's Discipline', *NTS* 55 (2009): 366–79 (esp. 374).

[2] For a recent discussion on whether wisdom is a genre, see the interdisciplinary methodology proposed by W. Kynes, *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature": The Birth, Death, and Intertextual Reintegration of a Biblical Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 107–46.

[3] J. Frow, *Genre* (Oxford: Routledge, 2006); Tremper Longman III, 'Form Criticism, Recent Developments in Genre Theory, and the Evangelical', *WTJ* 47 (1985): 46–67; Tremper Longman III, 'Israelite Genres in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context', in *The Changing Face of Form Criticism for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Marvin A. Sweeney and Ehud B. Zvi (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 177–98.

case, Proverbs 3:11–12 (LXX) constitutes the generic prototype of proverbial wisdom, and Hebrews 12:4–13 is the secondary framework into which the proverb is transposed.[4] The degree to which the wisdom genre of the prototype is incorporated into the secondary framework is ultimately determined by the strength of literary connection between the two texts.

In this article, I present an inductive evaluation of those literary connections and demonstrate that Hebrews 12:4–13 incorporates not only the text but also the genre of Proverbs 3:11–12. I conclude by considering the hermeneutical implications of this genre transposition, particularly with regard to the epistle's characterisation of human suffering as divine discipline.

1. A Literary-Prototype Approach to Identifying Genre

Genre occupies a unique place in the constitution of meaning. According to Hirsch, every text has an 'intrinsic genre' which is 'more than a heuristic tool; rather it is constitutive of meaning'.[5] Instead of being yet another actor—alongside the author or editor, reader and text—genre is the common literary world that all actors inhabit with assumed definitions, values, and interpretive rules. The author employs genre in order to construct meaning on a higher level. Genre occupies the white spaces between words and constitutes 'the implied information that we add to the words we hear'.[6] According to Frow, it 'produces effects of truth and authority that are specific to it, and projects a "world" that is generically specific'—a genre world—such as the world of ancient Israelite wisdom.[7]

Genre is therefore similar to a camera lens which a photographer affixes to reframe an object. Depending on the particular lens chosen, the photographer recasts the one object with different visual effects. Similarly, different genres recast the same set of words through different genre worlds, each with their own 'effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility'.[8] As a result, two texts with identical words but cast in different genres necessarily have different interpretive rules and consequently different meanings—they cannot be considered the same text. For example, the words, 'there was a pale green horse', when read as historical narrative, imply the literal existence of a coloured equine creature. However, when those same words are cast within the genre of apocalypse, the reader interprets the horse not as a literal animal but as a symbolic figure (Rev 6:8).

Just as a photographer can affix different lenses to a camera, an author can also use different genres within a single text to create what Frow terms a 'complex genre'. Unlike simple univocal genres, complex genres are 'multivocal: their formal logic allows or encourages the incorporation of other forms, other "voices"'.[9] The author incorporates these generic voices through a process of 'citation': 'the shifting

[4] The author of Hebrews cites Proverbs 3:11–12 from the LXX, and in this article I will give primary consideration to the LXX unless otherwise stated.

[5] E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), 116.

[6] Frow, *Genre*, 86–87.

[7] Frow, *Genre*, 80.

[8] Frow, *Genre*, 2. Longman describes genre using the following six metaphors: institution, contract, game, code, deep structure, and patterns of expression ('Israelite Genres in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context', 182). See also Longman, 'Form Criticism', 51–53.

[9] Frow, *Genre*, 43. See also Bakhtin's dialogical model of genre theory according to which 'dialogues exist metaphorically within genres' (Martin J. Buss, 'Dialogue in and among Genres', in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer [Atlanta: SBL, 2007], 15–16).

of text from one textual and generic context to another.'[10] In this vein, Hebrews 12:4–13 constitutes a complex genre by citing Proverbs 3:11–12 and incorporating its generic voice into the epistle. In such circumstances, Bakhtin argues, the cited text carries its original genre world into the secondary framework. Regarding the incorporation of multiple genres within a novel, he writes: 'Each of these genres possesses its own verbal and semantic forms for assimilating various aspects of reality.'[11] In other words, an author who cites a text in a secondary framework transposes aspects of the cited text's original genre world into the new literary environment. The cited text retains the literary effects of its original genre and carries them into the secondary framework where they are redeployed for the agenda of the secondary author.

Given that genre is a literary world that the author uses and incorporates to shape the meaning of a text, the task of identifying genre transposition is necessarily inductive. Instead of the deductive approach of traditional form criticism, the process of identifying genre begins when the reader encounters the first words of the secondary framework. Bakhtin describes the process accordingly:

> We learn to cast our speech in generic forms and, when hearing others' speech, we guess its genre from the very first words; we predict a certain length … and a certain compositional structure; we foresee the end; that is, from the very beginning we have a sense of the speech whole, which is only later differentiated during the speech process.[12]

This inductive approach complements Longman's method which identifies the transposition of genre based on the strength of literary connection between the genre and the secondary framework. For Longman, 'similarities between texts on many levels and the interrelationships between these similarities are evidence of generic identity.'[13] Frow describes these literary similarities as 'generic cues' that specify 'how to use the text, what one can expect to happen at different stages, and what to do if these expectations are not confirmed.'[14] These cues do not individually determine a genre; rather, they are literary markers that cumulatively indicate the genre of a text. Consistent with Bakhtin's inductive reading process, generic cues are both external and internal to the text. The reader first encounters the external frame of the text which constitutes its outer form. It demarcates the text from its surrounding literary environment, suggests a new generic context, and confirms an appropriate reading strategy. Examples include introductory greetings and concluding benedictions, as well as 'the structure of the text and the metrical or nonmetrical speech rhythm.'[15] Moving past the external frame, the reader then engages the text's internal cues—its inner form—which either corroborate or contradict the originally assumed genre. Examples include 'nonformal aspects of the texts, the mood, setting, function, narrative voice and content.'[16] According to this method, the greater the literary connections between the cited

[10] Frow, *Genre*, 49.

[11] M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 320–21. Contra Yuri Tynyanov who argues that a transposed text 'enters another genre and loses its own genre' ('The Ode as an Oratorical Genre', trans. A. Shukman, *New Literary History* 34 [2003]: 565).

[12] M. M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vernon W. McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 79.

[13] Longman, 'Form Criticism', 60.

[14] Frow, *Genre*, 113. See also Longman, 'Israelite Genres in Their Ancient Near Eastern Context', 178.

[15] Frow, *Genre*, 115.

[16] Longman, 'Form Criticism', 60.

text and the secondary framework, the stronger the case for identifying the incorporation of the cited text's original genre.

As the reader evaluates these literary connections, the cited text functions as the generic prototype—a text which determines the characteristic features of its genre. Indeed, Frow defines genres 'by prototypes [that] have a common core and then fade into fuzziness at the edges'.[17] The generic prototype defines the literary core against which the generic cues in the secondary framework are evaluated. As these cues diversify from the core, the secondary framework's similarity with and proximity to the generic prototype weaken along with the certainty and purity of its shared genre. The task of identifying generic transposition therefore begins with defining a generic prototype. It then involves inductively comparing the generic cues of the secondary framework with the literary features of the prototype and other texts within its purported genre.

In sum, the extent to which the genre of the cited text is transposed into the secondary framework depends on the strength of literary connection between the secondary framework and the citation as the generic prototype. The stronger the literary connection, the greater the likelihood of genre transposition.

2. Generic Cues

Beginning with its external frame and progressing to its internal cues, I now inductively evaluate the extent to which Hebrews 12:4–13 as the secondary framework incorporates the wisdom genre of Proverbs 3:11–12 as the generic prototype. This inductive reading process evaluates the cumulative force of multiple generic cues and determines the transposition of genre not on the basis of any single literary connection but on the overall balance of probabilities.[18]

2.1. External Frame

As the reader first engages Hebrews 12:4–13, he or she encounters its external frame which sets their initial expectations of the genre. On balance, these three external cues—the citation of the generic prototype, structure, and speech rhythm—collectively suggest the incorporation of the wisdom genre.

2.1.1. Citation of the Generic Prototype

Following the paean of Jesus as the prime exemplar of faith, the reader confronts a new pericope commencing at Hebrews 12:4. The pending citation of Proverbs 3:11–12 as the generic prototype in verses 5–6 secures this boundary by demarcating the subsequent exegesis of the proverb (12:7–13) from the preceding exegesis of Habakkuk 2:3–4 cited in Hebrews 10:37–38 (10:39–12:3).[19]

According to Carter, an NT citation of an OT text appeals 'beyond the citation to a larger "bundle of ideas"' which are situated within a 'common tradition or cultural context in which the citation's

[17] Frow, *Genre*, 59. This approach is consistent with Carol A. Newsom's method which structures genres 'with central and peripheral members' ('Spying out the Land: A Report for Genology', in *Bakhtin and Genre Theory in Biblical Studies*, ed. Roland Boer [Atlanta: SBL, 2007], 24).

[18] Cf. Leo Perdue, 'Liminality as a Social Setting for Wisdom Instructions', *ZAW* 93 (1981): 114–26.

[19] See Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 615; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2015), 380.

authority and content are recognized'.[20] This 'common tradition or cultural context' corresponds closely with Frow's concept of a genre world. To detach the citation from that cultural context 'ignores the audience's knowledge of a larger common tradition'.[21] The citation of the generic prototype therefore appears to actualise both its canonical authority and its wisdom genre, both of which the author expects his audience to recognise.

The accusation that the audience had 'forgotten' (ἐκλανθάνομαι) the proverb presumes their actual or expected familiarity with it.[22] The epistle's saturation in the OT corroborates this presumption. Specifically with respect to the cited proverb, Attridge notes: 'These traditional proverbial notions [of suffering as divine discipline] were frequently repeated in Jewish tradition and by early Christians'.[23] Such repeated use implies the audience's familiarity not just with the proverb but also with the wisdom tradition from which it originates. Accordingly, the intended function of the quotation is to recall the wisdom of Israel's forebears and invoke that thought-world which is shared with the audience.

The author appears to incorporate the wisdom genre of the prototype not only into the citation proper but also into the broader pericope (Heb 12:4–13). According to Lane, the citation in verses 5–6 'furnishes the point of departure for an exposition of the text in verses 7–11'.[24] This develops the work of Walters who structures Hebrews around six OT quotations, each introducing a new point of exegesis and paraenesis. The citation of Proverbs 3:11–12 frames the sixth section of the epistle (12:3–13:19) whose paraenesis is located in Hebrews 12:3–29 and 13:1–19.[25] Within this proposed structure, the citation of the generic prototype in Hebrews 12:5–6 forms the scriptural basis for the exposition and exhortation that follow in verses 7–13.[26] The cited proverb introduces not only a new section of the epistle but, as Carter observes, it also invites the reader to enter its 'common tradition'—in this case, ancient Israelite wisdom—as they proceed to engage the broader pericope.

2.1.2. Structure

Moving beyond the citation of the generic prototype, the reader then identifies its literary structure reflected in the secondary framework. Proverbs 3:11–12 conforms to the 'distinctive structure' of an instructional proverb: 'an imperative plus motivation and/or accompanying conditions'.[27] The imperative is emphasised in verse 11 and the motivation is then supplied in verse 12, both clauses connected by an explanatory γάρ. The very same imperative-indicative progression is reflected in the structure of the

[20] Warren Carter, 'Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and an Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7–9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:15–16', *JBL* 119 (2000): 505.

[21] Carter, 'Evoking Isaiah', 506.

[22] Cf. William L. Lane who favours an interrogative construction (see ESV) (*Hebrews 9–13*, WBC 47B [Nashville: Word, 1991], 420). In either case, whether by accusation or by question, the author presumes his audience's prior knowledge of the proverb.

[23] Harold W. Attridge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 361.

[24] Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 421.

[25] John R. Walters, 'The Rhetorical Arrangement of Hebrews' (paper presented at the annual Christmas Conference of the John Wesley Fellows, Shakertown, 1989), quoted in William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC 47A (Nashville: Word, 1991), cxiv–xv.

[26] See also George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews: A Text-Linguistic Analysis*, JSNTSup 73 (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 9–10, 112–47.

[27] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology*, 2nd ed (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2021), 243.

secondary framework. Not only does the author of Hebrews cite the generic prototype in 12:5–6, he then applies and expands its literary structure to his subsequent exposition (12:7–11).

Hebrews 12:7 opens with the verb ὑπομένετε, which can be rendered either as an indicative or an imperative. Given the hortatory rhetoric and paraenetic purpose of the epistle—as well as the parallel imperatives of ἀναλογίσασθε (12:3) and ἐκλύου (12:5; cf. Prov 3:11)—an imperative reading of the verb is preferred.[28] Hebrews 12:7b–11 then provides the theological motivation for this imperative, mirroring the indicative component of the generic prototype (Prov 3:12). The motivation in the proverb is divine sonship and love: 'the one whom the Lord loves he disciplines'. The parallel indicative in Hebrews 12:8–11 reflects the very same motivation: 'what son is there whom his father does not discipline?' (12:7). The author of Hebrews then deploys *synkrisis*—a lesser to greater argument—to intensify three comparative benefits of divine discipline vis-à-vis earthly discipline: life, holiness, and righteousness (Heb 12:9, 10, 11). In this way, the secondary framework in Hebrews 12:4–13 parallels the imperative-indicative structure of the generic prototype in Proverbs 3:11–12 and thus corroborates the *prima facie* transposition of a wisdom genre.

2.1.3. Speech Rhythm

However, on a first reading of both texts, the speech rhythms of the secondary framework and the generic prototype appear inconsistent, and this casts doubt over the extent to which the author of Hebrews incorporates the proverb's wisdom genre. Proverbs in their basic genre are generally structured in bilinear or, occasionally, trilinear parallel. The epigrammatic nature of each proverb demands terseness 'with the greatest concentration on the subject-matter and with a disregard of any presuppositions, attendant circumstances, etc'.[29] Accordingly, each proverb is ordinarily disconnected from its neighbouring aphorisms, with very few conjunctions between them. In this sense, the meaning of each individual proverb can be discerned without reference to its immediate literary environment. The aphorisms in Proverbs 3:1–12, including the generic prototype, are not internally stitched together by a series of conjunctions but externally framed by an inclusio of a vocative υἱέ which demarcates the lecture from its surrounding text (Prov 3:1, 11).[30]

In contrast to the clipped staccato rhythm of the generic prototype, the rhetoric of Hebrews 12:4–13 progresses logically as homiletic prose and is internally bound by a series of conjunctions. The imperative to 'endure' discipline is followed by an explanatory γάρ which introduces a slanted question (12:7). The same conjunction reappears in verse 10 to expound the second benefit of divine discipline. A transitional post-positive δέ connects the pericope at verses 8 and 11, as does the coordinate εἶτα at verse 9. Verses 8 and 12 are further integrated into the pericope by an inferential ἄρα and διό. This series of conjunctions, together with the logical progression of ideas that develop throughout the secondary framework, are inconsistent with the terse and disjointed speech rhythm of proverbial wisdom.

This literary cue admittedly places greater distance between the secondary framework and the generic prototype and thus *prima facie* weighs against identifying the transposition of genre. However, it is important to give proper weight to this incongruity relative to other generic cues. According to

[28] Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 421. For an indicative reading, see Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 650.

[29] Gerhard von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM, 1972), 32.

[30] Köstenberger and Patterson identify such 'bookending' as a structural indicator of biblical poetry (*Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, 282–85).

Frow, a text's speech rhythm is of less probative value than its rhetorical structure or 'structure of address' (see 3.2b).[31] Accordingly, while some external synergies between the generic prototype and the secondary framework are admittedly weak, such as their speech rhythm, they are less indicative of genre transposition than the internal cues to which I now turn.

2.2. Internal Cues

While the external frame of Hebrews 12:4–13 places the secondary framework in moderate generic proximity with Proverbs 3:11–12, the reader must consider its internal cues to confirm the extent to which it incorporates the prototype's wisdom genre. These internal cues include the secondary framework's thematic content, rhetorical structure, setting and function, as well as any allusions to the broader wisdom corpus in Proverbs.

2.2.1 Thematic Content: Human Suffering

According to Frow, the thematic content of a text is 'the shaped human experience that a genre invests with significance and interest'.[32] That is, particular genres are concerned with corresponding *leitmotifs*. The theme of human suffering is common to the core wisdom corpus of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, and it is also the particular concern of Proverbs 3:11–12. Job considers wisdom in the context of unexplained human suffering, while Ecclesiastes complements the *prima facie* optimism of Proverbs by lamenting the moral disorder of creation. Proverbs itself does not evade the problem of human suffering, variously attributing it to the consequences of folly, the oppression of the wicked, the vicissitudes of fortune, and the discipline of the Lord (Prov 3:11–12). More specifically, divine discipline is one of eight OT theodicies identified by Sanders, and it features prominently in Eliphaz's and Elihu's unwise characterisations of Job's sufferings (Job 5:17; 33:14–30).[33]

The sapiential theme of human suffering is introduced to the reader not only in Hebrews 12:4, it is actually the historical occasion for the paraenesis of the broader pericope (10:32–12:3).[34] The author refers to his audience's 'hard struggle with sufferings', which include their public exposure to 'taunts and afflictions' and 'the confiscation of [their] possessions' (10:32–34). He then catalogues models of endurance through persecution as 'witnesses' to his suffering audience (11:32–38; 12:1). This encomium climaxes in Christ as the exemplar of perseverance *par excellence*, whom the audience is exhorted to consider in their present 'struggle against sin' (12:1–3). Indeed, the extant suffering of God's people is the literary frame for the encomium of persevering faith (10:32–39 ḫ 11:1–12:3 ḫ 12:4–13). It is precisely because of his audience's present suffering that the author draws on the Israelite wisdom tradition by incorporating its genre as a means of motivating their endurance. By characterising human suffering as divine discipline, the author signals to his audience his integration and use of the ancient Israelite wisdom genre.

[31] Frow, *Genre*, 84.

[32] Frow, *Genre*, 83.

[33] James A. Sanders describes human suffering in the OT as (1) retributive; (2) disciplinary; (3) revelational; (4) probational; (5) illusory (or transitory); (6) mysterious (only God has Wisdom); (7) eschatological; or (8) meaningless (*Suffering as Divine Discipline in the Old Testament and Post-Biblical Judaism* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017], 1). See also Nicholas Moore, 'Deferring to Dad's Discipline: Family Life in Hebrews 12', in *Marriage, Family and Relationships: Biblical, Doctrinal and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Thomas A. Noble, Sarah K. Whittle, and Philip S. Johnston (London: Apollos, 2017), 124; Attridge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 361.

[34] Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 329.

2.2.2. Rhetorical Structure: Paternal Voice

The 'rhetorical structure' of a text refers to 'the way textual relations between the senders and receivers of messages are organised in a structured situation of address.'[35] It includes the credibility, authority, emotional tone, and degree of formality between the author and reader. For Frow, this is the generic cue with greatest probative value, and in the case of the secondary framework it is strongly indicative of an incorporated wisdom genre.

The author of Proverbs adopts the narrative voice of a father imparting wisdom to his son—a rhetorical convention of ancient Israelite wisdom.[36] In the lecture of Proverbs 3:1–12 and the generic prototype more specifically (3:11–12), the author refers to his audience as υἱέ, adopting a paternal persona to more effectively and affectively impart wisdom. Fox highlights the following five effects of the paternal voice in Proverbs 1–9: (1) Authority: the father's status brings credibility of character and authority of ethos; (2) Promise and warning: only the father can rightfully reward the obedience or punish the disobedience of a child; (3) Intimacy: the paternal tone is not merely imperative but persuasive; (4) Vividness: the father warns against folly by personifying it as an adulteress; and (5) Irony: the father mocks the fool as the harbinger of his own destruction.[37] The paternal voice therefore characterises the rhetorical structure of proverbial wisdom.

As the reader continues to evaluate the generic cues within Hebrews 12:4–13, the author's use of the sapiential paternal voice can be distinctly discerned. While the author of Hebrews does not himself adopt the persona of a father, he confers it on God. Indeed, by first addressing the citation to his audience 'as sons' (Heb 12:5) and then clarifying the divine nature of their sonship (12:7), the author places the proverb in the mouth of God.[38] In this sense, the paternal persona is ascribed not to the author but to God himself. By portraying God as the 'Father of spirits' (12:9), the author imports Fox's rhetorical effects of authority, promise, and intimacy to motivate his audience toward endurance. Paternal authority is implied in the audience's expected 'respect' for and 'submission' to discipline (12:9). Paternal intimacy underlies the legitimacy of the audience's sonship (12:7). Paternal promise is expressed in the future reward for filial obedience: 'the peaceful fruit of righteousness' (12:11). Peeler notes that 'the author's sole appeal to wisdom literature serves as the culmination of his portrayal of God's identity as a Father in relationship to the audience'.[39] This maintains and, in fact, intensifies the paternal persona that defines the rhetoric of proverbial wisdom and the narrative voice of the generic prototype.

The paternal voice of wisdom also alerts the reader to the fear of the Lord which theologically connects the secondary framework with the wisdom genre. While the noun 'fear' (יראה) has a broad semantic range, its various meanings 'centre on respecting God as God and treating him as he deserves'.[40] Fearing the Lord therefore involves a relationship of trust and dependence from creature to creator. Proverbs 3:11–12 recasts this creature-creator relationship in filial terms: God is the father who

[35] Frow, *Genre*, 82.

[36] Glenn D. Pemberton, 'The Rhetoric of the Father in Proverbs 1–9', *JSOT* 30 (2005): 69.

[37] Michael V. Fox, 'Ideas of Wisdom in Proverbs 1–9', *JBL* 116.4 (1997): 621–24.

[38] See Amy L. B. Peeler, *'You Are My Son': The Family of God in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, LNTS 486 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 148; Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 526.

[39] Peeler, *'You Are My Son'*, 146.

[40] Lindsay Wilson, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 17 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2017), 22; Longman, *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom*, 12–13. For a fuller study, see Miles V. Van Pelt and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., 'יראה', in *NIDOTTE* 2:527–33.

disciplines his son, and the reader is the son who fears the Lord as his trustworthy father. By conferring the paternal persona on God, the author of Hebrews appropriates the filial relationship of the generic prototype as the theological foundation of the secondary framework. Just as the Lord is the trustworthy father who disciplines his son in Proverbs 3:11–12, God is the trustworthy father who disciplines his sons in Hebrews 12:7. The author of Hebrews intentionally contrasts God's infallible paternal discipline with the fallible judgment of earthly fathers (12:10). In doing so, he confirms to the reader that his exhortation to endure suffering is theologically grounded in the foundation of ancient Israelite wisdom: the fear of the Lord.

2.2.3. Function: Moral Formation

The function of Israelite wisdom is the moral formation of the reader. To reach the goal of wisdom and righteousness, Lyu observes, 'the learner is expected to go through the reshaping of his inner person. His desires, hopes, and disposition must be reconditioned to reflect the ideal.'[41] This is the core sense of 'discipline' (παιδεία) in Proverbs 3:11.[42] The admonition to 'not think lightly of the Lord's discipline' is motivated by the reward of divine love. Elsewhere in Proverbs, the goal of παιδεία is 'righteousness, justice, and integrity', 'life', and 'wisdom' (1:3; 6:23; 19:20). The function of the generic prototype and proverbial wisdom is, more generally, moral formation. Longman aptly summarises, 'Proverbs wants to make a person good as well as successful.'[43]

If the secondary framework does indeed incorporate the genre of proverbial wisdom, the reader of Hebrews 12:4–13 should expect to identify the same paraenetic purpose. This expectation is borne out as moral formation defines the three indicatives which support the primary imperative of the pericope, 'Endure for the sake of discipline' (Heb 12:7). The basis for the author's exhortation to endure is the formative benefits of divine discipline vis-à-vis those of earthly discipline: life, holiness, and righteousness (12:9, 10, 11). The first and third of these benefits explicitly accord with the goals of παιδεία in proverbial wisdom: 'life' (ζωή, cf. Prov 6:23) and 'righteousness' (δικαιοσύνη, cf. Prov 1:3). However, where proverbial wisdom focuses on the formation of character, Hebrews 12:4–13 spiritually transforms these moral benefits. Once again through *synkrisis*, the author makes a cosmological comparison between 'the fathers of our flesh' and 'the Father of spirits' (12:9). This, together with the substantive sense in which we 'share' (μεταλαμβάνω) the holiness of Christ (12:10), redefine the object of formation from our moral character to our spirit. This spiritual formation is not incidental to the experience of suffering but it is divinely intended to be 'for our benefit' (12:10). The sanctifying function of divine discipline is depicted in the athletic metaphor of Hebrews 12:1–3, and it is revived in verses 11–13. Suffering is described as training (γυμνάζω), which is rewarded with what Hughes describes as 'the rest and relaxation enjoyed by the victorious contestant once the conflict is over',[44] in this case 'the peaceful fruit of righteousness' (12:11). Hebrews 12:4–13 therefore shares the formative function of the generic prototype, further strengthening the case for genre transposition. It not only adopts the formative purpose of proverbial wisdom but transforms its object from the moral to the spiritual.

[41] Sun Myung Lyu, *Righteousness in the Book of Proverbs*, FAT 2/55 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 64.

[42] N. Clayton Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1–13 in Its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context*, SNTSMS 98 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 217–18; cf. Ched Spellman, 'The Drama of Discipline: Toward an Intertextual Profile of *Paideia* in Hebrews 12', *JETS* 59 (2016): 487–506.

[43] Tremper Longman III, *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom: A Theological Introduction to Wisdom in Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 10.

[44] Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 533.

2.2.4. Setting: Liminality

This function of moral formation in Proverbs is not without a social setting. Perdue argues that proverbial wisdom is particularly directed toward those in a position of social liminality. The liminal stage is one of 'betwixt and between' in which persons are 'temporarily (on occasion permanently) detached from their previous social structure and have not yet begun to reincorporate'.[45] While proverbial wisdom applies to both the 'simple' and the 'wise', there is a clear focus on 'the inexperienced' and the 'young man' in need of 'shrewdness', 'knowledge and discretion' (Prov 1:1–5). Fox presents 'an adolescent about to enter the world' who 'may be married or about to be' (cf. 31:1–31).[46] Indeed, Proverbs 3:11–12 is part of a wisdom lecture intended to prepare a son for 'many days, a full life' (3:2). The admonition to 'not think lightly of the Lord's discipline' is addressed to a young man in a position of social liminality.

The audience of Hebrews 12:4–13 is addressed in a not dissimilar social setting, though in this text that setting is eschatologically intensified. The future-orientation of the spiritually formative benefits of discipline places the audience in a state of not only social liminality but also eschatological liminality. The promise that the audience will 'live' if they submit to the Father of spirits is presented in the future tense (ζήσομεν, 12:9). While the aorist infinitive μεταλαβεῖν in verse 10 may otherwise indicate the permanent possession of holiness, it is more likely default in aspect and should be understood as a future benefit when read in parallel with ζήσομεν.[47] Both these benefits indicate an inaugurated eschatology, where the spiritual benefits of divine discipline are presently enjoyed in part but await future consummation. The audience therefore occupies a liminal position of 'betwixt and between': between 'the moment' in which all discipline seems painful and the 'later' time in which it will yield the peaceful fruit of righteousness (12:11). Just as the goal of proverbial wisdom is the moral formation of social liminals, the goal of Hebrews 12:4–13 is also the spiritual formation of eschatological liminals.

There is also a sense in which the audience occupies a position of covenantal liminality. On the one hand, Jesus has already inaugurated the 'better covenant' prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31–34 (cf. Heb 8:6–13; 10:15–18). The repetition of the ἅπαξ word group emphasises the eschatologically realised aspects of the new covenant (9:12, 26; cf. 10:12). Nevertheless, there are hints that the old covenant is still in force and its earthly temple is still standing at the time of writing (8:3–5; 9:6–7; 10:1–3; 13:10–11).[48] Koester thus describes the tension between covenants: 'The shift from the old to the new covenant (8:6) has begun, but is not complete since a change has occurred, but the promises have not been fully realized.'[49] Whatever date we attribute to the authorship of the epistle, the audience lives at a point of covenantal transition, and the exhortation of Hebrews 12:4–13 is intended to prepare them for suffering in the new covenant age. In a novel thesis, Hooker dates the epistle post-70 CE and frames its message not as 'Do not *fall back* into Judaism' but as 'It is time to *move on*, and to *leave behind* your former understanding of Judaism.'[50] If Hooker's thesis is correct, it strengthens the case for both the audience's liminal context

[45] Perdue, 'Liminality as a Social Setting for Wisdom Instructions', 116.

[46] Michael V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 18A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 62.

[47] Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 425; cf. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 654.

[48] Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 302; T. Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 138.

[49] Koester, *Hebrews*, 392.

[50] Morna D. Hooker, 'Christ, the "End" of the Cult', in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart and Nathan MacDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009),

and also the secondary framework's spiritually formative function as it seeks to prepare Jewish Christians for life in the new covenant. There is therefore a dual sense of eschatological and covenantal liminality in the audience's setting that accords with the social liminality presumed by proverbial wisdom.

For the reader of Hebrews, the cumulative force of the internal cues presents a compelling case to identify the transposition of the wisdom genre into the secondary framework. The author of Hebrews writes to an audience in traditional wisdom settings of suffering and liminality, he adopts the traditional wisdom persona of a father, and he appropriates and spiritually transforms the traditional wisdom function of moral formation as the goal of his paraenesis.

2.2.5. Allusions to Proverbs

Finally, I note a number of allusions throughout the secondary framework to the generic prototype, the wisdom lecture of Proverbs 3:1–12 as its immediate context, and the broader wisdom tradition, the first two sets of which have not been hitherto considered by the literature. To the reader familiar with ancient Israelite wisdom, these allusions may be indicative of a wisdom genre.

In Hebrews 12:5, the author accuses the audience of having 'forgotten' (ἐκλανθάνομαι) the proverb and summons them to remember it as the basis for their endurance. This echoes the exhortation which opens the wisdom lecture in Proverbs 3:1, 'do not forget (ἐπιλανθάνομαι) my teaching'. Notwithstanding the differing prefix, both verbs share the same root λανθάνω and the sense of forgetting. The lexical synergy between these two verses suggests that the author of Hebrews is intentionally alluding to the wisdom lecture within which the generic prototype is located (Prov 3:1–12). Indeed, he appears to accuse the audience of committing the very mistake against which they were warned. In fact, the use of ἐκλανθάνομαι (Heb 12:5) instead of ἐπιλανθάνομαι (Prov 3:1) intensifies their actions from ordinary forgetfulness to 'forget (altogether)'.[51]

A second set of allusions to the wisdom lecture of Proverbs 3:1–12 can be identified. In Hebrews 12:9, those who submit to the discipline of the Lord will 'live' (ζήσομεν). Eschatological eternal life is the benefit of divine discipline. This alludes to and intensifies the corresponding benefit in Proverbs 3:1–2 of heeding the warning to 'not forget my teaching': namely, 'years of life' (ἔτη ζωῆς). Even though ζωή appears 38 times throughout Proverbs LXX, it is used in the same manner in both Proverbs 3:2 and Hebrews 12:9—as the indicative underlying an imperative. Similarly, the promise of the 'peaceful fruit (καρπὸν εἰρηνικὸν) of righteousness' (Heb 12:11) alludes to the promise of peace (εἰρήνην) in Proverbs 3:2, both as promises corresponding to commands. The same case can be made for 'healing' (ἰαθῇ) in Hebrews 12:13 as an echo of 'healing to your body' (ἴασις ἔσται τῷ σώματί σου) in Proverbs 3:8.

Adopting Thiessen's thesis, Hays observes that 'the call to make "straight paths" (Heb 12:13) probably evokes the promise of the end of exile found in Isa. 40'.[52] This Isaianic connection is consistent with the parallel allusion identified by Guthrie: Hebrews 12:12, 'strengthen tired hands and weakened knees' (τὰς παρειμένας χεῖρας καὶ τὰ παραλελυμένα γόνατα ἀνορθώσατε), and Isaiah 35:3–4, 'Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees' (ἰσχύσατε, χεῖρες ἀνειμέναι καὶ γόνατα παραλελυμένα,

197 (emphasis in original).

[51] "ἐκλανθάνομαι," in BDAG 305.

[52] Richard B. Hays, '"Here We Have No Lasting City": New Covenantalism in Hebrews', in *The Epistle to the Hebrews and Christian Theology*, ed. Richard Bauckham, Daniel R. Driver, Trevor A. Hart and Nathan MacDonald (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 164.

παρακαλέσατε).[53] It also supports Thiessen's thesis that identifies a wilderness motif in Hebrews 12:5–13. However, given the explicit citation of Proverbs 3:11–12 in Hebrews 12:5–6, which appeals to ancient Israelite wisdom, it makes more sense to connect the 'straight paths' (τροχιὰς ὀρθὰς ποιεῖτε τοῖς ποσὶν ὑμῶν) of Hebrews 12:13 with Proverbs 4:26a, also identified by Guthrie: 'Make straight paths for your feet and direct your paths' (ὀρθὰς τροχιὰς ποίει σοῖς ποσὶν καὶ τὰς ὁδούς σου κατεύθυνε).[54] This allusion does not contradict Thiessen's wilderness thesis but subordinates it as a secondary theme under a primary wisdom motif. In contrast to the clear embedding of proverbial wisdom in Hebrews 12:5–6, there is no explicit reference anywhere in the secondary framework to Israel's wilderness wanderings. Indeed, Thiessen concedes that 'neither the wilderness wanderings nor Deuteronomy 8 are specifically mentioned'.[55] In considering the primary conceptual background of a text, Guthrie wisely advises:

> The tracking of echoes might best begin with a consideration of the broader contexts of the book's citations.… When one is stepping out on uncertain ground, it is better to step first on the firmer parts of a path rather than the softer spots of a wide-open field, and the contexts of the quotations are, at least, an appropriate place to begin our search.[56]

In this vein, the quotation of Proverbs 3:11–12 is the 'firmer part' of Hebrews 12:4–13 and it—not Deuteronomy 8—should be our first step. From there, we are able to more confidently presume the provenance of allusions and echoes, giving preference to those within the original 'context of the quotation'—in this case, the wisdom of Proverbs.

Accordingly, there is greater warrant to draw a primary thematic connection with the wisdom tradition rather than wilderness tradition. In fact, the author of Hebrews appears to synthesise both traditions in the secondary framework. Not only is he inviting his audience to 're-envision their lives so as to place themselves *in* the wilderness,'[57] as Thiessen argues, he is also invoking the wisdom of Proverbs to motivate them to endure *through* the wilderness. Thiessen's identification of the wilderness motif is therefore complemented by the wisdom tradition, which adds paraenetic force to the audience's self-awareness of their wilderness experience.

2.3. Summary

Identifying the transposition of genre requires the reader to make a cumulative judgment of the external and internal literary synergies between the generic prototype and the secondary framework. While there are some weaknesses of literary connection—in particular, speech rhythm—there is nevertheless strong literary convergence that favours identifying the incorporation of the wisdom genre into Hebrews 12:4–13.

[53] George H. Guthrie, 'Hebrews', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. Gregory K. Beale and Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 987.

[54] Guthrie, 'Hebrews', 988.

[55] Thiessen, 'Hebrews 12.5–13', 374.

[56] Guthrie, 'Hebrews', 920.

[57] Thiessen, 'Hebrews 12:5–13', 379 (emphasis added).

Table: Generic Cues in Proverbs 3:11–12 and Hebrews 12:4–13

	Generic prototype (Prov 3:11–12)	**Secondary framework (Heb 12:4–13)**	
External frame			
Citation	Original text	Transposed text	✓
Structure	Imperative → Indicative	Imperative → Indicative	✓
Speech rhythm	Epigrammatic	Homiletic	✗
Internal cues			
Thematic content	Suffering as divine discipline	Suffering as divine discipline	✓
Rhetorical structure	Earthly paternal voice	Heavenly paternal voice	★
Function	Moral formation	Spiritual formation	★
Setting	Social liminality	Eschatological liminality Covenantal liminality	★
Allusion to Proverbs	ἐπιλανθάνομαι (3:1) ἔτη ζωῆς (3:2) εἰρήνην (3:2) ἴασις ἔσται τῷ σώματί σου (3:8) ὀρθὰς τροχιὰς ποίει σοῖς ποσὶν (4:26a)	ἐκλανθάνομαι (12:5) ζήσομεν (12:9) καρπὸν εἰρηνικὸν (12:11) ἰαθῇ (12:13) τροχιὰς ὀρθὰς ποιεῖτε τοῖς ποσὶν ὑμῶν (12:13)	✓

✓ Convergence ★ Intensification ✗ Divergence

3. Hermeneutical Implications

The transposition of the wisdom genre into Hebrews 12:4–13 has a significant impact on our interpretation of the text and, in particular, its characterisation of human suffering as divine discipline. Each genre world, Frow argues, creates 'reality effects specific to it: some worlds claim a high reality status, others announce themselves as fictional or hypothetical.'[58] The reality status claimed by wisdom—in particular, proverbial wisdom—is highly circumstantial. The aphorisms of Proverbs are predominantly structured in couplets as parallelisms. According to Waltke, these individual proverbs, as a result of their epigrammatic rhythm, 'concentrate or distill truth and so by their nature cannot express the whole truth about a topic.'[59] A sapiential proverb therefore does not intend to make a universal truth claim. 'Rather, it is a single component of truth that must be fit together with other elements of truth in order to approximate the more comprehensive, confused pattern of life.'[60] Indeed, some sets of proverbs make claims that are *prima facie* contradictory, both of which are true but circumstantially relevant (e.g. Prov 26:4–5). The applicability of either proverb depends not just on the particular circumstances but on

[58] Frow, *Genre*, 93.

[59] Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 38; Waltke, 'Does Proverbs Promise Too Much?', *AUSS* 34 (1996): 325.

[60] Waltke, *Proverbs*, 38.

the proper exercise of wisdom (26:7). The key hermeneutical danger of interpreting wisdom is genre misidentification: 'to read a proverb as if it were always true in every circumstance.'[61]

In the case of Proverbs 3:11–12, most commentators acknowledge its circumstantial character but none of them explicitly appeal to the genre of the proverb to support their claim. Longman entertains the possibility that the proverb is not universally applicable: 'The difficulty is knowing when suffering is to teach us (divine discipline) and when there is *some other reason* behind it.'[62] Fox speculates that Proverbs 3:12 'may well be a quoted maxim or turn of phrase' and notes in passing that '*sometimes* suffering is divine discipline.'[63] Lucas also describes the proverb as 'one biblical perspective on the problem of suffering.'[64] Indeed, Waltke's earlier observation regarding the epigrammatic style of proverbial wisdom is made with specific reference to the claims of Proverbs 3:1–12 which include the generic prototype. He argues that these optimistic proverbs 'must be read holistically, within the total collection'—a collection that includes proverbs which 'recognize the failure of justice.'[65] With respect to Proverbs 3:11–12, therefore, divine discipline is but one account of human suffering. Proverbs frequently acknowledges various other causes of human suffering, which include unjust oppression and violence (1:11; 21:7), economic injustice (13:23; 14:31; 21:6, 13; 22:22), and slander (10:18; 12:17). The presence of 'better-than' proverbs presupposes the unjust suffering of the righteous, humble, loving, and upright (11:1; 15:16; 16:8, 19; 19:22b). While these proverbs do not explicitly provide an explanation for suffering, they acknowledge 'the vicissitudes of fortune'[66] and the reality of living in an imperfectly ordered world. Longman rejects a simplistic retribution theology and clarifies that, according to ancient Israelite wisdom, 'while sin can lead to suffering, that is not the only explanation for pain in the world.'[67]

When the genre lens of wisdom is applied to Hebrews 12:4–13, it creates a similar if not intensified reality effect and cautions us against universalising divine discipline as an absolute theodicy. Appreciating the homiletic character of the epistle, Hebrews 12:4–13 is the author's wise application of the proverb to a particular set of circumstances faced by his audience. Building an all-encompassing theodicy of divine discipline on the basis of this text would violate the reality effect of its wisdom genre. Indeed, the epistle elsewhere provides accounts of human suffering that do not involve divine discipline. The author most notably attributes suffering and death to divine judgment for sin and unbelief (Heb 2:2; 3:16–19; 10:26–27; 12:25). He also identifies the following potential causes of human suffering: the world which is not yet 'in subjection to [Christ]' (2:8), the flesh which is afflicted by 'weaknesses' and is vulnerable to temptation (4:15), and the devil 'who has the power of death' (2:14). Even though the audience's suffering appears to be occasioned by the 'sin' of Hebrews 12:4, there is no guarantee that this is personal sin deserving retributive wrath. Rather, in view of the broader pericope beginning with the recounting of persecution in Hebrews 10:32–39, it is better understood as oppression by the wicked akin to the 'sinners' from whom Christ endured hostility (12:3).[68]

Identifying the secondary framework as wisdom cautions us against applying a simplistic retribution theology, and it invites us to adopt a nuanced wisdom approach to understanding human suffering. The

[61] Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Proverbs* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 48.
[62] Tremper Longman III, *Proverbs*, BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 135 (emphasis added).
[63] Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 152–53 (emphasis added).
[64] Ernest C. Lucas, *Proverbs*, THOTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 63 (emphasis added).
[65] Waltke, 'Does Proverbs Promise Too Much?', 326.
[66] Fox, *Proverbs 1–9*, 153.
[67] Longman, *The Fear of the Lord Is Wisdom*, 189.
[68] Lane, *Hebrews 9–13*, 418–19; Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 619.

reality effect of wisdom requires us to interpret Hebrews 12:4–13 not as universally applicable but as a circumstantial truth.

4. Conclusion

While the literary synergies between the secondary framework and the generic prototype are not perfect, they cumulatively indicate the transposition of the wisdom genre into Hebrews 12:4–13. The generic cues within the secondary framework invite us to identify the wisdom tradition and incorporate the values and assumptions of its genre world. When read as wisdom, Hebrews 12:4–13 presents divine discipline as one account of human suffering among many and warns us against simplistically applying it beyond its original context.

It can be tempting for Christians to offer simplistic solutions to the problem of suffering. We may generalise that suffering is either God's judgment on the world or discipline of his people, or suggest that all suffering has our spiritual formation as its principal purpose à la Hebrews 12:4–13. Whatever element of truth these claims may have, they share a fatal flaw: both claims turn circumstantial truths into universal laws. While we can make general systematic claims about divine sovereignty, it is biblically unwarranted and pastorally damaging to consider all suffering divine discipline. As I have argued, Hebrews 12:4–13 should not be read as propositional theology, a philosophical apologetic, or an exegetical basis for a universal theodicy. Instead, it is the careful application of proverbial wisdom to the particular circumstances of its original audience. The author of Hebrews does not cite Proverbs 3:11–12 in order to provide a theological account of human suffering. Rather, he applies its wisdom so that, whatever the reason, we might endure suffering as submissive sons of a loving Father—so that we might fear the Lord.

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From *Logizomai* to Luther: The Great Exchange and the Development of the Imputed Righteousness

— Bradley Gray —

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Abstract: Martin Luther's theology of imputation, which is often understood through the paradigm of "the great exchange," is a formative albeit misunderstood tenet of Reformation doctrine. Even though Luther never explicitly deployed the phrase, nevertheless, the gospel is conveyed in the language of a two-way transaction, wherein Christ's righteousness is imputed to sinners as their sins are imputed to him. The pastoral necessity to preach the good news of imputation is best understood against the backdrop of historical and contemporary challenges to the doctrine itself. Imputation, therefore, remains vital not only for doctrinal clarity but for the believer's assurance of salvation.

Among Martin Luther's countless theological contributions, the great Reformer's grammar concerning "the great exchange" remains his most permeable and accessible concept. While the life-changing announcement of the gospel might involve more, it certainly never offers less than the good news of Christ bearing the sins of humanity and, in turn, imputing his righteousness to those who believe. As prevalent as "the great exchange" nomenclature is within the vocabulary of the church, though, it might surprise one to know that Luther himself never used the phrase verbatim. Near equivalents such as "wonderful exchange"[1] or "favorable exchange"[2] do appear in Luther's lectures on Psalm 22 and Galatians 3, respectively. However, since these lectures occurred later in his career as a Reformer, some have suggested that "the great exchange" language is not reflective of the "historical Luther" but of the Melancthon-ized Luther, that is, of the Luther who "fell victim to the corrupting

[1] "This is that mystery which is rich in divine grace unto sinners: wherein, by a wonderful exchange, our sins are now no longer ours but Christ's: and the righteousness of Christ is ours. He has imparted that unto us, that he might clothe us with it, and fill us with it: and he has taken our evils upon himself that he might deliver us from them." Martin Luther, *Complete Commentary on the First Twenty-Two Psalms*, trans. Henry Cole, 2 vols. (London: Simpkin & Marshall, 1826), 2:369.

[2] "He [Christ] made a very favorable exchange for us. He took on himself our own person of sin and gave us His innocent and victorious person, with whom we are now dressed anew and free from the curse of the law, for Christ of His own free will was made a curse for us." Martin Luther, *Commentary on Saint Paul's Epistle to the Galatians (1535): Lecture Notes Transcribed by Students and Presented in Today's English*, trans. Haroldo Camacho (Irvine, CA: 1517 Publishing, 2018), 248.

forces of orthodoxy."[3] While it is beyond the purview of this essay to trace not only the maturation of Luther's theology but also its historical coherence, it is instructive to note that the wedge that some scholars attempt to drive between proto- and post-Lutheran assimilations of the Reformer's body of work represents a failure to appreciate the theological development of a medieval Augustinian monk who gradually "came to reject the doctrine of progressive justification in favor of the forensic doctrine of definitive justification."[4]

Accordingly, as theological schools of thought such as the so-called New Perspective on Paul and the New Finnish School, among others, seek to reinterpret the scriptural understanding of justification and imputation, they do so not only at the expense of Luther himself but also at the expense of the orthodox articulation of the gospel. It is incumbent upon theologically-minded students and scholars alike, therefore, to have a firm grip on the doctrine of imputation, which is nestled at the heart of the doctrine of justification. To understand the one is to understand the other. Symbiotically, as one's grasp of what it means to have righteousness imputed to one's standing *coram Deo* is diluted by the interpretive frameworks of Neo-Lutheranism and Neo-Orthodoxy, so, too, is one's understanding of the gospel of the self-giving of God "for our sins" (Gal 1:4) diminished. Consequently, imputation remains situated at the theological epicenter of the gospel, not merely as an abstract piece of doctrinal dogma but as the essential mechanism by which the righteousness of Christ is accounted to sinners, which undergirds the church's enduring mandate to proclaim the message of salvation by grace through faith.

1. Dressed in Another's Righteousness

Properly speaking, "imputation" is derived from the Greek term λογίζομαι, which is often rendered as "counted," "regarded," or "reckoned" throughout the New Testament. It features quite prominently in Paul's examination of Genesis 15 and the righteousness of Abraham in Chapter 4 of his letter to the Romans, particularly as he explains why "the righteousness of faith" is dependent upon faith alone (cf. vv. 9–25). The act of imputation refers to something being given or credited that was absent or nonexistent before. "It ascribes to one," Mark A. Garcia attests, "what belongs properly to another, and does so with an interest in expressing both the otherness and the unity involved."[5] This reflects the Reformers' unflinching determination that a believer's justification is *extra nos*, that is, sinners are declared righteous by a righteousness that is "alien to them and proper to Christ."[6] In other words, imputation denotes an event standing in contradiction to what is and to what the law's judgment of the sinner is—it is suggestive of a gift given disproportionately to the worth of the recipient.[7] In the auspices of Paul's inquiry into Abraham's standing before God, the former pagan from Ur is "accounted"

[3] R. Scott Clark, "*Iustitia Imputata Christi*: Alien or Proper to Luther's Doctrine of Justification?," *CTQ* 70 (2006): 276. Clark traces the "historicity" of Philipp Melancthon's influence on Luther's theology on pp. 275–84.

[4] Clark, "*Iustitia Imputata Christi*," 287–88.

[5] Mark A. Garcia, "Imputation as Attribution: Union with Christ, Reification and Justification as Declarative Word," *IJST* 11 (2009): 419.

[6] Clark, "*Iustitia Imputata Christi*," 273. J. V. Fesko concurs: "The Protestant reformers were adamant about protecting the extra nos of justification and recognizing that its legal ground was imputed, not inherent, righteousness." "Reformed Orthodoxy on Imputation: Active and Passive Justification," *Perichoresis* 14.3 (2016): 63.

[7] Jared C. Hood calls it "a contrary-to-fact legal exchange." "Luther on Justification: 'Inward, Eternal, Heavenly, Divine,'" *RTR* 76 (2017): 42.

(λογίζομαι) as righteous not on account of his works but only according to the word of promise given to him by God alone (Rom 4:3–5; cf. Gal 3:7–9, 15–18).

The most vivid depiction of this concept is found in the fourth vision of Zechariah's oracle, in which he is given a glimpse of the high priest, Joshua, standing on trial in the courtroom of heaven (Zech 3:1–5). Prosecuting Joshua's case is the primordial accuser himself (cf. Rev 12:10), who, it is inferred, is eager to expose Joshua's delinquency pictured in the "filthy garments" in which he is clothed (Zech 3:3). As the one who stood to represent all of Israel on the Day of Atonement (cf. Lev 16), a high priest with excrement-ridden robes is indicative of the culpability, shame, and guilt that permeates the entire nation. Consequently, Zechariah's vision is representative of what God would do for his covenant people, both individually and nationally. In that way, then, even though the accuser's indictment convincingly condemns Joshua, the charges are ultimately deemed inadmissible—not because they were untrue but because the Lord had already conceived of a method and means for his acquittal. According to the word of the angel of the Lord, Joshua's filthy garments are taken away and replaced with "pure vestments," an event that signals the removal of his iniquity (Zech 3:4). This is consonant with the prophet Isaiah's evocative declaration of the Lord clothing his people "with the garments of salvation" (61:10), garments which, according to John's apocalyptic vision, have been washed "white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev 7:14).

The previous example is one of the many ways in which the biblical portrait of imputation is, therefore, trenchantly and profoundly portrayed in the "wonderful exchange" of apparel, where "we who are Christ's," as the late David Broughton Knox affirms, "stand in God's presence covered with the robe of Christ's merits."[8] Inherent to this discussion are the positive and negative aspects of imputation. That is, not only is something given, but something is also removed in the process. Paul articulates this explicitly in his second letter to the Corinthians, where he notes that "in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself" precisely by "not counting [λογιζόμενος] their trespasses against them" (2 Cor 5:19). It is only as a result of this non-imputation that the divine pro-imputation of "the righteousness of God" can commence (2 Cor 5:21). "He lays our sins on his Son and gives us his Son's righteousness," Hans J. Iwand explains. "He reckons to us what is not ours (*imputatio*), namely, a foreign righteousness and he does not reckon to us that which is ours, namely, our own sins (*non imputatio*)."[9] The justice of God, therefore, by which the unrighteous are declared righteous finds its contours in the language of imputation, wherein God the Father does not count the sins and transgressions of the perpetrators against them but, instead, counts them against the person of his Son, Jesus Christ.

2. The Doctrine That Won't Stay Quiet

Notwithstanding the measure of comfort that countless saints and sinners have derived from the doctrine of imputation, it persists as a source of frustration and derision, if not outright division. Although debates concerning the legitimacy of this central doctrine of the Christian faith emerged most pointedly during the Protestant Reformation, Paul's emphatic articulation of justification by faith in Galatians suggests that such disputes were already present in the apostolic era. These foundational disagreements serve as the basis for later theological development and conversation regarding the

[8] David Broughton Knox, *Justification by Faith* (London: Church Book Room, 1959), 6.

[9] Hans J. Iwand, *The Righteousness of Faith According to Luther*, ed. Virgil F. Thompson, trans. Randi H. Lundell (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 71.

doctrine of imputation. This is compounded by the debate and eventual determination of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, of which Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia was likely a precursor. Be that as it may, what remains troublesome for proponents of the Reformed view of the imputation of Christ's righteousness is the apparent absence of verbatim language within the biblical corpus detailing and/or defending the doctrine itself. Skeptics have exploited this dearth and proceeded to question its validity both scripturally and historically. This is the contention of Michael F. Bird, who insists that while imputation might be legitimate within systematic theology disciplines, it is inconsistent with the language of the New Testament writers.[10]

Scholarly suspicion over the viability—or lack thereof—of imputation is most pointedly expressed by the doctrine's reigning critic N. T. Wright, who, in his treatment on justification, remarks with his insightful rhetoric, "If 'imputed righteousness' is so utterly central, so nerve-janglingly vital, so standing-and-falling-church important … isn't it strange that Paul never actually came straight out and said it?"[11] Wright's assertion is jarring, to say the least. His further comments on justification in general and imputation in particular lead him to conclude that the concept of imputed righteousness is, at best, "a category mistake"[12]—a latent holdover of Reformational history. Accordingly, Wright sees a glaring disconnect within the legal language of justification and imputation, as it is frequently understood among Reformed theologians, since in the paradigm of justification as a forensic verdict, the judge, he maintains, "does not give [a] person his own particular 'righteousness.'" Rather, the judge "creates the status the vindicated defendant now possesses, by an act of declaration."[13] The righteousness of faith, therefore, does not so much involve imputed righteousness as the basis of the sinner's newfound standing as much as it conveys the sinner's welcome into the covenant community, the hallmark of which remains individual faithfulness within that community. As a result, any notion of justification as a legal verdict is diluted into mere personal or ecclesiological standing.

Notwithstanding how compelling such scrutiny may be, the Reformational, not to mention the Pauline, interpretation of Abraham's justification is, to be sure, not a Pauline or Lutheran invention. "Paul," J. V. Fesko maintains, "does not create the doctrine [of imputation] *ex nihilo*."[14] Imputed righteousness, in other words, is no figment of the Reformers' imagination, meticulously articulated to thwart the ecclesiological overreach of Rome. Rather, as Brian Vickers observes, it is "a legitimate and necessary synthesis of Paul's teaching" that emerges both theologically and exegetically from the entire corpus of Scripture.[15] This underscores the fact that imputation is not inherently a Reformational idea but a biblical precedent, one that faithfully concurs with the essential understanding of justification throughout both the Old and New Testaments. Accordingly, Jordan P. Barrett concludes that although "the doctrine of imputed righteousness is not explicitly stated in Scripture," it remains "the result of common themes which, when seen together, is best expressed through a doctrine of imputed

[10] Michael F. Bird, *The Saving Righteousness of God: Studies on Paul, Justification and the New Perspective*, PBM (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 70ff.

[11] N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 46.

[12] N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 98.

[13] Wright, *Justification*, 69.

[14] John V. Fesko, "Imputed Righteousness: The Apostle Paul and Isaiah 53," *MSJ* 32.1 (2021): 6.

[15] Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 18.

righteousness."[16] The Scripture's univocal testimony is that the locus of God's program of reconciliation is discerned in the dissonance of God's Son reckoned as a sinner.

As J. V. Fesko proceeds to demonstrate, there is an abundance of Old Testament corroboration for not only the notion of imputation but also the conviction that it is true. Chapter 53 of the prophet Isaiah's oracle serves as Fesko's primary point of departure, wherein the eschatological servant assumes the pain and grief due to humanity's transgressions and iniquities as his own (vv. 3–5). This he endures as "an offering for guilt" on behalf of the unrighteous, that he might account them as righteous (vv. 10–11). Despite the inviolable innocence of the servant (v. 8), he is "numbered with the transgressors" (ἐν τοῖς ἀνόμοις ἐλογίσθη, LXX) so that he might make "intercession" for them (v. 12). His unsullied obedience in spite of the gauntlet of disdain, rejection, and death not only satisfies the righteous will of the Lord but also creates the righteous gift by which "the many" are made righteous. "The many," Fesko concludes, "receive the legal status and righteousness of the One."[17]

Isaiah's prophetic vision supports Paul's apostolic annunciation that the Christ of God, whom Philip unassailably identifies as the eschatological servant (Acts 8:26–35), obeyed "to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:8). It is precisely by means of this obedience that, as Paul says elsewhere, "the many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). The breach that was caused by humanity's transgression is repaired through no other means than the person of the Son of God—the one who is both man and God—succumbing to suffering the consequences of such transgressions himself. Just as all the iniquities, transgressions, and sins of the people of Israel were borne by the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:21–22) and just as Isaiah's servant is said to "bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:11), so, too, has Christ been made sin "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21; cf. 1 Cor 1:30). As Paul elaborates in his letter to the Romans, faith is the instrument by which "the ungodly" are "counted as righteousness" (Rom 4:5)[18]—not because they have amassed a requisite number of works, nor even because they have lived faithfully within their newfound status as covenant members of the kingdom of heaven, but exclusively because the object of their faith is the one who creates out of nothing.

The void left behind in the wake of humanity's unrighteousness is precisely what the Christ of God comes to fulfill (Matt 3:15; 5:17), both by living perfectly under the auspices of the law and by willingly surrendering to the curse of death (Gal 3:13; 4:4–5). Left to their own devices, human beings are utterly incapable of conforming to, let alone consummating, the righteousness that God's justice stipulates. Christ's obedience, therefore, is both exemplary and substitutionary. In him, divine righteousness is deployed to effectuate the divine demand, corresponding to what is referred to as Christ's active and passive obedience, both of which are absolutely "necessary for salvation, and may never be disconnected."[19] Through his active obedience, Christ flawlessly conforms to the righteousness of the law in thought, word, and deed; but through his passive obedience, he vicariously endures the penalty of unrighteousness in his suffering and death on the cross. To be counted (λογίζομαι) as righteous,

[16] Jordan P. Barrett, "Biblical Judgments and Theological Concepts: Toward a Defense of Imputed Righteousness," *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 32.2 (2014): 162.

[17] Fesko, "Imputed Righteousness," 9.

[18] "Faith," writes Matthew Barrett, "is the instrumental means through which we are justified. It is not the basis or ground of justification." *40 Questions About Salvation*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 222.

[19] Michael Howard Seal, "Calvin and the Imputation of the Obedience of Christ to the Believer," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 11.2 (2019): 37.

therefore, means that Christ's "passive righteousness comes to us," as R. Scott Clark concludes, via the "imputation of Christ's active, alien righteousness and is received through faith."[20] As Christ, the Son of Man, obeys in life and death, he creates out of nothing the right standing by which sinners are made right. The biblical doctrine of justification is, therefore, shaped by the incongruous word of the gospel, which "creates righteousness and makes alive"[21] by the gracious reckoning of sinners as right with God through the imputation of Christ's own righteousness.

3. Imputation and the Assurance of Faith

With no apparent definitive biblical reference to point to, the controversy concerning imputation is left to fester in the halls of academia, leaving the laity to endure the fallout. The collateral damage of all this theological wrangling over imputation is sustained by those in the pews, which means that discerning the biblical basis for imputed righteousness is not only a historical or even a doctrinal concern as much as it is a pastoral concern. Accordingly, if one aims to provide a theologically robust foundation for genuine assurance in the life of faith, the doctrine of imputation must be a central theme in one's preaching. This is why many of the most revered confessions of faith in the Reformed tradition include explicit affirmations of the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers.[22] Perhaps most conclusively, Question 60 of the Heidelberg Catechism asserts that one is made righteous "of mere grace, grants and imputes to [one] the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ."[23] The homiletical heritage of the church, therefore, concerns the clear articulation of imputed righteousness, without which believers are susceptible to doubt and uncertainty regarding their eternal standing before God. In that way, the doctrine of justification, as Paul Helm comments, "is not a matter merely of academic debate, one confined 'within the precincts of the schools,' nor is it basically an ecclesiological matter, but it has to do with the 'judgment seat of God.'"[24]

Consequently, one is obliged to return to the biography of Martin Luther, whose crisis of religion ushered him from the performative shackles of Rome to the liberating shores of grace, the result of which saw the ecclesiastical landscape of the sixteenth century reshaped in the wake of the Protestant movement. At the heart of Luther's so-called "breakthrough" was a thorough reawakening to the fact that the righteousness that is required by God corresponds to the very righteousness that is given to sinners by God in the gospel (Rom 1:16–17). "I began to understand," Luther later wrote, "that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous person lives by the gift of God, namely by faith."[25] Within this deeply personal realization, one finds a treasury of pastoral implications that have continually been rediscovered throughout the ages, affording countless believers the certainty of their standing.

[20] Clark, "*Iustitia Imputata Christi*," 295.

[21] Jonathan A. Linebaugh, *The Word of the Cross: Reading Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022), 27.

[22] "Reformation era confessions and catechisms that affirm the doctrine of imputed righteousness include the *Tetrapolitan Confession* (1530), III; *Forty-Two Articles* (1553), XI; *French Confession* (1559), XVI–XX; *Belgic Confession* (1561), XXII–XXIII; *Heidelberg Catechism*, qq. 60–61; and *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566), XV." Fesko, "Reformed Orthodoxy on Imputation," 61.

[23] *The Heidelberg Catechism; or, Method of Instruction in the Christian Religion* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 2021), 41.

[24] Paul Helm, "John Calvin and N. T. Wright on Imputed Righteousness," *SBJT* 13.4 (2009): 60.

[25] Martin Luther, "Preface to the Complete Edition of Luther's Latin Writings, Wittenberg, 1545," *Luther's Works: American Edition*, 55 vols., ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 1958), 34:337.

One's righteous status before the God of the universe is, therefore, unfettered by the constraints of human performance and unfurled as a divine gift—an incongruously "great exchange." In the profundity of imputed righteousness, Luther not only found peace for his soul but also charted a course for the church's understanding of justification for centuries to come.

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Does Edwards's Exegetical Typology "Always and Only Point to Spiritual Things Related to Christ?" A Response to Drew Hunter from the Evidence of the *Blank Bible*

— Cameron Schweitzer —

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Abstract: This essay responds to Drew Hunter's 2019 article, "Hebrews and the Typology of Jonathan Edwards," challenging his thesis that Jonathan Edwards's exegetical typology "always and only points to spiritual things related to Christ." Through an analysis of Edwards's *Blank Bible*, the essay identifies 143 notations where Edwards employs typology to uncover antitypes that are not strictly Christological. The evidence presented suggests that Edwards's exegetical typology is broader and more complex than the Christological framework in which Hunter situated it. This article argues that, instead, Edwards's exegetical reflections in the *Blank Bible* highlight that typology was, for him, a spiritual, historical, teleological, and eschatological hermeneutic for interpreting God's work in redemptive history.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758 CE) was mighty in the Scriptures.[1] And exegetical typology enamored that biblical strongman, who spent the "lion's share of his time" wrestling the text.[2] He once opined that nearly everything in the Hebrew Bible "was typical of gospel things. Persons were typical persons, actions were typical actions, cities were typical cities, … nations were typical nations, the land was a typical land, God's providences were typical providences … indeed the world was a typical world."[3] These comments cause Douglas Sweeney, the modern pioneer of the foreboding forest that is

[1] For biographies see, Samuel Hopkins, *The Life and Character of the Late Reverend, Learned, and Pious Mr. Jonathan Edwards* (Northampton, 1804); George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

[2] Douglas Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete: Biblical Interpretation and Anglo-Protestant Culture on the Edge of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

[3] Jonathan Edwards, *The "Miscellanies": (Entry Nos. a-z, aa-zz, 1–500)*, ed. Thomas Schafer, The Works of Jonathan Edwards 13 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 434–35. One can access Edwards's works electronically at edwards.yale.edu.

Edwards's exegetical corpus, to assert that exegetical typology was Edwards's lifelong, "all-pervasive interpretive passion." This was, Sweeney notes, a passion saturating almost "all of his manuscripts and treatises," serving as a "synecdoche for his exegesis."[4]

Given the sea of scholastic literature on Edwards's life and thought, it is peculiar that scholarship, since the Edwardsean renaissance of the 1940s, has not fully appreciated that Edwards was a biblical exegete joyfully inhabiting a "God-haunted" world.[5] For those outside Edwardsean studies, it is an uncontroversial dictum that Edwards was a normal Congregational minister from a normal family of Bible-believing ministers in eighteenth-century New England holding to normal biblical beliefs.[6]

Edwards's "normality," though, is the "dirty secret" of Edwards studies.[7] Scholars have been more interested in modernizing Edwards as the philosopher, theologian, homiletician, psychologist, or revivalist—an unparalleled genius far-ahead of his time, who would have shed his ministerial robes if he had the opportunity.[8] The literature reflects this sentiment. For example, in a recent volume on Edwards and Scripture, Sweeney notes that, as of 2005, looking at M. X. Lesser's massive annotated bibliography on Edwards studies, "less than half of one percent of scholarship" engages "his interpretation of Scripture." Sweeney admits, however, that since 2005 this has shifted. He asserts that we have just "begun to appreciate his chief occupation," as work on Edwards's exegesis surfaces like the "tip of the iceberg" in the otherwise vast sea of Edwards studies focused on almost everything other than his scriptural interests.[9]

Given this scholastic oversight, it is unsurprising that there is little work exclusively investigating Edwards's hermeneutical synecdoche—though exegetical typology runs mightily through nearly all

[4] Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 71. Cf. Robert Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 185.

[5] Robert Boss, *God-Haunted World: The Elemental Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (pub. by author, 2015). Cf. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 473–74.

[6] Kenneth Minkema, "The Edwardses: A Ministerial Family in Eighteenth-Century New England" (PhD diss., The University of Connecticut, 1988).

[7] Brandon Withrow, "'Full of Wondrous and Glorious Things': The Exegetical Mind of Jonathan Edwards in his Anglo-American Cultural Context" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2007), 3–4; Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 7; Conrad Cherry, "Symbols of Spiritual Truth: Jonathan Edwards as Biblical Interpreter," *Int* 39 (1985), 263–71, 263.

[8] Kenneth Minkema, "Jonathan Edwards in the Twentieth Century," *JETS* 47 (2004): 659–87, 675.

[9] Sweeney, "Conclusion," in *Jonathan Edwards and Scripture: Biblical Exegesis in British North America*, ed. David Barshinger and Douglas Sweeney (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 249–51. Citing M. X. Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729–2005* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008). Though Sweeney's statement reflects fifteen-year-old data, it still is a fair assessment, given the relatively unaltered scholastic landscape in the last two decades. This figure has gone up, at most, a few percentage points since 2005. The forthcoming work to update M. X. Lesser's annotated bibliography at the Jonathan Edwards Center Midwest will clarify the current scholastic-landscape: https://prts.edu/jec-mid5est-launches-a-new-book-project/. For a fuller introduction to Edwards's exegesis, and a survey of the scholarly literature—a burgeoning, specialized field—see "Appendix B: An Introduction to Edwards's Exegesis," in Cameron Schweitzer, *Towards a Clearer Understanding of Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology: A Case Study in the "Blank Bible"* (Dallas: JESociety Press, 2025), 281–88. For recent, important work on Edwards's exegesis, see Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete;* Barshinger and Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and Scripture*; Brown, *Jonathan Edwards and the Bible*; Stephen Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards's Bible* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013); Stephen Stein, "Edwards as Biblical Exegete," in *The Cambridge Companion to Jonathan Edwards,* ed. Stephen Stein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 181–95.

of his published works, sermons, and private notebooks.[10] Only a handful of treatments exclusively investigate Edwards's typological exegesis. The voluminous secondary literature on Edwards shrouds these studies strewn across book chapters and articles.[11] One important work on Edwards's biblical typology, though, is Drew Hunter's article, "Hebrews and the Typology of Jonathan Edwards."[12]

1. Hunter's Essay

In this splendid article, Hunter surveys "Edwards's interpretive reflections on Hebrews [to] reveal his typological interpretation of the Old Testament." His goal is to bring "Edwards's principled typological method" as a uniquely important voice into "several, current theological discussions."[13]

Hunter believes he is warranted to limit his investigation into Edwards's typological methodology by examining his exegesis on Hebrews, since Edwards's "notes on Hebrews" give the "clearest window" through which one appreciates Edwards's arrangement of the "typological furniture of his hermeneutical house." Furthermore, because "Hebrews arguably contains more typological discussion than any other biblical writing," Hebrews is, for Edwards, "the most significant biblical book" for forming "his own thoughts on typology." Within this methodological limitation, Hunter scans Edwards's corpus, unearthing "many comments on Hebrews that give a window into Edwards's typology."[14]

From his data, Hunter organizes his essay in three parts. In the first part, he provides "exegetical examples from texts that [Edwards] viewed as typological." In the second part, he takes a "step beyond" by constructing six "theoretical principles" of Edwards's exegetical-typological methods. The final part

[10] For a discussion of the lop-sided way scholars write about Edwards's typological thought as compared to Edwards's own writings devoted to typology, see Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 7–10.

[11] Mason Lowance and David Watters, introduction to *Typological Writings* by Jonathan Edwards, Works 11:157–82; Sweeney, *Edwards the Exegete*, 53–136; Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards's Bible*, 58–107; Barshinger, *Jonathan Edwards and the Psalms: A Redemptive-Historical Vision of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 164–217; Benjamin Wayman, "Women as Types of the Church in the Blank Bible: The 'Feminine' Ecclesiology of Jonathan Edwards," *Jonathan Edwards Studies* 2.2 (2012): 56–78; Tibor Fabiny, "Edwards and Biblical Typology," and Gerald McDermott, "Alternative Viewpoint: Edwards and Biblical Typology," in *Understanding Jonathan Edwards: An Introduction to America's Theologian,* ed. Gerald McDermott (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 91–108, 109–12; Nelson Kloosterman, "The Use of Typology in Post-Canonical Salvation History: An Orientation to Jonathan Edwards' *A History of the Work Redemption*," *MJT* 14 (2003): 59–96; Douglas Landrum, *Jonathan Edwards' Exegesis of Genesis: A Puritan Hermeneutic* (Mustang, OK: Tate, 2015), 81–120; Linda Munk, "Jonathan Edwards: Types of the Peaceable Kingdom," in *Millennial Thought in America: Historical and Intellectual Contexts, 1630–1860*, ed. Bernd Engler, Joerg Fichte, and Oliver Scheiding (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher-Verlag, 2002): 215–28.

[12] Drew Hunter, "Hebrews and the Typology of Jonathan Edwards," *Themelios* 44.2 (2019): 339–52.

[13] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 340.

[14] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 340–41. Hunter's assertions arise from observations on Edwards's unpublished notebook, "Types," in his *Typological Writings*, Works 11:145–55, about which he states, Edwards employed "Types" "to [explain] and [defend] his view of typology," referring to Hebrews "twice as often as any other book." For an introduction to "Types," see its editor's introduction (Edwards, *Typological Writings*, Works 11:3–33) and Schweitzer, "How Scripture Justifies Jonathan Edwards's Typological View of the Old Testament: A Reconsideration of the 'Types' Notebook," in *The Jonathan Edwards Miscellanies Companion: Volume 2*, ed. Robert Boss and Sarah Boss (Dallas: JESociety Press, 2021): 261–86.

of Hunter's essay provides five ways in which Edwards "serves exegetes and theological interpreters as a model of thought and principled theological interpretation."[15]

In part one, Hunter constructs three categories for Edwards's exegetical examples from Hebrews. First, there are types of "sacrifice and priesthood." Hunter comments that "sacrifice and priesthood are two of the most prominent themes in Hebrews. Therefore, it is no coincidence that these are also the most prominent typological examples in Edwards's reflections on this book." Hunter then provides Edwards's thoughts about the sacrificial system's "typological aspects." These "aspects" include Israel's altars, Moses's ceremonial law, and its various elements. Lastly, Hunter describes Edwards's thinking on the "typology of other institutions," drawing the reader to Edwards's ideas that "demonstrate a broader understanding of typology." He highlights Edwards's types for the church, heaven, and eschatological rest found in Jerusalem, Mount Sinai, and Israel's entrance into Canaan.[16]

Building upon these examples, Hunter then provides six "principles of typology" from Edwards's thoughts on Hebrews. Hunter's critical principle about Edwards's typology is that "types always and only point to spiritual things related to Christ and the gospel." Since, for Edwards, "the antitype is always related to Christ and 'gospel things' of the New Testament age … these 'gospel things' that have arrived in Christ are the substance of not just some, but all ancient types."[17]

From this intimate connection between Old Testament types and christological antitypes, Hunter proposes five additional Edwardsean, exegetical-typological principles. First, there is continuity and discontinuity between type and antitype. Second, there are more types in the Old Testament than the New Testament provides.[18] Third, an interpreter can discover types that the New Testament never

[15] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 341, 348.

[16] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 341–43.

[17] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 344–45. Surprisingly, given Hunter's attention to Edwards's "Types" notebook, he missed Edwards's statement that "types are used in the New Testament as well as the Old." Statements like these should have given Hunter pause before making sweeping statements about Edwards's "christological" typology.

[18] Edwards, *The "Miscellanies,"* 434–35.

mentions.[19] Fourth, interpreters should only name types when properly "warranted."[20] Lastly, if one does not see biblical types, then it is solely the interpreter's fault.[21]

The essay's final section provides five ways that Edwards's exegetical-typological practices and principles aid exegetes today. First, Edwards provides a "model of thoughtful and principled typological interpretation," patterned after the New Testament, showing both "freedom and constraint." Second, Edwards embodies how one can imitate the New Testament's typological hermeneutic while moving beyond its own typological-exegesis. Third, Edwards provides a template that evangelical scholars can employ as they respond to biblical criticism while upholding the Bible's integrity—"appropriating where able and responding where needed." Fourth, Edwards's typological exegesis and whole-Bible hermeneutic, rooted in his belief of the canon's "remarkable unity," bequeath an apologetic to Christians that contends for the Bible's divine authorship. Lastly, Edwards exemplifies how scholars can have "theological integrity," allowing the Bible supreme authority in one's life, such that it shapes "interpretive practices and publications." Hunter then ends his essay forcefully. Drawing everything together, he states that Edwards models "a pastor-theologian who delighted in and submitted to the Bible as a divinely authored, aesthetically beautiful, and unified work that points us to Christ and 'gospel things.'"[22]

Hunter's essay powerfully highlights an undeniably rich and important dimension of Edwards's typological exegesis, providing a real contribution to Edwards scholarship and the church. Readers should commend Hunter's work for three reasons. First, it ventures into a largely unexplored area of Edwards's typological exegesis, as Hunter focuses on analyzing Edwards's writings and synthesizing his exegetical-typological principles. This is a needed contribution to Edwards scholarship. Second, by publishing in *Themelios*, Hunter invites non-Edwardsean scholars into a burgeoning field in Edwards studies. Opening Edwards's corpus to new researchers is praiseworthy. Third, Hunter's essay shows how authors can appropriately retrieve Edwards for pertinent conversations today. Inviting others to do the same, he helpfully provides an imitable template. His work also reminds Edwards scholars that his thought ought not be untethered from the church, for this was the body Edwards spent his life serving.

Two issues come to mind, though, when assessing Hunter's work. The first concerns Hunter's research constraints for acquiring his data of Edwards's exegetical-typological practices and principles. In this

[19] On this point, Edwards writes in his "Types" notebook, musing upon 1 Corinthians 13:2, that Paul "implies that there were [an] abundance of mysteries then not understood … divine truths wrapped up in shadows.… There is a medium between those that cry down all types, and those that are for turning all into nothing but allegory and not having it to be true history" (Edwards, *Typological Writings*, 151).

[20] Edwards's principle of "typological warrant" is critical for his typological exegesis. He states in "Types" that "persons ought to be exceeding careful in interpreting types, that they don't give way to wild fancy; not to fix an interpretation unless warranted by some hint in the New Testament of its being the true interpretation, or a lively figure and representation contained or warranted by an analogy to other types that we interpret on sure grounds" (Edwards, *Typological Writings*, 148). Edwards believes, therefore, that "biblical warrant" allows one to draw "typological deductions." Namely, when Edwards finds New Testament precedent for a given type, he believes, by "warranted analogy," he can draw additional types from that same Old Testament type even with the New Testament's silence. For example, Edwards interprets Eve's formation from sleeping-Adam's side as a type for the Church's formation from the resurrected Christ, since Paul typologically interprets Adam and Eve as figures for Christ and the Church in Romans 4 and Ephesians 5. Edwards reasons, therefore, that since Paul understands Adam and Eve typologically, then on "sure grounds" he is warranted to interpret their actions typologically, constructing his less-established type on an established one's surer ground (Jonathan Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* Works 24:135).

[21] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 343–47.

[22] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 347–52.

article, Hunter only investigated Edwards's typological thinking on Hebrews. While one sympathizes that he had to limit himself such that his findings fit in an article's parameters, one wonders if Hunter's limited study is sufficient to support some of his broad conclusions. A reader cursorily familiar with Edwards knows that he has scores of volumes devoted to exegeting, interpreting, and applying the Old Testament for his audience in the early American colonies. Also, one wonders if there are more books upon which Edwards commented wherein the reader could find many other instructive aspects of his exegetical-typological hermeneutic that would contribute to a fuller understanding of his interpretive practices and principles. Given his research limitations, it seems hasty for Hunter to conclude that for Edwards "the antitype is always related to Christ and 'gospel things' of the New Testament."[23]

The second issue relates to some of Hunter's conclusions drawn from his data. In the article's first section, Hunter recognizes that there are non-christological antitypes in Edwards's exegesis. Hunter refers to these examples as the "typology of other institutions" that demonstrate Edwards's "broader understanding of typology," providing the examples of Jerusalem and the "true Jerusalem," Mount Sinai and heaven, and Israel's promised land "rest" and the saints' eschatological rest. These examples suggest, therefore, that Hunter may have been too quick in concluding that "Christ and 'gospel things' are the substance of not just some, but all ancient types."[24] Even limiting himself to Edwards's thoughts on Hebrews hints that Edwards's construal of biblical typology is broader than Hunter's narrow "christological" boundaries. His study is a step in the right direction to better understanding Edwards's exegetical typology. It seems, however, that a broader study is necessary to unearth better terminology to describe his typological exegesis.

2. Thesis and Scope of the Article

This essay provides such a study by introducing Edwards's exegetical-typology through surveying Edwards's longest, most-beloved exegetical notebook, *The "Blank Bible."* Edwards penned roughly 5,500 entries in this Bible notebook over three decades. For this reason, this exegetical manuscript outnumbers—in terms of published page count in the Yale University series—the combined totals of his other exegetical notebooks: *Notes on Scripture*, "Types," "Types of the Messiah," and Revelation commentary. The *"Blank Bible"* is a fitting subject for this essay, then, because it allows readers to probe

[23] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 345.

[24] These statements highlight a weak point of Hunter's article: he does not always clearly define his terms. This undermines his thesis of the christological nature of Edwards's exegetical typology. Hunter speaks of "gospel things" related to Edwards's understanding of antitypical fulfilment but does not define the "things" to which "gospel things" refer. One wonders, "are these 'things' immediately attached to Christ, like his gifts of applied redemption?" If so, one can justifiably relate these "gospel things" to Christ's person and work. Or, one asks, "are these 'things' further removed from Christ, such that one cannot consider them *strictly* christological, like the Holy Spirit's or anti-Christ's advent, or eschatological judgment?" This lack of definitional clarity obscures Hunter's "christological thesis" when he speaks of Edwards's "broader understanding of typology" and provides examples that point to the New Testament church, heaven, and eschatological rest, since these antitypes are not, *explicitly* speaking, the gospel or Christ—the antitypes to which Hunter claims Edwards's "types always and only point." It is possible, though, given Hunter's definition of "gospel things," to include these other antitypes such that he does not undermine his thesis about Edwards's "christological" exegetical typology. To include these other antitypes within Hunter's definitional categories, however, would either require Hunter to provide greater definitional clarity or for the reader to be quite charitable in their interpretation of his terms.

the inner workings of Edwards's interpretive mind by providing a window through which to observe his exegesis of the entire Bible.[25]

This essay will contend that Hunter's thesis that "Christ is the substance of all ancient types" is too narrow to account for all the available evidence. The data of the *"Blank Bible"* will suggest that more precise yet simultaneously broader terminology is needed to describe Edwards's exegetical-typological practices better. Edwards's notes in his *Blank Bible* are too diverse in their assignment of antitypes, as well as the *manner* and *time* in which he asserts types find fulfillment, for Hunter to assert accurately that for Edwards "the antitype is always related to Christ and the 'gospel things' of the New Testament age."[26]

To underscore the inadequacy of Hunter's description of Edwards's "christological" typology, this essay will survey the 143 notations in the *"Blank Bible"* in which Edwards uses a word from the "type family" (type, types, typify, typifies, etc.) to connect a redemptive-historical sign with an antitypical signification that is not strictly "christological."[27] Given the present argument, this essay will not overview the sixty-seven notations in the *"Blank Bible"* in which Edwards connects a type with a christological antitype (i.e., his person, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, exaltation, or his application of redemption).[28] In the other 143 notations, Edwards speaks of eleven antitypes to which various types point. These include the Holy Spirit, "intra"-Old Testament, "intra"-New Testament, the Church, eschatology, Christian ministry/ministers, Christian spirituality, the demonic, sin, the world, as well as "gospel things." For brevity's sake, this essay provides a brief summary for each of these antitypical categories, in addition to analyzing an example from each. The intent is to allow the reader to appreciate the diversity of Edwards's typological exegesis.[29] After surveying Edwards's typological

[25] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 123–1248. Edwards received this small King James Bible in the early 1730s, in which he interspersed blank pages to provide ample space for notes on the adjacent texts. Consequently, this volume is one of the most important yet peculiar pieces in Edwards's corpus. For a robust introduction to the "*Blank Bible*," see Stephen Stein's introduction (Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 1–117). For a shorter treatment of the document, see "Appendix A: Jonathan Edwards's *Blank Bible*," in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 273–80.

[26] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 345. For similar statements of Edwards's "christological" typology, see Glenn Kreider, *Jonathan Edwards's Interpretation of Revelation 4:1–8:1* (Dallas: University Press of America, 2004), 287–89; Nichols, *Jonathan Edwards's Bible,* 103–4; Michael McClymond, *Encounters with God: An Approach to the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 68; Stephen Holmes, *God of Grace and God of Glory: An Account of the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 107; William Tooman, "Edwards's Ezekiel: The Interpretation of Ezekiel in *The Blank Bible* and *Notes on Scripture*," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3.1 (2009): 17–39; Janice Knight, "Learning the Language of God: Jonathan Edwards and the Typology of Nature," *William and Mary Quarterly* 48.4 (1991), 531–51; Sean Lucas, *God's Grand Design: The Theological Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 49–50; James Detrich, "A Recital of Presence: Christological use of Scripture in *A History of the Work of Redemption*" (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2016), 340–41.

[27] The *"Blank Bible"* does not have numbered notations. Rather, Edwards appends each note to the scriptural text giving rise to that particular reflection. Thus, the easiest way to delineate one note from the next is to refer to it by the text to which it is connected, i.e., Genesis 27:5 or Matthew 1:11.

[28] For a treatment of his christological and soteriological antitypes, see chapters 2–4 in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 31–90.

[29] For a thorough analysis of the 210 typological notations in *Blank Bible*, see my *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 31–261.

exegesis, the essay then summarizes its findings and proposes different terminology for categorizing Edwards's exegetical typology.

3. The Biblical Typology of Edwards's "Blank Bible"

3.1. Types of the Holy Spirit

Edwards typologically connects the Old Testament to the Holy Spirit in five *"Blank Bible"* notes.[30] Leaning on the New Testament's metaphorical depictions of the Spirit, Edwards finds types in the Old Testament's first-fruit offering and its description of water in relation to God's presence.

In a note on Daniel's vision of "the Prince" in the prophet's ninth chapter, Edwards reflects on the typological significance of anointing oil's witness to the Spirit.[31] He begins this long note by observing that Gabriel refers to the prince as "the Messiah." For he "had been spoken of as 'anointed.'"[32] In four "respects" Edwards then shows why Jesus must be that "Messiah, Christ, or the anointed"—tying each "respect" to the Holy Spirit. Edwards makes these connections because he notices that God anoints individuals for his sanctified purposes only by his Spirit. Therefore, according to his thinking, the Old Testament's description of leaders being "anointed by oil" must prefigure the Holy Spirit's anointing Jesus to fulfill his God-given, messianic role. In his interpretive eyes, consequently, "simply reading passages that contained imagery of 'oil' thus excited ideas of the work of the Spirit," given his belief that Scripture itself typifies the Holy Spirit by oil.[33]

From such typological reasoning, Edwards asserts that this passage adumbrates four "respects" in which the Spirit anointed Jesus, the Messiah. First, Jesus was anointed "in his divine nature … as the Father doth eternally pour forth the Spirit of love upon him." Second, he was anointed "in his human nature … as the Spirit dwelt in him from the first moment of his existence in union with the eternal Logos." Third, God anointed Jesus by the Spirit at his baptism "to consecrate him for his [mediatorial] work." Fourth, "every believing soul" anoints Jesus by "the exercise of the grace of the Holy Spirit towards him."[34]

[30] For Edwards on the Holy Spirit, see Robert Caldwell, *Communion in the Spirit: The Holy Spirit as the Bond of Unity in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007); R. A. Leo, "Holy Spirit," in *The Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*, ed. Harry Stout, Kenneth Minkema, and Adriaan Neele (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 298–300; Michael McClymond and Gerald McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 262–72.

[31] Daniel 9:25 states, "understand that from the going forth of the commandment to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks." All scriptural citations are from the King James Version, as this was the English translation Edwards used.

[32] For a catalog and analysis of Edwards's other notes on pneumatological types, see the section "Pneumatological Types of the *Blank Bible*" in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 257–61.

[33] For the Bible's connection of anointing-oil with the Holy Spirit, see Isaiah 61:1; Acts 10:38; and 1 John 2:20, 27. Ryan Hoselton, "Spiritually Discerned: Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, and Experiential Exegesis in Early Evangelicalism" (PhD diss., Ruprecht-Karls-Universitat Heidelberg, 2019), 205; cf., Barshinger, *Edwards and the Psalms*, 221–22.

[34] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 767–68.

3.2. Edwards's "Intra"-Old Testament Typology

In the "*Blank Bible*," one finds that, for Edwards, sometimes Old Testament types have a shorter antitypical gaze than the New Testament. To be specific, in the "*Blank Bible*," Edwards composed fifteen notations in which he states that an earlier part of the Old Testament typified a later part of the same Testament. He writes of these typological pairs in eleven Hebrew books.[35]

These notations fall into two broad categories. Eight speak of typical things/events that find fulfillment in later antitypical things/events, while seven speak of types that find fulfillment in later prophesies. Types in the first group include Melchizedek's blessing, Jacob's smitten thigh, or the baby Moses's preservation in the Nile. This group's antitypes include events like God's blessing to Abram, Jacob's tumultuous life, and Israel's preservation in Egypt. While in the latter seven examples, Edwards's types include Exodus's smitten rock, Hannah's Song, or the sun that stood still for twenty-four hours. The antitypical prophesies to which they point include the works of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and Zechariah.

An instructive example from the first category is Edwards's brief note on Joseph's exaltation in Potiphar's house and its typological significance for his life (Gen 39:4–6).[36] He comments, "what we are informed of in these verses, of Joseph's being set over all Potiphar's [house], seems to be typical of the same thing as Pharaoh's setting of him over all Egypt."[37]

Edwards roots this typological connection around the similar and dissimilar ways in which Joseph was "set over" all that his masters placed under him. Edwards makes three observations in typologically comparing Joseph's two exaltations. First, Joseph's exaltation in Potiphar's house temporally precedes his exaltation under Pharaoh. Second, Edwards notes that both of Joseph's masters set him over "all they had." Third, Edwards points out the dissimilarity of these two exaltations. Potiphar was master over his house, while Pharaoh was master over Egypt. So, in the first instance, Joseph merely governed Potiphar's house, while in the second he governed Egypt. In Edwards's mind, therefore, Joseph's earlier exaltation typifies his later and greater exaltation.

3.3. Edwards's "Intra"-New Testament Typology

The *"Blank Bible"* unveils another startling aspect of Edwards's biblical typology. He believes that types are not only the Old Testament's purview nor are antitypes exclusively the New Testament's property. In seventeen notes in the "*Blank Bible,*" Edwards speaks of type-antitype pairs circumscribed by the New Testament. Edwards left two such notes in his comments on the Old Testament, and the other fifteen in the Christian Testament.[38] These notations situate into eight categories. These include his principled statements about New Testament typology, New Testament types in Old Testament notes, types of Christ's preaching, the typological significance of Christ washing his disciples' feet, types of Christ's redemption, ecclesiological types, in addition to types of sin and heaven.

[35] Exodus, Genesis, and Numbers, Judges, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Joel, and Zechariah.

[36] "Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him: and Potiphar made him overseer over his house, and all he had … it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house.… And he left all he had in Joseph's hand.… Joseph was well favoured."

[37] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 188. For a catalog and analysis of Edwards's other "intra"-Old Testament types, see the chapter "Edwards's 'Intra' Old Testament Typology," in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 121–42.

[38] Old Testament: Psalms and Isaiah. New Testament: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and 1 Corinthians.

An intriguing example is Edwards's note on Isaiah's "virgin sign" in which he offers a few thoughts on the typological witness of Jesus's virgin birth.[39] He states that Mary's conception "is typical of the purity of Christ's conception," for she was a "typically pure," "undefiled virgin." Her purity is symbolically significant, Edwards contends, because there is "defilement in coition," as our "propagation from the more unclean parts of bodies" ceremonially defiles. Here he appeals to "the law of Moses" as proof of this defilement—likely having a text like Leviticus 15:16–18 in mind and its statement about the defiling nature of "copulation."

Edwards states that sexual intercourse ritually defiles because "original sin and corruption [is] conveyed by generation."[40] Every individual, therefore, is born "sinful" and "corrupted," due to one's inheriting Adam's original sin, embodied, Edwards believes, in the "uncleanness" of sex itself. The significance of Christ being born from a virgin, consequently, is that he was "not conceived in sin." Of all men, he was born without sin, and his unstained-holiness was typified in his proceeding forth "from a pure virgin." As Mary was physically undefiled, so Christ was spiritually undefiled.[41]

3.4. Edwards's Ecclesiological Typology

After Edwards's christological and soteriological typologies, his comments uniting Old Testament types with ecclesiological antitypes form his largest group of typological notes in the "*Blank Bible.*"[42] Edwards's ecclesiological types account for forty-seven notes.[43] There are four categories into which these notations fall: general, ecclesial types, types of the Gentile church, types of the Jewish church, and his "functional" ecclesiological antitypes. The term "functional" is used in the sense of what Edwards believes the church ought to do, what God has done in/with it, or what may occur in the church. The types Edwards uncovers are quite diverse. He asserts that the infant Moses's preservation in the Nile, the Law's rules for leprosy-stricken dwellings, and important women like Rebecca, Rachel, and Mary all typify the church.

An amusing, compact example of Edwards's ecclesiological typology is his note on 1 Chronicles 25:9–31.[44] Edwards asserts that the ranked and ordered "company of singers in the temple" is a "lively type of the triumphant church." Edwards finds significance in the company's numbers: twenty-four

[39] Isaiah states, "The Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." For a catalog and analysis of Edwards's New Testament typology, see the chapter "Edwards's New Testament Typology" in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 145–64.

[40] For Edwards's treatment of the topic, see his *Original Sin*, Works 3:107–437. Edwards echoes the historical teaching of "traducianism": the soul and body come into existence through the parents' sexual union.

[41] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 636–37.

[42] Benjamin Wayman addresses this topic in his "Women as Types of the Church." He argues that Edward's ecclesiological typology in the "*"Blank Bible"* is "overwhelmingly feminine." This author believes, though, that Wayman's conclusions are over-stated and inaccurate. See Schweitzer, "Does Edwards Have a "Thoroughgoing 'Feminine' Ecclesiology?" A Response to Benjamin Wayman in a Reconsideration of the Evidence from *The Blank Bible,"* Jonathan Edwards Studies 11.2 (2021): 147–82.

[43] For Edwards's ecclesiology, see Sweeney, "The Church," in *The Princeton Companion to Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Sang Hyun Lee (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005): 167–89; Rhys Bezzant, *Jonathan Edwards and the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Amy Plantinga-Pauw, "Jonathan Edwards' Ecclesiology," in *Jonathan Edwards as Contemporary,* ed. Don Schweitzer (New York: Lang, 2010), 175–86.

[44] For a complete catalog and analysis of Edwards's many ecclesiological-typological notes in the "*Blank Bible,*" see the chapter, "Edwards's Ecclesiological Typology," in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 93–120.

"wards" with "twelve persons in each ward" totaling "twice twelve times twelve." This "is agreeable," he observes, to Revelation's numbering God's church. Thus, "the leaders or heads of these twenty-four wards do probably typify the same thing that is signified by twenty-four elders in Revelation." These numerical similarities are not accidental, granted that, in Edwards's mind, "numbers are not simply historical markers." But numbers can "show how God foreshadowed the millennium even in the Old Testament."[45]

3.5. Edwards's Eschatological Typology

Scholars have well documented Edwards's fascination with eschatology.[46] It is not as well known, however, that Edwards's typological curiosities fused with his eschatological interests. The *"Blank Bible"* shows that Edwards's Old Testament types did not only point to New Testament events and persons but also to antitypes in the "last days" and the age to come.

Edwards uses "type" and its derivatives to connect the Old Testament to the eschaton typologically in twenty-nine *"Blank Bible"* notations. This makes eschatology Edwards's third most favored antitype behind Christ's person and work (sixty-seven notes) and ecclesiology (forty-seven notes). These twenty-nine notations occur in nineteen biblical books.[47] Edwards's antitypes include events and persons in the "last days," eschatological judgment and hell, and heaven with its eternal rest. His types include the flood, Egypt, Mount Sinai, Daniel's lion's den, or people like Absalom.

Edwards left a fascinating note speaking of Christ's *parousia* in Leviticus 9:22–23.[48] There he points himself to the "Interleaved Bible" note on Hebrews 9:28, which elucidates how "Aaron's coming out after offering the sacrifice to bless the people" typifies Christ's second advent. Edwards states that the events in Leviticus's ninth chapter are not accidentally akin with how Hebrews 9:26–28 speaks of the nature and purpose of Christ's advents.

Edwards argues that for the author of Hebrews "there is not an image that can enter in the Jewish mind, more suitable to convey the grand idea" of the glory of Christ's *parousia* than recalling "the grand solemnity" of the high priest coming out in golden robes to bless the people after having made atonement. It is Christ who will return in glory "not to deal with sin, but to save those who eagerly wait for him." Just as the priest came out to the congregation a "second time" to offer pardon after making atonement, so Christ will return a "second time" after having ritually purified heaven, having completed our pardon. Edwards argues, therefore, that Aaron's movements in Leviticus typify Christ's *parousia*.[49]

[45] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 409–10. Kreider, *Edwards's Interpretation of Revelation,* 161. For more on Krieder's interpretation of Edwards's numeric typology, see 159–61, 186–87.

[46] For an introduction, see Stein's introduction to *Apocalyptic Writings* by Jonathan Edwards, Works 5:1–94; McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 566–79; C. C. Goen, "Jonathan Edwards: A New Departure in Eschatology," *CH* 28 (1959): 25–40; Brandon Withrow, "A Future of Hope: Jonathan Edwards and Millennial Expectations," *TJ* 22 (2001): 75–98; Mark Rogers, "A Missional Eschatology: Jonathan Edwards, Future Prophecy, and the Spread of the Gospel," *Fides et Historia* 41 (2009): 23–46.

[47] Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, 2 Samuel, 2 Chronicles, Job, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Romans, Hebrews, 2 Peter, Jude, and Revelation.

[48] Leviticus states, "Aaron lifted up his hands toward the people, blessed them, and came down from the offerings.… Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle, came out, and blessed the people: and the Lord's glory appeared." For a catalog and analysis of Edwards's other eschatological types, see the chapter, "The Eschatological Typology of the *Blank Bible,*" in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 167–89.

[49] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 252, 1150–51.

3.6. Edwards's Types of Christian Ministers/Ministry

In four *"Blank Bible"* notes, Edwards typologically connects the Old Testament to Christian ministers/ministry and the sacraments.[50] Edwards points out that the Hebrew Scriptures adumbrate Christian ministers and important functions of their office like preaching, prayer, and sacramental administration. He finds these types in a dug-out well, Moses's intermediation, and David's slung stones.

In one such note, Edwards comments on the Old Testament's witness to the minister's intercession in his note on Jabez's prayer (1 Chr 4:9–10).[51] Edwards points out that Jabez "was probably a scribe" of esteemed honor who excelled in "learning and piety." Granted Jabez's profession and status, Edwards concludes that his prayer made him "especially a type of the ministry." For God's responding to his request to "enlarge [his] coast" embodies "God's enlarging the church in answer to the prayers of ministers." For it is through ministerial prayers, Edwards implies, that God expands his church's "coasts" as he did for Jabez.[52] It is only through prayer that God "remarkably pours out" his Spirit.[53]

3.7. Edwards's Types of "Christian Spirituality"

Not all of Edwards's Old Testament types in the *"Blank Bible"* looked forward to historical, concrete antitypes. For in a few notes, Edwards details how the Hebrew Scriptures adumbrated trans-temporal, spiritual truths about the Christian experience. These are Edwards's types for "Christian spirituality."[54] These notations underscore that just as "spirituality was central to his life," so too Christian spirituality is important to Edwards's exegetical typology.[55]

When concentrating on Edwards's employment of "type" and its derivatives to connect the Hebrew Scriptures to Christian spirituality, one finds fourteen relevant notes in the "*Blank Bible.*" These notes occur in seven biblical books in the Jewish canon, and one in a Gospel that looks back to the Old

[50] For Edwards and the ministry, see William Schweitzer, ed., *Jonathan Edwards for the Church: The Ministry and the Means of Grace* (Welwyn-City, UK: Evangelical Press, 2015); and Sweeney, *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word: A Model of Faith and Thought* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009). For a catalog and analysis of Edwards's other notes on ministerial types, see the section "Types of Ministers and Ministry" in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 254–56.

[51] "Jabez called on God, saying, 'Oh that thou wouldest bless me, and enlarge my coast, that thine hand might be with me, and that thou wouldest keep me from evil!' And God granted his request."

[52] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 403–4. Edwards so strongly believed in prayer's ministerial importance that he devoted a treatise to underscoring how it will bring about Christ's kingdom. See his "An Humble Attempt" in Jonathan Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings*, Works 5:309–437.

[53] Detrich, "A Recital of Presence," 208–9.

[54] This category, the previous, and a few to follow, underscore the difficulty of categorizing Edwards's exegetical typology, for he often connects a type to an antitype that is a general principle or to an action or role that is repeatedly replicated outside Scripture. Not a few authors might refer to these examples of Edwards's exegesis as "allegorical" rather than "typological," even though Edwards uses "type" and its derivatives to refer to the connection others label "allegorical." Hunter speaks too hastily, therefore, when he states that "Edwards was not an allegorist." Depending on how one distinguishes allegory from typology, they may or may not conceive of Edwards as engaging in "allegory and disregard[ing] an event's historical and literary context," reading meanings into texts not there. Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 348.

[55] William Van-Vlastuin, "Spirituality," in *Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia*, 543–45. For an introduction to Edwards's spirituality, see *Jonathan Edwards' Spiritual Writings*, eds. Kyle Strobel, Adriaan Neele, and Kenneth Minkema (New York: Paulist, 2019); Kyle Strobel, *Formed for the Glory of God: Learning from the Spiritual Practices of Jonathan Edwards* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013); McClymond and McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 60–76.

Testament.[56] There are four broad antitypical categories to which these types point: a Christian's experience of regeneration and conversion, the practice of repentance, the Christian life's journey-like nature, as well as the Christian's faith. His types include events like Lot's wife becoming a salt pillar, the golden calf, and Elisha's miracles, and individuals like Ittai the Philistine or Ruth the Moabite, and even Jonadab's abstinent command to his posterity.

An intriguing example is Edwards's short but significant note on God's curse of Eve in Genesis 3:16.[57] He focuses on God's statement that "in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children." Edwards states succinctly that Eve's curse of painfully bearing children "is fulfilled in a literal and mystical sense." It is consummated literally, of course, in Eve's immediately bearing children agonizingly—and continuously realized in every painful birth since.[58]

Edwards's only clue as to what he means by "mystical sense" is his passing comment "of which the former is a type."[59] In other words, he believes that birthing's literal pains typify the "pains" of one's "spiritual birth" through the church. Edwards's interpretation is not surprising given his frequent appeal to femininity as an important characteristic of the church.[60] He says in note 314 of *Notes on Scripture* that the church "is often in Scripture represented as [a] mother," "travailing" to bring Christ "forth in the hearts of believers." Edwards believes, therefore, that "each believer, irrespective of gender, conceives and bears a principle of new creation within."[61] He also says in his previous note in the *"Blank Bible"* on Genesis 3:15 that, "in the new creation the man is taken out of the woman." That is, for Edwards, Christ births the "new man" through his bride, the Church (John 3:3). Edwards reasons, therefore, upon his "typological warrant," that childbirth's pains must typify the difficulty with which Christ brings forth spiritual children.[62]

3.8. Edwards's Demonic Types

One of Edwards's more intriguing antitypical categories in his *"Blank Bible"* is his group of ten notes that typologically connect the Hebrew Bible with the demonic.[63] Edwards's typological eye focuses on a few Old Testament characters: the pharaohs, the leviathan, and Tyre's prince. He highlights that the former testament does not only adumbrate Satan himself, but even typifies his defeat at the cross and his kingdom's final destruction.

In two interconnected *"Blank Bible"* notes, Edwards states that the pharaohs of Exodus were satanic types. He ties his first reflection to the cruel pharaoh who, at the beginning of Exodus, instructs the

[56] Genesis, Deuteronomy, 2 Samuel, 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Matthew.

[57] For a catalog and analysis of Edwards's other types of "Christian spirituality," see the chapter, "The Spiritualistic Typology of the *Blank Bible,"* in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 217–37.

[58] Scriptures speaking of the "pains of childbirth" or "birth pains": Jer 48:41; Mic 4:9–10; 5:3; John 16:21.

[59] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 139.

[60] For Edwards's understanding of women and ecclesiology, see "Edwards's Ecclesiological Typology" in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 93–117.

[61] Jonathan Edwards, *Notes on Scripture*, Works 15:288. Paula Cooey, "Eros and Intimacy in Edwards," *The Journal of Religion* 69.4 (1989): 484–501, 495. Cf. Barshinger, *Edwards and the Psalms*, 228–29.

[62] Edwards may have had Paul's statement to the Galatians in mind as this connection's biblical basis: "my little children, over whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you" (Gal 4:19). Paul considers himself the spiritual "progenitor" of his disciples (1 Cor 4:14–15; 1 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philem 10).

[63] For Edwards on the demonic, see Kamil Halambiec, "Satan," in *Jonathan Edwards Encyclopedia,* 509–10; Christopher Reaske, "The Devil and Jonathan Edwards," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 33 (1972): 12–38; Amy Plantinga-Pauw, "Where Theologians Fear to Tread," *Modern Theology* 16 (2000): 38–59.

Egyptians to kill the baby boys of the Hebrews (Exod 1:16, 22).[64] Edwards notes that, in so doing, he acted as a "type of the great red dragon" from Revelation 12. For the dragon, personifying the devil, "stood to devour the child as soon as it was born," just as pharaoh stood at Hebrew birth stools to "devour" the boys.[65]

In his note on Hosea 2:15, Edwards similarly connects Exodus's second pharaoh with Satan. He comments on Hosea's prophecy that in the future Israel will "sing as in the day when she came forth from Egypt." Edwards asserts that this "refers to that triumphant song that Moses and Israel sung when they came up out of the Red Sea." It was then that pharaoh "was ready to swallow 'em up at the Red Sea." Edwards states simply that the pharaoh was, therefore, "a type of the devil."[66] In Edwards's mind, such a connection between these two characters is reasonable, because the pharaoh arrogantly thought he could exterminate God's people at the sea, bringing them to naught, just like the devil, who, for Edwards, is the ultimate "confluence of pride and hatred" and has angrily and foolishly raged to exterminate God's people every day since that afternoon by the seaside.[67]

3.9. Edwards's Types for Sin

In five *"Blank Bible"* notes Edwards speaks of various types for sin.[68] He twice appeals to leaven as an embodiment of sin's multiplying, sour corruption. He also believes that blood, Egyptian task-slavers, and sexual intimacy are types of sin.

One of this group's more detailed notations is Edwards's thoughts on the typological connection between leaven and sin.[69] Edwards describes these typological connections in his note appended to Hosea's likening of Israel to a baker's baking bread (Hos 7:4). Edwards points out that here, "as is common in Scripture," the author compares sinful Israel to two things: "to an oven heated, and to the dough leavened, and kneaded, and so fitted to be cast into the hot oven." Edwards then draws out the fittingness of these comparisons. First, Israelites are like a burning oven "because their hearts are heated with lust." Second, they are akin to "dough leavened" because Scripture uses it "as a type of wickedness." For just as dough is leavened and kneaded so "to be cast into the oven," so too, men "ripen in wickedness … for destruction." Edwards accentuates these points by comparing Hosea's implied baker with Satan. He asserts that just like a baker mixes leaven into the lump and kneads it, waiting on the dough "to thoroughly ferment" that he may throw it into the oven, so the devil casts "the leaven of wickedness into

[64] "Pharaoh said, 'When ye [be] a midwife to the Hebrews, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live.'" For a catalog and analysis of Edwards's other devilish type-antitype pairs, see the section, "Demonic Types in the 'Interleaved Bible,'" in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 247–51.

[65] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 206. See Edwards's reflections on Revelation 12 in his "Notebook on the Apocalypse." There he interprets the woman and dragon as a portrait of the early church's triumph over paganism (Edwards, *Apocalyptic Writings*, 107–10). Ruminations like these underscore that Hunter is too hasty to state that "Edwards did not find types that point to various early church figures, locations, or events in post-biblical world history." Edwards did find antitypes outside of biblical history. Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 344.

[66] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 777.

[67] Plantinga-Pauw, "Where Theologians Fear to Tread," 47.

[68] For Edwards's hamartiology, see his *Original Sin,* Works 3:102–437; Clyde Holbrook's introduction to *Religious Affections* by Jonathan Edwards, Works 2:1–67; McClymond and McDermott, *Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 339–56.

[69] For a catalog and analysis of Edwards's other types for sin, see the section, "Types for Sin in the *Blank Bible,*" in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 251–53.

men's hearts" and thoroughly kneads it through so as "to establish the heart in sin." Thus, the baker of sinful souls "waits till the measure of their sin be filled," then draws them into hell's oven.[70]

3.10. Edwards's Nature Typology

In his "*Blank Bible,"* Edwards left several notations which underscore that his typological musings upon nature are not only the purview of his notebook, "Images of Divine Things."[71] In his note-taking Bible, he left eighteen notations fusing his natural and biblical typologies, placing them in twelve biblical books from Genesis to Revelation.[72] The biblical-natural types he locates include the stars, hair, the Nile, grapes, wheat, and the sun. He claims that these types find antitypical fulfillment in Christ's person and work, institutions like the church, or places like hell. These eighteen notes fall into five categories: Edwards's luminary types, the sun's various antitypes, types of Christ's person and work, types of the Church, the Christian life, hell, and final judgment.[73]

In his *"Blank Bible"* note on Joshua 10:13, Edwards compactly demonstrates how his understanding of nature, scriptural language, and typology coincide to evidence God's recapitulative manner of working in redemptive history.[74] Commenting on Joshua's description of the solar events during Israel's battle with the Canaanite kings, Edwards discusses the typological ties between the sun, moon, and stars, with Christ, the church, and angels.[75] Edwards first points out that this event fulfills Job 9:7, for God commands the sun neither to rise nor the stars to move. Then he quotes from Deborah's Song that speaks of "the stars" fighting Sisera (Judg 5:20). Next, Edwards states that because "the angels are called stars," "Christ is often compared to the sun," and the moon to the "heavenly church," then "here we have all the heavenly hosts … standing still to fight against the enemies of God's people." Given these connections, Edwards claims that these events represent Christ, "all the heavenly hosts of saints," and "all the angels" contending with the Church's enemies.

Edwards then provides further canonical roots for this heavenly event, stating, "hereby is typified that which is … in Rev. 19." He comments that this text, in addition to Revelation 16, speaks of the

[70] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 782–83.

[71] Edwards, *Typological Writings*, 50–142. Writing on Edwards's nature typology is voluminous, being a particularly popular subject for Edwards scholars. For an introduction to this literature, see Schweitzer, "'See Notes On': The *Blank Bible's* Contribution to Edwards's *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*," in *The Jonathan Edwards Miscellanies Companion: Volume 2*, ed. Robert Boss and Sarah Boss (Dallas: JESociety Press, 2021): 227–60, 227–31. For the most recent and important work on Edwards's natural typology, see Lisanne Winslow, *A Great and Remarkable Analogy: The Onto-Typology of Jonathan Edwards* (Gottingen: V&R, 2020), and Robert Boss, *Thunder God, Wonder God: Exploring the Emblematic Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Dallas: JESociety Press, 2023).

[72] Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, 2 Kings, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Luke, and Revelation.

[73] In "Images" no. 156, Edwards provides two additional categories into which the reader can group these reflections: "spiritual mysteries," which are "typified in the constitution of the natural world," and Scripture making "application of the signs and types in the book of nature as representations of spiritual mysteries."

[74] For a catalog and analysis of Edwards's other ontological types in the "*Blank Bible*," see the chapter, "The Nature Typology of the *Blank Bible,"* in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 191–215.

[75] Joshua reads, "The sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people avenged themselves upon their enemies … and hasted not to go down about a day." Edwards also tells himself to "see nos. 117, 167, 207, and 209" in his *Notes on Scripture* (Works 15:83, 98, 129–31, 134–35). The first speaks of how the moon "stopped." The second comments on how God places everything "in subjection to the church." The third unfolds how the luminaries typify Christ and the Church. The fourth argues for the story's historicity by appealing to other ancient histories that speak of a "scorching" sun.

Church's final victory that inaugurates "millennial" glory, having made "valiant progress against her enemies."[76] At this time, the "sun shall no more go down," fulfilling, he believes, the prophecies of Isaiah 60:20 and Zechariah 14:6–7. He claims that these prophecies point to the same reality that the sun's standing still typifies.[77] Given the antitypical referents of the luminaries, as well as the various Scriptures Edwards wields in support, he interprets these otherworldly objects as actors in the church's eventual eschatological triumph. This notation exemplifies, therefore, Edwards's belief that the Bible "makes application" of natural types because they do not merely analogize helpfully what God intends to teach those attuned to his word. Rather, the Bible employs natural types because God intentionally designs these worldly things to communicate spiritual truths.[78]

3.11. Edwards's Types of "Gospel Things"

The last antitypical category is Edwards's most general in his *"Blank Bible."* In ten notations, Edwards makes general comments about the Old Testament's typological witness to "gospel things" or "redemption." These notes do not detail the specificities of these "gospel things" or the aspects of "redemption," nor do Edwards's comments elucidate the nature of the type-antitype connection. Edwards uncovers these types in seven biblical books, finding them in the Old Testament's description of the patriarch's blessings, the exodus, the flood, the sacrificial system, and "rest."[79]

Edwards left a fascinating note in the *"Blank Bible"* about Proverbs' typological witness to "gospel things." He attaches one such thought to the sage's statement that "a word fitly spoken" is "like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (Prov 25:11).[80] In this note, Edwards details how proverbial sayings are like "gold conveyed under the appearance of silver." That is, "when both the thing spoken is good … and when it is spoken in an agreeable manner … the words are the silver, and the sense is gold." Even "eloquent words," which one wields to speak wisely, are "not better than the things spoken or represented, nor yet near so good." For it is "the use of it," in Edwards's mind, that is the gold.[81]

Edwards ends the note by stating, "this proverb is remarkably verified in the words spoken to us by God" by which "he communicates divine things to us." These "divine things" are exemplified in "types and similitudes," like the "tabernacle, temple, ark, mercy seat, golden altar, candlestick, and the glorious robes." These, Edwards avers, signify "the glorious things of the gospel." Like the two-fold sense of a wise saying, types are like "beautiful and precious pictures," but the antitypes are "far more so."[82]

[76] Bezzant, *Edwards and the Church*, 98.

[77] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 326–27.

[78] Lisanne Winslow, "'A Great and Remarkable Analogy': Edwards's Use of Natural Typology in Communicating Divine Excellencies," in *Regeneration, Revival, and Creation*, ed. Chris Chun and Kyle Strobel (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020): 220–34, 223. Cf. Paul Helm, Introduction to *Treatise on Grace and other Posthumously Published Writings* (Cambridge: Clarke, 1971), 17.

[79] Genesis, Exodus, Deuteronomy, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, and John.

[80] For a catalog and analysis of Edwards's other types of "gospel things," see the section, "'Types of 'Gospel Things,'" in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 240–46. Stephen Stein argues that this note represents Edwards's "mature thinking on Proverbs." Stein, "'Like Apples of Gold in Pictures of Silver': The Portrait of Wisdom in Jonathan Edwards's Commentary on the Book of Proverbs," *Church History* 54.3 (1985): 324–37.

[81] Stein, "Like Apples of Gold," 327.

[82] Edwards, *The "Blank Bible,"* 572–74.

4. Conclusion

This essay has tried to accomplish several things. First, it surveyed the recent scholarly landscape on Edwards's exegesis, suggesting that work still remains to be completed and, in particular, work on Edwards's exegetical typology. This article then interacted with Drew Hunter's article detailing Edwards's biblical typological practices and principles from Hebrews. The foregoing evidence has suggested that Hunter's research limitations, examples cited, and definitions provided, on the whole, lend themselves to a reassessment of the evidence.

This essay then provided an overview of 143 notations in the *"Blank Bible"* wherein Edwards uses a word from the "type" word family to connect a redemptive-historical sign with a signification not strictly christological. This essay noted that the types within these 143 notations find fulfillment in one of eleven antitypical categories: the Holy Spirit, "intra"-Old Testament, "intra"-New Testament, the Church, eschatology, Christian ministry/ministers, Christian spirituality, the demonic, sin, the world, as well as general "gospel things." This article provided an example from each of these categories to allow the reader to sense something of Edwards's wide-ranging typological exegesis exemplified in his "*Blank Bible.*"

This evidence suggests that Hunter may have concluded too hastily that Edwards "operated with the principle that types always and only point to spiritual things related to Christ and the gospel."[83] Edwards's exegetical-typological notations in the *"Blank Bible"* pose five challenges to Hunter's thesis. First, they highlight that Edwards does not only connect Old Testament types to christological antitypes. Second, for Edwards, Old Testament types can point to antitypes within the Old Testament. Third, Edwards claims that there are New Testament type-antitype pairs that are not strictly christological nor bound by that Testament's boundaries. Fourth, Edwards believes that Old Testament types can adumbrate eschatological antitypes. Lastly, Edwards connects historical types to ahistorical antitypes that embody theological or spiritual principles.

The foregoing evidence appears to imply that Hunter improperly categorized Edwards's exegetical typology as one in which he "always related" antitypes to Christ.[84] Edwards's array of antitypes are too diverse to fit within such limiting strictures, just as the manner and time in which Edwards purports that types find fulfillment resist christological confines. It seems appropriate, therefore, to replace the imprecise term, "christological," with more accurate and broader terminology to describe Edwards's biblical typology.

The *"Blank Bible"* seems to commend to its readers that Edwards understands biblical typology as a kind of historiographical framework by which he interprets the world and redemptive history as a constant movement towards its God-ordained teleological and eschatological ends. These four, important concepts, therefore, appear to encapsulate best Edwards's biblical typology: spiritual, historical, teleological, and eschatological.[85]

One can refer to his typology as "spiritual" in the sense that Edwards believes that God sovereignly unites types with antitypes. For Edwards, "types" are God's intentionally designed harbingers of greater

[83] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 344.

[84] Hunter, "The Typology of Jonathan Edwards," 345.

[85] For a fuller explanation of these terms, see "Concluding Reflections" in Schweitzer, *Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology*, 265–69.

and/or future redemptive-historical realities.[86] Types and antitypes, in Edwards's worldview, therefore, are "ontologically real" entities that exist in explicit relationship because God intended for them to exist-in-relation.[87]

Edwards's biblical typology is also "historical," because it is a schema that he strives to anchor in history. In his "*Blank Bible,*" Edwards roots all of his biblical types in sacred Scripture's history, and most of his antitypes in that same history, too. If one examines the types Edwards mentions in his "*Blank Bible,*" the reader will find that they all are persons, events, objects, or institutions in Holy Scripture. While Edwards ties most of his antitypes to the Bible's redemptive-historical narrative, some of his antitypes, however, do not relate to redemptive history in the same way. Some are timeless propositions about the world, God, salvation, or the church, while others are aspects of the lived experience of God's people throughout history that one cannot anchor definitively to redemptive history's timeline. Having said that, though, both the genesis and anchor of Edwards's exegetical typology is God's sacred history of redemption recorded in the Bible.

It seems appropriate, also, to refer to Edwards's biblical typology as "teleological." Granted that, as far as the present researcher has observed, in all of Edwards's type-antitype relationships, he always states that the antitype is the "greater," more "significant" entity to which the "lesser," less "significant" type points. As one moves from type to antitype in Edwards's system, they will find that the antitype, when compared to its corresponding type, is more theologically robust and narratively significant for the history of redemption.

Lastly, one can also fittingly call Edwards's exegetical typology "eschatological." Given that, in most of Edwards's type-antitype relationships, he finds that the type precedes its antitype on redemptive history's timeline.[88] To summarize, Edwards's exegetical practices preserved in the *"Blank Bible"* recommend that it is more precise not to refer to his biblical typology as "christological," but as his spiritual, eschatological, and teleological framework for interpreting God's unified orchestration of redemptive history.

[86] An example of a type-antitype relationship that is "future" *and* "greater" is Aaron and Christ. Christ arrives later in history than Aaron and is also Israel's "greater" priest. An example of a type-antitype relationship that is simply "greater" is Edwards's connection of leaven with sin. Leaven does not precede sin in redemptive history, but its sour, spreading nature is eclipsed by sin's "greater," spiritually sour, infecting nature.

[87] Lisanne Winslow, *A Trinitarian Theology of Nature* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2020), 55.

[88] Type-antitype pairs that are not eschatological include some of his types of Christian spirituality in which the type does not temporally precede the antitype (like leaven and sin), and some of his biblical-ontological types wherein the type exists before and after its antitype (i.e. the rising and setting sun that typifies Jesus's death and resurrection), in addition to his ahistorical antitypes embodying theological truths or aspects of the Christian experience (i.e., the Christian's faith).

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The Christocentric and Christotelic Nature of Johannine Pneumatology

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Abstract: Several years ago, a highly regarded Pentecostal ecumenist suggested that the Paraclete's work in the "world" supports a more inclusive soteriology. This article responds to this proposed theological trajectory within Johannine pneumatology, seeking to contribute to broader conversations regarding christological exclusivism and pneumatological inclusivism. An exegetical survey of the Spirit's work in John's Gospel—including the Spirit's activity in Jesus's earthly ministry, within the believer, and in the world—demonstrates that Johannine pneumatology remains decidedly christocentric and christotelic from start to finish. When one gives careful attention to the text, it becomes clear that John's view of the Spirit's work is decidedly and firmly anchored in his christological particularism.

This article evaluates a proposed theological trajectory within Johannine pneumatology that was impressed upon me several years ago through a brief yet provocative comment from a well-known ecumenist. I served at the time on the faculty of a seminary in Southeast Asia and was in the final stages of a project that involved an extensive analysis of the overall pneumatology of John's Gospel.[1] The seminary was hosting the Pentecostal-Reformed Dialogue that year, so I found myself at dinner with a colleague and two leading members of the Pentecostal side of the Dialogue. One of them, in response to hearing of my current research in Johannine pneumatology, commented that no one had adequately developed the implications of the Paraclete at work in "the world" (a clear allusion to John 16:8–11). This suggestive remark, coupled with the mention of Amos Yong as a possible exception to this lacuna in theological reflection, clearly pointed to the possible—even probable—salvific activity of the Spirit outside of and apart from the church.[2] Such remarks, exhibiting an inclination toward some

[1] For a revised expansion of this PhD dissertation, see Adrian P. Rosen, *The Meaning and Redemptive-Historical Significance of John 20:22*, StBibLit 177 (New York: Lang, 2022).

[2] The trajectory of the Yongian pneumatological project was evident from Yong's earliest contributions. See, e.g., Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005). See also the critiques of this trajectory provided by James R. A. Merrick, "The Spirit of Truth as Agent in False Religions? A Critique of Amos Yong's Pneumato-

form or other of inclusivist or universalist soteriology, are hardly infrequent within contemporary theological discourse. But this comment does surface a question deserving careful exploration: What is the nature and extent of the Spirit's work within the Johannine perspective? In response, this article will elucidate the nature, the focus, the goal, and the extent of the Spirit's activity in Johannine theology as set forth in John's Gospel. In doing so, it seeks to contribute to broader conversations regarding christological exclusivism and pneumatological inclusivism. Our survey of Johannine pneumatology divides into three categories: (1) the Spirit's work in Jesus's earthly ministry; (2) the Spirit's work in the believer; and (3) the Spirit's work through the believer and in the world.

1. The Spirit's Work in Jesus's Earthly Ministry

The first category of texts includes John 1:33 and 3:34, both of which point to Jesus's reception of the Spirit. This reception of the Spirit affects both Jesus and John the Baptizer.

1.1. John 1:32–33

The larger context within which the Gospel of John recounts Jesus's reception of the Spirit is the testimony of John the Baptizer about Jesus's messianic identity. This section begins in John 1:19[3] with the words, "And this is the testimony [μαρτυρία] of John." The overall focus throughout remains the same: who Jesus is.

In John 1:32–34, where Jesus's own reception of the Spirit constitutes a central focus, John the Baptizer bears witness to Jesus as both the Spirit-baptizer (v. 33) and the Son of God (v. 34). Bracketing this is the *inclusio* formed by the Baptizer's confession of Jesus as the Lamb of God, first uttered in its fuller form in verse 29 ("Behold! The Lamb of God [ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ] who takes away the sin of the world!"), then reiterated in shortened form ("Behold the Lamb of God!" [ἴδε ὁ ἀμνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ]) on the following day (cf. v. 35) in verse 36. In addition to this, Jesus's preeminence due to his preexistence is also underscored (v. 30; cf. v. 15).

A couple of things are noteworthy in connection with our topic. First, John the Baptizer's knowledge of Jesus's messianic identity (and his consequent ability to bear witness to Jesus as Messiah) comes as the result of his observing the Spirit's descending and remaining on Jesus.[4] The prior divine revelation received (v. 33) predisposes him to quickly and accurately discern the christological significance of this event. Thus, in relation to John the Baptizer, the Spirit's action in descending and remaining upon Jesus is decidedly christotelic—that is, faith in Christ, including a cognitive grasp of his person and work, is the obvious *goal*. The Spirit, through this visible event, elucidates who Jesus is and points to his redemptive work. The Spirit's witness to Jesus enables John to understand and testify to both who Jesus is (Lamb of God, Spirit-baptizer, Son of God) and what he does (takes away the sin of the world, gives the Spirit). Second, this event—or, more specifically, the *action of the Spirit* here described—reveals

logical Theology of Religions with Reference to Current Trends," *TJ* 29 (2008): 107–25; J. David Willoughby, "The Spirit of God and the Religions of the World: A Response to Amos Yong's Claims," *Themelios* 49.2 (2024): 423–33.

[3] This testimony is first referenced in John 1:15, but its elaboration comes in 1:19 and following.

[4] Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 48: "The Spirit bears witness to the identity of Jesus; John the Baptist makes it known."

Jesus as the Spirit-baptizer, that is, as the one who will bestow the Spirit upon others.[5] This action of the Spirit thus points to a christocentric pneumatology in that it reveals Jesus to be the source of the Spirit.

1.2. John 3:34

The principal concern of John 3:31–36 is to establish Jesus's credentials,[6] and verse 34 highlights that he, as God's sent one, can speak the words of God. The author grounds this assertion (note the use of γάρ) by clarifying that Jesus's ability to speak the revelatory words of God stems from his unbounded reception of the Spirit: "For God does not give the Spirit by measure" (οὐ γὰρ ἐκ μέτρου δίδωσιν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα).[7] While later rabbinic teaching provides possible clarification of the meaning of this statement,[8] the prophetic nature of the Spirit's work vis-à-vis Jesus remains clear regardless of whether or not this rabbinic view reflects earlier use of the language of measured portions of the Spirit of prophecy.[9]

According to John 3:34, then, Jesus's ability to speak the words of God is a function of his immeasurable reception of the Spirit of prophecy.[10] The Spirit's work here is christocentric in two ways.

[5] Cornelis Bennema, in "Spirit-Baptism in the Fourth Gospel: A Messianic Reading of John 1,33," *Bib* 84 (2003): 35–60, disputes this and posits that the text points to the effects of Jesus's Spirit-endowed ministry rather than his giving the Spirit. For a rebuttal to Bennema's argument, see Rosen, *John 20:22*, 143–44.

[6] Timothy Wiarda, *Spirit and Word: Dual Testimony in Paul, John and Luke*, LNTS 565 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 148.

[7] NA[28] omits ὁ θεὸς; but regardless of the textual-critical question, the fact that God, not Jesus, is the intended subject remains clear. See Gary M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 83–84; Rosen, *John 20:22*, 168–69. Conversely, some scholars argue in favor of Jesus as the subject: Raymond Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, AB 29–29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, 1970), 1:161–62; Udo Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes*, 5th ed., THKNT 4 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2016), 117; Johannes Beutler, *A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, trans. Michael Tait (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 107. If one were to adopt this interpretation, the strong christocentric focus, while configured differently, would not be weakened. In this case, Jesus would be the source rather than the recipient of the Spirit.

[8] See the often-cited statement in Lev. Rab. 15.2: "Even the Holy Spirit resting on the prophets does so by weight, one prophet speaking one book of prophecy and another speaking two books." *Midrash Rabbah: Leviticus*, ed. H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, trans. J. Israelstam and Judah J. Slotki, 3rd ed. (New York: Soncino, 1983), 189. C. K. Barrett, in *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 226, dismisses the parallel as irrelevant; Max Turner, in *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts in the New Testament Church and Today*, revised ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 59 n. 8, remains cautious due to the lateness of the rabbinic text.

[9] For further exegetical analysis of this verse, see Rosen, *John 20:22*, 168–71.

[10] Two opposite interpretive extremes must be avoided in relation to Jesus's reception of the Spirit. First, some downplay or outright deny that the Spirit empowers Jesus. For example, David Crump argues that, unlike the synoptic portrayal of Jesus's reception of Spirit-empowerment, John presents Jesus's reception of the Spirit as functioning as no more than a messianic identity marker. Cf. David Crump, "Who Gets What? God or Disciples, Human Spirit or Holy Spirit in John 19:30," *NovT* 51 (2009): 78–89, at 83; "Re-examining the Johannine Trinity: Perichoresis or Deification?" *SJT* 59.4 (2006): 395–412, at 402 n. 17. Also denying the Spirit's empowering Jesus in the Johannine perspective, see Marianne Meye Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 160–65, 170–76, 187. The second interpretive extreme, diametrically opposed to the above approach, remains the more troubling and dangerous reading. While some display a propensity to downplay Jesus's reception of Spirit-empowerment, presumably due to their (admirable) desire to safeguard a proper view of Christology, others overread it in a way that disturbingly diminishes the uniqueness of Christ by reducing him to little more than a pattern of Spirit-empowerment that all believers must aspire to fully replicate in their own contemporary experience. See, e.g., Bill Johnson (Bethel Church, Redding, California), who claims Jesus "laid aside"

First, the Spirit enables Jesus's prophetic speaking of God's words; that is to say, the work centers on Christ in that it is an empowerment of Christ himself. Second, regarding the content of Jesus's teaching, the revelatory words of God uttered by Jesus plainly take the person and work of Christ himself as their primary focus, as can be seen throughout the Gospel of John. Thus, this whole matter of the Spirit's descending upon Jesus to prophetically enable his ministry is christocentric from start to finish. It is, moreover, christotelic in that the goal throughout consistently remains the same: bringing humanity to a point of understanding and decision for Christ.

2. The Spirit's Work in the Believer

This second category of texts accounts for the majority of pneumatological references in John's Gospel: John 3:3–8; 4:23–24; 6:63; 7:37–39 (4:10–14); 14:16–20; 14:25–26; 16:12–15; and 20:22. The focal point throughout these texts remains on the Spirit's work in the life of believers in Jesus Christ.

2.1. John 3:3–8

This passage presents several exegetical difficulties, not all of which need to be decisively resolved for the purpose at hand. Rather, a brief unpacking of the main pneumatological elements should prove sufficient before moving on to trace the christological connections within the larger contours of the pericope and Johannine theology.

The Spirit is first mentioned within this text at John 3:5, which speaks of being born/begotten "of water and the Spirit" (ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος) as the precondition for entrance into the kingdom of God. The parallel with being born ἄνωθεν ("again" or "from above") as the precondition to see the kingdom of God (v. 3) suggests that further clarification of this same spiritual birth is given in verse 5.[11] The water most probably symbolizes the Spirit, so that the phrase ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ πνεύματος should be translated "of water, that is,[12] the Spirit." In support of this, the Spirit is thus symbolized in subsequent passages (7:37–39; cf. 4:10–14), and verses 6 and 8 mention only the Spirit, not water.

Next, John 3:6 underscores that natural human birth produces natural human nature (τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τῆς σαρκὸς σάρξ ἐστιν), whereas spiritual birth brought about by the Spirit imparts

his "divinity" in the incarnation, lacked "supernatural capabilities" of his own, and "performed miracles, wonders, and signs as a man in right relationship to God … not as God" (*When Heaven Invades Earth: A Practical Guide to a Life of Miracles* [Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 2003], 79, 29 as quoted in Jonathan Black, *40 Questions about Pentecostalism*, 40 Questions [Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2024], 65). For a helpful and succinct treatment of this issue, see Black, *40 Questions*, 63–70.

[11] There are several exegetical issues here that, while important, are nonetheless peripheral to the focus of the present essay. These include: (1) whether γεννάω should be taken to mean "born" or "begotten"; (2) whether the kingdom of God is here understood as a present spiritual kingdom or a future messianic kingdom on the earth; (3) whether ἄνωθεν means "from above," "again," or a combination of these; (4) whether "to see" the kingdom (v. 3) is equivalent in meaning to "to enter" the kingdom (v. 5). These questions are not germane to the present study and thus will not be further analyzed here. For evaluation of these points, cf. Rosen, *John 20:22*, 148–53.

[12] Taking the καί as epexegetical. Cf. Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary,* 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 1:550–51. See also Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), 114; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 99; Grant R. Osborne, *John: Verse by Verse*, ONTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2018), 78; Seung-In Song, *Water as an Image of the Spirit in the Johannine Literature*, StBibLit 171 (New York: Lang, 2019), 130 n. 58.

a spiritual nature (καὶ τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος πνεῦμά ἐστιν). While John's Gospel nowhere elaborates on precisely what spiritual characteristics this entails, 1 John does (2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18).

Finally, John 3:8 draws a comparison between the wind and the Spirit (cf. Ezek 37:1–14).[13] The regenerative work of the Spirit is portrayed as inscrutable and mysterious as to its inner workings,[14] not as unpredictable or unrestricted as to where this life-giving function occurs. A careful probing of the surrounding context supports this conclusion.

Quite interestingly, the most narrowly limited context of these statements (i.e., John 3:3–8) does not overtly spell out any sort of christological particularism. Perhaps this helps explain why John 3:8 so often gets leveraged in support of the Spirit's supposed salvific movement within non-Christian religious milieus. That such a reading constitutes a misconstrued interpretation of this text quickly becomes clear, however, upon a more robust and comprehensive exegetical-theological investigation of the details that are germane to this question. For only if one takes these pneumatological statements in isolation from the broader context of John 2:23–3:21 and the overall scope/sweep of Johannine Christology, soteriology, and pneumatology can such a theological trajectory—that is, one which seeks to obscure the christocentricity of the Johannine pneumatological perspective—appear to sustain any credibility or plausibility at all.

The evidence points toward the christocentric nature of regeneration by the Spirit. The context of the narrative within which John 3:8 occurs makes this both unmistakable and unavoidable. First, one should consider the progression of the narrative leading up to the pneumatological statements here. While our chapter divisions tend to obscure the connections found in the text at this point, one should note how John 3:1 stems from 2:23–25. In these verses, many "believed" (ἐπίστευσαν) in Jesus's name consequent to the miracles performed in Jerusalem (2:23), but Jesus did not "entrust" (ἐπίστευεν) himself to them "because he knew all [men]" (πάντας) (v. 24), "and because he had no need that anyone should testify concerning man [περὶ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου]; for he himself knew what was in man [ἐν τῷ ἀνθρώπῳ]" (v. 25). John 3:1 then transitions from this general statement about the group, which is characterized in terms of its superficial "belief" and its humanity (ἄνθρωπος), to a specific example in the "man" (ἄνθρωπος, retaining the same emphasis on human nature rather than male gender) Nicodemus, who likewise exhibits this same miracle-based, superficial faith, which remains inadequate to save (v. 2). The crucial point for this study is that true faith in Jesus remains very much in focus in John 3:1–8.

Transitioning for a moment to consideration within the broader Johannine context, the foregoing observation is hardly surprising in light of John 1:12–13, where it is those who receive/believe in Christ who are begotten by God and thus become God's children. So too, if one were to broaden the scope beyond the gospel to include the epistles, 1 John 5:1 also baldly asserts a direct correspondence between belief in Jesus as the Christ and being begotten by God.

[13] Some have attempted reading both occurrences of πνεῦμα in John 3:8 as referring to the Spirit, not as a wordplay pointing first to the wind (τὸ πνεῦμα) and then the Spirit (ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος). For documentation of advocates of such an approach, together with refutation, cf. Rosen, *John 20:22*, 165–66 n. 176. Even if one were persuaded by this untenable reading of the verse, it would not weaken or obscure the christocentric nature of the passage.

[14] Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 129; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 197. See Paul A. Rainbow, *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles and the Apocalypse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 264: "Like wind, this … birth makes a decisive impact on human experience but comes from beyond human knowledge or control."

Back in John 3, as the conversation with Nicodemus progresses, Jesus clarifies the necessity of his being lifted up on the cross in order to make possible the bestowal of eternal life, as well as the reality that belief in Christ serves as the precondition for reception of this eternal life (vv. 14–15). As this conversation ends and the author transitions to his own commentary on it (vv. 16–21),[15] the focus of the soteriological truths delineated remains decidedly christocentric.

At this point, we can draw rather firm conclusions about the christocentric pneumatology of this passage. Starkly put, this text offers no support for the notion that the Spirit regenerates the non-Christian religious other apart from a conscious conversion to faith in Christ. Rather, the regenerative work of the Spirit here retains its robust christocentric focus.

2.2. John 4:23–24

In the latter portion of Jesus's dialogue with the Samaritan woman in John 4, he mentions a soon-to-arrive time (vv. 21, 23) in which true worshippers will worship God "in the Spirit and in the truth" (vv. 23–24). Several exegetical points are noteworthy, but some are more germane to our discussion than others. I will first highlight key exegetical questions, then move on to discuss christocentricity. First, scholars are divided as to the precise meaning of ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστιν (v. 23, which literally translates as "an hour is coming and now is"). Suggested interpretations include: (1) the "hour" is both future and present;[16] (2) the words καὶ νῦν ἐστιν ("and now is") are "a narrative augmentation" that reflect the post-resurrection perspective of the author;[17] (3) the words καὶ νῦν ἐστιν do not convey the idea of the *presence* of the "hour" but rather point to its *imminent* arrival (cf. νῦν ἐστιν in John 12:31).[18] While I prefer the third option, one's conclusions on this point will not affect the christocentric nature of the Spirit's work as explained within this passage.

Second, there exist contextual constraints on the meaning of ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ: (1) πνεῦμα ὁ θεός ("God is [qualitatively] spirit")[19] grounds and explains this; (2) regardless of one's understanding of whether the "hour" is here better understood as present or soon-to-arrive, a salvation-historical progression is inescapable: Jesus inaugurates (either after his glorification or during his ministry) a

[15] See Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Lifting Up the Son of Man and God's Love for the World: John 3:16 in Its Historical, Literary, and Theological Contexts," in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of D. A. Carson on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 142, and esp. 149. See also Cornelis Bennema, *The Power of Saving Wisdom: An Investigation of Spirit and Wisdom in Relation to the Soteriology of the Fourth Gospel*, WUNT 2/148 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 168; Edward W. Klink III, *John*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 204–5.

[16] E.g., Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 224: "There is an advance on v. 21: not only is the time coming, but it has come. This oxymoron is a powerful way of asserting not only that the period of worship 'in spirit and truth' is about to come and awaits only the dawning of the 'hour', *i.e.* Jesus' death, resurrection and exaltation, but also that this period of true worship is already proleptically present in the person and ministry of Jesus before the cross."

[17] Benny Thettayil, *In Spirit and Truth: An Exegetical Study of John 4:19–26 and a Theological Investigation of the Replacement Theme in the Fourth Gospel*, CBET 46 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 114: "καὶ νῦν ἐστιν (v. 23) is a narrative augmentation to ἔρχεται ὥρα of v. 21 with the worship of the Johannine community in mind—the community where the worship 'in Spirit and truth' is already taking place.… This statement of Jesus regarding the hour (4:23) reflects the perspective of the gospel. From the standpoint of Jesus' historic ministry, the hour was in the future and only from the post-resurrection standpoint of the author and the community, the hour is present."

[18] For support of this interpretation, see Rosen, *John 20:22*, 171–73, 121–23.

[19] Cf. Rosen, *John 20:22*, 173, on a qualitative sense as opposed to an indefinite sense ("a spirit") or a definite sense ("the [Holy] Spirit").

new spiritual reality. Importantly, this seems to preclude the interpretation that regards ἐν πνεύματι as referring to the human spirit as the intended referent here, with emphasis thus falling upon genuine, internally engaged worship.[20] Simply put, God always required such worship from the heart; this would constitute nothing new. Rather, the text points to worship in the realm of[21] the Spirit whom Jesus will give, and the truth revealed by and embodied in Jesus.

This passage points to the christocentric nature of the Spirit's work in at least two ways. First, the preceding context of this statement includes the promissory remarks of Jesus pointing to his giving the "living water," or the Spirit (cf. 7:37–39), to those who ask him (4:10, 14). Jesus *himself* is the giver of the Spirit and bestows the Spirit upon those who ask *him*. The text is, therefore, christocentric in that it points to faith in Christ and reception of the Spirit from him. Second, the true worshippers of the Father (v. 23) not only worship in the Spirit but also in the truth (vv. 23–24). The "truth," within Johannine usage, is christocentric through and through. Consequently, worship "in the Spirit" remains inseparably linked to a warm embrace of God's redemptive revelation centered in Jesus Christ.

2.3. John 6:63

In the latter portion of the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus asserts, "The Spirit is the one who gives life" (τὸ πνεῦμά ἐστιν τὸ ζωοποιοῦν, John 6:63). There is general consensus among scholars that τὸ πνεῦμα here refers to the Holy Spirit. Just as the Father and the Son give life (see 5:21, which employs ζωοποιεῖ in reference to the action of both), so too does the Spirit—thus making the impartation of life a Trinitarian function. Jesus then contrasts this life-giving function of the Spirit with the complete uselessness (οὐκ ὠφελεῖ οὐδέν[22]) of ἡ σὰρξ ("the flesh"), which here refers to human nature.[23] The idea is that human nature remains inherently and utterly incapable of attaining participation in eternal life, whereas the Spirit bestows such life.[24] Next, Jesus affirms that his words spoken to those present "are

[20] J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928), 1:149; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, revised ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 239; George Johnston, *The Spirit-Paraclete in the Gospel of John*, SNTSMS 12 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 45; C. John Collins, "John 4:23–24, 'in Spirit and Truth': An Idiomatic Proposal," *Presb* 21 (1995): 118–21.

[21] Taking ἐν as conveying a locative sense ("in") rather than pointing to agency ("by"), which is also possible but less likely, especially in light of the locative sense in v. 21 with which it is contrasted: "in this mountain" (ἐν τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ), "in Jerusalem" (ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις). Cf. Keener, *Gospel of John*, 616.

[22] L&N 35.2 (1:457) explicates ὠφελέω as meaning "to provide assistance, with emphasis upon the resulting benefit." Cf. the use of οὐκ ὠφελεῖτε οὐδέν at John 12:19. On the emphatic double negative construction, see Morris, *Gospel according to John*, 340 n. 150; Klink, *John*, 342. Lidija Novakovic, in *John 1–10: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, BHGNT (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2020), 226, observes that the two negatives (οὐκ … οὐδέν) "do not cancel but reinforce each other."

[23] Contra the various proposals that identify ἡ σὰρξ as in some sense or another referring to Jesus's "flesh." For example, Rudolf Schnackenburg, in *The Gospel according to St. John*, trans. David Smith and G. A. Kon, 3 vols. (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 2:71–72, regards Jesus's "earthly mode of existence" as the referent; Bennema, in *Power of Saving Wisdom*, 203, reads the term as pointing to Jesus's death on the cross apart from the revelatory work of the Spirit; see also Turner, *Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 66. Cf. Rosen, *John 20:22*, 176, for further elucidation of the problematic nature of such christological readings of "the flesh." More helpfully, Novakovic, in *John 1–10*, 225, explains: "ἡ σὰρξ does not refer to Jesus' flesh but to human nature in general."

[24] Whether or not the life-giving work of the Spirit is within the purview of Jesus's statement here has occasioned some discussion. See Schnackenburg, *Gospel according to St. John*, 2:72: "6:63a mentions, not the understanding bestowed by the Spirit (cf. 14:26; 16:13), but the giving of life, and it is in this that the flesh is no help."

Spirit and are life" (πνεῦμά ἐστιν καὶ ζωή ἐστιν). In contrast to the general agreement relative to the first occurrence of πνεῦμα, scholars posit various construals of the meaning of this second occurrence: (1) Jesus's words are "the Spirit's instrument";[25] (2) Jesus's words are "Spirit-inspired and life-giving";[26] (3) Jesus's words are "life-giving because they are infused by the Spirit";[27] (4) Jesus's words "belong to the realm of the Spirit";[28] and (5) Jesus's words lead to[29] reception of the Spirit and eternal life.[30] The final option proves most compelling. As Beasley-Murray aptly explains: "The words of Jesus in the discourse are 'Spirit and life'—for those who receive them in faith, since they who accept them and believe in the Son receive the Spirit and the life of which he speaks (5:39–40 and 7:37–39)."[31] Jesus's words are the source of the life-giving work of the Spirit for those who are receptive to his teaching. In this light, it becomes evident that the Spirit's life-giving work is limited to those who hear and accept the words of Christ. While this interpretive option remains the best, in my view, what must be stressed for our present purposes is that all of the proposed interpretations retain the christocentricity of the Spirit's work.

2.4. John 7:37–39 (4:10–14)

It is the one who comes to Jesus (John 7:37), who believes in him (vv. 38, 39), who will receive the Spirit (v. 39; cf. also 4:10–14, where one "asks" Jesus for the gift). To be sure, scholars have debated several aspects of this text. Most notably, some posit a repunctuation of the text whereby the Spirit flows from within Jesus,[32] while others defend the traditional punctuation that places the Spirit within the believer.[33] If the text portrays the Spirit as located within the believer, the question becomes whether the focus remains on the personal salvific work of the Spirit (cf. 4:10–14), or it shifts to the believer as in some sense the mediating source of the Spirit's presence to others.[34] Most importantly for our present purposes, the christocentric focus of the Spirit's work remains regardless of one's decisions on these

G. K. Beale, in *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 570, argues that the Spirit is here envisaged as the agent of the already-not yet resurrection (cf. 6:39–40, 44, 47, 51, 53–54, 58). See J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 407–8; Rosen, *John 20:22*, 177. Conversely, in support of the revelatory function, see Turner, *Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 66; Bennema, *Power of Saving Wisdom*, 203–4; Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1:694–95; Wiarda, *Spirit and Word*, 141–45.

[25] Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 409 n. 21.

[26] Murray J. Harris, *John*, EGGNT (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 146.

[27] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel*, NSBT 24 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 94–95.

[28] James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NACSBT (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 142.

[29] For a similar use of the linking verb εἰμί with the sense "leads to," see John 12:50 (cf. NIV).

[30] Rosen, *John 20:22*, 178–79.

[31] George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36, 2nd ed. (Nashville: Nelson, 1999), 96.

[32] E.g., Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 1:320–21; Burge, *Anointed Community*, 88–93; Keener, *Gospel of John*, 1:728–30.

[33] E.g., Juan B. Córtes, "Yet Another Look at JN 7,37–38," *CBQ* 29 (1967): 75–86; Turner, *Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 61–62; "Receiving the Spirit in John's Gospel," 29–31; Bennema, *Power of Saving Wisdom*, 192–95; Rosen, *John 20:22*, 180–87.

[34] The former view remains more probable. See Cortés, "Yet Another Look," 79; Carson, *Gospel according to John*, 324; Ridderbos, *Gospel of John*, 274; Michaels, *Gospel of John*, 464–65; Rosen, *John 20:22*, 188–90.

points of exegetical disagreement. The text points to Christ bestowing the Spirit on those who believe in him; there is no salvific movement of the Spirit apart from such belief.

2.5. John 14:16–20

The christocentric nature of the first Paraclete saying is obvious. First, Jesus himself requests that the Father would give the Spirit (John 14:16). Second, the disciples of Jesus are the recipients of the Spirit (v. 16). Third, the title "Spirit of truth" (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, v. 17) doubtless retains the same christocentric orientation for "truth" that prevails throughout other parts of John's Gospel. Fourth, the "world" cannot "receive" the Spirit because it neither sees nor knows him (v. 17). Fifth, Jesus assures the disciples, "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (v. 18). The best interpretation of this understands it as a prediction of Jesus's post-resurrection appearance when he imparts the Spirit to them (20:22).[35] Even if one interprets this as a spiritual coming of Jesus at Pentecost,[36] however, the christological focus remains unmitigated. In light of these details, this text inextricably links the Spirit's work to the person of Christ and clearly limits this pneumatic activity to the disciples of Jesus.

2.6. John 14:25–26

In contrast to his teaching while present with his disciples (John 14:25), Jesus predicts in verse 26 that the Paraclete will perform the twofold function[37] of both teaching them all things (ὑμᾶς διδάξει πάντα) and reminding them of all that he had told them (ὑπομνήσει ὑμᾶς πάντα ἃ εἶπον ὑμῖν) before his departure. The christocentric nature of the Paraclete's work is lucid enough. First, the Father sends the Spirit *in Christ's name* (τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον, ὃ πέμψει ὁ πατὴρ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματί μου, v. 26). Second, the disciples *of Jesus* are the obvious recipients of the Spirit. Third, the content of the Paraclete's revelatory ministry exhibits a decidedly christocentric focus: he not only reminds them of things that Jesus had taught them but also teaches them all things—presumably meaning all things that they need to know relative to Christ and the gospel. Thus, as David Turner observes, "The Spirit's christocentric ministry is both retrospective and prospective."[38]

[35] E.g., Keener, *Gospel of John*, 2:974; Rosen, *John 20:22*, 207–13.

[36] E.g., R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 1001–2; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel according to John*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953–1954), 2:279–80; Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969), 2:281–82; George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, revised ed., ed. Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 330.

[37] Conversely, some scholars regard the "teaching" and "reminding" as synonymous. See, e.g., Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 2:650–51; Klink, *John*, 640. Against this, positing two distinct yet closely related activities in this verse, see Wiarda, *Spirit and Word*, 124–36. While I regard the exegetical evidence as firmly on the side of two distinct yet related activities, the more important point for this study remains that one's acceptance of the alternative interpretation would not remove the christocentric nature and focus of the Spirit's work in John 14:26.

[38] David L. Turner, "The Doctrine of the Future in John's Writings," in *Eschatology: Biblical, Historical, and Practical Approaches*, ed. D. Jeffrey Bingham and Glenn R. Kreider (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 211–26, at 222; cf. Thompson, *John*, 316.

2.7. John 16:12–15

The fifth and final Paraclete saying expands on the content found in the second saying (John 14:25–26). While some details remain subject to debate,[39] the fact that the Paraclete's work is decidedly christocentric may be easily established. Several features are notable. First, the Paraclete will fill out and complete Jesus's teaching to the disciples (16:12–13); thus, the pneumatic revelation within the passage's purview exhibits direct continuity with the teaching delivered during the earthly ministry of Christ. The Spirit's teaching is christologically anchored. Second, he is again called the "Spirit of truth" (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, v. 13; cf. 14:17; 15:26). Third, he will "guide" the disciples into "all truth" (ὁδηγήσει ὑμᾶς εἰς πᾶσαν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, 16:13). Such referencing of "truth" within Johannine theology doubtless evokes the overall christological shape of the conceptualization of truth throughout John's Gospel. In this light, J. H. Bernard correctly suggests "all the truth" means "all the truth about Christ and His Gospel."[40] Fourth, he will not speak on his own authority (οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ, v. 13).[41] As W. Boyd Hunt rightly observes:

> The fact that the Spirit guides into further truth is balanced by the statement that he does not speak on his own authority. Both truths are basic. The Spirit speaks, he does not simply repeat what Jesus has already said. Yet the Spirit's speaking is always a witness to Christ. The Spirit is self-effacing, he points to Christ.[42]

Fifth, he will glorify Christ (vv. 14–15). From start to finish, the Paraclete's ministry here remains self-effacing and christologically focused, and only the disciples of Jesus directly receive or benefit from the pneumatic revelation in view.

2.8. John 20:22

This passage clearly portrays the life-giving work of the Spirit in unmistakably christocentric terms.[43] Jesus himself imparts the Spirit—and this only to those who believe in him. John employs the verb ἐνεφύσησεν ("he breathed/blew on"), found only here in the NT. In so doing, he not only conceptually links this event back to John 3:8 and Ezekiel 37, but he also roots its significance in Genesis 2:7, where the LXX uses the same verb to describe YHWH's breathing life into Adam. Thus, the disciples receive the life-giving work of the Spirit. This experience of the disciples was unique in that they were here transitioned into life under the new covenant, and in that Jesus was physically present as he bestowed the life-giving work of the Spirit under the new covenant.[44] Believers in subsequent times obviously do

[39] As exhibited, for instance, by the diversity found among scholars in interpreting "the coming things" (τὰ ἐρχόμενα) in John 16:13. For a brief survey of options, cf. Rosen, *John 20:22*, 237–38.

[40] Bernard, *Gospel according to St. John*, 2:510. So too, Eskil Franck, in *Revelation Taught: The Paraclete in the Gospel of John*, ConBNT 14 (Lund: Gleerup, 1985), 74, interprets "truth" here as "the divine revelation which ultimately is concerned with the Word that became flesh, with Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and with the consequences of these events."

[41] See Craig S. Keener, "Sent Like Jesus: Johannine Missiology (John 20:21–22)," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12.1 (2009): 21–45, here at 37. Cf. Harris, *John*, 278.

[42] W. Boyd Hunt, "John's Doctrine of the Spirit," *SwJT* 8.1 (1965): 45–65, at 57.

[43] This text has given rise to a surprising array of interpretations, the analysis of which extends well beyond the scope of this article. For further elaboration and evaluation of these views, see Rosen, *John 20:22*, 5–55; and "Interpretive Questions Related to the Gift of the Spirit in John 20:22," *JETS* 68 (2025): 285–97.

[44] For a more detailed summary of this theological understanding of the impartation of the Spirit on Resurrection Day, see Rosen, *John 20:22*, ch. 6.

not experience such a covenantal transition as they move from the old era to the new, nor do they receive the Spirit directly from the physically present, resurrected Jesus. However, the decidedly christocentric elements of this reception—consisting of (1) Jesus himself bestowing the gift of the Spirit, and (2) giving this gift only to those who consciously receive him in faith—remain the same for all believers (cf. 7:37–39; 4:14).

Noteworthy at this juncture, however, is that the christocentricity of John 20:22 remains even if one prefers one of the many alternative proposed interpretations (e.g., the view that Jesus's action here is anticipatory of reception of the Spirit on Pentecost, or views that regard this reception of the Spirit as other than life-giving). The two crucial points remain indisputable despite divergent interpretations regarding the specifics of the so-called insufflation: (1) Christ bestows the Spirit, and (2) only believers in Jesus Christ receive the Spirit.

3. The Spirit's Work through the Believer and in the World

This final category includes John 15:26–27 and 16:7–11. The focus here primarily falls upon the Spirit's work in relation to unbelievers, but it does include Spirit-empowerment of Christ-followers for effective witness.

3.1. John 15:26–27

The third Paraclete saying links the Spirit to Christ in several ways. First, it is Christ himself who "sends" the Spirit (v. 26: ὃν **ἐγὼ πέμψω** ὑμῖν, "whom **I will send** to you"). Second, it is the disciples of Jesus who receive the Spirit (v. 26: ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω **ὑμῖν**, "whom I will send **to you**"). Third, the Spirit is characterized as "the Spirit of truth" (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας), which most probably points to the Spirit as the communicator of truth. As previously stated, the truth within Johannine usage retains a strongly christocentric focus throughout its frequent occurrences. Fourth, the Spirit testifies concerning Christ (v. 26: ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμου); that is, the content of the testimony centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ.[45] This affirmation explicitly articulates the christocentricity and christotelicity of the Spirit's work in bearing witness *to Jesus*. Fifth, the Spirit's witness is portrayed as in tandem with the witnessing activity of the disciples (v. 27), who are qualified for this task as a result of their firsthand experience of the historical ministry of Jesus (ὅτι ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ ἐστε, "because you have been with me from the beginning"; cf. 1 John 1:1–3; Acts 4:19–20). Sixth, this testimony of the Spirit occurs following his being sent to the disciples (John 15:26). The Spirit comes to/is sent to the disciples and bears witness to Christ along with the disciples in the context of the unbelieving world's rejection of Christ and persecution of his followers (15:18–25; 16:1–4).[46] By implication, the Spirit undergirds

[45] Rightly, Wiarda, *Spirit and Word*, 113–14, who cogently argues in support of περὶ ἐμοῦ pointing to the Spirit's witness "about" Jesus; wrongly, Felix Porsch, *Pneuma und Wort: Ein exegetischer Beitrag zur Pneumatologie des Johannesevangeliums*, FTS 16 (Frankfurt: Knecht, 1974), 271, who regards περὶ ἐμοῦ as meaning "für Jesus"; and Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 2:686, who translates it as "on my behalf."

[46] In support of interpreting the Spirit's witness as positive testimony about Jesus directed to the unbelieving world with an evangelistic goal, see Wiarda, *Spirit and Word*, chap. 7; Rosen, *John 20:22*, 221–24. Conversely, Porsch, *Pneuma und Wort*, 271, interprets the Paraclete's testimony as "an inner witness" (ein inneres Zeugnis) serving to strengthen the disciples' "threatened faith in Jesus" (bedrohten Glauben an Jesus). Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 2:698, reads this as the Spirit's prosecution of the world aimed at proving its guilt.

and empowers the witness of the disciples, advancing his own witness concerning Christ through the apostolic proclamation and in cooperation with this preaching of the gospel.

3.2. John 16:7–11

The fourth Paraclete saying expands on the content introduced in the third saying (John 15:26–27)[47] and, as such, it retains the same christocentric and christotelic focus.[48] Several points are noteworthy for the present study. First, just as in 15:26, so also here the Advocate comes to/is sent to the disciples (16:7), but the work described is directed toward the world (vv. 8–11).[49] Second, the Spirit's convicting/convincing work relative to the unbelieving world (ἐκεῖνος ἐλέγξει τὸν κόσμον περὶ ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ περὶ κρίσεως, v. 8) is christotelic; that is, the Spirit's work aims at conversion—the awakening of conscious faith in Christ. Third, the Spirit's convicting work is christologically grounded from start to finish (cf. the ὅτι-clauses [i.e., because-clauses][50] throughout vv. 9–11). Fourth, the Spirit's work is christocentric in that he comes to and works through the disciples—those who already believe in Christ.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Johannine pneumatology (as found in John's Gospel) provides no support for vague, speculative musings regarding the Spirit's salvific and regenerative movement either within non-Christian world religions or apart from a conscious belief in Christ and his cross-work on our behalf. Rather, when one gives careful exegetical attention to the text, it becomes clear that John's view of the Spirit's work is decidedly and firmly anchored in his christological particularism (cf. John 14:6). Within the Johannine theological perspective, there can be no salvific, spiritual life bestowed by the Spirit apart from conscious faith in Jesus the Messiah (cf. 20:30–31).

[47] Barrett, *Gospel according to St. John*, 482.

[48] For a more in-depth exegetical analysis of this text, see D. A. Carson, "The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7–11," *JBL* 98 (1979): 547–66; John Aloisi, "The Paraclete's Ministry of Conviction: Another Look at John 16:8–11," *JETS* 47 (2004): 55– 69; Rosen, *John 20:22*, 228–35.

[49] Contra Brown, *Gospel according to John*, 2:712: the Paraclete's proving "the world's guilt is directed to the disciples, but the forum is internal." More helpfully, see Wiarda, *Spirit and Word*, 117–19.

[50] Some regard these as explicative rather than causal. E.g., Ridderbos, *Gospel of John*, 532 n. 167; Schnackenburg, *Gospel according to St. John*, 3:129.

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Missio Trinitatis: Theological Reflections on the Origin, Plan, and Purpose of God's Mission

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Abstract: Trinitarian theology provides the basis for understanding *missio Dei*. The divine sendings of the Son and the Spirit explain the origin of God's mission, while the divine council with the *pactum salutis* helps us comprehend the whole plan of God's redemptive mission. God's external work of mission, accomplished and applied across the history of redemption, highlights the eternal purpose of God's mission and helps us align our participation in it. Using this time-tested Trinitarian language helps us avoid divergent definitions of this important concept, while clarifying ambiguities and guarding against common misuses. It also helps us better understand the church's evangelistic witness in relation to the Triune God and his mission.

In the past century it has become popular to use the term *missio Dei*, Latin for "the sending of God" or "the mission of God," to explain mission as the work of God. Yet the concept of *missio Dei* is not new. It is rooted in the fifth-century teaching of Augustine of Hippo (354–430) on the divine sendings of the Son and the Spirit.[1] It was also used by the sixteenth-century Dutch theologian, Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676), author of the first comprehensive Protestant theology of mission, to distinguish God's activity in mission from all subordinate human activity.[2] More recently, German missiologist Karl Hartenstein used *missio Dei* in 1934 to distinguish God's mission activity from the role of the church.[3] The term was popularized at the International Missionary Council in 1952 and further developed by Lutheran theologian Georg Vicedom in 1958.[4] Since then, *missio Dei* has become a concept used widely across many theological traditions.[5]

[1] See Augustine, *On the Trinity*, books 2–4.

[2] Jan A. B. Jongeneel, "The Missiology of Gisbertus Voetius," *CTJ* 26 (1991): 47–49; cf. Ronaldo Lidório, *Theology, Piety, and Mission: The Influence of Gisbertus Voetius on Missiology and Church Planting* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2023).

[3] Karl Hartenstein, "Wozu nötigt dei Finanzlage der Mission," *Evangelisches Missions-Magazin* 79 (1934): 217–29; trans. by John G. Flett and Henning Wrogemann, *Questions of Context* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 75.

[4] See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 389–90.

[5] For diverse examples, see: Vatican II, *Ad Gentes* (Rome: Holy See, 1965), 1.2; Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 4–5; and Thomas Schirrmacher, *Missio Dei: God's Missional Nature* (Bonn: Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft, 2017).

The contemporary meaning of *missio Dei* is somewhat ambiguous, however, cluttered with many divergent definitions and applications. Its popular usage today within a wide range of traditions has stretched this concept into conflicting and even questionable directions. At the root of this divergence are conflicting methodologies: some see mission as a divine attribute, describing God as missional;[6] others use *missio Dei* as the hermeneutical key or framework for all of Scripture;[7] still others use the *missio Dei* concept more precisely to describe God's salvific work within the world as distinct from the evangelistic witness of the church.[8] Though still a helpful theological concept for missiology, the present ambiguity surrounding *missio Dei* is unhelpful and urgently calls for precise clarification.

This problem of ambiguity can be solved, in my opinion, by returning to the Augustinian roots of the *missio Dei* concept and by grounding our contemporary use of this term in classic Trinitarian doctrine. The solution is not simply to add more qualifiers or nuances to our own divergent uses of the term. Rather, we must dig deeper into the rich history of time-tested Trinitarian teachings.[9] Most popular uses of this term are built on Western Liberal Theology or on Barthian Theology.[10] But we must start further back to develop our understanding of *missio Dei* from the theology of Augustine, Aquinas, and the Protestant Reformation. It goes without saying that the *missio Dei* concept must be defined according to God's self-revelation, and it must be used by the church only in ways that are consistent with Scripture.

To that end, therefore, we will examine three areas of classic Trinitarian doctrine that relate directly to mission: the two divine sendings, the eternal council, and God's external work. Inferences drawn from each of these foci will suggest several preliminary reflections for contemporary missiology. My goal is to help us refine and reapply the *missio Dei* concept within the framework of an orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. A retrieval of time-tested Trinitarian teaching will guard the term *missio Dei* from misuse and will guide us into further applications of this important concept. It will also help us better understand the church's evangelistic witness as a holistic participation in the Triune God and his mission.

1. The Two Sendings of God

Scripture teaches that the eternal God sends both the Son and the Spirit into the world. Though not often a foregrounded theme, these divine sendings are mentioned deliberately at significant points, operating as it were behind-the-scenes, throughout the biblical narrative. The Father sent the Son: "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem …" (Gal 4:4; cf. John 3:16; 1 John 4:14). The Father also "sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts" (Gal 4:6;

[6] See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

[7] See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 17.

[8] For example, see Brian A. DeVries, *You Will Be My Witnesses: Theology for God's Church Serving in God's Mission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024), 7–11.

[9] A return to Trinitarian theology is needed because, as Flett has argued, "The seemingly disparate range of *missio Dei*'s evident and lamented problems all derive from the single base of its deficient trinitarianism" (John G. Flett, "*Missio Dei*: A Trinitarian Envisioning of a Non-Trinitarian Theme," *Missiology* 37.1 [2009]: 6). See also John F. Hoffmeyer, "The Missional Trinity," *Dialog* 40 (2001): 108–11; and Darren Cronshaw, "*Missio Dei* Is *Missio Trinitas*," *Mission Studies* 37 (2020): 119–41.

[10] For example, see Chul-ho Youn, "*Missio Dei Trinitatis* and *Missio Ecclesiae*: A Public Theological Perspective," *International Review of Mission* 107 (2018): 225–39.

cf. Luke 24:49; John 14:26; 15:26). Likewise, Christ often mentioned his divine commission during his earthly ministry (e.g. John 17:3, 8, 18, 21, 23, 25) and he commissioned his witnesses following the same pattern: "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.… Receive the Holy Spirit" (20:21–22). Thus Scripture speaks of these two divine sendings in the history of redemption: the Father sent both the Son and the Spirit of his Son.

The doctrine of these divine sendings, also called divine missions, is the logical starting point for a biblical understanding of the *missio Dei* concept. As already noted, Augustine writes of these missions in *The Trinity*, building on the theology of pre-Nicene fathers.[11] His theology was further developed by Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) in *Summa Theologiae*, a foundational work for the Trinitarian theology of theologians who followed.[12] More recently, renewed interest in these divine missions is proving valuable for guiding our reflection on related issues in contemporary missiology.[13]

A retrieval of this classic Trinitarian theology gives us orthodox language to explain the origin of *missio Dei* in the divine missions of the Son and of the Spirit. With the universal church, we worship one God in three persons, confessing that the three divine persons are all subsistences of the one divine substance simultaneously. The eternal divine essence is the Father begetting the Son, the Son being begotten of the Father, and the Spirit proceeding from both the Father and the Son. We also confess that the external operations of the Trinity are undivided: "as Father and Son and Holy Spirit are inseparable, so do they work inseparably."[14] Yet, while "the operations pertaining to the sendings are common to the three, the missions are distinct and proper to the individual person."[15]

To that end, consider three distinctions that help us explain these two missions. First, theologians have distinguished between God's being and God's activity: the *ontological* or *immanent* Trinity refers to God's immutable internal relations and divine attributes, while the *economic* Trinity refers to the activity of the three Persons with regard both to his internal divine council and his external works of creation and redemption.[16]

Similarly, we distinguish the eternal processions and the divine missions. The eternal processions, as relations within the immanent Trinity, are the eternal *begetting* of the Son from the Father and the eternal *spiration* of the Spirit from the Father. Each of the divine missions, as activities of the economic Trinity, flow from these eternal processions as created effects: the incarnation of the Son, who is sent by the Father, and the outpouring of the Spirit, who is sent by the Father and the Son.[17] Thus the divine

[11] Augustine, *The Trinity* 2.4.6–5.10; 4.19.25–21.32; cf. Fred Sanders, *The Triune God*, New Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 94.

[12] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1.27–43. See also Gilles Emery, *The Trinitarian Theology of Saint Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); and Dominic Legge, *The Trinitarian Christology of St Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[13] See Fred Sanders, *The Deep Things of God*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Torey J. S. Teer, "'As the Father Has Sent Me, Even So I Am Sending You': The Divine Missions and the Mission of the Church," *JETS* 63 (2020): 535–58; and Adonis Vidu, *The Divine Missions: An Introduction* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021).

[14] Augustine, *The Trinity* 2.7. As the patristic dictum affirms: *opera Trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*.

[15] Vidu, *Divine Missions*, xv.

[16] Alternatively, theologians distinguish the Triune God (theology) from his works (economy), using categories of the processions, missions, and appropriations. See Ryan M. McGraw, *A Mystery Revealed* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2023), 14; and Thomas Joseph White, *The Trinity: On the Nature and Mystery of the One God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2022), 547–87.

[17] "A mission represents the extension of a procession. Like a solar flare, it is a prolongation of the eternal dynamism of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit into creation, a new manner of divine existence in the world." Yet, these

processions are eternal and immutable, while the divine missions are temporal and for the purpose of salvation.[18] This second distinction is necessary to explain how the eternal and immutable God can enter into the time and space of his creation in order to reveal himself covenantally for the redemption of fallen creatures.[19]

Following Augustine and Aquinas, we also distinguish between visible missions and invisible missions.[20] The Son's visible mission was his incarnation to accomplish redemption, coming from the Father and returning to the Father (John 13:3); and the Son's invisible mission is his mystical union with his people in all ages. The Spirit's visible mission was his various manifestations throughout redemptive history, most notably the rushing wind and tongues of fire at Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4; cf. Matt 3:16; John 20:22); and the Spirit's invisible mission is his outpouring to apply redemption, experienced by all believers across all ages as his indwelling grace and empowering presence. This distinction is important, among other things, for ministry today: Christ lives in us and we in him, even though we were not with him visibly as ethnic Jews living during the first century (1 John 1:1–3). Likewise, the same Spirit indwells and empowers us today, even though we do not physically experience Pentecost Day phenomena like rushing wind or tongues of fire.

The doctrine of these divine missions helps us define *missio Dei*, as well as the church's participation in it, using language consistent with the whole of Scripture.[21] As the doctrines of Christology and Pneumatology must logically flow from and be shaped by Trinitarian theology, so also our missiology—the study of God's mission—must be built upon and shaped by this same theology. In view of this fact, therefore, consider three implications of this doctrine for contemporary missiology.

First, mission is the work of God, rooted eternally in his being and enacted temporally within created time and space. As noted in the introduction, contemporary missiologists have correctly used the term *missio Dei* to express this point: mission is primarily the activity of God. Ultimately, mission is not the work of the church or any human agency. Our Triune God is the author and finisher of mission.[22] However, it is not proper to say that God is missional. South African missiologist David Bosch expresses this common view, saying: "mission is not primarily an activity of the church, but an attribute of God. God is a missionary God."[23] But this language is not precise enough. While the first part of his statement is correct, the second part confuses the distinction between God's attributes and God's activities. According to classic Trinitarian theology, the divine sendings, unlike the eternal processions,

divine processions and missions "are not two different realities but one regarded from two different points of view" (Vidu, *Divine Missions*, 46, 61).

[18] "Hence 'mission' and 'giving' have only a temporal significance in God; but 'generation' and 'spiration' are exclusively eternal; … for the Son may proceed eternally as God; but temporally, by becoming man, according to his visible mission, or likewise by dwelling in man according to his invisible mission" (Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.43 a2).

[19] "The distance between God and the creature is so great … [*it was necessary for*] some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant" (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 7.1).

[20] See Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.43 a6; cf. Augustine, *The Trinity* 4.5.28.

[21] As Vidu observes, it is surprising that contemporary definitions of *missio Dei* have not been built on this theology of divine missions (*Divine Missions*, 67).

[22] Calvin Theological Seminary professor Samuel Volbeda notes, "It is encouraging to know that the end of missions has been planned as well as its beginning" ("The Biblical Doctrine of Missions," unpublished lecture notes [circa 1945], 19–25).

[23] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 390.

are activities of the economic Trinity that are enacted in time and space. Mission is a temporal work of God; it is not an eternal divine attribute. Using the term missional to describe God's eternal being muddles our understanding of *missio Dei*.

Second, the structure of missiology is thoroughly Trinitarian. The term *missio Dei* could be replaced with the term *missio Trinitatis*, to highlight the singular will and plan of the Triune God and his two divine sendings. The Father is not sent; rather, he does the sending. So there are two divine missions, not three. The Son is sent into the world by the Father to do the will of the Triune God, and he returns to the Father having accomplished redemption. The Spirit is sent into the world, by the Father and the Son, to apply redemption and to gather the church into fellowship with the Triune God. These two divine missions flow from the divine processions and they act according to the divine council. Missiology proper is not based on or defined by ecclesiology or historical theology, and certainly not by contemporary pragmatic or contextual factors. Instead, biblical missiology must be structured by this doctrine of divine sendings (the focus of this section) as well as the divine council and external work of God (the next two sections). Further, according to this structure, the missions of the Son and of the Spirit are enacted in a specific order: first, the Son's mission and, then, the Spirit's mission flowing from it.[24] Moreover, the divine missions always cooperate with and complement each other.[25]

Third, God's mission is temporal and enacted across the timeline of world history. The origin of God's mission is the divine sendings, planned before creation in the divine council but enacted temporally within time and space. God's temporal missions will end, after the gospel has been proclaimed to all nations, when the Spirit has gathered all the elect into the matured church, and when the Son has destroyed all opposition and consummated the kingdom (Matt 24:14; 1 Cor 15:24–28; Eph 4:13). The end of God's mission is enjoyment of the beatific vision of his radiant glory, in which his redeemed people will participate in the future age, once the missions of his Son and his Spirit are fully accomplished.[26] As Scripture reveals, the mission activity of both the Son and the Spirit (both visible and invisible) take place temporally between the creation and the final judgement. The entire revelation of God's mission is set out on this timeline; each of the various stages and steps of their missions are charted against this background.[27] Thus the activity of *missio Dei* must be defined within this eschatological timeline, and our own present place in it is located at a point on this same timeline, in reference to us as a past (the already fulfilled), present (the now), and a future (the not yet).

[24] Vidu notes the danger of reversing this order: Karl Rahner, Fredrick Crowe, and Amos Yong, he writes, "represent a growing movement to reverse the order of the two missions, such that the Spirit's mission is constructive of the incarnate personhood of Christ." But "the biblical description of the Spirit's mission clearly orders it to the Son's mission" (Vidu, *Divine Missions*, 73–75).

[25] Our use of *missio Dei* must not present them as disconnected or discordant in any way. Pentecostal missiologist Amos Yong keeps the sendings together using the language of Irenaeus (130–202), who spoke of the Logos and Pneuma as "two hands of the Father," but still promotes inclusivism by arguing that the outpouring of God's Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17) is a broader concept in soteriology than the particular atoning work of God's Son (John 17:9). See Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 43; and *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 81–120.

[26] Vidu, *Divine Missions*, 88–100.

[27] German missiologist Walter Fretag wrote, "The whole meaning and purpose of history and the trajectory of salvation in history are accomplished in and by means of mission," cited in John G. Flett and Henning Wrogemann, *Questions of Context: Reading a Century of German Mission Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 83.

2. The Eternal Divine Council

In addition to revealing the two divine sendings, Scripture also teaches that our Triune God planned his mission before he created the world.[28] Psalm 2:6–9 speaks of this pretemporal divine plan:[29]

> "'As for me, I have set my King
> on Zion, my holy hill."
> I will tell of the decree:
> The LORD said to me, "You are my Son;
> today I have begotten you.
> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage,
> and the ends of the earth your possession.
> You shall break them with a rod of iron
> and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.'"

This dialogue between the Father and Son is crucial to our subject for several reasons: It gives us language for defining the intra-Trinitarian dialogue. It describes the setting of God's mission within the context of the nations raging against his Christ (Ps 2:1–3; cf. Gen 12:3; Dan 7:13–14; Rev 11:15). It announces beforehand essential aspects of the progressively-revealed promise of the Father to the Son (Ps 2:8; cf. Gen 3:15; Ps 72:8; Isa 49:6; Acts 1:8; 1 Pet 1:10–12). It also indicates Christ's victory and final judgment, the last step of the Son's visible mission (2:9; cf. Dan 2:34–35; Rev 12:5; 19:15). Psalm 2 must be central to our understanding of *missio Dei*, not least since it had great significance for the missiology of the apostles (cf. Mark 12:7; Luke 22:69–70; Acts 1:8; 4:25–30; 13:33).

This Old Testament passage is a preview of God's plan of redemption, made before the creation, which was more fully revealed in Scripture once the Son "sat down" after completing the penultimate step of his visible mission (Heb 1:3). The New Testament gives us many more references to the divine council (Eph 1:11; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 1:2; 1 Pet 1:20; Rev 4:11). We still do not know all the details of God's mission plan (Deut 29:29), but Scripture makes it clear this plan was determined before creation within the divine council.

The doctrine of this divine council helps us understand the overarching plan of *missio Dei*. As with the divine sendings, classic Trinitarian theology gives us orthodox language with which to define missiology in relation to this foundational concept. For a summary of this doctrine, we turn to the teaching of Protestant theologians who further developed the Trinitarian theology of the patristic fathers in this decisive area.[30]

According to these theologians, the prae-temporal council is the eternal "purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph 1:11). It is God's eternal plan and good pleasure; the action of the Triune God, encompassing both his internal works of the divine decrees (*opera ad intra*)

[28] This divine council is eternal, that is, outside of time with a temporal outworking. Yet Scripture also describes it as logically existing before the creation (Eph 1:4). Hence it is both *eternal* and *prae-temporal* (not simply prior within time, as in *pre-temporal*, yet still logically before). See Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, "The Puritans on the Covenant of Redemption" in *A Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012), 237 n. 1.

[29] In the foreground, Psalm 2 speaks of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:14). Yet New Testament exegesis focuses on its Christological fulfillment and intra-Trinitarian dialogue (Acts 4:25–26; Heb 1:5; 5:5; Rev 19:15).

[30] This section builds on the theology of Francis Turretin (1623–1687) and Petrus van Mastricht (1630–1706), as well as Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) who synthesizes them and others (such as Hermann Witsius).

and his external works of creation, providence, and redemption (*ad extra*).[31] God's council is praetemporal, logically situated "before the foundation of the world" (Eph 1:4; cf. 3:11; Matt 25:34; Acts 2:23; 2 Tim 1:9; Rev 13:8). Though this council includes God's predetermined plan for "all things" (Prov 19:21; Isa 14:24–27; Dan 4:24), in Scripture it "has reference mainly to the work of redemption,"[32] a fact that is important for our understanding of *missio Dei*, as will be noted in the next section. The purpose or end of this council is ultimately the realization of the beatific vision: "to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:14; cf. Rom 11:36; Eph 3:21; 1 Tim 1:17; Rev 1:6).

The divine decrees are the internal works of God, rooted in God's eternal foreknowledge and foreordination, that direct his external works, and that are made visible to us in the course of world history.[33] God's decrees are eternal, unconditional, all-wise, immutable, and universally effective.[34] They include God's plan for predestination, the creation and governance of the world, and redemption.[35] The intra-Trinitarian dialogue in Psalm 2 reveals some details of this plan; many more details are revealed through the missions in history of the Son and the Spirit. Thus, we describe God's mission of redemption as planned in advance by God's council and predetermined by his decree.

The *pactum salutis*, also called the covenant of redemption or counsel of peace, is the "intra-trinitarian agreement among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to plan and execute the redemption of the elect."[36] This agreement, made within the eternal council, is an expression of the Triune God's singular will (*voluntas Dei*) and decree of redemption and is a logical explanation for how the divine processions relate with the divine missions. The eternal decree is God's will of all things, including the elect's salvation, and the *pactum salutis* is God's will concerning the entire work of salvation.[37] This doctrine helps to explain Scripture's intra-Trinitarian dialogue (Isa 49:6; John 17), expressed in covenantal language (Ps 40:7–8 // Heb 10:5–10; Ps 110:4 // Heb 7:20–23), which is foundational for God's covenant of grace that is progressively revealed to us across biblical history. This agreement was made in eternity but enacted in time and space.[38] As in Psalm 2, Scripture presents it as a covenantal agreement between the Father

[31] Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2021), 3.1–7.

[32] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 2.344–345.

[33] Francis Turretin says the decrees "are nothing else than the counsels of God concerning future things out of himself." See *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1994), 1.311–322; cf. Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2.372–374.

[34] Mastricht, *Theology*, 3.8–23.

[35] Much attention regarding these decrees has focused on their logical order and on predestination. While important, this discussion should not eclipse or exclude study of how *missio Dei* is rooted in the eternal council and divine decrees. For a helpful study in this area, see Jacob D. Rainwater, "'Before the Foundation of the World': The Covenant of Redemption and Trinitarian Action" (PhD diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023).

[36] J. V. Fesko continues, "The covenant entails the appointment of the Son as surety of the covenant of grace who accomplishes the redemption of the elect through his incarnation, perfect obedience, suffering, resurrection, and ascension. The covenant of redemption is also the root of the Spirit's role to anoint and equip the Son for his mission as surety and to apply his finished work to the elect" (*The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* [Fearn, UK: Mentor, 2016], 132).

[37] "From a trinitarian perspective, there is and must be, given the terms of the older orthodoxy, an essential identity of the decree and the pactum" (Richard A. Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 [2007]: 61).

[38] Bavinck writes, "The pact of salvation, however, further forms the link between the external work of God toward salvation and what he does to that end in time. The covenant of grace revealed in time does not hang in the

and Son (Isa 42:6; Zech 6:12–13), with the Spirit also participating in this agreement for the redemption of God's people (Isa 11:1–2; 42:1; Acts 2:33).[39]

Therefore, God's overarching plan of mission, as decreed by the Triune God in this divine council, is the *pactum salutis*, the pretemporal agreement which determines God's external work in the world, throughout the history of redemption, to save fallen sinners. Thus, piecing it together from our limited perspective, we can delineate the logical sequence in which the pretemporal mission plan would be enacted, in created time, by the eternal triune God.[40] Before creation, the Father chose his elect people from all nations as a bride for his Son (Eph 1:4). The Father will send his Son into the world to accomplish redemption (Gen 3:15; John 3:16–17). The Father will anoint the Son with the Spirit for his visible mission (Isa 42:1; 61:1–3). The Son will do the Father's will, making atonement for his elect (John 17:4). The Father will honor the Son (John 17:5; Phil 2:9–11). The Father will send the Spirit by the Son to indwell the elect and to empower them for witness (Luke 24:49; John 15:26). The Spirit will gather the elect from all nations, to consummate the covenantal marriage, and to bring them into perfect Trinitarian fellowship (1 John 1:3–4; Rev 7:9). Thus the missions of the Spirit and the Son will accomplish the Father's eternal plan, all "according to the purpose" of the triune God and "to the praise of his glory" (Eph 1:5–6, 9, 11–12, 14).

This doctrine of the divine council also helps us explain key biblical passages related to God's mission.[41] For example, Christ's prayer in John 17 is an intra-Trinitarian dialogue that reveals the deep relationship of the Son to the Father. In light of the *pactum salutis*, we see this dialogue at the end of the Son's visible mission as his personal mission report to the Father who sent him: "I … accomplished the work that you gave me to do" (John 17:4). The Spirit's outpouring, seen in the same light, is simply the next step in the eternal decree of redemption: the Father honors the Son when his visible mission is accomplished, and then "the promise of the Father" is sent into the church to continue the Son's invisible mission (Luke 24:49). The completion of the Son's visible mission to Israel also triggers the radical expansion of gospel witness to all nations as a direct fulfilment of the Father's eternal promise to the Son: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa 49:6), a dogma of missiology that Paul fully understood (Acts 13:46–48; Rom 15:8–9). God's missional plan was once a "mystery hidden for ages" but has now been revealed to the church "by the Spirit" (Eph 3:4–11), as we will consider in the next section.

air but rests on an eternal, unchanging foundation. It is firmly grounded in the counsel and covenant of the triune God…" (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3.215); see also Turretin, *Institutes* 2.177.

[39] Mastricht writes, "Likewise the Holy Spirit, as the consummator of all things, through whom the Trinity executes all things, and as the emissary, consents and executes the agreements, distributes his gifts among the elect … and regenerates" (Mastricht, *Theology* 4.16); see also J. V. Fesko, "The Covenant of Redemption and the Ordo Salutis," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 33 (2022): 5–19; and Rainwater, "Covenant of Redemption and Trinitarian Action," 50–100 and 217–53.

[40] The Scripture verses listed here are not intended to be proof texts but simply noteworthy references for each point.

[41] Contemporary missiology has largely overlooked the relationship of *missio Dei* and covenant theology. See John H. Kromminga, "The Relationship of Covenant and Mission in the Reformed Tradition" in *The Covenant and Missions* (Farmington, MI: Missionary Internship, 1984); and Davi C. Gomes, "The Source of Mission in the Covenant of Redemption" in *A Covenantal Vision for Global Mission* , eds. Paul Wells, Peter A. Lillback, and Henk Stoker (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2020), 3–19.

The plan of God's mission, therefore, was determined by the divine council and, more specifically, directed by the Triune *pactum salutis*. Before considering the historical enactment of this plan, consider three implications of this doctrine for contemporary missiology.

First, God's mission of redemption is the hermeneutical key to biblical history.[42] The storyline of Scripture must be charted on the timeline of God's temporal mission of redemption. Creation sets the stage; it is the cosmic theater in which God's glory will be displayed. The tragic fall of Adam into the state of depravity is the universal problem that God's mission remedies. The history of redemption tells the story of God's mission across the pages of Scripture:[43] It progressively reveals the Father's plan. The Old Testament prepares for Christ's coming, while the Gospels slow the pace in order to focus on the details of the Son's visible mission. Then the rest of the New Testament expands this vision, beginning to tell the story of the Son's Gentile mission as empowered by his Spirit. Thus the systematic study of Trinitarian missiology must guide our understanding of redemptive history and biblical eschatology.

Second, the scope of God's mission has always included people from all nations. Though the Gentile mission was radically expanded only after Pentecost, the salvation of people from all nations was not a subsequent or secondary plan made after Israel had failed but an essential part of God's eternal plan to bless all families of the earth (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8). Hence it is no surprise to find occasional glimpses of God's grander plan scattered across the Old Testament (Num 14:21; Isa 56:7; Hab 2:13–14). From before the beginning, God's universal desire was that people from all nations would be his people and that he would be their God (1 Pet 2:9–10; Rev 21:2–3). Thus, mission did not start in the New Testament after the Great Commission.[44] It is true, Ascension and Pentecost mark the point on the *missio Dei* timeline when the witness of the church was greatly empowered and when the Gentile mission was radically expanded. But our definition of *missio Dei* must start much further back, in time with the first gospel promise (Gen 3:15) and in eternity with the *pactum salutis*. Furthermore, mission is not merely God's reaction to Adam's sin and the international rebellion that ensued (Ps 2:1–6).[45] It is true that the gospel promise, first revealed in the garden after the Fall, is the remedy for Adam's sin. But God's decree of redemptive mission was planned before time, along with his other decrees of predestination and creation. From before the beginning, God had already decreed to save rebellious sinners from every nation. Thus, our Triune God of sovereign grace laughs at all international rebellion since he has already given the nations as an inheritance to his Son (Ps 2:4; Matt 28:18), and since his eternal plan of mission will soon be accomplished when "every tongue confess[es] that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:11).

Third, the message of God's mission is gracious salvation in the face of pending judgment. It is helpful to view gospel proclamation through the broader lens of the divine decrees. The divine decrees include the final judgment of Christ, since God's mission will be finished only after his vengeance is poured out upon all those who reject his Son (Ps 2:9; cf. 2:12; Rev 19:15). From this perspective, we see

[42] Christopher Wright makes a strong case for a missional hermeneutic in *The Mission of God*, 24–32. The term *missional* is helpful when used as a hermeneutical lens for Scripture, similar to Christological or covenantal, a method of interpretation for the whole revelation of God's redemption plan.

[43] See DeVries, *You Will Be My Witnesses*, 27–110.

[44] For the historical context and canonical continuity of the Great Commission and Pentecost, see Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 83–84; and Richard R. DeRidder, *Discipling the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 170–96.

[45] The *pactum salutis* "manifests God's redemptive plan as eternal and as something far more than a reaction to the problem of sin" (Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*, 15).

the gospel is a sincere offer of salvation to fallen sinners who face certain judgment (Ezek 33:10–20). The revelation of the Triune God's plan to save sinners—this mystery now made public—is the good news that we proclaim to sinners in their fallen state (Gen 3:15). Stated differently, the *pactum salutis* was not required for God to destroy the wicked since his decrees of predestination and creation were enough to justly condemn sinners. But his covenantal plan of redemption and the divine missions were required for our gracious God to save guilty sinners and also "to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier …" (Rom 3:26). The gospel reveals God's righteousness, and gospel proclamation vindicates him (Rom 1:16–17; 1 Tim 3:16). Thus, *missio Dei* is much more than merely the one-time sharing of an anthropocentric message about how God wants to bless you or about the importance of human flourishing.

3. The External Work of God

Popular uses of *missio Dei* usually have in view God's activity in the world to accomplish his mission. We started further back for this study in order to ground our definition of *missio Dei* in the classic Trinitarian doctrines of the two divine sendings and the eternal divine council. Now we can develop our definition of *missio Dei* by reflecting on God's external work in the world and, specifically, on the purpose of his mission. Paul's teaching in Ephesians brings together many of these themes: "making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, … things in heaven and things on earth. In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will" (Eph 1:9–11); and "so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord" (3:10–11).

God's mission in the world, also called *missio ad extra*, is the external outworking of his internal plan. This mission was predestined before the foundation of the world "according to the council of his will." It was announced in the world, first by God himself with the covenant promise (Gen 3:15; 12:1–3), and then "through the church" by means of gospel witness (Rom 10:14–17; Gal 3:8). God's mission was progressively revealed in redemptive history, "the mystery of his will" now "set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time" (Eph 1:9–10). God's global mission progresses along the trajectories of the missions of the Son and the Spirit. The Son came down from the Father and returned up to the Father, having redeemed his church as a bride. The Spirit was sent by the Father through the Son and will return to the Son and Father, having gathered the church into Triune fellowship. Pentecost is the mid-point of *missio Dei*, occurring at "the fullness of time," marking the end of the Son's earthly ministry and the outpouring of the Spirit into the church. God's mission in the world will end when God's eternal redemptive purpose is fully accomplished.

What is the purpose of God's mission? Paul's refrain in Ephesians 1 gives us the ultimate answer: God's purpose is to glorify himself (Eph 1:6, 12, 14). There are two ways to answer this question more fully. We can look back to the pretemporal council and divine decrees: God's missional purpose is the plan that would be enacted to redeem his elect people. Or we look forward to the end goal of mission: God's missional purpose is the consummation of restored covenant fellowship with the Triune God in glory. Each of these answers, though from different perspectives, correspond completely, since our eternal and immutable God has predetermined the end from before the beginning. Before a more detailed answer

to this question, however, we turn once more to Trinitarian theology and its outworkings to ensure that our definition of *missio Dei* is precisely consistent with the language of Scripture and sound doctrine.

First, we must distinguish between God's external works of creation and regeneration. These divine works are distinct from each other, though both are the outworking (*opera ad extra*) of God's council and divine decrees (*ad intra*). The relationship between the two is a point of much discussion.[46] For our purpose, we simply note that God's creative work produced nature as a theater to display his glory, and God's redemptive work reveals his grace within this context. God's work of creation produced a "very good" nature that once perfectly displayed God's glory, but this creation was soon corrupted with sin by the fall of Adam. God's work of redemption is not opposed to nature but remains distinct from it with the different purpose of revealing God's grace within it, specifically after the fall, in order to restore it and thus consummate God's original plan for it.[47]

Second, the divine missions of the Son and the Spirit are enacted within the created order. God's good creation, now groaning under the curse for Adam's sin, is the context within which God performs his mission. Aquinas viewed the divine missions as the outworking of God's redemptive work, not as part of his creative work: "Divine missions are the work of sanctifying grace, which is 'above and beyond' the 'one common mode.'"[48] The Protestant Reformers affirmed Aquinas's teaching of the divine missions as operating distinct from creation but also corrected its focus with Augustine's theology.[49] God's redemptive work, which is distinct from his creative work and logically following it, is temporally enacted within the creational context, eschatologically recreating and consummating it. Therefore, using the Reformed nature-grace paradigm, we describe *missio Dei* as God's redemptive work, a work that is distinguished from his creation (and governance) but that takes place within the context of the corrupted creation.

Third, God's mission accomplishes both the recovery of sinners, in contrast to Adam's fall, and the consummation of covenant fellowship, in continuity with God's creational goal. The covenant of grace, the outworking of the *pactum salutis*, is God's remedy for Adam's rebellion. The inability of Adam and all his posterity to obey God's original requirements proved the need for a better covenant with better terms and a better mediator. Scripture presents God's mission as juxtaposed with Adam's sin. After the fall, the Triune God took action to save fallen sinners from the consequence of their sinful rebellion. As depravity, creational decay, and damnation are the consequences of Adam's disobedience, so likewise redemption, re-creation, and glorification are the consequences of God's mission (Rom 5:12–21). Thus, while God's mission is executed within fallen creation, its goal is much grander than merely creation renewed.[50] Restoration of creation is a direct consequence of this work, but the end goal of God's

[46] Bavinck is helpful here, seeing "re-creation is not a system that supplements creation, as in Catholicism, not a religious reformation that leaves creation intact, as in Luther, much less a new creation, as in Anabaptism, but a joyful tiding of the renewal of all creatures," quoted in Jan Veenhof, "Nature and Grace in Bavinck," *Pro Rege* 34.4 (2006): 15.

[47] "Grace is opposed not to nature, only to sin.… Grace restores nature and takes it to its highest pinnacle" (Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3.557); cf. Turretin, *Institutes* 1.29–30.

[48] Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1.43.3. Aquinas confuses the nature-grace relationship and overemphasizes sanctifying grace. See Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3.574–579.

[49] Augustine viewed grace "as that which liberates and controls nature" (*On Nature and Grace* 2.42.1).

[50] Summarizing Bavinck's views, Veenhof writes, "Grace militates against *sin* in the natural, but it does not militate against the natural itself; on the contrary, it restores the natural and brings it to its normal development, i.e., the development intended by God" ("Nature and Grace," 19). Veenhof adds: "The redemption by grace of cre-

redemptive mission is greater: restoring fallen sinners into covenantal fellowship and consummating the kingdom to the praise of his glory.

Stated concisely, *missio Dei* is the Triune God's work within the world to save fallen sinners. God's mission is his redemptive work that takes place within the creation, after the fall and in contrast to Adam's sin, until the day of salvation has ended (2 Cor 6:2; Heb 3:13), and according to the eternal purpose of God's will (Eph 1:11).

We are now ready to summarize the multi-dimensional purpose of God's mission in Trinitarian perspective. God's missional purpose is described throughout Scripture with various aspects and dimensions.[51] The purpose of the Father's sending includes being worshiped by people from all nations (Ps 22:27; Mal 1:11); making a name for himself among the gods (Isa 45:22; Rom 9:17); destroying all opposition and rebellion (Ps 2:9; Rev 19:11–21); and filling the earth with his glory (Num 14:21; Ps 72:19). The purpose of the Son's mission is multifaceted, including to obey and glorify the Father (John 17:4); to "show God's truthfulness" and confirm God's promises (Rom 15:8); to save his people from their sins (Matt 1:21); to establish the kingdom and "to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8); and to send the Spirit and inaugurate the Gentile mission (Matt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8). The purpose of the Spirit's mission includes glorifying the Son and declaring God's truth in the world (John 16:13–15); applying redemption in the elect (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:6); empowering the church for bearing witness (Luke 24:49; Eph 2:22); and gathering God's people from all nations (Isa 56:6–8; Rev 7:9).

Viewed together, Scripture displays the Triune God's mission as a multi-layered revelation of his eternal plan that will soon be fully accomplished (Rom 16:25–27). We still see it dimly on this side of glory, but we can depict it as a series of concentric layers, moving out from the center toward a grand all-encompassing vision.[52] From personal to universal, the purpose of God's mission is to save fallen sinners; to build his church by gathering his people from all nations; to renew creation and fill the earth with his glory; to consummate covenant fellowship in the eternal kingdom; "to unite all things" in Christ and "to put all his enemies under his feet" (Eph 1:10; 1 Cor 15:24–28); all of which is for the praise of his glory (Eph 1:14). With God's external work of mission in view, consider the following implications of this doctrine for contemporary missiology.

First, this Trinitarian definition of *missio Dei* clarifies how the church today should participate in God's mission. Mission is God's work within the world; the church merely bears witness to it. God's people, having been called out of the world as objects of his grace, are then sanctified in the world as his agents who must bear witness to Christ. The church participates in God's mission according to his design and commission: as the Son was sent by God into the world for redemption, so the church (analogically) is sent into the world to bear witness to this redemption (John 20:21–22).[53] As such,

ated reality, the reformation of nature, is not merely repristination, *but raises the natural to a higher level than it originally occupied*" ("Nature and Grace," 22).

[51] The Scripture references in these two paragraphs are not intended to be conclusive proof-texts but rather listed only as examples of these many nuances of God's missional purpose.

[52] For further reflection on the *visio Dei*, see Sanders, *Deep Things of God,* 72–76; and Vidu, *Divine Missions*, 80–87.

[53] As Teer concludes, "the sending of the Son by the Father to accomplish salvation and the sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son to apply salvation to believers. The Son and the Spirit are sent out into the world (*exitus*) that they may draw redeemed humankind back into participation in the divine life (*reditus*). Then, having been reconciled to the Father through the Son by the Spirit, believers are called to participate in God's mission in the world; as the church, they are sent out (*exitus*) to preach the gospel and, thus, beckon the lost world to return

the human agency of the church cannot "advance *missio Dei*" any more than it can "hasten the end" or even "grow the church."[54] Nor should the church try to duplicate the work of Christ or his Spirit.[55] The church simply bears witness to Christ as co-witnesses with his Spirit. In view of God's grander missional purpose, the church's witness is much more limited and focused: to demonstrate life in the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9–11; Gal 5:22–25); to bear witness to Christ among all nations (Acts 1:8); and to make known publicly the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10).

Second, the purpose of God's mission defines and focuses the world-facing activity of the church. The witness of the church includes evangelism, apologetics, global gospel partnerships, church planting, compassion ministries, biblical counseling, cultural engagement, gospel worship, gospel suffering, and the many other activities that faithfully bear witness to Christ. The goal for each of these activities should be aligned with the higher purpose of God's mission. For example, the church does not promote public good merely to increase human flourishing, but rather so that unbelievers will recognize and "glorify God" (1 Pet 2:12). Nor do we engage in interreligious dialogue merely to seek common good or social peace, but we dialogue with adherents of other religions for the purpose of evangelistic witness (Acts 17:16–17). Likewise, creation care is not essential to the evangelistic witness of the church, even though it may be good to steward wisely the resources God has given us. Obeying the cultural mandate often aids gospel witness, but it remains ancillary, since the purpose of God's redemptive mission is the salvation of sinners for eternal glory, not merely the preservation or renewal of his creation, and since the church has a higher mandate, a commission to bear witness to Christ among all nations (Isa 43:8–12; Matt 28:18–20).[56] Gospel witness is the primary activity of the church in the world because our highest goal is perfected worship for God's glory, as directed by God's missional purpose.[57]

Third, faith in the final outcome of God's external mission is the greatest motivation for our gospel witness. Missional hope is the joyful anticipation of the future success of God's mission; it is inspired by a spiritual vision of God's redemptive mission (Eph 3:9–13), built on Scripture's promises of Christ's coming kingdom (Phil 2:9–11), and anchored in the unchangeable character of God's eternal purpose (Heb 6:17–18).[58] This hope in the God of mission, in turn, stimulates prayer for the advancement of God's cause in the world and arouses the church to various activities of faithful witness. All other

to God (*reditus*). In so doing, the mission of the church joins—analogically—the Trinitarian agential chain that is the *missio Dei*" ("As the Father Sends Me," 557).

[54] Much contemporary literature uses *missio Dei* imprecisely and in ways that are inconsistent with the language of Scripture. Human agency can never be more than subordinate to and dependent upon the Triune God and his mission work. For a classic corrective, see J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961).

[55] C. S. Lewis wrote, "Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else" (*Mere Christianity* [New York: Macmillan, 1952], 177). Yet no mere Christian or church can ever become "a little Christ" in the world to any extent close to Christ's unique ministry in his incarnation. Rather, Christians bear witness in the world to Christ, proclaiming the excellences of his unique person and mission. In this way, Christ continues his invisible mission through his Spirit-empowered agents. See the Southgate Statement, "Affirmations and Denials Concerning World Mission," *Themelios* 45.1 (2020): 108–35.

[56] As God's redemptive work is executed within the context of God's creative work, so also the church's gospel mandate is more focused within the wider context of the cultural mandate given to all humanity. The effects of Adam's fall can only be remedied by God's redemptive work in Christ. See Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 208–19.

[57] As John Piper famously wrote, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't." *Let the Nations Be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 11.

[58] See DeVries, *You Will Be My Witnesses*, 246–53.

motivations for gospel witness must be evaluated by and subordinate to this vision of God's glory as the eternal outcome of his mission.

4. Concluding Reflections

Consider several concluding reflections from this study for contemporary missiology and Christian witness. First, a Trinitarian theology of God's mission corrects many of the present ambiguities and divergent definitions surrounding *missio Dei*. Adding more qualifiers or nuances to conflicting uses of the term is not the solution. Rather, we must return to time-tested Trinitarian teachings to redefine our missiology more precisely according to God's self-revelation in Scripture.

Second, a Trinitarian theology of God's mission provides a reliable foundation and framework for contemporary missiology. The basis and structure of our missiology must be thoroughly Trinitarian. The divine sendings of the Son and the Spirit explain the origin of God's mission, while the divine council and *pactum salutis* help us comprehend the whole plan of God's redemptive mission. Mission is the work of the Triune God, rooted eternally in his being and enacted temporally across the timeline of world history. God's salvific mission, as the outworking of the covenant of redemption, is the hermeneutical key to Scripture. Furthermore, God's external work of mission, accomplished and applied across the history of redemption, highlights the eternal purpose of God's mission and helps us align our participation in it.

Mission as an academic subject is often treated as an area of practical theology or sometimes as a subset of ecclesiology. Much missiology today focuses almost exclusively on subjects related to the church's participation in God's mission (missional ecclesiology, evangelistic strategies, apologetic methods, and intercultural ministry including contextualization). While these studies can be very helpful, they must be grounded in the doctrine of God and controlled by Trinitarian theology (*missio Dei*, Christology, and Pneumatology). The study of mission, therefore, should start with the doctrine of God, originating from the two divine sendings, shaped by the divine council and covenant of redemption, and defined as God's external work of salvation within human history.

Third, a Trinitarian theology of God's mission clarifies the role of the church within the mission of our Triune God. Mission is God's redemptive work within the world; God's people merely participate in it.[59] The role of the church, as defined by God's mission, is to bear witness to Christ as co-witnesses with his Spirit, testifying publicly to what God has done, is doing, and will do in the world. The Triune mission must also delineate and focus the church's participation. While the church's witness may involve many diverse activities—such as apologetics, global partnerships, church planting, compassion ministries, cultural engagement, etc.—the goal and methodology for each of these activities must be aligned with the higher purpose of God's mission.

Finally, a Trinitarian theology of God's mission stirs up confident conviction and enduring passion for mission.[60] The mission of our Triune God will be accomplished fully and without fail, all to the praise of his glorious grace! Our God of sovereign grace has already given the nations as an inheritance

[59] The phrase "mission of the church" can be misleading since it mentally conflates the distinct activities of God's mission and the church's witness. To increase clarity, therefore, I suggest using the term *mission* to refer to God's redemptive purpose and activity in the world and the biblical term *witness* to describe the church's world-facing calling and activity. DeVries, *You Will Be My Witnesses*, 16–17; cf. Stroope, *Transcending Mission: The Eclipse of a Modern Tradition* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 370–72.

[60] As Philipus J. Buys asserts, "a Reformed understanding and conviction of *missio Dei* will ensure that the missional vision of the covenant of redemption … stirs up a heartfelt vision, conviction and passion for missions

to his Son, and soon all peoples will confess that Christ is Lord, to the eternal glory of God. The church's faithful gospel witness has often been ignited and inflamed by a clearer vision of God's glory and this confident hope in the ultimate success of the Triune mission.

and the glory of God in the lives of theological students." "The Roots of *Missio Dei* in the Reformation, and Its Implications for Theological Education," *In die Skriflig* 54.2 (2020): 2.

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Toward a Christian-Household Philosophy of Technology

— Nicholas J. Weyrens —

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Abstract: Internet-connected digital technologies are having deleterious effects on children. In a world shaped by the digital, Christian parents have a moral duty to have an intentional philosophy of technology—a set of principles and practices—that will help their children flourish in Christ. In this essay, I propose four principles for a Christian-Household Philosophy of Technology to help parents understand how and why technologies shape children. By establishing the idea that we are what we attend to, I will connect the deformative effects of internet-based digital technologies with the spiritual deforming language of idols in Scripture. This highlights the importance for parents to protect their children's attention and cultivate their children's ability to attend, most notably to God, by integrating proposed practices into their own contextualized Christian-Household Philosophy of Technology.

In the 2006 film *Idiocracy*, Joe Bowers (Luke Wilson) participates in a military hibernation experiment gone wrong, finding himself waking up 500 years later in a dystopian future where the inundation of entertainment has made everybody idiots. Through a series of calamitous events, Bowers is arrested and is required to take an IQ test as part of the prison intake process. His IQ score is the highest in the world, which earns him a seat on the Cabinet of President Camacho (Terry Crews), a former wrestler turned Commander-in-Chief. To receive a pardon for his prison sentence, Joe Bowers promises to solve the worldwide crop failure. Bower's proposed solution to the Cabinet is to stop watering the crops with Brawndo, "The Thirst Mutilator," as the slogan says. In a comical depiction of capitalism run amok, Brawndo (a Gatorade-like substance) has replaced water for everything, the lone exception being the toilet.

> JOE: For the last time, I'm pretty sure all that Brawndo stuff might be what's killing the crops.
>
> SECRETARY OF STATE: But Brawndo's got what plants crave. It's got electrolytes.
>
> ATTORNEY GENERAL: (thinking painfully hard) So wait a minute.… You're saying you want us to put water on the crops? Water? Like out the toilet?
>
> JOE: Well, I mean, it doesn't have to be out of the toilet, but, yeah, that's the idea.
>
> SECRETARY OF STATE: But Brawndo's got what plants crave.

ATTORNEY GENERAL: It's got electrolytes.

JOE: Okay, look, the plants aren't growing. So I'm pretty sure the Brawndo's not working. Now I'm no botanist, but I do know that if you put water on plants they grow.

14-YEAR-OLD: Well, I've never seen no plants grow out of no toilet …

JOE: You wanna solve this problem, I wanna get my pardon. So why don't we just try it, okay, and not worry about what plants crave?

ATTORNEY GENERAL: Brawndo's got what plants crave.

14-YEAR-OLD: Ya, it's got electrolytes.

(Joe's about to lose it.)

JOE: What are electrolytes? Does anyone even know?!

SECRETARY OF STATE: It's what they use to make Brawndo.

JOE: Ya, but why do they use them to make Brawndo?

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE: Cuz Brawndo's got electrolytes.

The plants dying at the hand of a technological innovation serves as an apt metaphor for the primary problem this essay seeks to address. Just as Brawndo replacing water—a fundamental element of life—killed the plants in the apocalyptic *Idiocracy*, so too are internet-connected digital technologies—which are replacing fundamental virtue-forming habits—reaping harmful consequences on children.

I argue that because internet-connected digital technologies are having disastrous impacts on children today, Christian parents have a moral duty to develop an intentional household philosophy of technology to foster an environment for their children to be formed into Christlikeness.

I begin by drawing from the fields of Media Ecology[1] and theology to propose four undergirding principles that should guide a Christian-Household Philosophy of Technology (CHPoT). Then, reframing the work of G. K. Beale, I argue that we are what we attend to, and because the average child is attending to screens more than ever, that they are being deeply deformed by internet-connected digital technologies. Next, by showing the importance of (1) protecting children's attention from being captured and (2) cultivating their ability to attend, I argue for the moral imperative for Christian parents to have an intentional household philosophy of technology. Finally, I propose practices for Christian parents to consider for their own CHPoT.

[1] The most helpful definition of this multidisciplinarian field comes from the constitution of the Media Ecology Association: "Media ecology is defined as the study of the complex set of relationships or interrelationships among symbols, media and culture." Cited by Lance Strate, *Media Ecology: An Approach to Understanding the Human Condition*, Understanding Media Ecology 1 (New York: Lang, 2017), 24. For a robust definition of the field see chs. 1–2 of Strate, *Media Ecology*.

1. Defining Technology and Internet-Connected Digital Technologies

In modern parlance, technology has come to mean items that are electrical or have screens, but technology properly defined is much broader than that. Technology can be defined as *anything that is used by a human to extend their abilities beyond their human limitations*. Put more simply, technology is *any extension of humanity*. The cup extends the human capacity to hold liquid for one's own consumption; the bicycle extends the speed at which a human can travel; the computer extends the human capacity to learn, create, and entertain in ways unparalleled in history.

Andy Crouch argues all technology is borne on the wings of two promises: "now you'll be able to" and "now you'll no longer have to."[2] With a microwave, *now you'll be able to* eat popcorn in less than 4 minutes, and *now you'll no longer have to* wait long to have a hot meal. With a car, *now you'll be able to* drive longer distances in shorter amounts of time, and *now you'll no longer have to* use physical exertion to get from one place to another. All technologies promise an extension of our human capacities—they take us beyond ourselves.

Internet-connected digital technologies are a subset of technology proper. For the sake of this paper, the purview of this category is wide, including things like: mobile devices (smartphones, iPads), social media (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat), algorithmic video platforms (TikTok, YouTube), and games (PokemonGo, Roblox, Call of Duty). All of these technologies to varying degrees use behavioral techniques responsive to instantaneous feedback loops to hook users into more use, pinging them to come back when they're not using them.

With these shared definitions, I now propose four principles that will serve as a foundation for our CHPoT, three from the field of Media Ecology and one from theology.

2. Principles of a Christian-Household Philosophy of Technology

To lay the groundwork for our CHPoT we must understand a handful of philosophical and theological principles of technology. In this section, I first highlight three key principles from the field of Media Ecology. Summarizing the work of key thinkers in the field, I show that technologies (1) create new environments, (2) shape us, and (3) are biased. Then, from a theological position, I present a case that God is tool-agnostic.

2.1 Technologies Create New Environments

One key principle to undergird any CHPoT is to understand that technologies create new environments. In a lecture delivered in 1998, Postman argued, "Technological change is not additive; it is ecological.… A new medium does not add something; it changes everything. In the year 1500, after the printing press was invented, you did not have old Europe plus the printing press. You had a different Europe."[3] Another pioneer of the field, Marshall McLuhan, writes, "Any technology gradually creates a totally new human environment. Environments are not passive wrappings but active processes."[4]

[2] Andy Crouch, *The Life We're Looking For* (New York: Convergent, 2022), 139.

[3] Neil Postman, "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change," 28 March, 1998, https://web.cs.ucdavis.edu/~rogaway/classes/188/materials/postman.pdf.

[4] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2010), 12.

Though there is variability in degree, every piece of technology creates a new environment. From the clock,[5] to the saddle,[6] to the printing press,[7] to the smartphone,[8] cultures, peoples, and kingdoms are completely transformed by new technologies.

This does not mean that a hinge-point in history has occurred, such that a culture is changed by people because of the arrival of the new technology. When the advent of a new technology occurs, the technology itself creates a new culture which humans now interact within. Strate adds, "Cultures are produced by or emerge out of media environments, and as media environments change, so do the cultures that they contain; cultures in turn can influence the media environment, but it is the media environment that is primary."[9] The contemporary reader may find it difficult to cede this world-shaping power to impersonal objects, yet the same contemporary reader would be hard pressed to argue that the internet, for example, has not fashioned a completely new world.[10]

2.2. Technologies Shape Us

Because we inhabit new environments borne to us by new technologies, our technologies inevitably shape us. French philosopher Jacques Ellul highlights this interplay that the new technological environment has on man:

> The machine tends not only to create a new human environment, but also to modify man's very essence. The milieu in which he lives is no longer his. He must adapt himself, as though the world were new, to a universe for which he was not created. He was made to go six kilometers an hour, and he goes a thousand. He was made to eat when he was hungry and to sleep when he was sleepy; instead, he obeys a clock. He was made to have contact with living things, and he lives in a world of stone. He was created with a certain essential unity, and he is fragmented by all the forces of the modern world.[11]

Philosopher Hannah Arendt expresses a similar idea: "The things that owe their existence exclusively to men nevertheless constantly condition their human makers."[12] A key principle in our CHPoT is understanding that we shape our tools, and our tools shape us.

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[5] Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[6] Lynn White, *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (1966; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[7] Marshall McLuhan et al., *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011).

[8] Jonathan Haidt, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness* (New York: Penguin, 2024).

[9] Strate, *Media Ecology*, 26.

[10] In his 2010 book, author Nicholas G. Carr teases out the effects of the Internet on our brains. He writes, "Calm, focused, undistracted, the linear mind is being pushed aside by a new kind of mind that wants and needs to take in and dole out information in short, disjointed, often overlapping bursts—the faster, the better.… What we're experiencing is, in a metaphorical sense, a reversal of the early trajectory of civilization: we are evolving from being cultivators of personal knowledge to being hunters and gatherers in the electronic data forest." As the internet rewires how we think, it rewires how we relate to the world. In some sense, Carr is arguing that the Internet, for its virtually limitless storehouses of information, is regressing our society. The Internet has created an entirely new world (quite literally in the age of globalization) that trades breadth for depth. Nicholas G. Carr, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* (London: Atlantic, 2011), 21, 181.

[11] Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Doubleday, 2021), 325.

[12] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 9.

We have already said that every technology is an extension, but with every extension there is also an amputation. As we depend on technology for one thing, we usually get worse at doing that thing, because we no longer have to. Andy Crouch notes that just as technologies promise expanded capabilities and reduced burdens, they also bring about two consequences: "*restricted* capabilities and *enforced* burdens."[13]

With every technology there is an extension, but there is also an amputation. Both extension and amputation shape humans. Sometimes this shaping is physical—like the significantly higher rates of back problems in the Western-world shaped by the chair[14]—and other times it is emotional—like the unprecedented rates of loneliness in a world shaped by the smartphone. Whatever the effect, it bears repeating that all technologies shape us.

2.3. Technologies Are Biased

Our third principle is that technologies are biased, or put negatively, technologies are not neutral. To say technologies are biased is not a statement on morality. Rather, it means every technology has a *telos*—an end. Every technology is created with a purpose to achieve a certain job.

For the Christian, this reality squares with a theological worldview, because the Creator God creates with purpose—with intentionality. He created all things with a *telos*. As those that bear his image, mankind also creates technologies *teleologically*. A hammer is created for hitting (preferably nails). A chair is created for sitting. All these technologies were created with a purpose—an end—in mind.

Because a technology has an inherent bias does not mean that it can *only* be used in a certain way, but rather that the path of least resistance is that it be used in accordance with its bias.[15] That's why it's easier to use a pencil for writing than for roasting marshmallows. Or it's easier to use a hammer for hitting a nail than for raking leaves.

We need to know and understand that each technology imbibes the intent of its creator(s), but also that it can morph beyond the created intent. For instance, the iPhone was imagined by Steve Jobs to be an iPod and a phone rolled into one device. Over a decade later, the iPhone can still play music and make calls (original intent), but now it can hail a ride, order groceries, entertain for endless hours, and much more.

Understanding technological bias is a vital principle for the Christian parent. Too often, technology is viewed like a bicycle. The rider sits on the bicycle, and it only moves and goes at the pace and direction of the rider. Technology, however, is much more like a car; even when the driver is not accelerating the car is always idling forward unless the brake is pressed. All technologies are created by fallible people,

[13] Italics original. One of the most prominent examples of technology's formative power comes from Socrates, who argues that the invention of writing denigrates the ability of man to remember things. Crouch helpfully buttresses his argument with this example from *Phaedrus*. He concludes, "(1) *Now you'll be able to* write down stories and information, meaning (2) *you'll no longer have to* remember them.… But (3) *you'll no longer be able to* exercise the human capacity for oral memory, and (4) *now you'll have to* write something down in order to remember it." Crouch, *The Life We're Looking For*, 139–41.

[14] Kelly Starrett, *Built to Move: The Ten Essential Habits to Help You Move Freely and Live Fully* (New York: Doubleday, 2023), 35–38.

[15] "A bias does not represent absolute command over us … but rather a path of least resistance. We can always choose to move against the pull of the prevailing bias, and there is also the possibility of reinvention, as an alternate use of a technology that in effect transforms it into a different technology. The concern … is the degree to which we cede control to the biases of technology." Strate, *Media Ecology*, 36.

and as such, they often have fallible biases. Understanding this reality allows the Christian parent to have an appropriate awareness that any technology created by mankind may not take them or their children towards the same ends that they—or God—desire to go.

2.4. God Is Tool-Agnostic

Our final undergirding principle is theological in nature; to establish a CHPoT, we must consider: What does God think about technology (or tools)?

We see technology (or tools) used all throughout Scripture, both explicitly and implicitly: Cain built a city (Gen 4:17), Tubal-Cain made things out of bronze and iron (Gen 4:22), Noah built an ark (Gen 6), people built the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1–9), God gave his Spirit in Exodus to allow some craftsmen to use tools better than others (Exod 31), King Solomon built a temple (1 Kgs 6), Jesus used tools as a carpenter (Mark 6:3), and Paul used letters to spread the gospel around the world (2 Thess 3:17). A survey of Scripture would draw one to conclude that God is tool-agnostic. He does not care about the tools or technology but cares greatly about how humans *relate* to their technology.

Psalm 33:16–18 illustrates this reality:

> A king is not saved by a large army;
> a warrior will not be rescued by great strength.
>
> The horse is a false hope for safety;
> it provides no escape by its great power.
>
> But look, the Lord keeps his eye on those who fear him—
> those who depend on his faithful love.

The text notes two technologies here: a king's army and a warrior's horse. Though both "objects" are living beings, they become tools in the hands of their subjects. God does not prohibit the *use* of the army or the horse but warns against putting ultimate *dependence* upon them. A king's massive army is not ultimately what saves, nor is the immense strength of a thoroughbred horse a true source of safety. The Lord is the ultimate protector ("he keeps his eyes on those who fear him") and he protects those who "depend on his faithful love" (emphasis added). God is tool-agnostic; the real issue is whether one's ultimate trust and dependence is placed in a technology or in him.

The fourth undergirding principle of a CHPoT propels us forward into the next section of this paper.

3. We Are What We Attend To

If God is tool-agnostic—caring less about what tool is used than the intent behind it—we may rightfully wonder, why should Christians care about our use of technology at all as long as our "heart" is in the right place? It is here that I reframe the work of G. K. Beale to show that *we are what we attend to*. This truth enables us to make sense of the argument that internet-connected digital technologies are having severely deformative effects on our children.

3.1. We Become What We Worship

In his seminal work, *We Become What We Worship*, G. K. Beale argues that "we resemble what we revere, either for ruin or restoration."[16] Beale's work maps out Scripture's warnings about the dangers and effects of idolatry. Expanding on Martin Luther's larger catechism, Beale defines idolatry as, "whatever your heart clings to or relies on *for ultimate security*."[17] This idea connects to what we noted earlier about God's tool-agnosticism; it is if our hearts cling to our phones, our social media accounts, or our computers for ultimate security that make their use problematic in God's eyes.

Psalm 115 is a text that Christian media ecologists use as theological evidence for the formative power of our technology.[18] Verses 2–8 read as follows,

> Why should the nations say,
> "Where is their God?"
> Our God is in the heavens;
> he does all that he pleases.
> Their idols are silver and gold,
> the work of human hands.
> They have mouths, but do not speak;
> eyes, but do not see.
> They have ears, but do not hear;
> noses, but do not smell.
> They have hands, but do not feel;
> feet, but do not walk;
> and they do not make a sound in their throat.
> Those who make them become like them;
> so do all who trust in them. (Ps 115:2–8)

This same text is covered in Beale's biblical theology of idolatry. He writes, "The principle is this: if we worship idols, we will become like the idols, and that likeness will ruin us."[19]

One of the ruinous effects of idolatry according to texts like Psalm 115 can be seen in its "sensory-organ-malfunction language."[20] Idols have physical mouths, yet they are not able to speak; they have physical ears, but they do not hear. When trust is given to idols, the same fate befalls the one trusting in the idol and their spiritual senses become deadened.[21]

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[16] G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 49.

[17] Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 17. Italics original.

[18] "The psalm is more than a criticism of one type of symbolic form, however, but also represents a warning about the effects of technology, *the work of men's hands*. And the key phrase is, *they that make them shall be like unto them,* which suggests that our technology feeds back into us, reshaping us in their image." Strate, *Media Ecology*, 52.

[19] Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 46.

[20] Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 41.

[21] "Thus the idols have eyes and ears but cannot really see or hear either physically or spiritually, and their worshipers' sensory organs are also described as malfunctioning, which reveals that they have become spiritually blind and deaf like their false objects of worship." Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 49.

Because of the spiritual aspect of idols in Scripture, it is easy to forget that idols are tools—objects made by human hands to extend humans beyond their limitations. These inanimate objects shape those that make them *and* those that trust in them, as the Psalmist says. Just as Scripture's idols are tools, our tools can be idols. Because of the power of internet-connected technologies, which can provide a person with food (Door Dash), money (Bitcoin), sex (Tinder), and community (Facebook), modern tools are *more* likely to elicit ultimate security than the idols of Scripture. Furthermore, because our internet-connected digital technologies demand so much of our attention, we become more and more like them.

3.2. Time is Formation

Throughout history, time has become progressively commodified, the fullest expression of this reality being the aphorism, "time is money."[22] A phrase that was once used by managers to eke out more efficient production from employees is now an operant principle for digital technology and media companies worldwide.

For some of the largest companies in the world—Google (Ads and YouTube), Meta (Facebook and Instagram), Byte Dance (TikTok)—the more time a user spends on their products, the more money they make. In today's attention economy— "the market where consumers' attention is exchanged for goods and services"[23]—time *is* money. The companies that traffic in the attention economy employ thousands of the brightest minds in the world to create products that capture users' attention. It is often said that if the product is free, then you are the product. Shoshana Zuboff, however, warns that this does not quite capture the exploitative nature of what's taking place. It is not that smartphone users are the product, they are the metaphorical ore mine being stripped bare of their attention.[24] The throngs of engineers and designers employed by Meta, Snapchat, and Google are extremely skilled at their jobs. In 2022 alone, Google's ad revenue was $224 billion; in 2023, Meta (formerly Facebook) made 95% of its $135 billion from ads.[25] For these companies (and others like it), time is money.

Nicholas G. Carr, writing a decade before 91% of Americans owned a smartphone,[26] prophetically proclaimed, "The Internet doesn't change our intellectual habits against our will. But change them it does. Our use of the Net will only grow, and its impact on us will only strengthen, as it becomes ever more present in our lives."[27] As the proliferation of internet-connected digital technologies has continued, daily screen use has astronomically increased alongside it. How could it not? Aside from

[22] For a good treatment on the development of the idea, "time is money," see Jenny Odell, *Saving Time: Discovering a Life beyond the Clock* (New York: Random House, 2023), 11–17.

[23] Tim Aylsworth and Clinton Castro, "On the Duty to Be an Attention Ecologist," *Philosophy & Technology* 35.1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-022-00514-6.

[24] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2020), 69–70: "People often say that the user is the 'product.' This is also misleading.… For now let's say that users are not products, but rather we are the sources of raw-material supply." Later, Zuboff writes, "Forget the cliché that if it's free, 'You are the product.' You are not the product; you are the abandoned carcass. The 'product' derives from the surplus that is ripped from your life" (p. 377).

[25] Derek Saul, "Meta Earnings: Record Profits, Sales As Ads Stay Robust During Zuckerberg's 'Year Of Efficiency,'" *Forbes*, 25 October 2023, https://www.forbes.com/sites/dereksaul/2023/10/25/meta-earnings-record-profits-sales-as-ads-stay-robust-during-zuckerbergs-year-of-efficiency/.

[26] ConsumerAffairs. "Cell Phone Statistics 2024," *ConsumerAffairs,* 2 Dec 2024, https://www.consumeraffairs.com/cell_phones/cell-phone-statistics.html.

[27] Carr, *The Shallows*, 170.

their intentionally addictive design, these devices are where we do just about everything needed in daily life.

The average American spends five hours per day on their phone,[28] which means the average American spends seventy-six days *per year* on their phone. A recent article from the American Psychology Association says approximately half of US teens spend over five hours per day on social media alone.[29] Again, that equates to more than two full months per year that US teens are immersed in the environment of social media. To make those numbers more staggering, five hours per day spent on a phone or immersed in social media equates to spending one *entire year* every five years on that activity. Because people are spending so much time on internet-connected digital technologies—adults and children alike—they are being formed, or better said deformed, in unprecedented ways. For the Christian, time is not money, time is formation.

Or put differently, we are what we attend to.

3.3. The Deformation of Our Children

Like Joe Bowers in the dystopian *Idiocracy* who dared to say, "I think the Brawndo is killing the plants," in 2017, two brave voices, Jean Twenge and Jonathan Haidt, began to raise concerns about smartphones and social media use having detrimental effects on entire generations.[30] Until recently, these claims were largely dismissed.[31]

In their work with university students, Twenge and Haidt began to see the mental health of young adults precipitously decline around 2012.[32] Their hypothesis was that this was directly related to smartphone and social media use.

[28] Trevor Wheelwright, "Cell Phone Usage Stats 2024: Americans Check Their Phones 205 Times a Day," *Reviews.Org*, 16 December 2024, https://www.reviews.org/mobile/cell-phone-addiction/.

[29] Tori DeAngelis, "Teens Are Spending Nearly 5 Hours Daily on Social Media. Here Are the Mental Health Outcomes," *Monitor on Psychology* 55.3 (2024), https://www.apa.org/monitor/2024/04/teen-social-use-mental-health.

[30] Jean M. Twenge, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?" *The Atlantic*, September 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/.

[31] Sarah Rose Cavanagh, "No, Smartphones Are Not Destroying a Generation," *Psychology Today*, 6 August, 2017, https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/once-more-feeling/201708/no-smartphones-are-not-destroying-generation.

[32] Jonathan Haidt, Zach Rausch, and Jean M. Twenge, "Social Media and Mental Health: A Collaborative Review. (Ongoing)," tinyurl.com/SocialMediaMentalHealthReview.

Figure 1

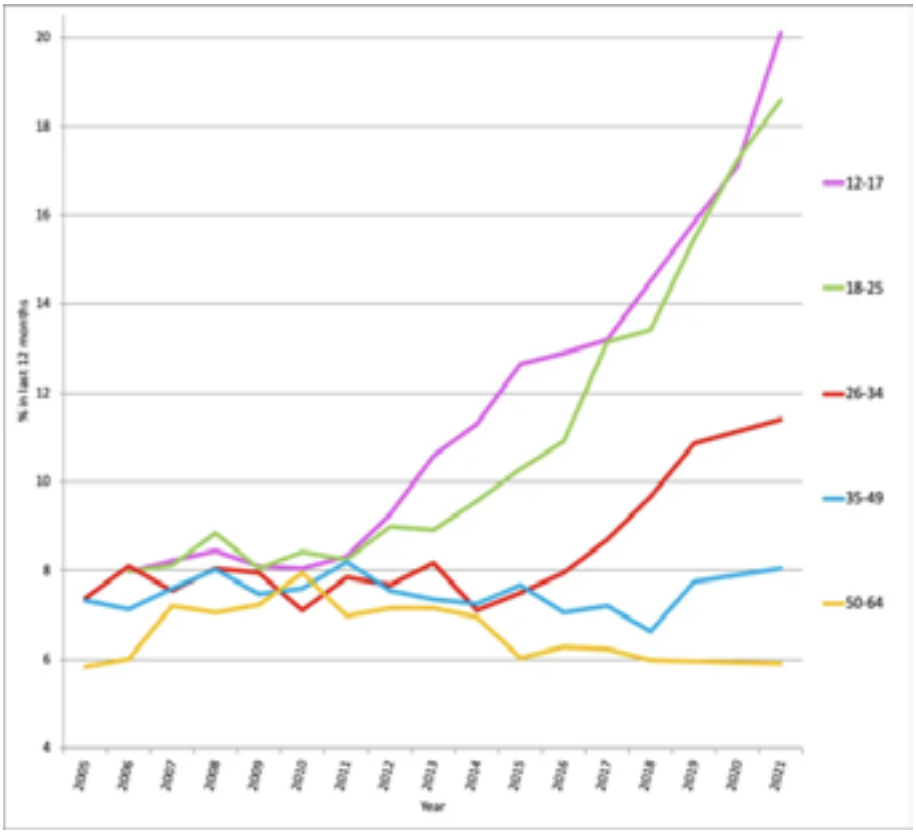
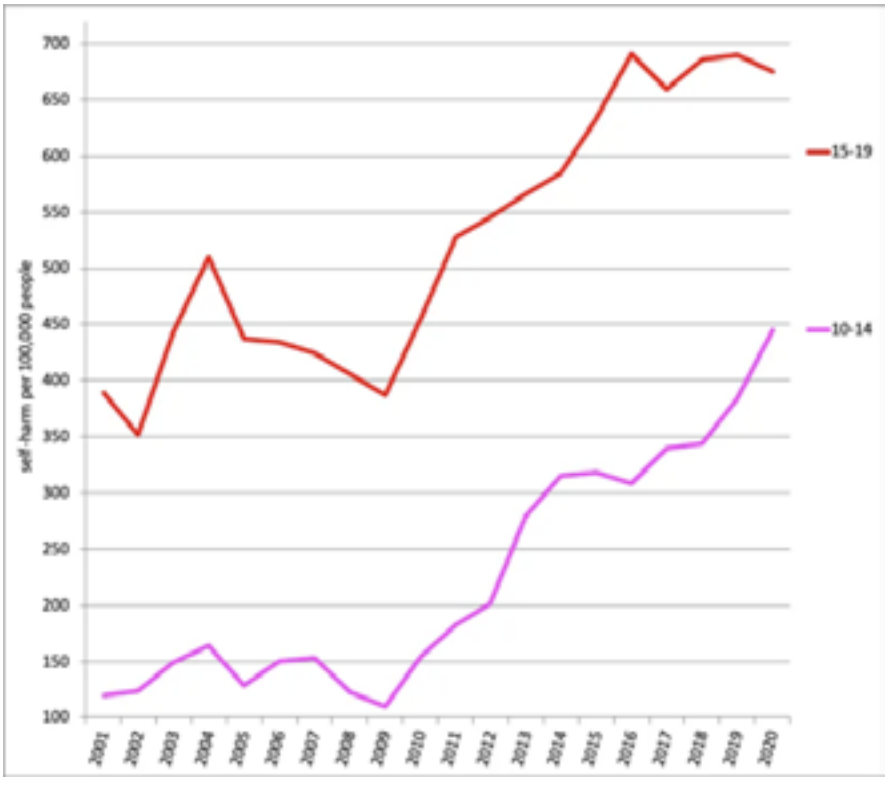


Figure 1 shows the percent of individuals who experienced major depression in the last twelve months (between 2005 and 2021). The percentage of adolescents (12–17 and 18–25) who experienced major depression began to exponentially increase around the year 2012 (as discussed above). Twenge and Haidt point to the period between 2012 and 2015 as the tipping point in which the majority owned a smartphone.

Some argued with their conclusion, positing that perhaps younger generations were more open to talking about mental health than older generations, which would skew the self-reported data. However, Twenge and Haidt noted that it is not just self-reported mental health issues that are showing up. The same parabolic rise is seen in suicide attempts and hospitalizations from self-harm for the same age bracket as seen in Figure 2.[33]

[33] Jean M. Twenge, "Here Are 13 Other Explanations for the Adolescent Mental Health Crisis. None of Them Work," *After Babel*, 24 October 2023, https://www.afterbabel.com/p/13-explanations-mental-health-crisis. The author refers to the Center for Disease Control as the source for these statistics on the rate of emergency room admissions for self-harm behaviors among US girls and young women, by age group.

Figure 2



Still others insisted that this might be a uniquely Western problem, which would mean causation could be found in other cultural issues (the pressures of college admissions, or financial crises, for example). Twenge and Haidt's argument, however, was supported with evidence from Sapien Labs, an organization that published a study measuring the Mental Health Quotient (MHQ)[34] of 30,000 teens and adolescents from all over the world. One aspect of the study involved examining mental health as a consequence of the age they received their first smartphone. As suspected, the later a teenager received their first smartphone, the better their MHQ score.

It seems clear that the earlier an adolescent has a smartphone the worse their mental health outcomes are, but what about social media?

A study of UK adolescents showed a direct correlation between time spent on social media and mental health for girls, such that more time on social media meant worse mental health outcomes. Boys began to see a "dose-response" at around two hours, but that hardly means that boys are not shaped by social media, just that they are shaped in different ways.

Though the conclusions of Twenge and Haidt are still debated, more voices of concern are emerging. In October 2023, forty-one states filed lawsuits against Meta for creating addictive features targeted at

[34] The Mental Health Quotient is made up of a variety of factors that are combined into six main categories: Mood & Outlook, Social Self, Adaptability & Resilience, Drive & Motivation, Cognition, and Mind-Body Connection. Sapien Labs, "Age of First Smartphone/Tablet and Mental Wellbeing Outcomes," 15 May 2023, https://tinyurl.com/bdfr42ma.

kids.[35] In June 2024, the Surgeon General asked Congress to consider requiring social media platforms to carry a warning label outlining the potential effects their services may have on children.[36] Many schools are adopting phone-free environments,[37] and though not directly related to children, ecclesial communities are experimenting with "digital fasts."[38]

A connection can be seen between Haidt and Twenge's conclusion of negative mental health outcomes and Beale's "sensory-organ-malfunction" that comes as a result of idolatry. Just as those in Psalm 115, who are no longer able to see or hear, even though they have eyes and ears, children with addictions to internet-connected digital technologies find that "'nothing feels good anymore' when they [are] not doing their preferred activity.… Ordinary life becomes boring and even painful without the drug."[39]

We are what we attend to, and if the idols we attend to have a way of deadening our senses, both physically and spiritually, then Christian parents ought to have great concern for the "soul-deadening" realities that are coming to light as a result of the internet-connected digital technologies beckoning for their children's attention.

Because we are what we attend to, in the next section we will examine the need for Christian parents to (1) protect their children's attention from being captured and (2) cultivate their children's ability to attend.

4. (At)tending the Garden in Digital Babylon

Christian parents today may feel like they and their children are living in a Digital Babylon—a dystopian wasteland where God cannot possibly be found. And even if a Christian household decides not to use internet-connected digital technologies, there is no escaping the world created by them.[40] However, amidst the Digital Babylon, resignation is not an option; Christian parents have a moral duty to tend to that which their children attend to, ensuring that their children's attention is not captured but rather cultivated and curated in such a way that they might bear the fruit of the Spirit.

4.1. Protecting Our Children's Attention from Being Captured

In their paper, "On the Duty to Be an Attention Ecologist," authors Timothy Aylsworth and Clinton Castro, make a case for an individual's ethical duty (to themselves) to be a digital minimalist.[41] They

[35] Cristiano Lima and Naomi Nix, "41 States Sue Meta, Claiming Instagram, Facebook Are Addictive, Harm Kids," *The Washington Post*, 24 October 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/10/24/meta-lawsuit-facebook-instagram-children-mental-health/.

[36] Michell Chapman, "Tobacco-like Warning Label for Social Media Sought by US Surgeon General Who Asks Congress to Act," *Associate Press*, 17 June 2024, https://apnews.com/article/surgeon-general-social-media-mental-health-df321c79149386300175440167 6f165c.

[37] Susan Linn, "The Movement to Free Schools of Smartphones Is Winning," *The American Prospect*, 13 December 2024, https://prospect.org/education/2024-12-13-movement-free-schools-of-smartphones-winning/.

[38] Darren Whitehead, "The Joy of Missing Out: Lessons from a Church-Wide Digital Detox," *After Babel*, 23 October 2024, https://www.afterbabel.com/p/the-joy-of-missing-out-lessons-from.

[39] Haidt, *The Anxious Generation*, 135.

[40] Strate, *Media Ecology*, 36–37. Strate writes, "I can choose not to own or use a gun, but I cannot live in a world without firearms, or nuclear weapons for that matter. I can choose not to own a car or fly on an airplane, but I cannot choose to live in a world without automobiles or jets flying overhead."

[41] Aylsworth and Castro, "On the Duty to Be an Attention Ecologist."

write, "The *attention economy* … poses a variety of threats to individuals' *autonomy*, which, at minimum, involves the ability to set and pursue ends for oneself."[42] Rooted in an argument from Kantian ethics, Aylsworth and Castro argue that the greatest problem at hand with internet-connected digital technology use by our children is that they may get to a place of problematic use in which they cannot choose their own "higher ends." Rather, they are driven to use technologies based on a compulsion created by the addictive design of the device. As Haidt argues, "Capturing the child's attention with 'immediately exciting sensorial stimuli' is the goal of app designers, and they are very good at what they do."[43]

The end goal for Kant (and thus Aylsworth and Castro) is autonomy, something that technological heteronomy simply does not allow for. "The problematic use of smartphones is not merely inconsistent with higher-order desires, it can undermine our capacity to pursue some of our autonomous desires," they argue. Because children have underdeveloped frontal cortexes, the capacity to resist these addictive technologies is much lower, which means the duty to protect children's attention does not fall to them but to parents.

Aylsworth and Castro conclude, "Parents and teachers are in a uniquely privileged position when it comes to shaping how their children and students engage with technology. If we believe that parents and teachers have a duty to promote autonomy, and if we believe that problematic use of technology poses a threat to autonomy, then we should conclude that parents and teachers have a duty to protect their children and students from this threat."[44]

For the Christian parent, autonomy is not the end goal, theonomy—a God-governed life—is. Nevertheless, a CHPoT can find alignment with Aylsworth and Castro's conclusion because of a shared desire to not see children's attention *captured* by the idols of the day. A CHPoT recognizes the importance of protecting children's attention from being captured, while also seeking to cultivate children's capacities for attention, and more specifically, to be able to attend to God.

4.2. Cultivating Our Children's Ability to Attend

In her essay, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God," philosopher Simone Weil helps to elucidate the importance of attention in the life of children, as well as the responsibility of parents to *cultivate* a child's capacity to attend. Because Weil primarily deals with the arena of education in her essay, it will require parsing out some of her language to make the connection to the subject at hand—the cultivation of children's attention by parents.

Weil's first key point is that "prayer consists of attention."[45] In Weil's thinking, to rightly orient a child's school studies, one must view the cultivation of attention through diligent learning as the primary desired outcome of education. This is because the life of prayer requires one to be able to attend to God whole-heartedly. She writes, "[Prayer] is the orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable toward God."[46] All of one's attention is required to commune deeply with God.

For Weil, the point of school studies in one sense is not even to get problems correct but to continue exercising the capacity for attention. If during a child's study, they are concentrating their attention on

[42] Aylsworth and Castro, "On the Duty to Be an Attention Ecologist."

[43] Haidt, *The Anxious Generation*, 128.

[44] Aylsworth and Castro, "On the Duty to Be an Attention Ecologist."

[45] Weil, Simone. "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God." *Waiting For God* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 105.

[46] Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies," 105.

a specific problem, even if they make no progress on the actual problem, something mysterious is still taking place. She says, "Without our knowing or feeling it, this apparently barren effort has brought more light into the soul."[47] For Weil, attention is of such importance because effort of attention indicates a real desire of the soul.

But the depth of true attention required for the spiritual life is not something that comes easy and is usually avoided. This explains the quickness, in our digitally-mediated world, to reach for the glowing rectangle in our pocket at the first hint of boredom. Weil points out, "Something in our soul has a far more violent repugnance for true attention than the flesh has for bodily fatigue.… That is why every time that we really concentrate our attention, we destroy the evil in ourselves. If we concentrate with this intention, a quarter of an hour of attention is better than a great many good works."[48] Because of the importance of attention for the spiritual life, Weil argues that it is the duty of "those who teach [children] but also their spiritual guides" (to which we would also include parents) to cultivate children's abilities to attend. Weil concludes, "Happy then are those who pass their adolescence and youth in developing this power of attention."[49]

If Aylsworth and Castro clarify the moral duty of parents to prevent children's attention from being captured, Weil helps us understand that it is the moral duty of parents to help cultivate our children's capacity to attend. A CHPoT does not simply keep attention capture at bay but cultivates the capacity to attend, because, as Weil points out, it is only in being able to fully channel our attention towards God that we can fully commune with Him.

4.3. The Duty of Christian Parents to Have a Household Philosophy of Technology

Because of the power of attention for our weal or our woe (depending on the object), Christian parents have a moral duty to protect their children's attention from being captured and to cultivate their children's ability to attend. These two duties can most easily be carried out by parents through the development of a philosophy of technology for their own household.

In the digital age, many Christian parents have simply accepted unfettered use of internet-connected digital technologies as the default position for all people regardless of age or gender. It is counter-productive for Christian parents to beat themselves up if they have not thought critically about what and how they allow their children to use technologies. However, Christians, more than anybody, should be able to step out of the cultural stream, to carefully examine the *status quo*, and proceed to ask challenging questions of the technological milieu of our day.[50]

McLuhan once wrote, "There is no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening." [51] In speaking about technological change, Postman argued, "We need to proceed with our eyes wide open, so that we may use technology rather than be used by it."[52] As important as it is for

[47] Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies," 106.

[48] Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies," 111.

[49] Weil, "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies," 114.

[50] Christian parents can ask simple, yet powerful questions like: Are these technologies forming my kids in ways that might help them flourish in Christ? How are they being shaped by that which they are attending to? For more questions, see L. M. Sacasas, "The Questions Concerning Technology," *Convivial Society*, 4 June 2021, https://theconvivialsociety.substack.com/p/the-questions-concerning-technology.

[51] Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, and Jerome Agel, *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko, 2001).

[52] Postman, "Five Things We Need to Know About Technological Change."

adults to think critically about what, why, and how they use internet-connected digital technologies in order that they might not be used by them, how much more ought parents to think critically about the what, why, and how for their children?

5. Practices for a Christian-Household Philosophy of Technology

Writer Flannery O'Connor once quipped, "Push back against the age as hard as it pushes against you."[53] The technological age—or Digital Babylon—is pushing on Christians harder than ever, yet Christian parents have an opportunity to take a stand. One way to do so is to develop a philosophy of technology for their own household. A CHPoT is primarily a set of guiding principles and practices that steer a household's use of technologies. It could include guidelines for *what* technologies are used; however, this proposal is primarily about establishing guidelines about *how* technologies are used. Because of the rapidity of technological change, the latter allows any CHPoT to last beyond Google's next I/O event.

In addition to the undergirding principles offered above, what follows are suggestive practices that could serve as foundational for a CHPoT. This list is certainly not exhaustive nor required for any household to adhere to.[54] Furthermore, the following are not hacks or techniques—quick fixes to optimize children's lives; these are habits that take time and handwork to instill, develop, and live by.

5.1. Cultivate Counter-Communities

A recent study[55] from the University of Chicago elucidates the current problem with social media: it is a "Collective Trap." In short, the more people that are on social media, the more "costly" it is for an individual to not be on social media. Though the focus of the aforementioned study is on social media, collective traps abound in technological spaces, especially for children and adolescents. When multiple children in a class at school have smartphones, or play Roblox, or have TikTok accounts, the pressure to engage or remain in a technological environment increases exponentially. One way for parents to free their children from collective traps is through cultivating counter communities. Convincing one lone child, for instance, to get off social media is difficult; convincing a child to get off social media when a handful of their closest friends have done the same is much easier. Collective traps require collective action for individuals to experience freedom.

The local church is already a counter-community, one committed to a categorically different way of life as it sojourns from its earthly home to the coming kingdom. The local church should be

[53] Flannery O'Connor, *The Habit of Being: Letters*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: Noonday, 1988), 229.

[54] L. M. Sacasas warns parents of falling victim to technocratic-parenting by succumbing to the one-right-way approach of parenting. This approach to parenting assumes that if parents follow techniques or hacks, they can optimize their child's life. Sacasas writes, "Parents have enough to worry about without also accepting the anxieties that stem from the assumption that we can perfectly control who our children will become by the proper application of various techniques." Parents must not be tempted to either pressure others or feel external pressure to adopt a specific set of practices in their CHPoT; to succumb to such pressure would be to subject their households to a technocratic impulse. Sacasas, "Children and Technology," *Convivial Society*, 7 July 2020, https://theconvivialsociety.substack.com/p/children-and-technology.

[55] Leonardo Bursztyn et al., "When Product Markets Become Collective Traps: The Case of Social Media," *Becker Friedman Institute for Economics at University of Chicago*, 3 October 2023, https://bfi.uchicago.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BFI_WP_2023-131.pdf.

a place for parents to cultivate technological counter-communities for their children, creating spaces to diffuse the technological pressures that might compound in other groups. Christian parents might consider banding together to, say, delay social media access or smartphone ownership *together* until their kids reach a certain age.[56] Though children—and even parents themselves—may experience this as restrictive, collective technological traps are still traps; they are the opposite of freedom. Cultivating counter-communities could provide children the freedom they desire, just in a different form.

5.2. Protect Children's Right to Sanctuary

In her work, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff discusses the importance of the home as a place of sanctuary. She writes,

> Home is our school of intimacy, where we first learn to be human. Its corners and nooks conceal the sweetness of solitude; its rooms frame our experience of relationship. Its shelter, stability, and security work to concentrate our unique inner sense of self, an identity that imbues our daydreams and night dreams forever. Its hiding places—closets, chests, drawers, locks, and keys—satisfy our need for mystery and independence. Doors—locked, closed, half shut, wide open—trigger our sense of wonder, safety, possibility, and adventure.[57]

The walls of homes and the rooms of children once stood as a barrier from the pressures of the market, the performativity of social relationships, and the bombardment of noise. But those barriers are now non-existent in the modern household because internet-connected digital technologies have knocked them down. If children have smartphone access in their rooms, there remains no safe spaces *anywhere* in their world for them to be "off-stage." There is no respite from the barrage of bad news, no relief from the painful social dynamics of adolescence and no safety from the algorithmically-driven ad-machine.

Children *need* a sanctuary. They need a safe space, a place where the pings and buzzes driven by others' needs and agendas don't even register in their minds. They need a place to make sense of the world so they can truly form their own identity. Philosopher Matthew Crawford warns, "What happens when our attention is subject to mechanized appropriation, through the pervasive use of hyperpalatable stimuli? … What is at stake in our cultural moment would seem to be the conditions for the possibility of achieving a coherent self."[58]

At minimum, children's rooms should be free of internet-connected digital technologies because it is only in the silence and solitude that they can truly develop a coherent self. They have a right to sanctuary, so parents should protect it.

5.3. Establish Guidelines for What, When, and How Technologies Are Used

Internet-connected digital technologies are not going away, nor is the end goal of a CHPoT necessarily the elimination of a child's use of them. However, it is imperative that each household establish guidelines that will provide a rough sketch for what, when, and how internet-connected digital

[56] Jonathan Haidt makes similar recommendations in *The Anxious Generation*, ch. 9 ("Preparing for Collective Action").

[57] Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism,* 476.

[58] Matthew B. Crawford, *The World beyond Your Head: On Becoming an Individual in an Age of Distraction* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015), 22.

technologies will be used. Guidelines are not rules; even within a family unit they should not be treated as inviolable law, and certainly not a new Law. Guidelines are intentional, pre-determined parameters that help guide a family in their everyday use of internet-connected digital technologies.

Guidelines should first begin by addressing the "what?" What devices are allowed in our household (smartphones, laptops, tablets, game consoles)? Do we use social media? If so, which ones? What types of entertainment services do we use (Spotify, Netflix, YouTube)? Do we own smart-devices or wearables? The answers to these questions can then lend themselves to addressing the question of "when?" If we're okay with our children having their own devices, at what age can they have their own laptop, tablet, smartphone, game console? When are we comfortable with our children using YouTube? Snapchat? TikTok? These questions finally set up households to answer the question of "how?" If our children have their own devices, are they allowed to use them whenever they want, or within certain boundaries of time? Do they need to be used in public spaces, or can they be used in private? Are devices allowed at the dinner table? During homework time? In the backyard? Can (or should) family members use multiple devices simultaneously? Should screens be shared with others, or are they always for personal consumption?

These questions are simply a jumping off point to further discern what guidelines might be established in each individual household. They may result in different guidelines for each household and may even change within a household depending on the season of life. Though the prospect of prayerfully considering the establishment of guidelines may seem daunting, "almost anything is better than letting technology overwhelm us with its default settings."[59] Because the *teloi* of internet-connected digital technologies do not always align with those of the Christian Household, "if we want a better life … we will have to choose it."[60]

6. Conclusion

It turned out, Joe Bowers was correct: Brawndo was killing the plants. Simply giving plants water, rather than ultra-processed liquid, allowed them to grow and all the *Idiocracy*'s problems were solved. Establishing a Christian Household Philosophy of Technology will not solve all the world's problems, but it may protect children's attention from being captured, while also cultivating their ability to attend to things that will lead to their flourishing—most notably, their flourishing in Christ. Because we become what we behold—either for our glory or our ruin—it is of the utmost importance for parents to have a framework which reorients the attentional life of a household away from the shallows of internet-connected digital technologies towards the depths of communion with the Triune God.

Parents may be overwhelmed by the prospect of creating their own CHPoT, but the simplest step for parents to take—especially those with older children—is to have conversations. A recent Pew Research survey reported that almost 40% of teens feel "they spend too much time" on social media,[61] which means there's a 40% chance that a child may welcome a CHPoT with open arms.

[59] Andy Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family: Everyday Steps for Putting Technology in Its Proper Place* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 20.

[60] Crouch, *The Tech-Wise Family*, 37.

[61] Emily A. Vogels and Risa Gelles-Watnick, "Teens and Social Media: Key Findings from Pew Research Center Surveys," 24 April 2023, https://tinyurl.com/k6u6vwca.

Because of the scope of this paper, there is opportunity for further study in multiple areas. Largely, the proposed CHPoT is like turning off the Brawndo spigots, but nothing has been said about turning on the "water"—the practices, habits, and rhythms that have helped Christian children flourish for millennia. Additionally, further exploration into the effects of internet-connected digital technologies at various childhood development phases would be helpful so parents can develop a CHPoT that is contextually appropriate for their children at different ages and stages.

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The Scandal of Marriage: Towards a Theology of Sexual Differentiation

— Jon Horne —

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Abstract: This essay argues that monogamous sexually-differentiated marriage (MSDM) is uniquely revealed through Christ's relationship with the church in Ephesians 5:30–32. Through a trinitarian reading, marriage is understood as the Father's initiative, sexually differentiated because it follows the form of Christ (groom) and church (bride), and perfected by the Spirit. The bride-groom metaphor is not merely illustrative but constitutive of marriage's form. Therefore, because Jesus is biologically male, marriage cannot be relativized to accommodate same-sex unions. This makes marriage a scandal not unlike that of Christ's particularity (1 Cor 1:23), which resists absorption into non-Christian notions of the divine.[1]

"Can I tempt you?" my colleague propositioned.

"Probably, but no, thank you," I countered.

"Why ever not?" she replied.

"Because," I said, "I'm a Christian. I will consummate my relationship only with a spouse, because Jesus will consummate his relationship only with the church."[2]

For over twenty years, I have wondered about those words. I could have said, "Because I'm a Christian, I believe that marriage is the appropriate context for sex," with 1 Corinthians 7:9 in mind. "But if they cannot control themselves, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to burn with passion."[3] Yet this does not explain why marriage is the appropriate context for sex. And if we transpose this conversation into the current debate over same-sex relationships, I believe and will argue accordingly (section 3), that Jesus's relationship with the church also explains, albeit mysteriously, why marriage is sexually differentiated (male-female).

[1] I would like to thank my employer, Bread of Hope, and the peer reviewers for invaluable feedback. Any shortcomings remain my own.

[2] I owe my response to Rico Tice. In January 2000, he had encouraged trainee *Christianity Explored* leaders to be creative with the *Two Ways to Live* booklet. (*Christianity Explored* is a course designed to introduce people to Jesus as he walks off the pages of Mark's Gospel. *Two Ways to Live* is a six-panel booklet outlining the contours of the Gospel.) Rico illustrated by reframing *Two Ways to Live* in terms of church and God as bride and groom.

[3] All biblical citations are taken from the NIV, unless stated otherwise.

The point that marriage is sexually differentiated can be argued from Matthew 19:4–6, where Jesus defines marriage by appealing to Genesis 1:27 and 2:24. Because Jesus refuses to accommodate no-fault divorce, other accommodations (like same-sex marriage) would appear to be out of the question too.[4] Is that not sufficient?

Perhaps not, if these conclusions are deemed relative. For example, one might argue that Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 specify male and female because male-female describes a relatively common species of sexual relationship (vis-à-vis male-male and female-female). Male-female describes a statistical mode: not an ethical norm.[5] Or one might argue that creation is relative to incarnation. For even if Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 are granted prescriptive status, their procreative potential,[6] to make the genealogy of Jesus possible, is fulfilled in his coming.[7] Therefore, sexual differentiation upon which procreation depends is no longer necessary.[8] Might this not explain why the New Testament passes over procreation in silence?[9] There is then a little more work to do.

1. The Mystery of Marriage

Christ and his church are the reason why Paul (Eph 5:30–32) not only presents marriage as sexually-differentiated (section 3) but also as monogamous (section 2). Christ and his church are the reason why monogamous sexually-differentiated marriage (henceforth MSDM) cannot be relativized by polygamy

[4] On divorce, see David Instone-Brewer, *Divorce and Remarriage in the 1st and 21st Century* (Cambridge: Grove, 2001).

[5] Victor Paul Furnish, "The Bible and Homosexuality: Reading the Texts in Context," in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate*, ed. Jeffrey S. Siker (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 21–23. But "Jesus read the Genesis story to say that marriage originates by a divine act ('The Creator made them male and female' [Mark 10:6]) and culminates in human union ('The two shall become one flesh' [10:8]) through a divine act ('God has joined together' [10:9]).… The etiological explanation carries prescriptive implication." Darrin W. Snyder Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture, and the Church: Theological Discernment on the Question of Same-Sex Union* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 66. These two divine acts anticipate a Trinitarian account of agency (given below) in the creation of marriage, whereby the Father effects marriage, the Son forms marriage (to be male-female), and the Spirit perfects, that is, realizes the form. Alternatively, one might simply argue that a male-female prescription for marriage is not universal. Megan K. DeFranza, "Journeying from the Bible to Christian Ethics in Search of Common Ground," in *Two Views on Homosexuality, The Bible, and The Church*, ed. Preston Sprinkle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 90; and Megan K. DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology: Male, Female, and Intersex in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 175–81. But if the male-female prescription is not universal, then on what grounds is monogamy universal? Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture, and the Church*, 69–71. Or if the male-female prescription is not universal, "might 'image of God' be the human truth for only the heterosexual majority?" Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture, and the Church*, 71. It will be argued below that marriage is to be universally male-female because church and Christ are bride and groom.

[6] Procreation is not restricted, here, to biological function but connotes raising children too.

[7] Augustine and Barth both argue that the incarnation removes the burden of procreation. Augustine, *The Good of Marriage* 9.22, in *Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, trans. Charles T. Wilcox, The Fathers of the Church 27 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1955); Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–1975), III/4:143.

[8] Rather than expand marriage to include same-sex relations, Song relativizes sexually differentiated marriage by arguing that the incarnation makes space for same-sex covenant partnerships. Robert Song, *Covenant and Calling: Towards a Theology of Same-Sex Relationships* (London: SCM, 2014), chs. 2, 5. For a rejoinder to Song, see Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture, and the Church*, 81.

[9] Song, *Covenant and Calling*, Kindle location 470–475.

(section 2) or by attempts to relativize sexual differentiation in the incarnation (section 4) or in creation (vis-à-vis the eschaton) (section 5). Attempts to relativize MSDM are attempts to homogenize it, to make different forms of marriage the same. This makes MSDM less significant;[10] although note well: arguments against the homogenization of marriage (sections 4 and 5) do not make a knock-down case against same-sex forms. This would require consideration of texts (e.g., Lev 18:22; Rom 1:26–27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10) that lie beyond the scope of this essay.

What follows receives marriage by faith (Prov 30:18–19). Specifically, faith receives as revelation the "great (μέγα) mystery" (Eph 5:32) that Christ and the church are the reason for marriage. Three things then follow. First, if theology is faith seeking understanding,[11] then marriage (and a theology thereof) is best not reduced to an understanding of its goods (procreation, etc.), for that would put understanding before faith. That is, whereas the goods of marriage can be understood by anyone, the mystery of marriage (that Christ and the church are the reason for marriage) can only be received by faith. Second, although marriage is a general—even if not universal—phenomenon[12] and, in that respect, comparable to concepts of the divine, special revelation in Ephesians 5:30–32 gives marriage universal definition.[13] And third, this special revelation—the mystery that Christ and the church are the reason for marriage—can, and will, be understood in three ways that correspond to the three persons of the Trinity. For example, the third section (below) explores this mystery as it corresponds to the Son as the formal cause of marriage. That is, church and Christ as bride and groom are the reason why the form of marriage is sexually differentiated. And since Christ is the groom because he is biologically male, marriage is sexually differentiated because Jesus is. Because of Jesus, Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 cannot be deemed relative.

But before then, and because the faith that theology seeks to understand is handed down (Latin *tradere*) via tradition, traditional Christian teaching on marriage will be considered first.[14] And this begins with Augustine. Augustine famously delineates three (ascending) goods of marriage: procreation, fidelity, and sacrament.[15] Procreation, being the lowest, is not essential to marriage.[16] The highest, sacrament, has two-fold significance. It is a bond between the spouses that points to something greater.[17] It also symbolizes the one city of God subjected to the one God.[18]

Later tradition refines the symbol (or sacrament) to that of Christ and the church. For example, Aquinas writes about "the union of Christ with the church, signified by matrimony."[19] And elsewhere,

[10] Following Christopher C. Roberts, *Creation and Covenant: The Significance of Sexual Difference in the Moral Theology of Marriage* (London: T&T Clark, 2007).

[11] Augustine, *The Trinity* 7.6.12, 15.1.1.

[12] Marriage is not universally given. For example, "Before the 1960s, [the] Na [people of southwest China] did not generally marry." Eileen Rose Walsh, "Na," in *Encyclopedia of Sex and Gender: Men and Women in the World's Cultures*, ed. Carol R. Ember and Melvin Ember (New York: Kluwer, 2003), 704.

[13] The literature on special revelation and on what can be gleaned apart from general revelation is vast and contested. Suffice to say, writing that "special revelation gives definition to general revelation" is an attempt to formulate a phrase elastic enough to accommodate this vast literature.

[14] See Roberts for a more comprehensive overview.Roberts, *Creation and Covenant*.

[15] Augustine, *The Good of Marriage* 24.47–48.

[16] Augustine, *The Good of Marriage* 3.12.

[17] Augustine, *The Good of Marriage* 8.19.

[18] Augustine, *The Good of Marriage* 17–18.34–35.

[19] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York: Benziger, 1948), suppl. q.49, a.2.

> Since, then, the union of husband and wife gives a sign of the union of Christ and the Church, that which makes the sign must correspond to that whose sign it is. Now, the union of Christ and the Church is a union of one to one to be held forever.… Necessarily, then, matrimony as a sacrament of the Church is a union of one man to one woman to be held indivisibly, and this is included in the faithfulness by which man and wife are bound to one another.[20]

Therefore, in contrast to later refinement, it is notable that within Anglican tradition Cranmer omits this third good and splits the first.[21] He omits symbol/sacrament in reaction to Catholic teaching and splits procreation into procreation per se, on the one hand, and procreation as a cure for concupiscence, on the other.[22] Fidelity remains.

But despite severing marriage as a sign of divine action, this good continues to echo in the wider tradition. Barth observes that the monogamy of marriage follows from the exclusivity of the covenant.[23] And he notes that this covenant is summed up in the marriage metaphor of Ephesians 5:22–33.[24] Tom Wright resonates,

> Heaven and earth … are different, radically different; but they are made for each other in the same way (Revelation is suggesting) as male and female. And, when they finally come together, that will be cause for rejoicing in the same way that a wedding is: a creational sign that God's project is going forwards; that opposite poles within creation are made for union, not competition; that love and not hate have the last word in the universe; that fruitfulness not sterility is God's will for creation.[25]

Echoes like these are undoubtedly the source of my words to my colleague. But before we consider them further, the goods of marriage demand several qualifications. First, "The Lord God said, 'It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him'" (Gen 2:18). Marriage, then, is a particular form of a general male-female good. So we marry because marriage itself is good. We do not marry just to procreate, or to be faithful, or to signify a greater reality. The goodness of sexually differentiated marriage (henceforth SDM, monogamous or otherwise—polygamy will be considered in the second section) precedes, transcends, and cannot be reduced to, the goods of marriage. Second, "Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Gen 3:16). Sin belies the reduction of the goodness of SDM to a self-evident truth of natural law. Such goodness must be revealed through Scripture. One corollary is that arguments for and against same-sex relations cannot be reduced to self-evident truths either. Third, how can we give due weight to the goodness—and goods—of marriage without idolising them? And conversely, how can marriage signify a greater reality without losing its own goodness?

[20] Thomas Aquinas, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith: Summa Contra Gentiles*,trans. Charles J. O'Neil (New York: Image, 1957), IV.78.5.

[21] "The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony," in *The Book of Common Prayer*.

[22] Following Augustine, *The Good of Marriage* 3.12.

[23] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:328, III/4:198.

[24] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/2:313.

[25] N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (London: SPCK, 2007), 116.

1.1. The Trinity

This third two-part question will be addressed through a theological interpretation of Ephesians 5:28–31. Paul writes that,

> husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." (NIV)

"For this reason" (Eph 5:31) can mean a number of things. These correspond to three of the four Aristotelian causes.[26] If I make a table, the material cause of the table is the wood, although the material cause will not be considered in what follows.[27] The efficient cause of the table is my agency in making it. The formal cause is the design of the table. And the final cause might be the community that forms around that table. If this is what it means to create a table, then what might it mean for God to create marriage? What does it mean for marriage itself?

First, "for this reason" could mean that because we are members of his body, marriage is possible.[28] This makes grace, by which membership is possible, the efficient cause of marriage. Second, "for this reason" could mean that because membership takes the form of a body, which is the bride of Christ, a man will marry a woman. This makes the bridegroom metaphor the formal cause of marriage, and the topic of the third section. Barth puts it this way, albeit referring to Yahweh and Israel, "We have here the unattainable prototype of what is realized in the human sphere between husband and wife."[29] And again, "The basis of love and marriage is not, then, the creation of woman out of man, but behind and above creation the co-existence of Christ and his community."[30] Third, "for this reason" could mean that the goal of marriage is to procreate members of his body. This makes being members of his body the final cause of marriage.[31] Marriage makes the church and genealogy of Jesus possible through procreation.

Further, we can entertain all three causes if we say that the Father corresponds to the efficient cause, the Son to the formal, and the Spirit to the final.[32] The one God then acts indivisibly through these three

[26] Aristotle, *The Physics* 2.3.

[27] Ortlund argues that Ephesians 5:30 connotes Genesis 2:23: "out of his flesh and out of his bones." Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*, NSBT 2 (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 154. This is presumably why some manuscripts explicitly include it. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 380. Either way, flesh and bone function as the material cause of marriage.

[28] This is Ortlund's view in *Whoredom*.

[29] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:318.

[30] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:328. Together, these three causes allow us, following Rogers, to misquote Barth. "Marriage is the external basis of the Bride-groom relationship, and the Bride-groom relationship is the internal basis of marriage." See Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1:96, 231; and Eugene Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God* (London: Blackwell, 1999), 158, 218.

[31] This is Radner's view, which echoes Augustine and Barth. Ephraim Radner, "The Nuptial Mystery," in *Human Sexuality and the Nuptial Mystery*, ed. Roy R. Jeal (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 85–116. See note 7 above.

[32] Correlating causes to divine persons echoes the church fathers. For example, Basil writes on the principalities and powers that, "In their creation, consider for me the initial cause of their existence (the Father), the Maker (the Son), the Perfecter (the Spirit). So the ministering spirits exist by the will of the Father, they are brought into being by the energy of the Son, and they are perfected by the presence of the Spirit." Basil, *On The Holy Spirit* 16.38, trans. Stephen M. Hilderbrand (New York: SVS Press, 2011). Presumably because of his aversion to Aristotle, Ba-

causes.[33] What does this mean for marriage? Marriage is good because it is the initiative and gift of the Father. Marriage is sexually differentiated because it follows the form of church and Christ as bride and groom. Marriage is perfected by the Spirit for Christ and his church. The latter will occupy us in the next section.

2. The Perfection of Marriage

Christ and his church are the reason why Paul (Eph 5:30–32) presents marriage as sexually-differentiated. But if this reason is understood solely in a final sense, i.e., the goal of marriage is to procreate Christ's lineage and body, the church, then polygamy, which lies in the lineage of Jesus, is not self-evidently precluded. Polygamy relativizes the implied bride-groom monogamy of Eph 5:30–32. But if the Spirit corresponds to the final cause, then the goal of marriage is not only to procreate Christ's lineage and body, but also to become like Christ and his church, i.e., monogamous. This is what it means for the Spirit to perfect marriage for Christ and his church.

Perhaps we can say that when the Spirit perfects, the Spirit enables creation to be the good it was meant to be.[34] The Spirit enables creation to be good in itself. For example, in Matthew 16:16, when Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, Tom Smail notes that Peter answers for himself (i.e., in himself) but not by himself. The Spirit enables Peter to be the good who he was meant to be—himself for Jesus. In this sense, "the mysterious relationship between grace and freedom is closely connected with the even more mysterious relationship between the Spirit and Son."[35]

We can now return to the third two-part question, How can we give due weight to the goodness—and goods—of marriage without idolising them? Marriage and its goods/goodness are subordinate to the Son because, as the next section shows, the Son is their formal cause. The cause (the Son) is greater than its effect (the goods), so the goods are not idolised. Conversely, how can marriage signify a greater reality without losing its own goodness? How can it be good in itself and not the mere means to some good? Because the Spirit enables creation to be good in itself—the good it was meant to be. And because marriage is created, the Spirit enables marriage to be the good it was meant to be—a good that will be

sil does not employ Aristotelian causes. Basil, *Against Eunomius* 1.9, 1.11, trans. Mark DelCogliano and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, The Fathers of the Church 122 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

[33] We are therefore not committed to social trinitarianism if effecting, forming, and perfecting (or, on Basil's schema: initiating, making, and perfecting) are not conceived as three separate acts but as three modes of one indivisible act. These three modes are indivisibly one because, taking the divine life as an example, one divine life and not three "is wrought in us by the Father, and prepared by the Son, and depends on the Holy Spirit." Gregory of Nyssa, *On "Not Three Gods"* (*NPNF* 2 5:334). If so, perhaps we can say the same for the one institution of MSDM, which is then "wrought in us by the Father, and prepared by the Son, and depends on the Holy Spirit." Or as I have it, the one institution is effected by the Father, formed by the Son, and perfected by the Spirit. That is, the one God causes the one institution of MSDM. Indeed, the very oneness of God is derived from these three modes in the first place "for the name derived from the operation cannot be divided among many where the result of their mutual operation is one." Gregory of Nyssa, *On "Not Three Gods"* (*NPNF* 2 5:334).

[34] Colin E. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many: God, Creation and the Culture of Modernity: The 1992 Bampton Lectures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 182.

[35] Tom Smail, *The Giving Gift* (London: Hodder, 1988), 68–69. Smail's solution, therefore, is not so much an antinomy as a parsinomy. Intellectual energy need not be expended on two issues: divine and human agency, on the one hand; and the Trinity, on the other. There is one issue in which the former (divine and human agency) is hidden in the more foundational issue of the latter (the Trinity).

outlined both finally and formally. First, what might it mean for the Spirit to enable marriage? Calvin writes that marriage is an ordinance, like 'farming, building, cobbling, and barbering.'[36] And elsewhere he notes that 'the knowledge of all that is most excellent in human life [epitomized by Oholiab and Bezalel's workmanship (Exod 31:1–6)] is said to be communicated to us through the Spirit of God.'[37] The Spirit, therefore, not only enables the sanctification of individual believers, but also the institution of general ordinances. Second, the Spirit enables marriage to be the final good it was meant to be—marriage for Christ and the church. Christ and the church are the final destination for marriage. The Spirit can enable marriage towards its destination because the formal good—here the institution of MSDM—provides the possibility for procreation, even if particular marriages are not fertile. And because procreation makes possible the genealogy of Jesus and every person in the church, marriage is for Christ and the church. Procreation therefore follows from sexual differentiation.

Third, the Spirit also enables marriage to be the formal good it was meant to be, which is to enable marriage to follow the form of church and Christ as bride and groom. (This form, which is revealed and therefore good, will be discussed in the next section.) This means that the Spirit enables marriage to be monogamously male-female. We see that perfecting work in action as Scripture moves from the polygamy of the patriarchs to the monogamy of Jesus's time.

> We should not be surprised, then, at the need to discern a history of sex that elaborates a nature of sex—a history that includes, of course, all kinds of perversion and exploitation, but which may also include (can we rule this out a priori?) differentiations, elaborations, complexifications that are essentially constructive. Even the married-single alternative presented by the New Testament is a salvation-historical development upon the "male and female" of Genesis.[38]

It is because of the Spirit, then, that Jesus interprets Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 to mean one thing and not another (Matt 19:4–6), i.e., not one that allows for polygamy. Understood in this way, Christ's relationship with the church not only forms marriage (the formal reading) but does so through time.[39] Thus the movement from garden to garden-city—from Genesis 2 to Revelation 21—is therefore complemented by a movement from forms of one-flesh union[40] that include polygamy to one monogamous male-female form. So, in the same way that the Spirit works through us, cultivating (or perfecting) the garden into actual cities to more fully reflect Revelation 21, cultivating (or perfecting) polygamousforms of one-flesh unions into one monogamous male-female form more fully reflects church and Christ as bride and groom.

Three qualifications follow concerning, first, the form of marriage vis-à-vis married individuals; second, the particularity of MSDM vis-à-vis homogeneity; and third, the goodness of marriage: sexual differentiation vis-à-vis procreation.

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[36] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 4.19.34, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press, 1960).

[37] Calvin, *Institutes* 2.2.16.

[38] Oliver O'Donovan, "How Can We Frame the Right Questions?" in *Human Sexuality and the Nuptial Mystery*, ed. Roy R. Jeal (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010), 17.

[39] "It is unrealistic to think that changes in imperfect cultural marriage patterns can take place in a short time [i.e., a lifetime] without severe family trauma." I. Gaskiyane, *Polygamy: A Cultural and Biblical Perspective* (Carlisle: Piquant, 2000), 37.

[40] I understand one-flesh to mean a kinship bond. Cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC 1 (Dallas: Word, 1987), 71.

First, the perfection of the form of marriage concerns precisely that—the form of marriage rather than the individuals therein. So the perfection of the form of marriage is not about the perfection of individuals, married or otherwise. After all, individuals within monogamous male-female marriage are no more perfect than anyone else. The perfection of the form of marriage also does not mean that it is the only final form. For the singleness of Jesus reveals singleness to be the perfection of another form. But that lies beyond the scope of this essay.

Second, by enabling things to be one thing and not another, the Spirit perfects (or realizes) the particularity of creation (e.g., the particularity of MSDM vis-à-vis polygamy).[41] Therefore, perfecting the particularity of creation contrasts with homogenization, whereby one thing (e.g., same-sex marriage) is treated as the same as another thing (e.g., MSDM).[42] Homogenization characterizes the call for same-sex marriages, although not all advocates of same-sex unions call for those unions to be marriages.[43]

Third, although MSDM is good, it is not good because its final cause is procreation. If marriage required procreation to be good, our understanding of a good (i.e., procreation) might monopolize what we mean by marriage. We might then ask, "Is a childless marriage really a marriage in the fullest sense?" But precisely because MSDM is a mystery received by faith, the form of church and Christ as bride and groom is revealed to be good in itself. So MSDM is good simply because it is sexually differentiated. Therefore, the burden is taken off procreation, which may come as a relief to infertile couples or to couples who do not wish to produce children. But even then, two things follow. One, children are neither accidental to, nor exist solely for, MSDM. On the one hand, children are not accidental because as a material cause of MSDM[44] they remain intrinsically bound up with the goodness of MSDM. That is, if no children became adults then there would be no adults to marry and, therefore, no MSDM. On the other hand, the *goodness* of children is *not* intrinsically bound up with MSDM. Rather, the goodness of children is bound up with the *imago Dei*, which allows for the pathway of celibacy, say. Children do not exist solely for MSDM. Two, infertile MSDMs are not equivalent to same-sex couples, at least not in their resurrection possibilities. Having lost twins at twenty-one weeks' gestation, I imagine, perhaps not implausibly so, that their resurrection will take place in the womb of my wife. Although marriage will pass away (Matt 22:30) perhaps parenthood will not. And if twenty-one week foetuses, then why not embryos? And if embryos then why not zygotes, gametes, and fertility? Is the healing of MSDM infertility, then, possible at the resurrection? I confess to not knowing the answer. But therein lies the difference. Whereas the possibility can be imagined for MSDM, it cannot be imagined for same-sex couples. For even at the resurrection, same-sex couples could not produce life.Recapitulating, Christ and his church are the reason why Paul (Eph 5:30–32) presents marriage as monogamous and sexually-differentiated. MSDM is not only established because accounts of creation state it but also because Christ

[41] Even Jesus is filled with the Spirit at particular points in his life for particular ends. Gunton, *The One, the Three and the Many*, 183. This can be seen in Matthew 1:18, 20; 3:16, 17; Romans 8:11.

[42] This perfecting particularity, whereby the work of the Spirit is informed by the Son, thus contrasts with the homogenizing direction set by Hays and Hays, whereby the work of the Spirit has less to do with the Son; instead, presenting as "'Spirit-led freedom to set aside biblical laws and teachings [we] deem unjust, irrelevant, or inconsistent with the broader divine will'". Christopher B. Hays and Richard B. Hays, *The Widening of God's Mercy: Sexuality Within the Biblical Story* (London: Yale University Press, 2024), 214. See, further, 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.

[43] See note 8.

[44] See note 27.

and his church are the formal and final causes of those accounts. The final cause not only concerns the perfection (or realization) of the church and genealogy of Jesus but also the perfection (or realization) of the sexually-differentiating formal cause.[45]

This formal cause will be the focus of the next section, before the issue—or scandal—of particularity of MSDM is taken up in the fourth.

3. The Metaphors of Marriage

In the first section, I suggested a Trinitarian reading of Ephesians 5:29–31 whereby "for this reason" (5:30) can be read in terms of efficient, formal, and final causes that correspond to the work of Father, Son, and Spirit. They are three modes of one indivisible work. Marriage is the initiative of the Father, without which marriage would not be possible. Marriage is sexually differentiated because it follows the form of church and Christ as bride and groom. Marriage is perfected by the Spirit for Christ and his church. Whereas the final cause occupied us in the previous section, the formal cause will occupy us in this.

3.1. Metaphor A: Husband and Wife as Christ and Church

Ed Shaw writes that marriage is "a divinely drawn picture that points us to a greater reality, and its constituent parts are not interchangeable as a result. People would, rightly, not consider changing the water in baptism (with all it symbolises) for another liquid."[46] This, in turn, begs the question of whether it is sinful to baptize in, say, milk. But first another question, What does it mean for marriage to be a "picture that points us to a greater reality"?

> Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

In Ephesians 5:25–30, Paul argues that a husband should love his wife like Christ loves the church. Verse 31 can then be taken to mean "the reason why man and wife become one flesh is to be like Christ and the church." Understood solely through metaphor A (husband and wife as Christ and church), marriage is all about illustrating Christ and church.[47] And although metaphor A does connote metaphor B (church and Christ as bride and groom; Rev 21:2), if A (husband and wife as Christ and church) is all Paul is really saying, then B is not essential, because husbands can (and do) love their wives without

[45] Whereas the final cause perfects (or realizes the formal cause), the formal cause grounds the final cause. For without SDM there would be no procreation, no church, and no Jesus.

[46] Ed Shaw, *The Plausibility Problem: The Church and Same-Sex Attraction* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 90.

[47] Ortlund, *Whoredom,* 153–54.

it.[48] Therefore, if love is all that matters, why should any one picture of marriage—like a monogamous male-female bride and groom—matter so much?[49]

This question is begged by Rowan Williams's seminal essay on the subject.[50] Williams writes, "the whole story of creation, incarnation, and our incorporation into the fellowship of Christ's body tells us that God desires us, *as if we were God*," and sex embodies this.[51] In sex, being desired elicits desire, and as we become an occasion of joy for the other, our own joy is made complete. The implication is that since such sex need not be sexually differentiated, or be within marriage, or be anything more than a one-night stand, to reflect something of God, sex outside of Fifth need not be prohibited.

But the implication that an epiphany (divine love) justifies its occasion (sex beyond MSDM) is not unproblematic. For what then of Flannery O'Connor's "A Good Man Is Hard to Find"?[52] There, a grandmother experiences an epiphany at the hands of a serial killer. The occasion for the epiphany is evidently not justified by the epiphany, as the occasion for the body's grace is not evidently justified outside MSDM. In neither case does the epiphany self-evidently justify the occasion.

Nonetheless, does metaphor A itself not allow for multiple forms of marriage? How so? Consider "the world is a stage" metaphor. The stage functions as the source of the metaphor, and the world as its target. Whereas altering the source quantitatively alters the metaphor—the world is a war zone—altering the target only qualitatively alters the metaphor—social media is a stage—thereby allowing for multiple targets. So when Paul, in Ephesians 5:29, infers that husbands should love their wives (the target) like Christ loves the church (the source), the target can be altered (to, say, same-sex relations) without quantitatively altering the metaphor. Similarly, curly fries could be the body of Christ, and their qualitative merits as a target debated (vis-à-vis bread).[53]

3.2. Metaphor B: Church and Christ as Bride and Groom

Ortlund notes another reason why man and wife become one flesh. Paul writes that a husband should love his wife like Christ loves the church, "for we are members of his body" (Eph 5:30). And insofar as being "members of his body" connotes B (church and Christ as bride and groom), church and Christ now are the target, and bride and groom the source. Now the source (bride and groom) cannot be altered without also quantitatively altering the truth about the target (church and Christ). For whereas groom-groom conflates church and Christ, bride-bride deflates Christ.[54] Neither captures the reality of bride and groom. So might Paul say about same-sex marriage, "It is not the church and Christ you celebrate"?[55] In itself, this does not preclude same-sex relations. Rather, it means that their grounds must be sought elsewhere.[56]

[48] Ortlund, *Whoredom*, 154.

[49] Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture and the Church*, 164.

[50] Rowan Williams, "The Body's Grace," in *Theology and Sexuality*, ed. Eugene Rogers (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 309–21.

[51] Williams, "The Body's Grace," 311. Italics original.

[52] Flannery O'Connor, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," in *Flannery O'Connor: Collected Works*, ed. Sally Fitzgerald (New York: The Library of America, 1988), 152.

[53] Different traditions come to different conclusions about altering eucharistic elements. With reference to Shaw, *The Plausibility Problem*, 90.

[54] Therefore, "The Christ/church parallel is not merely illustrative but the generating theological centre of his [Paul's] entire presentation." Ortlund, *Whoredom*, 156.

[55] Misquoting 1 Corinthians 11:20.

[56] See note 8.

Moreover, same-sex marriage sets a precedent that is open to question. What if we alter other practices? What are the criteria for altering one thing but not another? Take forgiveness, for example. In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt 6:12). God forgives (target) as we forgive (source). The source (we forgive) cannot be altered without also altering the truth about the target (God forgives).[57] So if we do not forgive, we alter the truth about God.[58] If we do not forgive, those whom we should forgive may not experience God as forgiving through us and so may not experience God as forgiving at all.

On the contrary, the target (church and Christ) deepens our understanding of the source (bride and groom). "That is to say, metaphor can have a revelatory function."[59] The truth of B (church and Christ as bride and groom), then, not only mediates the efficient cause of marriage.[60] The truth of B (church and Christ as bride and groom) is also the formal cause of marriage, which, together with efficient and final causes, transforms humans into corresponding marriages of brides and grooms. Marriage is essentially a male-female monogamous form.

This is not to deny that same-sex couples can also be transformed. (Indeed, Campbell cites Lonnie Frisbee as an example of a practicing homosexual through whom God was at work, and as a reason to justify that practice.)[61] But it is to deny that same-sex couples can be transformed into one-bride, one-groom relationships. Moreover, by his own logic of ends justifying means, Campbell's example begs the question, Should Israel embrace Persian gods, since Cyrus is anointed (Isa 45:1–13)? That is, should Israel embrace Persian gods, since God is at work through Cyrus? The difference is that same-sex

[57] The relation between divine and human forgiveness is not only formal but also efficient. Humans can forgive by receiving divine forgiveness.

[58] Or if we do not forgive in a Christian or "theological" way, we alter the truth about God. L. Gregory Jones characterizes the difference between therapeutic forgiveness and theological forgiveness, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). Whereas therapeutic forgiveness "internalizes and privatizes forgiveness by making it primarily an activity that goes on within individual persons' hearts and minds," theological forgiveness goes on between persons (p. 49). Jones continues, "'therapeutic' forgiveness has increasingly distorted the grammar of Christian forgiveness" (p. 39). And by distorting Christian forgiveness, therapeutic forgiveness has distorted the truth about God. How so? Jones identifies a tendency in therapeutic forgiveness towards forgiving God. "It does not matter that God is not culpable; what matters are my own feelings and health" (p. 52). For example, John Monbourquette writes, "Forgive God. Even God can be put on trial," although he goes on to ask, "Which God should we forgive?" suggesting that a true concept of God, as revealed in Jesus, would not need to be forgiven. John Monbourquette, *How to Forgive*(London: DLT, 2000), 66–67. This is not to deny the merits of therapeutic forgiveness, but it is to deny that therapeutic forgiveness is identical to theological forgiveness.

[59] Colin E. Gunton, *The Actuality of the Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 51. If marriage reveals something about Christ and church (metaphor A), is it not circular for church and Christ to reveal something about marriage (metaphor B)? The argument is only circular insofar as creation is the outer basis of the covenant, and the covenant the inner basis of creation. What creation reveals about the covenant (e.g., divine faithfulness; Jer 33:23–26), can only be fully known through what the covenant reveals about creation (e.g., that it is created for God; Col 1:16). Without the latter (special revelation), the former (general revelation) might be missed. Calvin, Institutes 1.4.1. Similarly, metaphor A can only be fully known through metaphor B. What marriage can reveal about Christ and church (e.g., mutual submission) can only be fully known through what church and Christ reveal about marriage (e.g., that marriage is male-female monogamy). Without the latter, the former (especially the form of human marriage) might be missed.

[60] This is Ortlund's argument, albeit about instantiations, not the institution of marriage. Since we are members of his body (Eph 5:30), "Our union with Christ as his body restores us to such graces as to make deep marital union applicable and attainable, if not easy, for a Christian couple." Ortlund, *Whoredom*, 156.

[61] Douglas A. Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics: The Triumph of God's Love* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 639.

relations do not reflect the nuptial form of the divine-human covenant, whereas Cyrus does not appear to have entered into that covenant at all.

Reiterating, Christ and the church are the reason why Paul (Eph 5:30–32) presents marriage as monogamous (section 2) and sexually-differentiated (section 3). As such, subsequent sections will address attempts to relativize sexual differentiation, to homogenize it, whether in the incarnation (section 4) or in creation (vis-à-vis the eschaton) (section 5).

The next section also explores the nub of the issue. Is MSDM (which is intrinsic to the bridegroom metaphor) a human projection onto the divine-human relation?[62] Or is MSDM revealed by this metaphor in order to be received by faith?[63]

4. The Particularity of Marriage

Is MSDM revealed by the bridegroom metaphor? More specifically, is the particular sexual differentiation (henceforth PSD) of marriage revealed by the PSD of the bridegroom metaphor? The scandal of particularity,[64] derived from 1 Corinthians 1:23, is instructive. Paul writes that the cross is a stumbling block (το σκάνδαλον) to the Jews. How can a particular man, Jesus, have universal significance?[65] What about those who have never heard? And analogously, what about those for whom MSDM is not an option? In both cases there is a temptation to strip away this particularity, so that Jesus becomes a cipher for some universal principle (like love),[66] or marriage a symbol of something universal (like covenant).[67] But in both cases the temptation can be resisted by leaning into particularity.

As Francis Watson has shown, by charting the significance of the particular days in Genesis 1 for the Gospel accounts,[68] the revelation of divine faithfulness in Christ cannot be abstracted from the particularity of creation. The divine faithfulness, which enables us to trust God for those who have never heard, is revealed precisely through those particulars that constitute the life of Jesus.

Similarly, one might also note the significance of Jesus's PSD. "Here is the man!" (John 19:5). John 4:1–42 would lose something if this were not so.[69] Because the woman at the well has had six significant relationships (4:18), Jesus makes her seventh. And because of Jesus's PSD, this makes him the groom. The particularity of marriage is therefore not only analogous to the particularity of Jesus. Marriage is sexually differentiated because Jesus is. Because of Jesus, Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 cannot be deemed relative. Asking, What if Jesus had been a woman? only begs questions like, What if he had been a Gentile? We have no other Jesus than the particular Jesus we have.

[62] Miroslav Volf, "The Trinity and Gender Identity" in *Gospel and Gender: A Trinitarian Engagement with Being Male and Female in Christ*, ed. Douglas A. Campbell (London: T&T Clark, 2003), 159.

[63] Ward and Cornwall argue for the former. See note 71. Barth and Roberts for the latter.

[64] See further Colin E. Gunton, "Universal and Particular in Atonement Theology," *RelS* 28 (1992): 453–66.

[65] Thus the metaphors used to describe that work—victory, sacrifice, groom, etc.—have significance beyond Jesus's particular milieu. Gunton, "Universal and Particular in Atonement Theology," 462–63.

[66] For example, John Hick, "Is Christianity the Only True Religion, or One among Others?" 2001, http://www.johnhick.org.uk/article2.html.

[67] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics,* 640–41.

[68] Francis Watson, *Text and Truth: Redefining Biblical Theology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 237–40.

[69] Lyle Eslinger, "The Wooing of the Woman at the Well: Jesus, the Reader, and Reader-Response Criticism," *Literature and Theology* 1.2 (1987): 167–83.

This story of the groom is then perfected (or realized) by the Holy Spirit, who is given "as a deposit guaranteeing [the wedding feast] to come" (2 Cor 5:5). Intriguingly, the Greek word for deposit (ὁ ἀρραβών) has since come to mean an engagement ring.[70] So, as the Holy Spirit enables us to receive this particular Jesus by faith, MSDM bears witness to this particularity rather than to a general notion of divine love or covenant in the abstract.

But this gives rise to an objection. Does making sexual differentiation significant make it an idol? The charge is made by a number of scholars. Rogers writes of smuggling in a paradigm, and Cornwall echoes Ward's argument that Barth's version of the formal cause argument appeals to natural theology (male and female in creation) rather than to the revelation of Jesus Christ.[71]

Interestingly, the charges of idolatry correlate with understatement surrounding the significance of Jesus as a man. Cornwall wonders whether Jesus might be intersexed. (For the purposes of this essay, I take intersex/DSD to mean a biological mosaic of male and female[72] that is not strictly synonymous with eunuchism.[73]) Cornwall writes that Jesus is assumed to be male "despite the striking absence of what we actually know about his genitals."[74] But this begs the question, Is an intersexed Jesus a man with a DSD and so a man all the same?[75] For scripture renders Christ as a man (e.g., the groom of John 4:1–42). Or, if Cornwall intends to relativize the male-female binary, Is an intersexed Jesus not a man at all? In that case how coherent is it to argue that an intersexed Jesus of history, reconstructed from scripture, simultaneously deconstructs the very man-rendering scripture from which it derives? Either way, Christ's perennial presence in the Temple seems to preclude those DSD's characterized by underdeveloped testes (Luke 2:22–52; Deut 23:1).

Similarly, Rogers argues that the election of Jesus reveals the difference between God and humanity more fundamentally than MSDM does, thereby downplaying the significance of Jesus as a man and his sexual differentiation from a woman.[76] But in what sense might election and intersex themselves be considered a priori, here, and therefore idols? (A priori methodology allows some prior concept to distort the object of faith. It risks reading into Scripture, rather than allowing the truth to be revealed by Scripture.)

Charges of idolatry thus go both ways. These charges continue in the next section, which concerns Campbell's concept of foundationalism. Campbell argues that the resurrection is beyond sex and gender, thereby implying that the resurrected Jesus is not biologically male and that to say otherwise is to make sex and gender a foundation or idol.

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[70] G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1937), 60.

[71] Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 181; Susannah Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ: Intersex Conditions and Christian Theology* (London: Equinox, 2010), 82; and Graham Ward, "The Erotics of Redemption—After Karl Barth," *Theology & Sexuality* 4.8 (1998): 65.

[72] Following Cornwall, Sex, 18. 'DSD' stands for Disorders of Sex Development, which is not unproblematic because 'disorder' debatably connotes something 'unhelpful' and 'stigmatizing'. For a more comprehensive account see Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ*, 'Glossary', 237–246; and DeFranza, *Sex Difference in Christian Theology*,23–67.

[73] Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ,* 134.

[74] Cornwall, *Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ,* 90.

[75] Debates about prelapsarian chromosomal diversity lie beyond the scope of this essay as do debates about the fallenness or otherwise of Jesus' flesh should such diversity be considered supralapsarian.

[76] Rogers, *Sexuality and the Christian Body*, 183.

5. The Homogenization of Marriage

Douglas Campbell critiques Paul's bridegroom metaphor. He writes,

> The key difficulty underlying the basic analogy Paul draws here is probably apparent to most of us modern readers attuned to gender-driven anomalies. Paul has structured the relationship between Christ and his church in terms of a male-female binary. Males have been precisely correlated with Christ, and females with the church. And this pairing is clearly inappropriate theologically, once one notices it.[77]

And he continues,

> Paul cannot limit participation in Christ to males, or participation in the church to females, as he does momentarily here in Eph 5, and in 1 Cor 11 as well. This makes no sense. The two genders cannot be divided up and distributed neatly into either Christ or the church. These two locations overlap and exist within one another. We are in the church because we are in Christ, and to be in Christ is to be the church. We are all in Christ, and we are all in the church. So Paul is right in what he affirms here—males are in Christ and females are in the church—but wrong in what he fails to affirm and therefore implies—that females are not in Christ and that males are not in the church.[78]

Osiek raises the stakes,

> Men certainly do not identify with the church in this metaphor, as members of it, but with Christ, because such identification suits male interests. Herein lies the great danger posed by this ecclesiological metaphor: it encourages men to identify with Christ, women with the church.… I would argue that casting the church as feminine, and above all as bride of Christ, far from enhancing the dignity of women, has in fact done harm to perception of the capacity of women to image the divine, and thus of women's fundamental human and Christian dignity.[79]

So Pauline binary leads to Pauline patriarchy. Campbell clarifies: Paul instructs wives to obey husbands (5:22, 24); whereas Paul instructs husbands to love wives (5:25, 28).[80]

The binary objection to the bride-groom metaphor, however, and the patriarchal men whom Osiek cites, only target metaphor A (husband and wife as Christ and church). They fail to take into account metaphor B (church and Christ as bride and groom) and the significance of Ephesians 5:30 therein. "Because we are members of his body"—the bride—"… a man will leave his father and mother …" (5:31). It seems Paul fully intends to imply that "husbands are also 'brides' in this passage, for they are members of the church, and they too call Christ their savior."[81] Conversely, the exhortation to "Follow God's example … and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us" (5:1–2) identifies wives with Jesus (the groom).

[77] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics,* 624.

[78] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 625.

[79] Carolyn Osiek, "The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22–33): A Problematic Wedding," in *Biblical Theology Review* 32.1 (2002): 38.

[80] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics,* 624.

[81] Lynn H. Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020), 354. Using this to legitimize male brides muddles target (husbands in church) with source (bride), thereby collapsing the metaphor.

Besides, whereas Paul instructs children and slaves to obey (6:1, 5) (ὑπακούω), he omits this verb when instructing wives (5:22), opting for ὑποτάσσω (submit) instead (5:24). And in 5:21, he instructs both husbands and wives to submit to one another. Husbands express submission through love (5:25, 28, 33) and wives through respect (5:33). Campbell silently passes over this mutual submission.

5.1. Foundationalism

But even if the content of Paul's argument can be defended, the method of that argument remains a target for Campbell, because Campbell charges Paul with foundationalism. By "foundation," Campbell means "a different foundation for truth from the one that God has laid for us in Jesus, and hence a structure that we ultimately build for ourselves."[82] Campbell adds in a footnote,

> It [metaphor A (husband and wife as Christ and church)] is inappropriate, moreover, because it is an overt act of foundationalism. A "natural" "created" structure has overridden the information we have received from our relationship with Christ about personhood (where we learn that true personhood transcends biological categories), and this is not how Paul usually argues, and certainly not in relation to anything he really seems to care about. If we applied this reasoning to the race binary, we would end up with all pagan converts adopting full Jewish customs! Our movement into the realm of eschatology seems to have been temporarily lost sight of then, although the Corinthian text actually acknowledges this problem when it states that no one is separate in the Lord (1 Cor 11:11).[83]

So whereas creation concerns particulars like male and female, "the new age for which we have always been destined lies beyond sex and gender."[84] Therefore, because Jesus inaugurates this new age, and because Campbell defines marriage in terms of covenant,[85] Campbell can conclude that "a covenantal account of marriage, which is a relational account of marriage, has no objections to adults of any sexual orientation or gender construction covenanting with one another in marriage.… This is an exemplary Pauline navigation."[86]

But, and contrary to Campbell, eschatology does not preclude the particulars of creation. Campbell writes of Galatians 3:26–28,

> Those who have been immersed and reclothed are something new.… They are "sons of God" like Jesus, the Son of God, and no longer characterized by ethnicity (Jew or Greek/pagan), social status (slave or free), or gender (male or female).[87]

[82] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 37.

[83] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 624–25 n. 2. Snyder Belousek argues that what is binding for Gentiles in Acts 15:20 reflects what is binding on non-Israelites in the Holiness Code (Lev 17:8–18:30; 24:10–22). Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture and the Church*, 230, 279. Therefore abstinence from sexual immorality (Acts 15:20) entails abstinence from same-sex relations (Lev 18:22; pp. 230, 278).

[84] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 608.

[85] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 610–11.

[86] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 640–41. Campbell questions whether this can be extended to polygamy, because polygamy appears to be intrinsically patriarchal. Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 641 n. 17.

[87] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 106.

However, and first, much depends on what Campbell means by "no longer characterized." Rather than erase social distinctions as Campbell does, Galatians 3:28 relativizes them. The point is that such distinctions do not exclude us from the resurrection, not that they no longer apply.

Indeed, some characteristics do not appear to pass away. For, and second, is the resurrected Jesus not Jewish? Does he not speak with a Galilean lilt? And is he not biologically male? Therefore, and contrary to Campbell again, the new age does not lie beyond sex[88] but beyond marriage, because the angels (with whom resurrected bodies are likened) arguably are sexed (Matt 22:30; Luke 20:35). They are sexed if we assume that the sons of God who marry and impregnate women are angels (Gen 6:2–4)[89] and that this lies behind Jesus's words. Therefore, resurrection bodies are likened to angels because angels marrying is not appropriate, not necessarily because those bodies are not sexed. And so, the most apt anticipation of resurrected bodies is non-sexually-active singleness, not same-sex relations.

Moreover, if the new age does not lie beyond sex and gender, then it is fitting that the metaphor of bride and groom, which connotes the new age, wedding feast and all (Rev 19:7–9), does not lie beyond sex and gender either. And if the metaphor of bride and groom does not lie beyond sex and gender, then neither does marriage.

Finally, Cornwall notes that Paul does not write male *or* female, following Jew or Greek, slave or free (Gal 3:28).[90] Paul writes male *and* female. That is, there are still males and females, but there is no longer a male-female binary that excludes intersex/DSD. Therefore, the implied term in Paul's argument is "'or not male and female'." So, if male and female do not pass away, then neither does intersex.[91] Contrary to Campbell's asexual construct, then, might we become more male, or female, or intersex in the new creation, not less? In the words of C. S. Lewis, might sex become "'solider'"?[92]

Third, the way in which Campbell frames the terms is therefore open to question. Can Campbell be indicted for a structure that he has ultimately built himself? One of the telltale signs of philosophical foundationalism is a tendency to eschew particulars. For example, Descartes's *cogito* is an attempt to eschew particulars from the world in order to discover foundational ideas that are clear and distinct.[93] Here, Campbell attempts to eschew the particulars of sex and gender. He does this by juxtaposing the particulars of creation (male or female) with eschatological personhood (allegedly neither male nor female).[94]

[88] And even if the resurrection did transcend sex and gender, is extending marriage (to include same-sex couples) not over-realizing eschatology? For the resurrection also transcends doors and death (John 20:19), but it does not follow that we should live without doors (whatever that means) or seek immortality in this life.

[89] See Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 139–40.

[90] Cornwall, Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ, 72–73.

[91] On this point, see Cornwall, Sex and Uncertainty in the Body of Christ, 182–196. I have similarly pondered whether my late down-syndrome brother will keep his extra chromosome in the new creation. Even if we cannot know for sure, it is plausible that he will still be downs, that he will still be him, that he will still be bowing to drivers who give way to him in the street. If so, then healing will be reserved for our failings towards him, and not for his extra chromosome. So if such plausibility can be granted here, then why not also for intersexed persons?

[92] C. S. Lewis, The Great Divorce (London: HarperCollins, 1946), 21, 53.

[93] Descartes accepts "nothing more than what was presented to my mind so clearly and distinctly that I could have no occasion to doubt it." René Descartes, "Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason," in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes: Volume I*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 92.

[94] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 608.

This bears more than a passing resemblance to John Zizioulas, who argues that biological personhood is "transcended" at baptism by ecclesial personhood.[95] So if Campbell's view is derivative, then it is important to note that although ecclesial personhood transcends biological personhood, for Zizioulas, it does not transcend biological nature.[96] That is, although who we are in Christ (i.e., loved eternally) transcends who we are biologically (i.e., mortal), it does not transcend our bodies. And if it does not transcend our bodies, which are sexed, then it does not fail to transcend sex.[97] So perhaps Campbell's notion of eschatological personhood—stripped of particular sex, race, etc.—is itself a philosophical fiction—or a "foundation" in Campbell's own words, a "structure that we ultimately build for ourselves."[98]

5.2. Recapitulation

Returning to the theme of section three, then, if the nuptial figure is simply an illustration of human marriage A (husband and wife as Christ and church), then marriage is not essentially a covenant between male and female. But if the nuptial figure reveals marriage B (church and Christ as bride and groom), then it not only defines marriage, it also reveals Jesus to be a groom in particular.

6. Closing Reflections

The profound mystery in Ephesians 5:32 is not Christ and the church per se but Christ and the church as the warrant for MSDM. Therefore, insofar as the union of church and Christ connotes the nuptial figure (bride and groom) then

> The form and figure of marriage are integrated: the figure of marriage (Christ and the church) delimits the form of marriage (one husband and one wife, bound inseparably) so that there is a true fit between form and figure.[99]

This is the scandal of marriage. But when the particulars of marriage are made arbitrary, its ability to resist (post)modern homogenization is compromised. Homogenization finds it hard to comprehend the particularity of Jesus and so may treat him as a cipher for some universal (like love).[100] Homogenization

[95] John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 49–65; Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 68.

[96] "… the ecclesial hypostasis does not [deny] … biological *nature*.… It implies a denial of the biological *hypostasis*. It accepts the biological nature but wishes to hypostatize it in a non-biological way, to endow it with real being, to give it a true ontology, that is, eternal life. It is for this reason that I stated previously that neither eros nor the body must be abandoned but must be hypostasized according to the 'mode of existence' of the ecclesial hypostasis." Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 63, italics original; note 97 illustrates what such hypostatization looks like.

[97] The enduring status of sex is implied when Zizioulas writes, "The eucharist is the only historical context of human existence where the terms 'father,' 'brother,' etc. lose their biological exclusiveness and reveal, as we have seen, relationships of free and universal love." Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, 60. That is, the sexed terms "'father,' 'brother,' etc." endure, thereby illustrating that our sexed bodies have been "hypostasized according to the 'mode of existence' of the ecclesial hypostasis" (p. 63).

[98] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 37.

[99] Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture and the Church*, 51.

[100] See note 66.

thereby displaces Jesus as the divine source of inclusivity and diversity. Against this, the scandal of MSDM functions as an apologetic for the scandal of the particularity of Jesus (and vice-versa).[101]

We can now revisit the opening vignette. The "true fit between form and figure" is why the consummation of church and Christ at the end of time (the figure) delimits sex to marriage (the form). Again, when Paul writes that the Holy Spirit is given to us "as a deposit (ὁ ἀρραβών), guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor 5:5), ἀρραβών has come to mean an engagement ring.[102] And only the church receives this engagement ring, initiating a relationship that is only consummated at the end of time. (Barth similarly observes that the monogamy of marriage follows from the exclusivity of the covenant.[103] Again, the form of the divine-human relation reveals Gen 2:24 perfected.) No wonder then when Perry concludes that consent (for human-human consummation) is best worked out in marriage.[104]

However, since the charge of idolatry (or foundationalism) goes both ways, it is important to keep listening to our interlocutors. It is important to keep checking for logs in our own eyes (Matt 7:3). So, what might we learn? First, Cornwall's work on intersex helps to put marriage in its place. What makes MSDM idolatrous, however, is not necessarily the appeal to creation,[105] but the way in which marriage is idolized in practice. "The real sin of marriage today is not adultery.… It is the idolatry of the family itself, the refusal to understand marriage as directed toward the Kingdom of God."[106] So perhaps the very existence of intersexed persons, for whom MSDM is not an option, not only relativizes marriage but also can help to maintain it.

This is because, and second, Williams writes that without those who are celibate and who can be freely devoted to God, we might miss what sex is all about.[107] Celibacy, however, is perhaps best not reduced to vocation, because vocation concerns Christ's calling us to himself,[108] rather than felt calling to something, whereby if one did not feel called one might not act celibate.[109] Besides, the experience of abusive marriage or unwanted non-sexually-active singleness is more akin to the story of Job than to vocation. Although Job begins with struggle, he ends elsewhere, and as it reaches its denouement, it helps us to learn our responsibility to one another as friends.

So lastly, and insofar as celibacy or non-sexually-active singleness helps to maintain marriage, marriage should help to maintain singleness. Both require the solidarity (or kinship) of the body corporate.[110] This might include nurturing both "vowed" friendships between singles "that transcend

[101] Luther makes providence rather than particularity the locus of witness: "The state of marriage is by nature of a kind to teach and compel us to trust God's hand and grace, and in the same way it forces us to believe." Martin Luther, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians 7*, ed. Hilton C. Oswald, trans. Edward Sittler, Luther's Works 28 (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), 18.

[102] See note 70.

[103] Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4:198.

[104] Louise Perry, *The Case against the Sexual Revolution: A New Guide to Sex in the 21st Century* (Cambridge: Polity, 2022), 183–184.

[105] See note 71.

[106] Alexander Schmemann, *For the Life of the World* (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2018), 110.

[107] Williams, "The Body's Grace," 317; glossed with 1 Corinthians 7:32–35.

[108] Os Guinness, *The Call: Finding and Fulfilling the Central Purpose of Your Life* (Nashville: Word, 2008).

[109] Campbell, *Pauline Dogmatics*, 639.

[110] Wesley Hill, "Afterword," in Belousek, *Marriage, Scripture and the Church*, 289–97.

… locality and survive … relocation"[111] and godparenting relationships between single adults and children.[112]

7. Summary

A Trinitarian reading of Ephesians 5:31 has been offered. Marriage is good because it is the initiative and gift of the Father. Marriage is perfected by the Spirit for Christ and his church. Marriage is sexually differentiated because it follows the form of church and Christ as bride and groom. So, because the groom is biologically male, MSDM bears witness to this particularity rather than to a general notion of divine love or covenant in the abstract. That is the scandal of marriage.

[111] Stephen R. Holmes, "Response to Wesley Hill," in *Two Views on Homosexuality, The Bible, and The Church*, ed. Preston Sprinkle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 161.

[112] Wesley Hill, "Response to Stephen R. Holmes," in *Two Views on Homosexuality, The Bible, and The Church*, ed. Preston Sprinkle (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 211.

Book Reviews

— OLD TESTAMENT —

— NEW TESTAMENT —

— HISTORY & HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

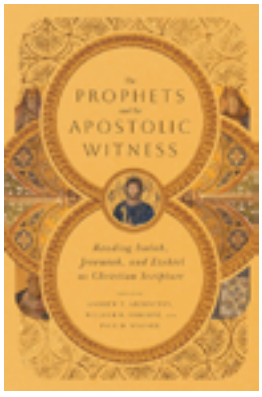
— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

— ETHICS & PASTORALIA —

— MISSION & CULTURE —

— OLD TESTAMENT —

Andrew T. Abernethy, William R. Osborne, and Paul D. Wegner, eds. *The Prophets and the Apostolic Witness: Reading Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel as Christian Scripture*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2023. 352 pp. £33.99/$42.99.



According to the Apostle Peter, the prophets prophesied about the grace that belongs to the Christian. They searched and inquired carefully, trying to discern even their own Spirit-given prophecies that revealed the future sufferings of Christ (cf. 1 Pet 1:10–11). If the prophets themselves encountered the challenge of understanding their own writings, how much more do Bible readers today meet difficulty when reading the prophets as Christian Scripture? Modern interpreters face many questions: Do direct prophecies only have one (Messianic) fulfillment, or can they have multiple fulfillments? Do the prophets speak only in their historical context, or can they speak beyond it? For example, does "Israel" refer only to the geo-political nation-state, or can the prophets mean something beyond the bare use of the term? Moreover, how do we handle the numerous citations of the prophets in the New Testament, some of which seem to not follow the "literal" hermeneutic of the typical modern reader? Because of these questions, *The Prophets and the Apostolic Witness* provides interesting grist for the intellectual mill.

This book is more of a work on hermeneutics than on the major prophets. It tackles the long-standing question of how the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament can be read as Christian Scripture but focuses that question on the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Like many of the "multiple views" books now popular on the market, this one goes through each of the major prophets and presents one scholar's take on how to interpret the book. In short, for each biblical book the editors appoint one scholar to argue for the typological method, one for the literal-grammatical method, and a third for the "sensus plenior" method. In these respective essays, the writers examine a text as a case study for their method (Isa 42:1–4; Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 37:1–14). Finally, for each book another scholar presents a history of interpretation, and another writes on how to preach that book as Christian Scripture. While certainly each essay contains interesting nuances on the prophetic works themselves, the larger interpretive issues are often in view. Unlike the "multiple views" books, in this volume the editors do not write direct responses to each other, though there are a few instances of interactions.

The book is helpful when it delineates the different approaches to the three prophetic books. In other words, one can benefit from seeing "side-by-side" how one scholar interprets a book like Jeremiah in contrast to another. On the other hand, some of the essays focused too much on the case study. For example, the first three essays on Jeremiah explain in extensive detail the authors' views of the new covenant in Jeremiah. There is some exploration of less explicit prophecies or allusions in Jeremiah, such as Jeremiah 31:15, Rachel weeping for her children (pp. 107–10). This reader wishes more of such soundings were included in this volume. Also, the last two essays on each prophetic book, the history of interpretation and "how to preach" chapters, are interesting but not as valuable. The essays on history of interpretation provide interest but essentially cover the same ground of the different hermeneutical approaches already discussed. Similarly, the essays on preaching reflect much of the same methods

already described. This reader is unsure how the preaching essays uniquely contribute to volume, since how one preaches a text depends on one's prior interpretive approach.

This work can be a help to students who are first delving into hermeneutics of the prophetic corpus, or even as an introduction to the basic interpretive issue of understanding the Old Testament in light of the New. In the latter respect, this work is easy to understand, as opposed to some of the more complex hermeneutics textbooks. At the same time, the book can also be used for hermeneutical classes and discussions, not just for teaching on the prophets. Pastors may also gain help from this work as they begin a preaching series through one of the Major Prophets. If this book can encourage Bible readers and teachers to see Christ in the Major Prophets, the editors have accomplished a worthy task.

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Cynthia Hsing-Wei Chang. *The Power and Purpose of Blood in God's Design: Leviticus 17 and Its Implications for Christian Engagement with Chinese Culture*. Carlisle, PA: Langham, 2024. 238 pp. £21.99/$32.99.

It was only in my first semester living and teaching in Asia that a student asked, "Sir, can Christians eat blood?" It was a class on the Pentateuch, but the student added, "I ask because at lunch today in the dining room we have blood." Though I had thought vaguely about this issue already, I had never been confronted with blood on the menu. Thankfully, I discovered there was a bloodless option. Coagulated blood jelly is not appealing to my Western palate.

That example occurred when I was teaching in Thailand, but I have had the same questions and class discussions in Malaysia, Myanmar, and the Philippines, and it is a live issue in China.

During my time living in Asia, I read and reviewed Jay Sklar's wonderful Tyndale commentary on Leviticus (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014) and noted that, on the issue of blood, he only has a brief footnote, referring to Acts 15, that the prohibition is to prevent offending Jews. I also later reviewed Ming Him Ko's Asia Bible commentary on Leviticus (Carlisle, PA: Langham Global Library, 2018), also for *Themelios*. Ko addresses the issue but regards blood as simply food that Jesus has now declared clean, and its Acts prohibition is a cultural issue.

So Chang's monograph is a welcome contribution to this issue, which is important in the Asian world at least. She acknowledges that part of the impetus for this book and study is the common practice of eating cooked blood pudding in Chinese culture. Perhaps Westerners might substitute the English or Spanish black pudding for context. This monograph is based on her PhD dissertation under Professor Richard Averbeck at TEDS in the USA. Chang teaches at Singapore Bible College.

Her thesis is broader than this single issue, as she discusses the structure of Leviticus as a whole and the literary function of chapter 17 within that. She notes the importance of understanding that the ritual texts are "narrativized" and the narratives are "ritualized" (pp. 34–37). She makes comparisons with

some Ugaritic ritual texts and then examines the well-being offerings (pp. 69–120) and the prohibition on eating blood (pp. 121–54).

There is little scholarly consensus on how chapter 17 fits in the structure of Leviticus. Chang argues that, while chapter 17 shows significant continuity with chapters 1–16, at the same time it shows thematic and structural connections with chapter 22, and thus 17–22 ought to be regarded as one section. The rituals need to be read in the context of relationship-building between Yahweh and Israel, and the literary context is significant for determining the meaning of rituals.

With this background, Chang then argues that the regulation of well-being offerings highlights the covenantal relationship between the offerer and Yahweh and other Israelites. She finds several similarities with Ugaritic well-being offerings, notably the harmony being expressed between the offerer and the deity or deities. She also demonstrates a progression in strictness from Exodus 20 to Leviticus 17, but which then becomes more lenient in Deuteronomy 12 regarding a central altar (pp. 118–19). Rather than arguing for a chronology that makes Leviticus late, she argues that the shift is due to textual contexts, a fair argument in my opinion.

On the eating of blood, she discusses the similar prohibitions in Genesis 9 and Deuteronomy 12, noting they all occur in a covenantal context (pp. 132–42). The prohibition in Leviticus 17 is tied to blood for atonement on the altar and thus not any blood that is shed.

Finally, Chang applies her findings on the blood prohibition to Chinese practices (pp. 160–65). She argues that blood as a symbol of life is for atonement and within a relationship between the offerer and God. Blood for atonement is fulfilled in Jesus's death for sin. She also mentions Leviticus 19:26, where the separation of Israelites from Gentiles is behind the prohibition of eating blood. Her reading, not argued in this book, of Acts 15 is that it is about the harmony between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Like with Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 10, Christians may eat but may choose not to eat for the sake of harmony with other, weaker Christians. Thus, Chinese Christians can eat cooked blood pudding.

I have not been persuaded by Chang's argument, though she has given me much pause to think. The prohibitions in Acts 15 seem stronger than merely maintaining harmony between Jewish and Gentile Christians. Richard Bauckham ("James and the Gentiles (Acts 15.13–21)," in *History, Literature and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington III [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996], 154–84) and others are more persuasive on Acts 15, I suggest. The prohibition in Genesis 9 applies to all humanity and not only Israel, so Chang's argument that this prohibition is covenantal is unconvincing for me.

Nonetheless, Chang's monograph is stimulating, and I highly commend it. Especially given the multicultural nature of much of the Western church, we need to have a higher understanding of Asian cultural contexts and issues.

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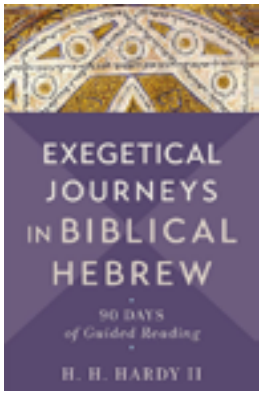
H. H. Hardy II. *Exegetical Journeys in Biblical Hebrew: 90 Days of Guided Reading*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. 312 pp. £19.99/$24.99.



You have completed the introductory textbook, perhaps even passed the final exam, and are now wondering how to sustain your newfound grasp of Biblical Hebrew. You recognise that if you stop here, much of the grammar will fade within months, a familiar frustration for many who have taken a basic course. H. H. Hardy II's *Exegetical Journeys in Biblical Hebrew: 90 Days of Guided Reading* is written precisely for those who want to press on (or return after a long hiatus) and who desire to cultivate the habit of reading the Hebrew Bible regularly and meaningfully.

The workbook is structured into three progressive journeys: Beginning, Continuing, and Expanding. Each journey is designed to span 30 days and is subdivided into three to five "routes" (i.e., biblical passages), each of which unfolds over several days. Daily assignments consist of one to three verses to read, words to parse, grammatical questions to engage with, vocabulary to review, and translation exercises to complete. Then, each lesson offers exegetical insights rooted in the day's grammatical work and concludes with a devotional reflection, aptly named "For the Journey."

There is much to commend about this workbook. Most significantly, it delivers on its promise: to lead post-introductory learners into a daily rhythm of engaging with the Hebrew Scriptures. Each day's work can typically be completed in about fifteen minutes, although learners who are still developing fluency may need more time. The level of difficulty increases at a measured and manageable pace. The selected passages are familiar, often overlapping with those encountered in an introductory course, which offers the learner a sense of confidence and continuity.

The parsing exercises are particularly valuable. They help reinforce grammatical awareness, a skill often neglected by readers who, having attained some reading fluency, may prefer to "just read" and bypass the more technical aspects of the language. Long-term neglect of practicing parsing inevitably weakens one's ability to engage in close exegesis. The grammatical questions, too, are well-crafted, prompting learners not only to recognise forms but to explain them clearly. This certainly helps learners to retain grammatical sensitivity.

Perhaps the most vital contribution of the workbook is the exegetical insights provided towards the end of each day's assignment. Take, for instance, its comment on זָכוֹר in Exodus 20:8: "The infinitive absolute acts like a command…, they are not the typical imperative form (זְכֹר 'remember')" (p. 74). Having parsed a series of second-person *yiqtol* commands over the past three days, the learner is now alerted to the emphatic nature of the Sabbath command through the infinitive absolute. Insights such as this concretely demonstrate the value of engaging with the Hebrew text directly. They show how the grammatical and lexical work of the day can yield interpretive richness that is often obscured or flattened in translation ("Remember the Sabbath"). For many learners, this payoff is crucial. The study of Biblical Hebrew can be labour-intensive, and without a clear sense of exegetical gain, it is easy to become disheartened and wonder whether the effort is worth it. By rooting exegetical insights directly in Hebrew grammar and syntax, the book helps sustain learner motivation and encourages long-term perseverance in Hebrew reading.

While the workbook has many strengths, there are a couple of decisions Hardy made that this reviewer finds surprising. One notable concern lies in the English translations provided in the "Answer Key" section. Regardless of one's stance on formal versus dynamic equivalence, the primary function of an answer key in a language-learning context is to help learners assess whether their translation is serviceable and faithful to the original text. It is therefore puzzling that the author often opts for renderings that verge on over-translation. Consider, for example, the workbook's translation of Genesis 1:1–3: "In the beginning when God created the whole cosmos and the world—at once the land was a muddled mess, dark covered the deep abyss, and the Spirit of God lingered expectantly upon the watery surface—God proclaimed, 'Let light be!' And light dawned" (p. 20). In another context, this expansive and evocative rendering might be defensible, even illuminating. But as part of an answer key, it risks confusing learners about what the Hebrew text actually says. It may also inadvertently discourage them from carefully attending to the nuances of Hebrew syntax and vocabulary, since the workbook answer is often supplied in a paraphrased form. For pedagogical purposes, a more restrained and textually grounded translation would be far more appropriate in this context.

Another noteworthy concern involves the grammatical terminology used in the parsing exercises. The book refers to the *qatal* and *yiqtol* forms as "SC" (Suffix Conjugation) and "PC" (Prefix Conjugation), respectively. The use of SC and PC highlights the morphological structure of the verbs. However, the same workbook also uses the labels *wayyiqtol* and *wəqatal*, terms that focus more on the aspectual or functional characteristics of the verbs. This mixing of terminological frameworks—form-based for the base conjugations and function-based for the waw-consecutive forms—introduces an inconsistency that could confuse learners. If the author wishes to maintain a form-based framework (SC and PC), it would be more consistent to notate the waw-consecutive forms as "w-SC" and "w-PC." Conversely, if the author prefers the aspectual/functional terminology (e.g., *wayyiqtol*, *wəqatal*), then it would be clearer to describe the base conjugations as *qatal* and *yiqtol*. Either system can be pedagogically justified, but mixing frameworks in this way risks hampering the learners' ability to integrate and consolidate grammatical categories.

Despite these minor concerns, *Exegetical Journeys in Biblical Hebrew* remains an outstanding contribution to the field of Biblical Hebrew pedagogy. It fills a crucial and often overlooked gap between introductory grammar and sustained reading. It succeeds in providing learners with a structured, accessible, and spiritually enriching path forward. The workbook not only reinforces foundational grammar but also demonstrates, day after day, the exegetical rewards of engaging the Hebrew Bible in its original language. For anyone who has completed an introductory course and is seeking a way to build fluency and sharpen exegetical skill, this workbook is highly recommended. One can only hope that the author will continue producing additional workbooks, perhaps even developing a full series, to help learners grow into consistent, confident, and joyful readers of the Hebrew Bible.

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Jonathan G. Kline and Karen DeCrescenzo Lavery, eds. *A Hebrew Reader for the Pentateuch: 40 Pivotal Narratives for Study and Teaching*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Academic, 2024. xviii + 229 pp. £26.50/$29.95.

The extreme importance of the Pentateuch for cultivating a biblical worldview can hardly be overstated. It provides the theological scaffolding and narrative framework that undergirds the entirety of Scripture. However, every interpreter (exegete) must ultimately grapple with the text at the level of language. For some specialists, this necessarily entails an intimate familiarity with Biblical (Classical) Hebrew. Enter *A Hebrew Reader for the Pentateuch: 40 Pivotal Narratives for Study and Teaching* compiled and edited by Jonathan G. Kline and Karen DeCrescenzo Lavery.

This book is organized in five main sections, each with eight readings. The first section outlines select passages from primeval history, Genesis 1—11, which (arguably) has its own unique character. This is followed by four sections reflecting the different locations in which Israel—or their ancestors—find themselves, namely Canaan, Egypt, Sinai, and the Wilderness. One notes, of course, that during section three (Israel in Egypt), the Israelites flee from Egypt, cross the Red Sea/Sea of Reeds—i.e., *Yam Suph* (sec. 3.6)—and enter the wilderness (secs. 3.7 and 3.8). Thus, a more precise title might be "Israel in Egypt and on the way to Sinai" (p. x).

Kline and Lavery chose these narrative texts to help readers appreciate "the trajectory of the grand story of Israel's origins anew and see afresh how these stories, despite their diversity and often complex redactional history, can be seen to work together to form a narrative whole" (p. x; cf. p. ix). While some may quibble that there are no texts from Leviticus and only one from Deuteronomy (the death of Moses), the authors judiciously argue: "from the standpoint of genre [narratives] these two books effectively fall outside the scope of this volume" (p. x).

The Hebrew used within this book is drawn from the Westminster Leningrad Codex (WLC), or more officially, the Michigan-Claremont-Westminster Electronic Hebrew Bible—a popular (public domain) electronic version that is based on the BHS. Importantly, though, Kline and Lavery have made one small formatting change to the WLC (see p. xi): for *ketiv-qere* pairs, they present the *ketiv* first (with no vowels) followed by the *qere* in superscript.

Typographically, the text of each passage is often broken up into (very) short paragraphs, being guided, first, by the presence of the Masoretic paragraph markers *setumah* and *petukhah* (marked in the left-hand margin) and then the editors' "subjective judgments about the presence in the text of discrete thought units, shifts in speaker, or (typically small-scale) narratival transitions" (p. xi). Additional line breaks, indents, and larger-than-normal spacing divide the text further into prosodic units based on the Masoretic syntax. Kline and Lavery state:

> This formatting allows you to inductively develop a sense for the Masoretic accents and how they break up the text into meaningful units. Our aim is that this volume will enable you to train yourself to recognize the different kinds of syntactic and semantic groupings these accents create, so that when you read the Hebrew Bible you will have an intuitive sense for how each accent works, both on its own and in relation to the others (p. xiv).

After each paragraph, Kline and Lavery have included an apparatus that focuses on key words and their morphology. This apparatus (cf. p. xi) typically consists of two parts: verbs (with root and *binyan*) and morphologically difficult non-verbs. For ease of use, common personal and/or geographical names including gentilics are also included.

The book closes with a glossary of verbs and a glossary of non-verbs (in each case, words that occur fewer than fifty times in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament [HB/OT] are marked in bold). However, some glosses seem to lack nuance or precision. For instance, אֶלֶף is simply "thousand," and both הִנֵּה and הֵן are only rendered as "look, behold!"

While a ribbon marker would have been nice, this is a gem of a book that is otherwise hard to critique. While it might not offer the same syntactical and/or morphological "tips" that certain other books available on the market provide (e.g., Miles V. Van Pelt and Gary D. Pratico's *Graded Reader of Biblical Hebrew: A Guide to Reading the Hebrew Bible,* 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020]; Ehud Ben Zvi et al., *Readings in Biblical Hebrew: An Intermediate Textbook* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993]; Robert B. Chisholm Jr.'s *A Workbook for Intermediate Hebrew: Grammar, Exegesis, and Commentary on Jonah and Ruth* [Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2006]), it is still a valuable asset for those seeking a more meditative and tactile engagement with the HB/OT.

Its primary users are likely to be second-year Hebrew language students within a specific reading course on the Pentateuch, but it can also effectively be used for self-study. Readers moving through one "shorter" passage (twenty verses or less) a week and devoting two weeks to the "longer" ones (over twenty verses) can complete the entire volume in about one year. Lovers of Scripture can rejoice at the superb editorial work made available by Kline and Lavery!

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Geert W. Lorein. *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2024. 192 pp. £19.99/$21.99.

Geert Lorein's commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah replaces Derek Kidner's 1979 volume in the series. Kidner's slim volume is something of a standard, brief commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah, but its age meant it was in need of an update. The updated Tyndale series seeks to provide an "up-to-date reading of the text," continuing the series' emphasis on exegesis, which is what Lorein seeks to provide.

Lorein provides an extensive introduction that primarily situates Ezra–Nehemiah within its textual and historical context. Lorein comments briefly on the genre of the text before focusing on the historical background: dates, distances, geography, along with notes on the Persian empire and Jerusalem's place in it, and details about the lives of Ezra and Nehemiah. He then considers authorship, text, and language.

Throughout the introduction, Lorein considers key critical issues raised in Ezra and Nehemiah studies over the last one hundred and fifty years: the chronological relationship between Ezra and

Nehemiah; the reliability of the purported documents in the books; the identity of Ezra's law and its relationship to Persian authorization; and the unity of the books and their relationship to Chronicles. Lorein's generally conservative positions will be appreciated by readers looking for a solid foundation amid scholarly debate. The introduction closes with an interesting discussion of "the afterlife of Ezra–Neh. in Antiquity," followed by an outline of the books' theological themes.

The structure that Lorein discerns resembles most other standard structures of Ezra–Nehemiah. However, while most other structures see Ezra 1–6, 7–10, and Nehemiah 1:1–7:3 as three returns followed by a conclusion in Nehemiah 7:4–12:47, Lorein takes a slightly different tack. He sees a parallel between Ezra 1–6 (building the temple) and Nehemiah 1–7 (building the walls), as each is followed by parallel sections on building the community (Ezra 1–6 and Nehemiah 7:4–12:47). Nehemiah 13 then forms a coda, recounting the "recalcitrant reality." The strength of this reading lies in its attention to the thematic parallels between Ezra and Nehemiah. However, even though taking Nehemiah 13 as a "coda" is a common way to read the chapter, it does leave it slightly disjointed from the rest of Nehemiah. Unfortunately, Lorein does not discuss the rationale for his structure, which leaves the reader without a clear sense of how Ezra–Nehemiah fits together as a narrative whole.

The commentary itself mostly focuses on verse-by-verse exegesis. According to the general editors, the revised commentaries aim to provide an "up-to-date reading of the text," continuing the series' emphasis on exegesis (p. vii). However, as they note, "emphases in exegesis have changed markedly." While they do not spell out what this means for the current series of updated commentaries, they do highlight a change in format that recognises that "texts communicate in larger blocks rather than in shorter segments such as individual verses" (p. viii). This is reflected in the new three-part format: "Context," where literary and historical setting are considered; "Comment," offering close exegesis of the passage; and "Meaning," summarizing the contribution of the passage at hand to the book as a whole along with its theological themes.

In his commentary, Lorein frequently comments on historical and material details behind and in the text, such as socio-political background, likely dates of events, and the identities of key figures, places, and musical instruments. He also notes likely authorial intertextual connections to other parts of the Old Testament and frequently references Hebrew grammar and syntax to clarify complex sentences. Lorein also pays careful attention to often-overlooked elements, such as the names in the census lists and the locations mentioned, demonstrating a commitment to reading the whole text with care.

Despite the strengths of Lorein's approach, there are shortcomings. Lorein's attention to the world behind and in the text and to the details of the text leaves many important avenues unexplored. First, the commentary does not give sufficient attention to the dynamics of Ezra–Nehemiah as narrative, even at the level of plot and themes, let alone narrative art. For example, his discussion on Ezra 3:12–13 notes the mixed response of weeping and joy (pp. 88–89), but it does not consider what this response might mean in the context of the story. In the world of the text, it is intriguing whether the weeping is a result of an incomplete restoration from exile or memories of a long-lost past. The mixed responses raise a significant narrative tension: what will come of these mixed feelings, especially if and when the temple is complete?

Second, each section ends with a few paragraphs discussing the "meaning" of that part of the text. These sections are concise and accessible, offering brief reflections often framed in general moral terms. While this may help certain readers apply the text to life, more theological depth and attention to the story's inner dynamics would have strengthened these conclusions. To draw on his comments on Ezra

3:12–13, Lorein simply comments that this reflects the reality of mixed feelings in life (pp. 89–90). A stronger application might have considered the role of mixed responses in the context of the return from exile and how this might translate to, say, the modern experience of a Christian living in a kingdom that is both now and not yet.

Third, more generally, theological and ethical reflection tends to be brief and superficial. Lorein does have a special interest in the relationship between church and state, and Ezra–Nehemiah is certainly a fruitful text in this regard. He is to be commended for exploring how Ezra–Nehemiah urges readers to participate in a mixed society at a critical distance, trusting in God's sovereignty over all things. However, his comments are all-too brief, and he does not attempt to read Ezra–Nehemiah's political theology in any conversation with other canonical texts or the broader political-theological tradition. Similarly, although Lorein offers an apology for the divorces in Ezra 9–10, he does so primarily from a sociological perspective and argues that the position taken here does not materially differ from other parts of the Bible (pp. 152–54). The discussion would have benefited from a discussion of theological issues around Israel's election, holiness, and covenant in relation to foreign nations and their practices and to their precarious situation after the exile.

Related to the thin theological and ethical reflection is a lack of canonical contextualization. Standing as they do at the end of Israel's story, Ezra and Nehemiah reflect patterns from Israel's past and fulfill promises from their prophets. In a theological-canonical frame of reference, these books stand in Israel's story that moves towards and climaxes in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It might be argued that this kind of reading is outside the scope of the Tyndale commentaries. However, according to the general editors, their prayer is "that these new volumes will continue the rich heritage of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries and that they will continue to witness to the God who is made known in the text" (p. vii). Any Christian reading that is committed to reading "the Bible as Scripture," seeks to "engage with a full range of interpretive issues," and aims to "witness to the God who is made known in the text" must wrestle with—or at least gesture to—the way Ezra–Nehemiah can be understood in this canonical context. Furthermore, the revised Tyndale commentaries aim to provide an "up-to-date reading of the text." Since Kidner's volume in 1979, significant works have been published on Ezra–Nehemiah as literature (cf., e.g., Tamara C. Eskenazi, *In an Age of Prose: A Literary Approach to Ezra-Nehemiah* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1988]) and theology (Matthew Levering, *Ezra and Nehemiah* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2007], and David J. Shepherd and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, THOTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018]). Curiously, none of these significant studies appear in the bibliography, which is a missed opportunity to engage with recent literary and theological developments and so provide a truly up-to-date reading.

All of this, of course, raises the question of audience: Who is this commentary written for? The general preface does not say, but the preface to the old series specifies "the student of the Bible." What "students of the Bible" need today is very different from fifty years ago. The old Tyndale series reflected the reading culture of mid-twentieth century biblical scholarship with its primary focus on the world behind the text and the philological details on the Hebrew text. The British university student studying undergraduate theology in the mid-twentieth century may have benefited from a portable handbook on the text that briefly outlined critical issues. Today, students can easily find such information from a Google search and can access a multitude of commentaries at a keystroke. What they need most is a reliable guide to the interpretation of the text in the context of the rest of Scripture and the world today.

In sum, Lorein offers a careful and textually focused commentary that continues the strengths of the Tyndale tradition. Readers seeking a close reading of the Hebrew text within its historical and philological context will find this volume a helpful companion. Those looking for close narrative reading, theological reflection, or canonical integration may wish to supplement it with other recent works. Nonetheless, Lorein's commentary represents a steady contribution to the updated TOTC series and reminds us of the ongoing importance of attending closely to the biblical text.

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David L. Petersen. *Genesis*. Old Testament Library. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2025. xxi + 407 pp. £50.00/$65.00.

When it comes to commentaries on Genesis—for scholars and students alike, whether "critical" or "confessional" in nature—there is no shortage of options. David L. Petersen's contribution to the Old Testament Library series is a recent addition to the embarrassment of riches surrounding this formative, foundational book. Petersen maintains from the outset: "Genesis is a book. That claim might seem odd, but Genesis has rarely been examined and interpreted as a book" (p. 1).

To be clear, however, Petersen remains persuaded that both the Supplementary and Fragmentary Hypotheses (as opposed to the traditional Documentary Hypothesis) may be effectively combined. That is, Petersen unabashedly asserts that the "pre-Priestly material" within Primeval history (Gen 1–11) developed independently from the "pre-Priestly" literature in Genesis 12–36 and that much the same may be said of the "Joseph novella" (p. 10). In fact, Petersen explicitly states (cf. pp. 9–12, esp. p. 10) that he follows Rolf Rendtorff's lead, particularly as laid out in *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch,* trans. John J. Scullion, JSOTSup 89 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990).

Thus, by way of example, while Petersen treats Genesis 6:1–8:22 in a single chapter (the commentary itself contains over fifty chapters), there are two distinct units which are noted therein, namely, the "Pre-Priestly Version of the Flood" (pp. 74–77) and the "Priestly Version of the Flood" (pp. 77–81). That said, Petersen argues that Genesis 6:5—not Genesis 6:1–4, i.e., the story of the so-called *nephilim*—is the proper beginning of the Noachian Flood Narrative (p. 69).

Aside from a relatively thorough, albeit somewhat brief, introduction (pp. 1–37) which covers topics like Text, Method, and Historical Background (noting Petersen's special emphasis on Geography, i.e., *Ortsgebundenheit*, pp. 22–25) the book rounds off with two indices: (1) Scripture/Ancient Sources, and (2) Subjects/Authors. Regrettably, the Author Index fails to provide every instance of every individual noted in the commentary.

Petersen's translations are frequently distinctive. For instance, he renders the opening verses of Scripture as, "When God began to create the heavens and the earth—the earth was empty wilderness, the watery deep was dark, and a wind from God swept over the water—God said, 'Let there be light!' And there was light" (Gen 1:1–3; p. 30).

Petersen translates Genesis 1:27 as, "So God created the earth creature in his image. In the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (p. 31), noting within the commentary that, though it may sound "prosaic," Genesis 1:27 may be restated as, "So God created the earth creature, … but God really created the earth creature as something more than an individual: they are male and female" (p. 36).

Petersen often includes "literal" translations, including wordplay/pun explanations and some alternate renderings, in his footnotes. For example, concerning Genesis 3:20 Petersen renders the verse as, "The man named his wife 'Eve' because she was the mother of all (human) life," with a note indicating that "Hebrew *ḥawwâ* (Eve) is a wordplay on 'life,' *ḥay*" (pp. 47–48). Elsewhere, Petersen renders Genesis 6:6 as, "YHWH regretted that he had made humanity on the earth. He was terribly sad" (literally, "It was sad to his heart"; pp. 69–70).

To critique, there is a somewhat disturbing paucity of references to academia at large. For instance, from Genesis 37 to 52 (pp. 304–81) I could find only two references to other scholars. This is particularly surprising given the (deserved) reputation of this series for rigorous engagement with current scholarship; a commentary of this stature should be expected not only to interpret the text but also to situate that interpretation within ongoing academic discourse, enabling readers to assess competing views and developments in the field at large.

Text-critically, Petersen is right to affirm: "Though there are occasional scribal errors in the MT of Genesis, instances in which textual criticism must weigh the evidence from both ancient texts and versions, the MT provides an excellent basis for the translation and comments provided here" (p. 27). Even so, his commentary offers little to no sustained engagement with the Masoretic accentual system and its potential implications for exegesis and/or interpretation. In addition, the notes themselves are often rather workmanlike—solid, but occasionally lacking the nuance, texture, and sensitivity that one might expect from someone seemingly well-acquainted (cf. pp. 25–27) with Ron Hendel's magisterial work, namely *The Text of Genesis 1–11: Textual Studies and Critical Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Genesis 6:14a provides an excellent test case. Petersen renders this clause (without further comment) merely as, "Make for yourself an ark out of wood; make compartments in the ark." Aside from disputes concerning the Hebrew term "gopher," which (as mentioned) Petersen simply ignores, it has long been recognized that "reeds" is not only an acceptable textual alternative to "compartments" but superior. For more details, see Dustin G. Burlet, *Judgment and Salvation: A Rhetorical-Critical Reading of Noah's Flood in Genesis* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022) and Burlet, "Antiquity and Arithmetic: Hyperbole and a Rhetorical-Critical Reading of Noah's Ark," *Canon & Culture* 18 (2024): 131–71. Lastly, I am baffled why Petersen chose BHS and not BHQ as his basis (p. 25).

Lexically, Petersen effectively differentiates between each of the various Hebrew stems (Qal, Piel, Niphal, etc.) thus mitigating many possibilities of "exegetical fallacies." Unfortunately, while *HALOT* and *ThWAT* (the German counterpart to *TDOT*) both appear in the abbreviations list (notably, though, *DCH*, Gesenius [18th ed.], and BDB do not) Petersen makes scant references to them (cf. p. 375). The same holds true for grammar. To be clear, while *IBHS* is listed among Petersen's reference tools (but not GKC or others, such as DG, *BHRG*, Joüon/Muraoka, or Brockelmann's *Hebräische Syntax*), I was unable to find very many points where Petersen meaningfully engages its insights (pp. 151, 214, 223). In addition, since each of these instances are explicitly used within *IBHS* as examples, it would have behooved Petersen to have leveraged its index more. For instance, I am sure that readers would have appreciated clarifying the full (grammatical/syntactical) import of Genesis 9:6 by referring to *IBHS*

sections 11.2.5d, 23.2.2f, and 37.5a. In a similar manner, citing *IBHS* section 35.3.2c could have, perhaps, potentially benefited certain aspects of Petersen's exegesis of Genesis 8:3 and 8:7.

Despite these occasionally perplexing limitations, any new commentary on Genesis is welcome, especially from a scholar as seasoned and uniquely qualified as David L. Petersen. *Genesis* is sure to earn its place alongside Gerhard von Rad's 1972 work in the self-same Old Testament Library series as a "go-to" resource for scholars, students, and ministry leaders alike.

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— NEW TESTAMENT —

Chris Bruno. *Sharing Christ in Joy and Sorrow: A Theology of Philippians*. New Testament Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025. 128 pp. £14.99/$21.99.

In this recent volume in Crossway's New Testament Theology series, Chris Bruno, president and professor of New Testament and biblical theology at Oahu Theological Seminary, offers a compact, pastorally warm, and theologically rich exploration of Paul's letter to the Philippians. Bruno argues that the undergirding theme is the believer's union with Christ, particularly in the context of sorrow and joy, suffering and glory (p. 1). In six concise chapters (plus an introduction and conclusion), Bruno structures his theology around this union. He unpacks its implications across a range of Pauline themes: Christology, ecclesiology, eschatology, mission, and perseverance.

Bruno grounds his understanding of the letter in the *Carmen Christi*, which he reads as its theological center (p. 7). Christ's humiliation and exaltation become paradigmatic for the church's life and mission. Bruno points out how Paul's gospel logic proves that exaltation always comes *through* suffering (p. 12). The following chapter elaborates his controlling theme of union with Christ, a theme that undergirds the letter's exhortations (p. 20). Repeated phrases such as "in Christ" and "in the Lord" permeate Philippians (pp. 24–25). Chapters 3–5expand this union across the life of the church (focusing on shared humility, gospel advance, and eschatological hope), with the final chapter bringing the full emotional weight of Bruno's thesis to bear in a reflection on joy amid suffering. His closing pages are marked by poignant autobiographical resonance, written beside his dying father's hospital bed, a fitting conclusion to a theology of joy in sorrow.

Several strengths stand out. Bruno writes with personal warmth, pastoral clarity, and theological depth, and his familiarity with Pauline theology is evident throughout. Readers will appreciate the integration of biblical theology, particularly the Adam/Christ typology and echoes of Isaiah's suffering servant. In a letter sometimes argued to be devoid of Hebrew Bible allusions and references, he highlights Paul's rich use of the Hebrew Bible in Philippians. One only wishes he pressed further, not only to the Isaianic servant texts he highlights but also to the Psalms, where vindication language resonates with Paul's framing of suffering and exaltation. He integrates Pauline theology from more expansive letters, with concise attention to background, rhetorical structure, and the christological significance of Paul's

language. While avoiding unnecessary technicalities, Bruno's exegesis is especially strong in passages like 2:5–11, where his unpacking of Christ's "self-emptying" (2:7) as an adding, not subtracting, of humanity is both clear and careful.

Moreover, this book is refreshingly accessible for pastors and students alike. The brevity of each chapter makes it digestible, and Bruno resists the temptation to chase every scholarly tangent. He is aware of the limits of his scope, especially regarding Old Testament allusions, and states this up front.

That said, the book's strengths are also its limitations. In attempting to write a brief biblical theology, Bruno occasionally mutes the distinct voice of Philippians in favor of familiar Pauline categories. One wishes for greater attention to the unique literary and rhetorical features of the letter as they add dimension and weight to Paul's theology. For instance, Bruno does not discuss the linguistic prevalence of the συν- prefix (cf. Phil 1:7, 27; 2:2, 25; 3:17, 10; 4:3), though it bolsters his discussion for unity and mutual participation in Christ (pp. 16, 31–34). Additionally, there is no mention of the rhetorical movement of φρονέω language (cf. Phil 1:7; 2:2, 3, 5; 3:15, 19; 4:2, 10), especially as it informs Paul's concrete exhortations around unity and humility. Being of the "same mind" (2:2) requires "lowliness of mind" (2:3), which reflects the very "mind" of Christ shared by believers (2:5). Unfortunately, Bruno offers little sustained engagement with 1:1–11, a section that sets the tone and theological trajectory for the letter. These linguistic markers serve as scaffolding around which the theological argument is constructed.

Most notably, Bruno does not offer sustained discussion of Philippians 1:27–30, arguably the thesis of the epistle (cf. David Alan Black, "The Discourse Structure of Philippians: A Study in Textlinguistics," *NovT* 37 [1995]: 16–49). While the *Carmen Christi* is surely significant, its use is primarily paradigmatic and illustrative in the flow of Paul's argument in 1:27–2:11 (cf. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995]). To skim over 1:27 is to risk bypassing the letter's *stated* telos of a gospel-shaped unity, underscored by Paul's own vocabulary (i.e., "μόνον" in 1:27). Greater textual attentiveness at this point could have sharpened the theological clarity of the work, especially given Bruno's ability to connect christological themes to ecclesial realities.

Still, Bruno's work offers a valuable resource. Pastors preaching through Philippians will find encouragement, theological connections, and devotional clarity. In sum, *Sharing Christ in Joy and Sorrow* is a faithful and helpful introduction to the theology of Philippians. While it does not fully capture the distinct resonance of the letter, it succeeds in showing how Paul's hope in Christ enables believers to hold joy and sorrow together.

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Matthias Henze and David Lincicum, eds. *Israel's Scriptures in Early Christian Writings: The Use of the Old Testament in the New*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. xxvi + 1140 pp. £63.99/$79.99.

In the decades since Richard Hays's groundbreaking *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), there has been a tremendous outpouring of secondary literature on the relationship between the OT and the NT, mostly focusing on the latter's reuse of the former. This hefty edited volume, comprising a lengthy introduction and forty-two dense chapters, not only outlines the *status quaestionis* but also aims to advance the scholarly conversation. Toward this end, the editors assemble an international cast of contributors from a variety of theological and ideological perspectives. The editors do not rigidly impose a set structure for each chapter or advance specific criteria for identifying allusions, though they do suggest that each contributor utilize a fourfold taxonomy (marked citation, unmarked citation, verbal allusion, and conceptual allusion) to aid discussion of the various categories of scriptural reuse.

The book is divided into five parts. Part 1 sets the stage with seven chapters that helpfully provide a baseline of comparison. An introductory chapter tackling the tricky question of which books constituted "Scripture" in the first century is followed by six chapters which analyze the reception and patterns of scriptural reuse (1) within the Hebrew Bible itself, (2) in the various Greek translations of the Old Testament, (3) in early Jewish literature (e.g., 1 Enoch and Wisdom of Solomon), (4) in the Dead Sea Scrolls, (5) in the writings of Philo, and (6) in the writings of Josephus. These chapters are particularly helpful from a historical vantage point by positioning the NT authors' practices of scriptural reuse *within* a widespread Jewish literary and exegetical tradition.

Part 2 contains seventeen chapters covering every NT book. It should be noted that these chapters do not attempt to crawl through the text and offer analysis on every quotation or probable allusion. The result is a bit impressionistic, with each contributor free to focus on elements they wish to highlight. Despite not being exhaustive, the chapters in this section are generally thorough and routinely offer intertextual insights.

The eight chapters in part 3 attempt a synthetic analysis of a selection of major theological themes ("God," "Messiah," "Holy Spirit," "Covenant," "Law," "Wisdom," "Liturgy and Prayer," and "Eschatology") which cut across the OT and are then developed by NT authors. These chapters are more uneven. For instance, J. Thomas Hewitt offers a superb accounting of messianic idioms and images across both testaments. This is followed, though, by John Levison's chapter on "Holy Spirit," which includes a heuristic category ("Spirit and Ecstasy") that he admits lacks support in the OT: "The prominence of an ecstatic experience of the spirit [*sic*] has only a slim foothold in the Jewish Scriptures" (p. 623). He then makes the odd and unconvincing claim that early Christians "succumbed" to a "swell of ecstasy," asserting that this was a commonplace feature of Hellenistic Judaism in the Second Temple era (p. 625). The evidence for this, Levison argues, consists in the *downplaying* of ecstasy in Acts and 1 Corinthians (p. 625). Finally, in the chapter on "Law," Claudia Setzer rightly dispenses with a number of unhelpful stereotypes and misrepresentations of Israel's purity laws and legal traditions in biblical studies. But in the process, she unfortunately buys into caricatures of Reformational interpretations of Paul and

the law. Setzer instead appears to embrace John Gager's "two-track system" (p. 691), with covenantal nomism the path to salvation for Jews and faith in Christ the path for Gentiles alone.

Part 4 analyzes five significant OT sources (Deuteronomy, Isaiah, Psalms, Daniel, and famous figures from Israel's history) and traces their reception in the writings of the NT. Although all these chapters contain useful information, most fascinating is Valérie Nicolet's chapter concerning "Figures of Ancient Israel in the New Testament." She traces the reception in early Jewish literature and in the NT of Abraham, Moses, David, Jacob, Joseph, and Elijah, along with "lesser-used female figures" (p. 914) such as Eve, Hagar, Sarah, Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, surveying their typological or exemplaristic functions.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of *Israel's Scriptures in Early Christian Writings* lies in part 5, which in five chapters analyzes scriptural reuse in 1) the apocryphal Gospels, 2) the apocryphal Apocalypses, 3) the *Adversus Judaeos* literature (e.g., Barnabas, Justin Martyr, etc.), 4) Marcion and the "critical tradition" (i.e., heretical writings), and 5) early Christian pictorial art. These corpora are often overlooked and have generally received less attention regarding their use of the OT (aside from a few key studies of Justin Martyr's use of Scripture).

In sum, *Israel's Scriptures in Early Christian Writings* constitutes a significant contribution to scholarship. In terms of situating it among similar studies, this project claims a spot somewhere between G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson's classic edited work, *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), and the *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), edited by Beale, Carson, Benjamin L. Gladd, and Andrew David Naselli. *Israel's Scriptures* lacks the exhaustive detail of the *Commentary* but contains more up-to-date discussions. And while the *Dictionary* devotes much more space to theological themes, *Israel's Scriptures* surveys scriptural reuse in a wider array of literature. Its expansive scope, engagement with contemporary scholarship, and diversity of perspectives make this volume required reading for those interested in the relationship between the Old Testament and the New.

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— HISTORY & HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Herman Bavinck. *The Foremost Problems of Contemporary Dogmatics: On Faith, Knowledge, and the Christian Tradition*. Translated and edited by Bruce R. Pass and Gert De Kok. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2025. xvi + 376 pp. £41.99/$44.99.

Lexham Press's publication of *The Foremost Problems of Contemporary Dogmatics: On Faith, Knowledge, and the Christian Tradition* represents something of a triumph in Bavinck studies. This is not to say that this volume boasts anything particularly surprising or ground-breaking in Bavinck studies, only that such a publication signifies the wild success of an area of interest. That a modern publishing house would see these partially completed lectures as a fruitful publishing venture is a testament to Bavinck's increasing popularity in recent decades.

This book is the historical section of a series of lectures Herman Bavinck delivered towards the beginning of his time at the Free University in Amsterdam. In them, Bavinck sought to address the key ideas and figures that were shaping the theological landscape of his day. In this way, *The Foremost Problems* includes several analyses that may seem irrelevant to the reader today. The theologians covered in the last two chapters are not likely to ring a familiar bell for an English-speaking audience today. But this should not take the reader by surprise, since Bavinck made his agenda quite clear at the start: "anyone who may soon have to lead their people must be at home in his own era. He must be a child of his own time, understanding his own time" (p. 2).

So, the dated discussions of some of the later portions of the book are not an intrinsic mark against Bavinck. Indeed, the content in these sections is not only surprisingly instructive, but it models the patient, methodical *manner* in which Bavinck engages with competing systems of thought. In contrast to much of the modern Church that was "actually afraid of scholarship" and had—in his words—"allowed itself to be intimidated and terrorized by it, humbly begging for a small place somewhere in the intellectual inner sanctum" (p. 219), Bavinck respected no sacred cows: no figure, however tall they stood by way of influence—be it Kant or Schleiermacher or Hegel or Harnack—was beyond critique.

As the subtitle suggests, Bavinck is concerned in these lectures with the metaphysics of epistemology. The Enlightenment brought an unhealthy separation between faith and knowledge. Therefore, he sought to rehabilitate a distinctly Christian view of faith. Faith, for Bavinck, is not *strictly* trust but is rather a kind of knowledge. In agreement with classical Protestant commitments, Bavinck supports faith as being comprised of knowledge, assent, and trust. What makes Bavinck unique is that he brings these classical commitments into contemporary conversations of epistemology and the nature of knowledge. In other words, faith cannot be treated as one topic among many, as if it were a mere expression of the mystical and spiritual side of man. Rather, it is irreducibly consequential on the whole matrix of knowledge and reality itself. Faith has *epistemological* consequences, and the tendency to abstract faith from knowledge can only result in the death of faith. But such a separation also results in the death of *knowledge*. And in this way, Bavinck—even early on during his time at the Free University—is unambiguously committed to Christian worldview thinking.

The benefit of this outlook, of course, is that it gives the Christian permission—indeed, the command—to view all of life and reality in the light of the Christian story. This worldview thinking is what provides Bavinck with the rationale to explore his polymathic interest in explicitly theological terms. But the danger of this kind of framework is the temptation of reductionism. If all doctrines and beliefs are to be the product of—and contribution to—one's overall worldview, and if the goal is to praise the supremacy of the Protestant (and, more specifically, the *Reformed*) worldview over and against all others, reducing those other "worldviews" to some central ideas, simplistically construed, will always be a temptation. Some will no doubt accuse Bavinck of succumbing to such a temptation with his uncharacteristically brief analysis of Roman Catholicism in general, and Thomas Aquinas in particular.

Bavinck's reason for engaging in the medieval theology of Aquinas is right, insofar as it goes. He argues that those forces that have conspired to result in the "foremost problems of dogmatics" in his own day trace back to before the time of the Reformation. But Bavinck's analysis of those philosophical headwaters is not as nuanced as his analysis of his contemporaries. Bavinck describes the starkest expression of the Nature and Grace distinction and attributes Pure Nature theology unquestioningly to Aquinas, and monolithically to Roman Catholicism as a whole (pp. 17–32). This brief analysis is what informs Bavinck's criticism of later Reformed Orthodox theologians for critically appropriating Aristotle via Aquinas in their metaphysical commitments (pp. 75–76). He goes on to accuse the Protestant Scholastics of making "*ratio* ('reason') and *fides* ['faith'] … stand dualistically side by side on the scientific domain as they do in Thomas" (p. 76). According to this "dualistic" portrait of Roman Catholicism in general, and Aquinas in particular, Bavinck can likewise casually describe the "philosophy of Descartes" as "Roman Catholic" (p. 77).

This reviewer will leave it to others more capable to render the judgment on whether Bavinck is guilty of reductionism for the convenience of worldview analysis, but we can at least highlight the contrast of sweeping characterizations of Aquinas and the Roman Catholic tradition in the first half of the book with the patient and charitable analysis of modern liberal theologians in the latter half. The imbalance is discernable at the sheer level of page count. If he is guilty of reductionism, the need would surely not be to somehow express *less* charity and patience toward modern liberal thinkers but rather to receive our Lord's correction in this reappropriated context: "These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others" (Matt 23:23b).

In any case, this book is a good illustration of what makes Bavinck so formidable a thinker. In this book, Bavinck puts on full display the power and purpose of the neo-Calvinist project. One cannot help but be impressed with his command of the depth and breadth of material covered in this volume. This reviewer suspects that *The Foremost Problems of Contemporary Dogmatics* will be something of a "deep track" for fans of Bavinck. Those who simply want to become more acquainted with Bavinck's thought would do much better to explore other works (such as *The Wonderful Works of God*, his *Reformed Dogmatics*, his *Essays on Religion, Science, and Society*, or even his more devotional *The Sacrifice of Praise*) before turning to these lectures.

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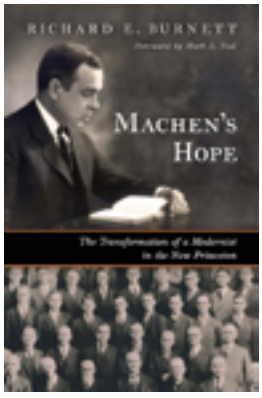
Richard E. Burnett. *Machen's Hope: The Transformation of a Modernist in the New Princeton*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024. 620 pp. £35.99/$45.99.



Richard Burnett's new biography of J. Gresham Machen tells the compelling story of Machen's transformation "from a modernist to an anti-modernist" (p. 3) during his tenure as a student, and later as a professor at Princeton Theological Seminary. According to Burnett, a close examination of Machen's writings and personal correspondence makes it clear that, despite what previous biographers have insisted, Machen ought not to be regarded as a "die-hard defender of Old Princeton" (p. 289) who was determined—throughout the entirety of his tenure at Princeton—to march in lockstep with the heritage of Old Princeton Seminary. Instead, he ought to be regarded as a first-rate scholar who was discouraged throughout much of his tenure by what he believed was the "hopelessly parochial mindset" of the seminary with which he was associated, and who, as a consequence, "was more interested in overcoming Old Princeton's legacy than preserving it" (p. 206). Indeed, although Machen eventually came around to embracing the substance of the Old Princeton tradition in its fulness, nevertheless he was not persuaded at the outset of his tenure that the contemporary proponents of that tradition—who were reluctant to embrace the methods of the modern university—"were prepared to meet the greatest intellectual challenges" of the age in which they lived (p. 206). For that reason, Machen found himself standing in sometimes more and sometimes less sympathy with the ideals of those at Princeton University who were agitating for what Burnett insists was the formation of a "New Princeton," a Princeton that would be liberated "not only from the legacy of Old Princeton and the chains of its distinctive dogmas but from theology altogether as an academic discipline" (p. 73). In short, Burnett's Machen was a life-long proponent "of modern university ideals" (p. 206) who was devoted throughout most of his tenure to helping like-minded colleagues deliver Princeton Seminary from its intellectual isolation by applying "the methods and results of higher criticism" (p. 536) to the substance of the seminary curriculum. As Burnett's beautifully written, meticulously researched, and often provocative analysis makes clear, Machen's hope for success in this regard—which was grounded in his expectation that the methods of the modern university would enable not just Princeton but other universities "to flourish, make 'great scientific progress,' and eventually produce 'the beautiful blossoms of an intellectual culture'" (p. 530)—endured until he recognized that the methods to which he was devoted had been compromised by the "antisupernaturalistic philosophy" (p. 323) that came to the fore in the early twentieth century. It was at that point, Burnett contends, that Machen was transformed "from a modernist to an anti-modernist" (p. 3), and his hope for authentically enlightened learning was reoriented along more overtly orthodox lines.

While theological conservatives who are interested in Machen and his relationship to the history of the Witherspoon or Old Princeton tradition will no doubt find much to commend in Burnett's careful analysis of Machen's hope, it is also true that they will likely find at least something with which to quibble. For example, I am among those interested readers who is pleased to learn that Burnett may be counted as a scholar who is willing to concede that Machen and his colleagues at Old Princeton had more in common with their Kuyperian brethren than is typically acknowledged in discussions of the history of the American evangelical experience (for example, see pp. 291–302). At the same time, however, I want to push back against Burnett's unambiguous insistence that Machen's understanding of the relationship between piety and learning was compromised by the naïve realism of the Scottish

Enlightenment. Machen's eventual "break with modernism was not as clean as [he] thought," Burnett contends, because he "remained tied" (p. 408)—just as the Old Princeton theologians before him had remained tied—to an understanding of objective science that had a distinctively Scottish provenance. But what if Machen's approach to believing scholarship was not in fact compromised by the naïve realism of the Scottish intellectual tradition, as recent work on the history of the Old Princeton tradition has maintained? This, it seems, is anything but an irrelevant question—particularly in the context of Burnett's analysis—for how it is answered will have a dispositive bearing upon how we account for the transformation of Machen's hope that Burnett recounts and that more conservative readers will likely be eager to celebrate. Did Machen, as Burnett contends, abandon "modernism" and become an "anti-modernist" by "mak[ing] peace with modernity," i.e., by making a self-conscious effort to make "concessions" (p. 553) to the thoughts and assumptions of the age in which he lived? Or did he embrace "anti-modernism" because he was becoming increasingly aware of the enduring significance of more subtle—and indeed more orthodox—elements of the Old Princeton tradition, especially those elements that have to do with what revisionist historians are insisting was Old Princeton's indebtedness to an Augustinian understanding of "right reason"? While Burnett's analysis would be even more compelling if he had wrestled with these kinds of questions, the fact remains that *Machen's Hope* is an impressive volume that makes an important contribution to the literature on Machen and the Old Princeton tradition more generally.

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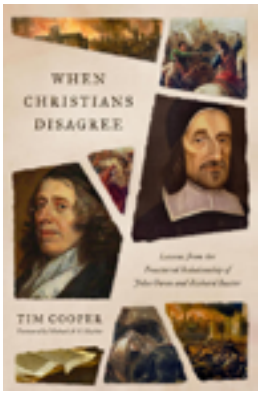
Tim Cooper. *When Christians Disagree: Lessons from the Fractured Relationship of John Owen and Richard Baxter*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024. 184 pp. £13.99/$18.99.



This book is a must-read. I have read it twice, in less than three months, because I am experiencing exactly what the subtitle describes: a fractured relationship with Christian brothers. Who among us has not or will not (again!) need to navigate the stormy waters when Christians disagree? Tim Cooper, professor of church history at the University of Otago in New Zealand, has drawn sobering lessons about brotherly love from the fractured relationship between two giants of the English Second Reformation, John Owen and Richard Baxter. While many serious Christian leaders will readily identify their key theological works (e.g., *The Mortification of Sin*, *The Reformed Pastor*), few are aware of their acrimonious relationship.

Profiting from the historical and emotional distance that separates today's leaders from Owen and Baxter—they lived nearly 400 years ago—Cooper unfolds their tragic story. After a brief historical review of the life and ministries of these "Two Good Men" (pp. 9–28), Cooper successively explores three contributing elements to the intensification of all church disagreements: experience, personality, and theology.

Both Owen and Baxter experienced the English Civil War (1642–1651), but they experienced it in very different ways due to their geographical proximity (Baxter) or distance (Owen) from the bloody

fighting. "In sum," writes Cooper, "Owen saw the war as a blessing from God, while Baxter viewed it as God's judgment on a sinful people" (p. 37).

The same intensity could be felt in their personality clash (p. 41). Owen was known for "his tendency to respond with anger when others stood in his way" (p. 48). Baxter was not shy to stand in someone's way with "his tendency to come across as magisterial, haughty, arrogant, impervious to correction, blind to his own weakness, incapable of self-doubt, and personally disdainful of others" (pp. 50–51).

Theologically, the two pastors were in wholehearted agreement, except on some questions which "may seem extremely technical to us." Their different answers were articulated "in large part because each was driven by a different set of concerns" (p. 58). While Baxter warned against the waywardness of antinomianism, Owen feared the insecurity of Arminianism. "The particular concerns of each man," notes Cooper, "led them to focus on different issues and talk past each other" (p. 70).

Having identified their differences, Cooper develops the explosive nature of their exchanges. Their "accidental animosity" began in written form in 1649 when Baxter reluctantly criticized Owen's book *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (pp. 74–75). Owen's reply "may have been brief, but it was heated and pointed" (p. 80).

The loss of mutual trust played out when the two men did finally meet in 1654 to serve a government-appointed subcommittee on church unity. Cooper's summary of their acrimonious relationship is insightful:

> It is worth pausing briefly to recall that [Owen and Baxter] came into the same room with very different life experiences, opposing personalities, contrasting theological concerns, and a history of sniping at each other in print. Furthermore, as we have learned, they arrived with differing agendas over the very purpose of the subcommittee in which they were both to play a part. How could this ever go well? (p. 96)

It did not, and it rarely does. Today, many ministry leaders can recount how a meeting went terribly wrong, tearing brothers apart. However, they were often unaware that these fissures existed before the meeting began, or at least they were unable to identify them. Drawing lessons from the Owen-Baxter disagreements, Cooper directs our eyes to see and know ourselves.

> If we are engaged in controversy, we become blind to so much of what is going on, not least inside us. That, I hope, has been the value of this book. In understanding their story, perhaps we can better understand our own narratives. (p. 125)

Each chapter helpfully concludes with questions for personal reflection. While Cooper suggests that the reader may ponder these questions "either by yourself or in a small group" (p. 5), the emphasis is on individual analysis. However, the real benefit will be revealed when we engage in this discussion with fellow leaders who can see us better than we understand ourselves. If we have the courage to engage this discussion *before* a conflict rears its ugly head, we may have the humility to listen and to learn *in the midst of* the controversial storm.

When Christians Disagree should be required reading for all seminary students. (I'm proposing it for translation into French for my students in Quebec.) Young men training for the ministry often naïvely assume their ability to elude leadership conflict. Their foolishness increases as they read the great works of theological giants. Cooper's book opens their eyes to the reality that solid theologians need to be personally sanctified.

Pastors, elders, and ministry leaders would benefit greatly from reading and rereading *When Christians Disagree*. Because of their service within the church, they will certainly experience fractured relationships. Some pastors become crusty combatants. Like Owen and Baxter, they shut themselves off and comfort themselves with self-justification. Wise pastors will recognize the need for "openness and self-awareness" (p. 126). Regularly reflecting upon *When Christians Disagree* will enable us to develop a fresh reading of our own personal conflicts. By God's grace, may we develop the wisdom, patience, and gentleness necessary for peaceful reconciliation.

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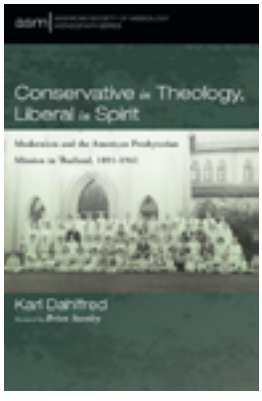
Karl Dahlfred. *Conservative in Theology, Liberal in Spirit: Modernism and the American Presbyterian Mission in Thailand, 1891–1941*. American Society of Missiology Monograph Series 69. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2024. 273 pp. £32.00/$40.00.



The title of this book, *Conservative in Theology, Liberal in Spirit*, comes from a 1927 answer given to an American journalist, Charles Selden, who was enquiring whether or not the PCUSA missionaries in Thailand were fundamentalists. The answer given by the executive secretary of the PCUSA mission in Thailand, Paul Eakon, reads, "Mr. Selden, I should say that almost all of our Mission, both old and young, are conservative in Theology, and liberal in their spirit" (p. xxi). The book is an exposition of that quotation in many ways. Eakon, in the modernist-leaning camp, was very careful in what he crafted and tried to hold the unity of the mission in his statement. During the period under study, the various PCUSA mission fields were complicated to categorise, with many ambiguities and diversities between fields. As this book also shows, this quotation is an excellent way to get a handle on these years of transition in one field.

This work was originally a PhD thesis at the University of Edinburgh under the supervision of Brian Stanley, professor emeritus of world Christianity, who has also provided the foreword for the published book. The thesis has had some reworking, which have been made more accessible for a wider audience. The first chapter, "What It Means to Be 'Modern,'" establishes the context of the rise of modernism, which then allows for that relationship to theological modernism to be acknowledged in the next chapter. This often neglected contextual and logical approach is helpful. In chapter 4, "Modernization in Buddhist Thailand, 1820 to 1941," Dahlfred also includes an excellent contextual grounding for surveying modernism within Thailand's culture and main religion.

I found chapter 7 particularly interesting as here Dahlfred examines three foreign visitors, Charles Selden, Donald Grey Barnhouse, and John Sung, and how they interpreted and interacted with what they found in Thailand through "the lens of their experience with modernism and fundamentalism in the United States and China" (p. 147). Selden was a Unitarian. Barnhouse's tour reveals the complexities within a divided American fundamentalism, particularly within the Presbyterian fold. And for readers unfamiliar with John Sung, this will serve as a good introduction to this noted Chinese evangelist, who had studied for a time at Union Theological Seminary in New York.

The conclusion, "Six Reasons the American Presbyterian Mission in Thailand Experienced Little Modernist-Fundamentalist Controversy," would make for an excellent seminar discussion class in select programs of study on Presbyterian mission history. Dahlfred shows that the fundamentalist-modernist controversy did not impact the Thailand field to the same degree as it did in China or the USA and offers six credible reasons as to why. Nonetheless, the controversy was there. In part, it revolves around how one interprets "the degrees of controversy." For example, the PCUSA field in Cameroon also had controversy with the rise of modernism, namely the resignation of Charles Woodbridge, who left to join the new Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions. Perhaps that is a higher degree of controversy; such a level of controversy did not happen in the Thailand field.

2025 has seen significant changes in the PC(USA) and World Missions (WM) as WM has come to an end as a separate denominational entity (Megan Fowler, "Presbyterian World Mission Closes, Lays Off Dozen of Missionaries," Christianity Today, 1 May 2025, https://tinyurl.com/366secyv). No doubt historians of missions will be concerned with tracing the trajectory of the shifts in the PCUSA/PC(USA) concerning foreign missions from the 1920s and 1930s to today. Therefore, Dahlfred's book comes at a very timely juncture when a serious historical study needs to be undertaken about this denomination and world mission. It will add another source to consider and will help to broaden the picture, giving exposure to researchers as to how the early shifts were impacting the Thailand field. As I was reading, I wished to know more about post-1941 Thailand through to today.

One small quibble with the printing: my copy clips the page numbers, chapter titles, and book title, which should appear in the header at the top of each page. Hopefully, this was just a minor problem on a few copies. The book has several helpful maps and illustrations to complement the text. It clearly opens up a study into an often-neglected historical study of a Presbyterian mission field, combined with a thematic, theological, and missional study in which the fundamentalist-modernist controversy was working itself out in various fields. As noted above, this book comes at a time when fresh assessments are being made. The author is well qualified to author this work, having been a missionary in Thailand for over two decades already and the author of a short biography on *Daniel McGilvary: Missionary Pioneer to Northern Thailand*. *Conservative in Theology, Liberal in Spirit* is well researched and written, captures the shifts taking place in theology and in mission focus, and shows the ambiguities that were and are there.

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Zachary M. Garris. *Honor Thy Fathers: Recovering the Anti-Feminist Theology of the Reformers*. Ogden, UT: New Christendom, 2024. 157 pp. $24.95.

Honor Thy Fathers is part historical retrieval and part present-day polemic. Following up on his more exegetically based book, *Masculine Christianity*, pastor and author Zachary Garris sets out to enlist historic Reformed theologians in a contemporary battle over the future of the PCA (and, more broadly, evangelicalism). A reader's response to the book will largely be determined by where they sit in that contemporary battle—but no matter where you're perched, you'll have something to gain (and wrestle with) from this volume.

Part 1 is titled "A Reformed Theology of Male Rule." In three chapters, Garris assembles a wealth of quotations from early Reformed theologians (Oecolampadius, Musculus, Vermigli, Bullinger, and Calvin), later Reformed orthodox (Zanchi, Cartwright, Perkins, Gouge, and others), and finally the Reformed catechisms on the role of men and women in the family. There is a consistent pattern: all of these theologians taught an ordering of relationships, with men leading and women submitting to their husbands. These teachings were typically grounded in the classic texts that have occupied the complementarian-egalitarian debate but, interestingly, were also commonly rooted in Reformed teaching on the meaning of the fifth commandment.

Next, Garris looks at the role of men and women in the church, drawing on a similar range of theologians to demonstrate that the Reformers believed only men should be pastors and elders. There was also a fairly consistent teaching that women should not lead in public prayers or public worship in any way during the gathering of the church.

The final chapter in Part 1 is entitled, "The Reformed on Male Rule in the Commonwealth." Here, the debate is about the appropriateness of female rulers in the civil sphere, and while there is general consistency in the teaching (with most theologians against it), the figure of Elizabeth I towers in the background. John Knox's famous (or infamous) *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, aimed at Mary Tudor, reverberated with ever-changing harmonics as Mary was succeeded by the more Reformed-leaning Elizabeth. Garris cites enough of the developing debate to show that the appropriateness of female leaders was a complex and nuanced issue for the Reformed, even as, in general, all theologians agreed that such rule was at best an unusual exception to the normal pattern of created order.

Overall, Garris's work in Part 1 is sound and helpful. Simply surveying the teaching of so many various Reformed figures and demonstrating the consistent exegesis of Scripture helps show how far the discussion of gender identity and roles has moved from the Reformation to the present. That's a helpful mirror to our own present position. Still, there are some remaining questions. Does the Reformed tradition adequately account for Scripture's dual insistence that men and women are equal in value and image-bearing status even as they are different in role? At times, earlier theologians seemed to equate functional difference in role (male headship in covenant relationships) with ontological difference (with female nature being inferior to male nature). Is this perhaps a relic of an Aristotelian vision of sex differences, modulated through Thomistic medieval thought? From a scholarly perspective, this would

be a worthwhile study (Prudence Allen's three volumes trace this era from a Roman Catholic perspective, but more work could be done with Reformed presuppositions and firmer exegetical grounding).

Garris has contributed to the discussion of men's and women's roles by letting the Reformers speak for themselves. But his goal is not merely historical analysis, which brings us to Part 2: "Abandoning the Reformed View of Male Rule."

Garris begins with a chapter entitled, "Reformed Feminism?" addressing what he sees as modern departures from the Reformed teaching on male rule in the home, especially the proliferation of egalitarian views in the academy and publishing world. As examples, he deals with Aimee Byrd's *Recovering from Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020) and Beth Allison Barr's *The Making of Biblical Womanhood: How the Subjugation of Women Became Gospel Truth* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2021), and Rachel Green Miller's *Beyond Authority and Submission: Women and Men in Marriage, Church, and Society* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2019). Each of these books is critical of complementarian teaching on gender roles in marriage and advocates what amounts to egalitarian views. Garris also gives attention to Nancy Pearcey's implicit egalitarianism in *The Toxic War on Masculinity: How Christianity Reconciles the Sexes* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023). Throughout, he argues that these examples indicate a departure from the Reformed heritage.

Then, chapter 5 addresses "Complementarian Deviations," focusing especially on what Garris perceives as a drift in Reformed teaching on women's roles in the church. In view are Tim and Kathy Keller's "narrow complementarianism," the PCA Report on Women in Ministry for similar departures, as well as Kevin DeYoung's exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 in his book *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021). For Garris, the (now) common complementarian reading that sees this text as a prohibition against women judging prophecy in the public assembly stands at odds with historic views, which held that women should not pray or lead in worship in any way in the public assembly. DeYoung affirms the appropriateness of a woman praying publicly in some circumstances (though not a pastoral prayer) during a Sunday gathering, and Garris treats this as evidence of a deviation from the tradition. Garris then closes his book with an appeal: "Which Way, Christian Man?" "There are only two options before us. Christians can continue to follow the path of feminism, undermining God-ordained authority structures and producing a disordered society. Or Christians can return to the faith of our Reformed forefathers, including their view of male rule in the home, the church, and the commonwealth" (p. 121).

With that, the book ends—but not the discussion. From this reviewer's perspective, Garris has helpfully held up the mirror of historic teaching to our present-day discussion of gender roles, and it is undeniable that Western evangelicalism's language, tone, and presuppositions have radically changed. The implicit individualism and gender-neutrality affect our understanding of men's and women's roles, even where we distance ourselves from the culture. The first half of Garris's book can help us see the influence of culture—even if we disagree with precisely how we respond next.

However, I think Garris too quickly assumes that all gender questions are equally clear from Scripture, hence his lumping of "home, church, and the commonwealth" into one tight package, such that even a different opinion about the role of women praying in the Sunday gathering can be interpreted as a deviation or capitulation. I do not think this is fair or faithful to the texts of Scripture. Here, Garris will not win for himself allies in the cause of creating a counter-cultural society in the modern church. Scripture itself is clear and contains clear teaching about men's and women's roles, yet not all gender

questions and applications are equally clear. It is a mark of maturity and wisdom to know the difference. *Honor Thy Fathers* would have had a greater impact if it had honored this distinction.

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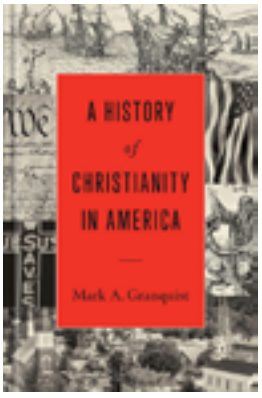
Mark A. Granquist. *A History of Christianity in America*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. 352 pp. £36.99/$44.99.



Themelios readers who have already taken courses in church history have likely seen this discipline as a division of theology. Church history is frequently understood to be the study of great theologians, their controversies, and their epoch-making books. Consequently, teachers of church history today are often located within departments of systematic and historical theology, with some instructors teaching both disciplines. Such was the reviewer's own exposure to church history half a century ago, and this pattern—if anything—has grown more prevalent. In the reviewer's mind, this long-established pattern demonstrates church history's vulnerability; it is one of the first disciplines to be cut back in the face of the ever-present curricular push to compress degree programs. Under such duress, the teaching of church history will frequently be assigned to systematic theologians.

Mark A. Granquist's *A History of Christianity in America* is decidedly not church history located at the periphery of theology. It is a substantial work with a distinctive approach. It could fairly be titled *A Social Science History of Christianity in America*. It aligns the study of church history more with pastoral disciplines (for example, social ethics or public theology) than with the theological disciplines.

In it, one finds the story of Christianity in what would become the USA, told from the era of Spanish conquest to the present, the successive waves of immigration in their various epochs, and even how later waves of immigrants within one faith tradition (in his own case, Lutheran) found themselves at variance with Lutherans who had arrived generations before them. Granquist is clearly fascinated by American Christian attitudes towards immigrants in all eras; immigrants, more often than not, faced attitudes of resistance, especially if the immigrants were non-Protestant.

From a vantage point in St. Paul, MN, where Granquist is a faculty member within Luther Seminary, the author takes special interest in the populating of inland America and the steady westward expansion of the population through territorial purchase, military conflict, and migration—whether in search of gold or religious freedom not obtainable in longer-settled eastern regions. Concurrently, he shows a detailed interest in the displacement of native peoples by this westward expansion, as well as the massive importation of African slaves, which followed the post-Revolution territorial expansion into the Southeast. He notes the many obstacles put in the path of the evangelization of these peoples, as well as some successes. He details both the abuses that followed the US government's entrusting of native education to Christian residential schools and the obstacles placed in the way of the evangelization of African Americans (which nevertheless proceeded).

Granquist is very interested in numbers: the respective numbers of citizens represented by the various branches of the Christian family and the changing ratio of Catholics to Protestants and of non-religious citizens to church members. We find to our surprise that America was at its least religious phase immediately following the Revolutionary War and was most religious in the post-World War II era. Granquist has been assiduous in utilizing data unearthed by social scientists such as the late Rodney Stark, who, with Roger Finke, produced the important *The Churching of America 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), as well as the periodic surveys conducted by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

Readers of *Themelios* will naturally want to know how Granquist approaches the question of the advance of the gospel in the America he describes. Here, the results are mixed. Consistent with his strong orientation to social science, he is generally reluctant to explore theological questions bearing on the fortunes of Christianity. While he readily recognizes that the European Enlightenment wrought harm once it reached American shores in the Revolutionary period, he is less certain than modern evangelicals that religious revivals (whether pre- or post-Revolution) were indeed a mighty force in reorienting America to Christ and the Bible. Notably, for Granquist, revivals were *always* arranged, staged, and planned, whether the evangelist in question was Jonathan Edwards or D. L. Moody. He discloses strong sympathy for the New Haven theologians such as Nathaniel Taylor and Horace Bushnell, who recast Christianity in the early post-Revolutionary period, while recognizing that liberalizing trends have weakened Christianity's role in society. He admires the Niebuhr brothers (H. Richard and Reinhold) and also Karl Barth, whose "theological realism" in the inter-war period recoiled against the now-admitted excesses of liberal theology. Billy Graham is recognized as but one contributing force in an already advancing post-World War II religious resurgence. But recall that this is a social history of Christianity in America.

Granquist attempts to write an account that is current. He is unafraid to tackle the question of the precipitous decline of the mainline Protestant denominations (including his own), the current leveling off of evangelical growth, and the very active participation of Christians in the current political polarization that now characterizes the USA. He can show that both American Catholicism and evangelical Protestantism have been numerically strengthened (rather than the reverse) by the influx of Hispanic and Asian immigrants; many came to America just because of its Christian heritage. He helpfully describes the profoundly negative consequences of the Covid epidemic on churches of all kinds.

The reviewer has profited from and respects the labors of Granquist, who has been known mostly for his Luther scholarship. He has not provided us with the history of theology, or historical theology, which we have come to assume that church history texts exist to provide. But he has provided us with a much-needed supplement, without the use of which our customary tendency to view church history as chiefly about theology and theologians will leave us with numerous ill-formed judgments.

Granquist's volume cannot displace the standard texts which our colleges and seminaries currently rely on. Its determination to treat all denominational traditions as equally worthy of attention and its tendency to downplay the question of the teaching and development of theology means that it will not cover the territory as a stand-alone volume. A Baptist or a Presbyterian will want more detail than is on

offer here. But this volume *will* make a wonderful supplement to textbooks that make the history of the church chiefly a narrative about theology and theological conflict. I happily commend it in that capacity.

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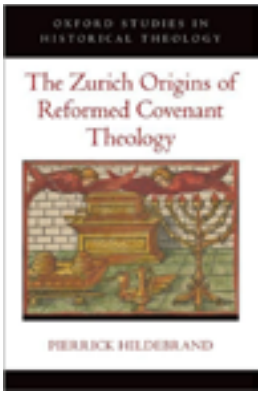
Pierrick Hildebrand. *The Zurich Origins of Reformed Covenant Theology*. Oxford Studies in Historical Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024. 440 pp. £71.00/$90.00.



Zurich's role in the early development of Reformed theology is frequently underestimated, especially (but not exclusively) due to the prioritization that scholars have sometimes given to other Reformed hubs like Geneva or Heidelberg. Pierrick Hildebrand's (University of Zurich) recently published doctoral thesis, *The Zurich Origins of Reformed Covenant Theology*, is a full-throated corrective that argues for the centrality of Zurich (i.e., Zwingli and Bullinger's roles) in the development of Reformed Covenant Theology.

The monograph is broken into three distinct sections, with the first two sections occupying the central core of his argument. Part 1 (chs. 1–2) investigates the distinctly Zwinglian origins of Reformed covenantal theology. Part 2 (chs. 3–5) explores Bullinger's development of Zwingli's inchoate doctrine into a central theological theme, while arguing that it was these very developments that allowed Bullinger to be a major player in the consolidation of the Reformed tradition. The final section, part 3 (chs. 6–7), explores the reception of Bullinger's covenantal theology in both Geneva and Heidelberg.

The first central argument of this book, explored in part 1, argues for a Zwinglian priority for the beginnings of Reformed Covenant Theology by examining Zwingli's works from 1519 to 1525, which showcased a theme of discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments and the early elements of Zwingli's break with the Roman Catholic Church (ch. 1). Hildebrand describes the year 1525 as the "Covenantal Turn" of Zwingli's theological career, pointing not to the Anabaptist controversy as the emerging context for this development (i.e., Gottlob Schrenk's traditional thesis that rests on works developed from 1526 and onward), but rather within the context of his polemic against the Roman Catholic view of the Lord's Supper. He bases this on what he sees to be "a hermeneutical move from an analogical to a univocal view of the relation between the Abrahamic covenant and Christ's new testament" (p. 59) in Zwingli's relatively unstudied work on the Eucharist, the *Subsidium* (August 1525). Zwingli, Hildebrand argues, continued to sustain this idea of covenantal continuity throughout the course of his career, and in turn, he granted Bullinger vital resources for the development of his own covenantal thinking.

From here, Hildebrand dedicates three chapters to a comprehensive treatment of Bullinger's works and his development of Zwingli's ideas, describing these central chapters as "the heart of [his] study" (p. 111). Bullinger did not simply repristinate Zwingli's ideas; rather he cultivated and continued Zwingli's Covenant Theology by imbuing it with two intimate and indissociable elements: the "historical-legal" aspect and the "organic-mystical" aspect. The former matter is one shared between Zwingli and Bullinger; it represents the "redemptive-historical unfolding of the one covenant of grace, which

culminates in Christ's vicarious atonement and implementation of his testament through his death" (p. 111). The latter aspect is much more unique to Bullinger in that it is described as the communal and spiritual life of God's covenant people made manifest through union with Christ. In other words, within Bullinger's developing theology, "the covenant is ultimately identified with union with Christ" (p. 202), which "enlarged" (p. 238) the legal aspect of Zwingli's Covenant Theology. This twofold understanding of Bullinger's Covenant Theology, according to Hildebrand, poses a challenge to the idea that Bullinger held to *either* a unilateral or bilateral covenant, as contemporary scholarly debates continue to insist. As such, Hildebrand suggests that there is far more continuity not simply between Zwingli and Bullinger, but also between Bullinger and Calvin.

The final section moves beyond Zurich as Hildebrand argues that both leading theologians in Geneva (i.e., Calvin) and Heidelberg (i.e., Ursinus and Olevianus) openly adopted insights from Bullinger's covenantal theology. In the case of John Calvin, Hildebrand emphasizes that Calvin *integrated* the twofold dimensions of Bullinger's covenantal theology directly into his own. Geneva and Zurich, then, should not be viewed as rivaling traditions but as a shared partnership in the development of Reformed Covenant Theology. Finally, he argues that Bullinger's theology was also adapted by Zacharias Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus, making it plausible that both Calvin and Bullinger provided a "common body of thought" for these Heidelberg theologians (p. 291).

It is no surprise that Hildebrand's monograph was awarded the REFORC Book Award of 2025. His central theses are thoroughly convincing and present a helpful corrective to certain narratives of the early Reformed tradition. There is simply one qualification I would make to a subsidiary argument in Part 1. In the attempt to dispel the idea that Zwingli's covenantal theology emerged as a reactive solution to the Anabaptism controversy, Hildebrand downplays that controversy as the contextual origin for Zwingli's "covenantal turn." While this is partly true, Zwingli had written his *Von der Taufe* (May 1525) just three months prior to the *Subsidium* (August 1525), and Balthasar Hubmaier had just published his *On the Christian Baptism of Believers*, criticizing Zwingli, on 11 June 1525. In my view, it is better understood as having emerged in a shared context of sacramental polemics emanating from Zwingli's distinctive hermeneutic.

That minor point aside, his section on Bullinger is a masterclass in primary source engagement. Among these sources are an assortment of archival materials, understudied exegetical materials, and sermons. His careful, close readings of primary sources are a reminder of the fruitfulness of returning to the sources themselves. This book is essential reading for any theologically trained person who wants to understand the roots, the reception, and, I would argue, the very heart of Reformed Covenant Theology.

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Drew Martin. *Grimké on the Christian Life: Christian Vitality for the Church and World*. Theologians on the Christian Life. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025. xxi + 230 pp. £15.99/$23.99.

Drew Martin, an associate professor of theology at Covenant Theological Seminary, offers readers a fascinating exploration of the theology and ministry of Francis Grimké (1850–1937). While Grimké is likely not a household name among contemporary Christians, during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era he was well known among Presbyterians and the nation's Black Christian community. Born on a South Carolina plantation, Grimké survived the brutality of enslavement and the Civil War. After studying at Lincoln University and Princeton Theological Seminary, he became pastor of the Fifteenth Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, DC, in 1878. Grimké was among the "talented tenth," as W. E. B. Du Bois termed the prominent Black pastors, academics, editors, and activists of the day. Grimké was the first Black moderator of the Washington City Presbytery. He helped found the American Negro Academy, spoke frequently at the Hampton Institute and Tuskegee Institute, and served as a trustee of Howard University. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington both solicited Grimké's support for their efforts to elevate the nation's Blacks.

After reviewing the contours of Grimké's life and basic Christian commitments, Martin examines Grimké's theology under four major categories: Grimké's vision of the individual Christian life, his views of marriage and family, his understanding of the nature of the church and its mission, and his perspective on how the church should pursue racial justice for Black Americans. Grimké argued that the gospel addresses humanity's greatest need—forgiveness of sin and reconciliation with God. The moral law of God not only draws people to saving faith by convicting them of their sin but also helps guide them into Christian maturity. Grimké's preaching on the family echoed the conventional nineteenth-century Protestant emphasis on the sanctity of marriage and the importance of cultivating the moral character of children. The kingdom of God served as the linchpin in Grimke's view of the church's rule in society. Grimké distinguished between the church's mission as a "gathered body" of believers that is united in corporate worship, the celebration of the sacraments, and discipleship, and the church's mission as a "scattered body" that seeks to win unbelievers to faith and to advance the kingdom of God by ending social injustices. To Grimké, the church's mission is to fulfill the Great Commission. But, Martin explains, he also insisted that the church must confront moral issues while carefully avoiding blatantly partisan political advocacy. That was the task for civic organizations, such as the N.A.A.C.P.; Grimké actively supported the N.A.A.C.P. because it was fighting to secure Black Americans' civil rights.

Martin provides a captivating introduction to an inspiring pastor whose evangelical theology prioritized pastoral ministry and orthodox preaching while resisting the temptation to shy away from the ways that racism impacted the lives of his congregation and that of other Black Americans. For pastors who seek to bring the gospel to bear upon the divisive social issues tearing apart the church and society today, Grimké provides a thoughtful example. He grounded solutions to racism in historic orthodox theology, most notably the doctrine of the *imago Dei*. While Grimké was highly respected in his day, he refused to become a "celebrity preacher" who monetized his prominence or his grievances.

Martin hopes that his work will encourage others to explore Grimké's life more deeply. At least two areas of Grimke's life and Martin's analysis merit more study. Grimké's criticisms of racism inside

the Presbyterian church need further study, as well as the responses his critique provoked. Grimké's criticisms were more confrontational and far-reaching than Martin's portrayal suggests. A second area worth further investigation is how Grimké's understanding of the church's mission contradicted the "doctrine of the spirituality of the church" that many white Southern Presbyterians advocated in order to silence the church's criticisms of chattel slavery before the Civil War and then Jim Crow segregation in the postbellum period.

Martin's study makes two helpful correctives to the standard accounts of American Christianity during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. For a generation, Martin Marty's "two-party thesis" shaped how historians viewed the Protestant landscape in early twentieth-century America: Protestants were either fundamentalists or modernists. Martin joins a growing chorus of scholars who demonstrate that this binary perspective does not match the historical facts. When the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1910s–1930s divided the Northern Presbyterian church into competing theological factions (and the more racially progressive pastors often moved in a more liberal theological direction), Grimké's theology remained solidly conservative but was also outspoken in his criticisms of racism. Yet Grimké never associated with either the fundamentalist party or Social Gospellers. He does not fit into the two-party paradigm because the paradigm is overly reductionistic. Martin's assessment of Grimké, moreover, graciously challenges Kerri Greenidge's recent study, *The Grimkés: The Legacy of Slavery in an American Family* (New York: Liveright, 2022), which argues that Francis Grimké embraced the Victorian culture of respectability of white Americans. As a result, he preached a sexist Victorian morality, practiced colorism or discrimination against darker-skinned Blacks inside his church, and promoted classism by catering to Washington, DC's elite Black community, not working-class Blacks. Martin's assessment challenges these conclusions. While Grimké might have advanced a Victorian morality typical of late nineteenth-century Black elites, it was a morality grounded in Protestant theology. In summary, Martin's analysis offers an outstanding contribution to American church history by recovering the theology and pastoral ministry of a once well-known pastor who addressed racism with Christian courage and evangelical theology.

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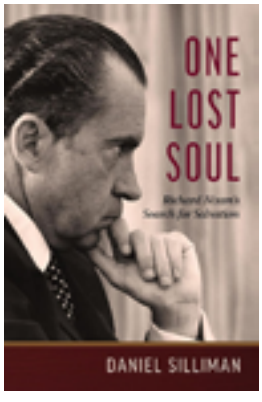
Daniel Silliman. *One Lost Soul: Richard Nixon's Search for Salvation*. Library of Religious Biography. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2025. vii + 317 pp. £28.99/$36.99



Richard Nixon is one of the most consequential figures in American political history. His legacy is not one of election victories and defeats, major legislative advancements, or foreign policy achievements, though he had plenty of each. Instead, he is best remembered for arguably the greatest political scandal in American history. That scandal is addressed by Daniel Silliman in his new religious biography, *One Lost Soul: Richard Nixon's Search for Salvation*. However, it is simply the best-known moment in a public life that intersected in various ways with American religion—especially evangelical religion.

Richard Nixon was not a religious man, at least not in the conventional sense. He was raised a Quaker, a tradition with which he would identify at least

nominally for most of his life. But by the time he graduated from Whittier College, he had embraced liberal theology. That liberalism did not translate into politics, however. Nixon entered politics after World War II as a conservative Republican and strident anticommunist. Nixon first made his name as a congressman who worked with the key witness Whitaker Chambers to out the suave diplomat Alger Hiss as a communist spy. Silliman argued that Nixon was a Cold War Christian during these years, embracing a form of civil religion that reinforced his conservative anticommunism.

Nixon was vice president of the United States under Dwight Eisenhower for two terms, then he ran for president in 1960. Nixon had the full support of white Protestant clergy such as Billy Graham and Norman Vincent Peale. But Nixon was not like them. He was not pious. He was not comfortable speaking the language of Zion. He refused to further stoke Protestant fears about John F. Kennedy's Catholicism. Nixon did not have the support of black Protestant clergy, who were frustrated that the former racial progressive was now courting conservative segregationists. Nixon lost a close race to Kennedy, then lost the gubernatorial race in California in 1962. It seemed like he was done with politics.

In 1968, Nixon forged a remarkable comeback when he was elected president. He won again in 1972, this time by a landslide. In both elections, many of his strongest supporters were again white Protestants, and especially evangelicals. Nixon was famous for his "Southern Strategy" that focused on law and order, but critics believed that it was a barely masked appeal to the racial animus of white southerners. While in office, Nixon continued to court evangelicals, and he was especially chummy with Graham. Nixon also hosted periodic worship services in the White House, which were carefully scripted affairs that allowed Nixon to both cultivate supporters and avoid attending a local church where he might be criticized in a sermon. When Nixon's political career ended because of Watergate in 1974, his white evangelical allies stood by him until almost the very end—most notably Graham.

Silliman does not offer a comprehensive biography of Nixon but focuses on several key moments: Nixon's hardscrabble childhood; his entrance into politics in the postwar years; his famously humiliating speech about his personal finances during the 1952 vice presidential campaign; his alliance with evangelicals and white Protestants during the 1960, 1968, and 1972 presidential elections; the White House worship services; the Watergate scandal and its aftermath; and Nixon's efforts to remake himself into a Republican elder statesman during the final two decades of his life.

Through each of these vignettes, several throughlines remain consistent. Nixon was a natural striver who was never comfortable with traditional Christian ideas like God's unconditional love or unmerited grace. He was cynical toward individuals who took their religion too seriously, especially when he thought their religion led to weakness or naivete. He was positively disposed towards religion but was never devout. Nixon rarely prayed, except in times of crisis—and then it seemed awkward and unnatural to those around him. He cultivated close strategic relationships with clergy but cursed like a sailor, abused alcohol and other drugs, and lied incessantly. Nixon was never convinced that God could actually be for him. He often feared that ministers might be out to get him.

Silliman is not sympathetic toward his subject. His disagreement with both Nixon's character flaws and his conservative politics is apparent, though not heavy-handed. At times in the biography, Silliman speculates about what Nixon was thinking in particular situations, but without clearly citing primary sources that would provide evidence for those speculations. Nevertheless, Silliman does an able job of

demonstrating the role that religion played throughout Nixon's life. The portrait is not flattering, but it rings true to the cynicism and resentments that animated Nixon's life and will forever color his legacy.

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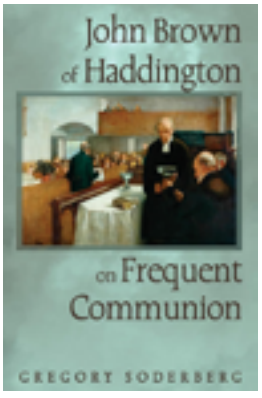
Gregory Soderberg. *John Brown of Haddington on Frequent Communion*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2024. xv + 41 pp. £11.00/$13.00.



Evangelical pastors of various denominations seem to be developing a greater appreciation for the Lord's Supper, accompanied by a growing desire to see it celebrated more regularly in their churches. However, many of them run into obstacles and objections along the way, which discourage them from pursuing more frequent participation at the Lord's Table. What they may not realize, though, is that previous generations of pastors dealt with this same issue, so there are resources available from the past to help them think through the biblical, theological, and historical rationale for patiently implementing such a change. One such resource is Gregory Soderberg's *John Brown of Haddington on Frequent Communion*.

The book consists mainly of a modernized reprint of John Brown's essay, *An Apology for the More Frequent Administration of the Lord's Supper; With Answers to the Objections Urged Against It*, which was originally published in 1804 after his death. Brown, who lived from 1722 to 1787, was one of Scotland's most significant pastor-theologians and one of its most respected authors. Therefore, a posthumous publication from his pen, especially one that expressed dissatisfaction with his own Scottish Reformed tradition's practice of infrequent communion, is both intriguing and noteworthy. Moreover, the Lord's Supper was a subject that held deep, personal interest for Brown, owing to the role it played in his conversion and to the role he believed it should play in the lives of his parishioners. Consequently, reading such an essay is not only instructive historically; it also has the potential to be of immense benefit pastorally and personally.

Like many pastors today, one of the biggest obstacles related to communion frequency that Brown faced was denominational tradition and custom. For his particular tradition, the custom was to administer the Supper only once a year. But he challenged such a blind, unexamined allegiance to custom by stating at the very beginning of his essay that every Christian should test their traditions and customs "by reason and revelation, and to reject or receive the same, according as they abide the test or not" (p. 1). He was convinced that such an examination would prove that more frequent celebration of the Lord's Supper should take place, and thus his essay was designed to "call to the bar the practice of administering the Lord's Supper so seldom" (p. 1). His careful and thoughtful reasoning is on full display as he argues his case, making it easy to see why he was such a trusted theologian and revered pastor. And as Soderberg points out, "The *Apology* was written at the end of [Brown's] life and demonstrates his settled convictions after years of serious scholarship and practical pastoral labor, not the flights of fancy of a young and idealistic innovator" (p. xi).

Speaking of Soderberg, he provides a helpful "Historical Introduction" at the beginning of the book, giving readers a concise overview of John Brown's life and ministry, as well as discussing the historical context that motivated Brown's writing of the *Apology*. He also includes explanatory footnotes throughout the work to aid in the understanding of specific references and context. Soderberg is well-suited to serve as a guide on this subject since his doctoral research focused on the debates surrounding communion frequency in Scotland in the 1700s and 1800s. Brown's *Apology* was one of the main sources he examined in his dissertation.

The *Apology* itself is divided into eleven brief sections, consisting of three main areas of emphasis: (1) sections 1–7 focus on New Testament practice and arguments from church history, (2) sections 8–10 consider spiritual and practical matters, and (3) section 11 deals with common objections to a more frequent celebration of communion. While each section is insightful and helps to build a compelling case, it is likely that readers will find the last section most helpful. There, Brown answers the most common objections and concerns about frequent communion that existed in his own setting, many of which are still common today and will therefore provide much "food for thought" for pastors wrestling with this issue. For example, he addresses the objection that "if the Lord's supper were frequently administered, it would become less solemn, and in time, quite contemptible…" (p. 19) by asking why we tend to think this way exclusively about the Supper but not other means of spiritual edification. Somewhat in jest, he inquires, "Why are we not taught that we should seldom pray, read, hear, and meditate, in order to keep up the solemnity of these ordinances, and to avoid the formality in them? Can any reason be assigned, why unfrequency should preserve the honor of the Lord's supper, and not also preserve the honor and solemnity of these divine ordinances?" (pp 20–21). If frequent praying, frequent reading and meditating on the Scriptures, and frequent hearing of the preached Word are all seen as helpful and valuable, then Brown reasons that the same should be true for Communion.

It should be noted that some of the arguments Brown makes are specific to his era and to his particular tradition, so they may not seem as relevant or helpful. Additionally, some readers may be unaccustomed to the seemingly harsh way that eighteenth-century Reformed evangelicals like Brown often spoke of Roman Catholicism and the papacy. However, neither of these issues should be taken as reasons not to read the book. With a little historical charity and some discernment in application, readers should have no problem gleaning valuable wisdom and assistance from this resource. At only fifty pages total, it can easily be read in just one sitting.

Having newfound access to such a helpful essay on such a pressing topic from such a revered figure is a tremendous blessing, and we owe Gregory Soderberg a debt of gratitude for reintroducing it to us. I gladly commend this book as another welcomed example of what Timothy George refers to as "retrieval for the sake of renewal."

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— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

Jeremy Treat. *The Atonement: An Introduction*. Short Studies in Systematic Theology. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023. xiv + 192 pp. £13.99/$18.99.

The atonement—the way Jesus reconciles us to God—is central to Christianity yet difficult to explain. "A good many different theories have been held as to how it works," C. S. Lewis observed; "what all Christians are agreed on is that it does work" (*Mere Christianity* [San Francisco: HarperOne, 2023], 54). Jeremy Treat, pastor and theologian, takes up this puzzle in *The Atonement: An Introduction*, exploring not just the *what* or the *why* of the doctrine but also the *how*.

Readers hoping for an adjudication between competing theories, however, will be disappointed. In fact, Treat is decidedly *anti*-theory—at least the exclusionary ones that elevate one aspect of the atonement at the expense of the others. As he points out, it is not "as if Christ *either* bore our punishment (penal substitution) *or* conquered evil (*Christus Victor*) *or* demonstrated his love as an example (moral exemplarism)" (p. 62). The main thrust of his argument is that Jesus's life, death, and resurrection is a comprehensive, multi-dimensional accomplishment irreducible to a singular explanation. At the same time, Treat rejects "disconnected plurality," which affirms *all* of the theories without integrating them. What is needed is an account that is comprehensive and coherent.

Much of Treat's scholarship to date has involved elucidating the connection between two dominant themes in Christianity: the cross and the kingdom (defined as "God's reign through God's people over God's place" [p. 19]). This book continues that thread. In fact, Treat argues these are complementary, not competing, themes, and that the story of the kingdom is an appropriate framework for comprehending the cross. The kingdom is established *through* the cross, bringing God's rule on earth. The cross does this by solving the complex problem of sin, which, among other things, separates humanity from God and earth from heaven. Unsurprisingly, a solution that can reunite both produces a multitude of effects.

To demonstrate just how wide-ranging this achievement is, Treat surveys twenty "dimensions" of the atonement, including propitiation, victory over the "powers," adoption, healing, and more. Each receives a concise explanation and scriptural support. What emerges is a mosaic that speaks to nearly every human need, leading Treat to call this doctrine, "a medicine cabinet for weary souls" (p. 93). There is a remedy for maladies as diverse as shame, guilt, oppression, sickness, divine wrath, and mortality.

Though Treat's study of the biblical data yields a composite view of the atonement, it all hinges on substitution—that what happened on the cross was *in our place* and *for our sins*. He begins by examining the Old Testament and finds that the narrative pattern, sacrificial system, and messianic prophecies all gesture toward substitution. The New Testament furthers this idea. There are several allusions to the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 (one of the primary substitutionary texts), and Jesus identifies himself with the unblemished lamb in the exodus story. Moreover, throughout the New Testament, Jesus's death is said to be "for" us (e.g., Rom 5:6; 1 Pet 3:18; 1 John 3:16; Mark 10:45; etc.). Thus, the atonement may be *more* than substitution, but it is not *less*.

Undergirding the logic of substitution is the biblical authors' affirmation that sin comes with a penalty. As Treat highlights, sin warrants "judgment (2 Cor 5:10), punishment (2 Thess 1:9), wrath (John 3:36), a curse (Deut 11:28), exile (2 Kings 17:6–7), and ultimately death (Rom 6:23)" (p. 49). Jesus suffers

all these in our place, exchanging our sinfulness for his righteousness. That is the *how* of the atonement. That is the way we are made right with God.

Yet questions remain. For instance, is substitution just? How are our sins imputed to Christ? If sin's full penalty is eternal separation, how did Jesus bear it? Such questions call for exegetical, theological, and philosophical exploration beyond the scope of this book.

Still, Treat offers helpful correctives. His emphasis on the Trinitarian nature of the atonement guards against the "cosmic child abuse" caricature: it is *God himself*, in the person of Jesus, who willingly bears judgment, not a coerced third party. And though much is made of God's wrath in discussions of substitutionary atonement, Treat argues this concept is often misunderstood. Wrath is not an essential attribute of God but rather a consequence of his love and holiness (p. 111). Anger at sin is love's necessary response to evil.

As an introduction, the book avoids deep philosophical debates, but it succeeds in framing the doctrine biblically, integrating diverse themes, and pointing toward practical implications. Treat reminds readers that theology is not solely an academic endeavor: our doctrine of the atonement should shape our identity, community, and mission as we live toward the realization of God's heavenly kingdom on earth.

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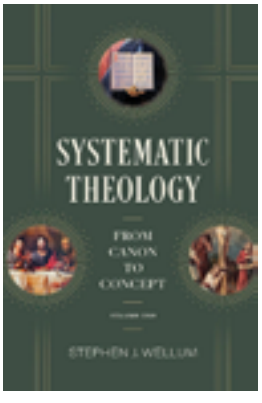
Stephen J. Wellum. *Systematic Theology, Volume 1: From Canon to Concept*. Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024. xvii + 936 pp. £59.99/$59.99.



Stephen Wellum, a longtime professor of Christian theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, has delivered the first volume of his three-part *Systematic Theology*. What is the justification for another systematic theology? First, Wellum offers a Calvinistic, Baptist, progressive covenantalist, and whole-Bible (intra-textual) perspective. Second, he is responding to the "collective identity crisis" that many evangelicals today are experiencing because of "the waning conviction that theology is an objective discipline grounded in the triune God who is truly there and who has authoritatively made himself known to us," particularly in Scripture (pp. xv–xvi). Wellum also applies his extensive experience in theological method and Christology to bear in this work.

The volume unfolds in four parts. Part 1 lays a lengthy foundation for faithful doing theology. One notable feature is Wellum's articulation of the relationship between systematic theology and other disciplines (esp. biblical theology). Another is his extended review of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment developments that challenge the traditional plausibility structures of historic Christian theology and therefore reject a normative theology "from above" (i.e., a revelational epistemology). Further, Wellum's discussion of typology sets the stage for understanding his vision for progressive covenantalism.

Part 2 covers the doctrine of revelation, focusing most attention on the doctrine of Scripture (authority, inspiration, infallibility, sufficiency, perspicuity, and canonicity). Significant here is a

discussion of the God-Word/Scripture-world relationship: "Scripture is located within a specific view of theology proper and providence in which the latter is understood as the product of God's gracious, sovereign, supernatural agency, and as such, it has his authority" (p. 179). Also noteworthy is the author's engagement with neo-orthodox (*à la* Karl Barth), post-liberal, post-conservative, and classic liberal and postmodern challenges to the "received view" of Scripture (i.e., the historic orthodox position).

Part 3 particularly represents Wellum's characteristic approach to theology. He accentuates the importance of understanding "the Bible's overall framework and worldview" (p. 413)—its "own content, categories, and intra-systematic structures" (p. 484)—out of which arises the grand metanarrative of Scripture: creation, fall, redemption, and new creation. As this metanarrative serves as the foundation for doctrinal formulation, Wellum's survey of its major plot movements highlights key aspects of several theological loci (e.g., theology proper, creation, sin, salvation) that await fuller treatment later in this and the forthcoming volumes. Wellum here also formally introduces progressive covenantalism (PC) as "the best way of making sense of the Bible's own terms": "Scripture presents a *plurality* of covenants … that *progressively* reveal our triune God's *one* redemptive plan for his *one* people, which reaches its fulfillment, telos, and terminus in Christ and the new covenant.… 'Kingdom through the progression of the covenants' captures the fundamental dynamic at work as God's redemptive plan unfolds, which starts with Adam and creation and culminates in Christ" (pp. 431–32). Further, in his comparison of PC and the varieties of dispensationalism and covenant theology, the author highlights the issues at stake between the competing theological systems as well as the commonalities between them. Also, a notable feature reflecting Wellum's Baptist perspective is his engagement with 1689 Federalism, which bears *some* similarities to PC.

Part 4 represents the turn to theological formulation; it covers theology proper, the Trinity, the divine decree, creation, and providence. Wellum contextualizes the discussion by engaging various contemporary rejections and reductions of a classical understanding of the nature of God and God-world relations (e.g., open theism). As such, issues related to the doctrine of providence appear several chapters earlier than the full treatment. Also, in order to "present the 'big picture' of who God is across the entire canon," the author offers a theological overview of the "triune Creator-covenant Lord" (pp. 570–71) before digging into the divine attributes and the Trinity in the subsequent two chapters. Wellum's unpacking of the one God and the three persons represents a strong commitment to pro-Nicene trinitarianism and the Reformed tradition (e.g., simplicity, immutability, impassibility, eternal subsisting relations, inseparable operations, the nature-will paradigm). He rejects social views of the Trinity and theories involving subordination among the divine persons within the Trinity, as in the Eternal Relations of Authority and Submission scheme. Finally, his treatment of the decree, creation, and providence represents clear Calvinist commitments (e.g., determinism, dual agency, compatibilism) and includes engagement with process theism, Calvinist-Arminian debates, the *pactum salutis*, non-Christian views of origins, evolution, and the problem of evil.

Wellum is off to a strong start with the first volume of his *Systematic Theology*. Although he is committed to "classic, orthodox theology" and as such is "saying nothing new" (p. xvi), he offers readers much by positioning his work as a response to various competing modern/postmodern visions of reality. It all comes down to worldview—a subject that pervades Wellum's work. Is God really there, and is knowledge of God possible? Yes, and yes. As Wellum shows, the foundation for a normative theology (i.e., "an objective science that yields true knowledge of God") is "our triune Creator-covenant Lord," who "has made himself known to us in creation, the incarnate Word, and Scripture" (pp. 30–31).

In addition, this volume truly reflects, as advertised, a progressive covenantalist approach to theology. PC is not merely the subject of one or two chapters; it permeates the entire work (see, e.g., pp. 8, 23, 120). Baptist distinctives are present but few, understandably so given the subjects covered thus far. I imagine these will become more conspicuous in the later volumes. Prominent or recurring features throughout this work include a strong Christocentric emphasis, frequent appeals to typological patterns (especially the first Adam-second Adam motif), pushback against "constructivist" views of knowledge and panentheistic views of God-world relations, and fidelity to classical trinitarianism and Reformed theology. I find these final two features especially beneficial. More than judging Wellum's presentation to be compelling, I believe it is most advantageous for readers. That is, while not everyone will agree with his conclusions, they will know exactly what to expect from his work.

Overall, Wellum's *Systematic Theology* is a careful, thorough execution of how to faithfully move from the biblical text (canon) to theological formulation (concept), given that God and his Word are the foundation for our theology.

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— ETHICS & PASTORALIA —

Sam Ashton. *Beyond Male and Female? A Theological Account of Intersex Embodiment*. London: T&T Clark, 2024. 288 pp. £28.99/$39.95.

The publication of Sam Ashton's *Beyond Male and Female? A Theological Account of Intersex Embodiment* marks a significant contribution to theological ethics. Ashton explores the theological significance of intersexuality, asking how Christians should understand bodies that fall outside of "the statistically predominant pattern of male and female" (p. 2). Socially and theologically, Ashton describes intersexuality as caught between the competing interpretive frameworks of sexual dimorphism (SD) and sexual polymorphism (SP). Christian "traditionalists" work within an SD framework, emphasizing male and female as complementary "creational givens," viewing intersex conditions as a tragic departure from an otherwise stable norm (p. 5). In contrast, Christian "innovationists" adhere to an SP framework, with sex viewed as a spectrum of biological diversity rather than a fixed binary. According to innovationists, the traditional case for SD "not only falsely privileges (and misreads) the 'order of creation' but it undervalues the import of eschatologically redemptive newness in Christ" (p. 7). The result is the unjust exclusion and dehumanization of intersex individuals.

How might the gospel of Christ be proclaimed in a way that upholds the "very good" creation of male and female while still being heard as "good news" for intersex persons? This is the guiding question of Sam Ashton's important study, which offers the first evangelical response to the best innovationist arguments for SP. The result is a careful dogmatic account that interprets intersexuality not as a

metaphysical shift away from the order of creation but, in God's providence, as an embodied witness to the truth that "all humans, however sexed, are ultimately ordered to life with God" (p. 227).

In Chapter 1, Ashton introduces intersexuality and the distinct interpretive challenges it raises socially, medically, and theologically. In response, he seeks to offer "a set of thick theological glasses through which to (self)interpret intersex embodiment" (p. 227). Whereas a *thin* theological method may affirm the truth of the Christian story yet pit its parts against each other—with creation subordinating eschatology, or redemption overruling creation—a *thick* theological method views the Christian story as a "divine drama" in which God's acts from creation to consummation are taken together as "a divinely ordered and coherent whole" (pp. 10–11). All this methodological staging sets the reader up for a theological *tour de force*, which, by "tracking and tracing the theo-dramatic movement of the sexed body from creation to consummation," aims "to elucidate what is essential and what is accidental for sexed embodiment" (p. 18).

Chapter 2 addresses the issue of the Bible's cultural background, assessing whether Thomas Laquer's thesis that the ancient view of the body was "monolithically one-sex" ought to inform how Christians interpret scriptural references to "male and female." In chapter 3, Ashton begins his study of the biblical and theological material by starting with the theo-dramatic act of creation. He outlines the evidence for interpreting intersex in the beginning, either in the *event* of creation (via the "primal androgyny" argument) or its creational *intent* (via "the hybrid argument"). Megan DeFranza's case for Adam and Eve as "parents of fecundity" rather than "prototypes of fixity" receives sustained and judicious attention from Ashton (pp. 68–78), who ultimately finds it lacking exegetical support and theological coherence in light of the whole theo-drama. Reading Adam and Eve canonically, Ashton builds a cumulative case for interpreting them as "prototypical parents," whose sexuate correspondence and capacity for procreation participate in the divinely ordered *shalom* of creation (p. 73). The influence of DeFranza's work among evangelical innovationists makes this section one of the study's most valuable contributions.

Chapter 4 probes the impact of humanity's fall into sin on the sexed body. Advocating an Augustinian view in which death is not a metaphysical substance but a parasitic evil, Ashton articulates a theologically rich and pastorally careful interpretation of intersex bodies—not as "more fallen," but "differently fallen" (p. 127). Since the *shalom* of creation's ordered diversity has been shattered by sin and death, *all* bodies are now impaired and experience traces of "disordered diversity in a diversely disordered world" (p. 128). Ashton draws on Aquinas to distinguish the ordered "structure" or essence of the sexed body in creation from its "direction" or accidental development in time. Though fallen, the sexed body is by no means in "free fall." God is guiding it providentially toward its redemption in Christ and transformation at his *parousia*.

Chapters 5 and 6 focus upon the theo-dramatic acts of redemption in Christ and consummation in the new creation. Ashton explores the implications of Christ's incarnation for the sexed body, considering whether Jesus was intersex (as some innovationists argue) and if "redemptive newness in Christ" might serve as a basis for replacing or expanding the structure of the sexed body in favor of SP (p. 145). Ultimately, Ashton argues that redemption in Christ *now "*refers to spiritual and social inclusion rather than sexed structural expansion or replacement" (p. 20). The conclusion of this section makes a powerful case that, in light of what Christ has accomplished in redemption, "it seems inappropriate to justify 'corrective' surgeries on intersex bodies." Rather, Christians are called to "heal" intersex people by welcoming them into *Christ's* Body, the Church, as full and equal participants (p. 169).

Chapter 6 extends the question of healing by exploring what eschatological consummation means for the sexed body generally and intersex bodies particularly. Giving a close and exegetically astute reading of 1 Corinthians 15, Ashton argues for a view of "consummation restoratively transforming creation" rather than replacing it (p. 194). Responding to Candida Moss's provocative critique of heavenly healing as "heavenly eugenics," Ashton draws on Augustine once more to offer a counter-interpretation of heavenly healing as "heavenly eulogization." By this, he suggests that the legacy of intersexuality may well endure in the new creation, "not in terms of ambiguous embodiment" but as "marks of honor" that testify to God's saving work in intersex persons (p. 216). The study concludes in chapter 7 with a review of the argument and an application of Ashton's "thick" theological approach in the context of pastoral care. Moving from dogmatic theology to pastoral theology, he ends by considering the moral-pastoral challenge of intersex individuals and marriage.

It is impossible to do justice to a work of such depth and breadth in the limited space provided. The range of Ashton's knowledge, theological perception, and command of primary sources is truly impressive. More impressive still is the irenic and pastorally sensitive approach that he brings to such a contentious and complex conversation. If I had to name one drawback of this remarkable book, it would be its limited accessibility. While Ashton aims to write "for academic, ecclesial, and worldly audiences" (p. 18), the book is much too technical for such a broad readership. Considering, however, that it originally served as his doctoral dissertation, I cannot imagine Ashton writing in any other way without it becoming another kind of book altogether. Perhaps we will just have to wait for a companion volume, written in a format that preserves his "thick" theological vision while expressing it in language that is more accessible.

Nonetheless, all of us owe Sam Ashton a debt of gratitude. I joyfully commend *Beyond Male and Female?* as a landmark work of evangelical scholarship and pastoral theology that deserves the widest possible reading, especially among pastor-theologians.

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Faith Chang. *Peace Over Perfection: Enjoying a Good God When You Feel You're Never Good Enough*. London: Good Book, 2024. 185 pp. £9.99/$16.99.

While pastors often need to exhort their flock to take sin more seriously, many may not be aware that some of their flock are *hyperfocused* on their own sinfulness; a condition known as "Christian perfectionism." Not to be confused with *sinless* perfectionism, Christian perfectionists are so painfully aware of their failures that they fear God will withdraw his favor from them. Through careful biblical analysis, personal testimony, and encouragement, Faith Chang's *Peace Over Perfection: Enjoying a Good God When You Feel You're Never Good Enough* helps to demystify and remedy this strange affliction that plagues many Christians.

In chapter 1, "The Perfectionist's Ache," Chang insists that the desire for spiritual perfection "is not wrong" but is rather "a mournful look at our Edenic

past" and a yearning "for a future that was meant to be ours" (p. 23). She helpfully refutes the common misunderstanding that Christian perfectionists are proud, legalistic, people-pleasers, or that they simply misunderstand the gospel (p. 19). To the contrary, she argues that they are rightly "longing for a perfection commanded by God himself" (p. 19).

In tackling spiritual perfectionism, Chang believes that the place to begin is with an appreciation of God's comprehensive knowledge of ourselves. In chapter 2, "Knowledge," she targets the perfectionist's fear of disappointing God and losing his favour by pointing out that, unlike us, God has no "false illusions of our goodness" (p. 39). Because God truly knows us inside out, and nothing we do takes him by surprise, "God's knowledge of us rewrites the scenes of exposure that we dread; because, though our sins grieve God, he is never disappointed in us as if he's only discovered who we really are after calling us to follow him" (p. 40).

In chapter 3, "Mercy," Chang brings famous Christian perfectionists such as Martin Luther, John Bunyan, and especially John Newton into the discussion, asking why God sometimes answers prayers for Christlikeness "in a way that just about drives us to despair" (p. 50). Her own experience is that "God opens our eyes in new ways to our sinfulness so that we may know more deeply—an experiential, down-to-our-bones kind of knowing—the great grace of having been declared forgiven and righteous in Christ" (p. 55). Chang reassures us that "inward affliction" is not necessarily "evidence of God's disfavour or damnation but proof of a holy work being done in [the] heart" (p. 57).

In chapter 4, "Law," Chang notes that Christian perfectionists can feel like they are "walking on a tightrope" due to having "weak" or "overly sensitive" consciences (p. 72). But she comforts us that "our good Shepherd leads us safely off our tightropes" by speaking to us and showing us his character, not that of a harsh taskmaster but more like "a kindergarten teacher who rejoices in her students' successes and deeply desires that they'd flourish in her classroom" (p. 70). She reminds us that "life with Jesus is about more than just not messing up. It is a wholehearted pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty" (p. 71).

Christian perfectionists struggle daily with the tension between believing that God loves them and that he is constantly "unhappy" with them because of their "failing and falling" (p. 84). Chapter 5, "Peace," addresses this problem. Drawing on the parable of the Prodigal Son, Chang argues that "with God, there is no cold-shouldering, no record of wrongs kept, no subtle demand that you 'earn it,' no demeaning reminders of our failures" (p. 88). She cites Ed Welch's insight that "obedience … is not our ultimate goal" but that obedience facilitates our objective of "progressive nearness" to God (p. 89).

In chapter 6, "Patience," Chang observes that Christian perfectionists perpetually lament the fact that their "progress toward Christ-likeness is painfully slow" and assume that God is similarly impatient with them (p. 99). Therefore, she reminds us that many Bible characters were not only "full of faith but also of cowardice, unbelief, and swindling," showing us that "the rich vein of God's patience runs through our story as his people" (p. 101). Even with the Gospels' portrayal of the stumbling, bumbling disciples, "You never get the feeling that Jesus is losing it with them" (p. 102). Instead, it is in our slow, painful sanctification that God's "wonderful patience" is displayed, "so that through our brokenness, another child of God might look at us and say, 'If God was so patient with her, and if he has changed her and is changing her, there is hope for me yet'" (p. 111).

In chapter 7, "Providence," Chang outlines how perfectionists are often "hounded by past regrets, paralyzed by present choices, and afraid about future failures" (p. 119). But she reiterates the fact that "the Christian's future is not ultimately determined by her own power to always know and do what is

right but by the gracious providence of God," by which *he* will bring us to our "final destination despite missed turns" (pp. 119–21). The key is understanding God's "subplots of grace" in our lives; the way "God's gracious providence means he will not allow our imperfections to harm others in ways he cannot redeem" (pp. 124–25).

In chapter 8, "Love," Chang exposes a big issue for Christian perfectionists: a struggle to sense God's delight and good pleasure (p. 139). While perfectionists fear that their sin is blocking God's love from breaking through, Chang cautions that "sometimes physical or mental illness, past trauma, intense suffering, or burnout," or perhaps the way God is portrayed in our churches, is the cause (p. 132). She also shows how God's love is different from ours: "We understand love as affection kindled and sustained because of something in the beloved.… But God's love is not like that. There is no explanation for God's love outside of itself because his love for us originates from within himself" (p. 138).

Perhaps more than anything, Christian perfectionists desire an end to their "wrestling with sin, condemnation, and loud consciences" (p. 150). So in chapter 9, "Rest," Chang reminds us that, since God's Spirit-wrought change in our lives is permanent, a day is coming when we will "finally love God with all [our] heart, soul, mind, and strength" (p. 157). Christian perfectionists need to keep an eye on this glorious future: "In this hope, we run, walk, fall, get up, muddle, and press on toward the finish—that on that day, he will present us blameless before his presence with great joy" (p. 162).

Chang's book is an easy read, and her deep thinking, warmth, and humor shine through in touching personal anecdotes and carefully curated quotes. As well as group discussion questions, she thoughtfully includes beautifully crafted prayers at the end of each chapter. Some of the areas she touches on could have benefitted from a little more theological depth, and additional exploration of the causes of Christian perfectionism—such as upbringing, temperament, or life-experience—might have helped the reader further. Nevertheless, as someone in her target audience, I found *Peace Over Perfection* to be one of the most helpful books I've read for my Christian walk. The book will also help pastors to be more nuanced in how they direct the focus of their sermons, realising that this corner of the flock often needs encouragement to *turn away* from morbid introspection and *turn towards* the One who has dealt with their sins once and for all.

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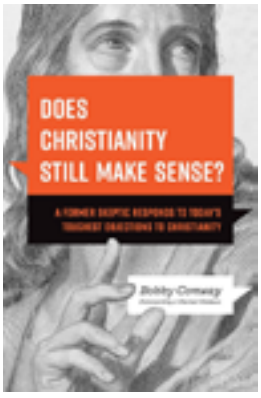
Bobby Conway. *Does Christianity Still Make Sense? A Former Skeptic Responds to Today's Toughest Objections to Christianity*. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Elevate, 2024. x + 204 pp. £17.99/$17.99.



Does Christianity Still Make Sense? was born out of Bobby Conway's journey from faith to doubt to faith again. It aims to encourage Christians who are questioning the reasonableness of what they believe while helping others respond to some of the pressing questions of our day. At a time when "faith deconstruction" seems rampant, this encouragement is welcome.

For those unfamiliar with Conway, he holds a Doctor of Ministry in Apologetics from Southern Evangelical Seminary and a PhD in Philosophy of Religion from the University of Birmingham in the UK. He serves as the Pastor of Image Church (in Charlotte, North Carolina), has had a YouTube ministry, and has written several other books.

Does Christianity Still Make Sense? is divided into two parts. Part 1 ("A Journey Toward Somewhere") is autobiographical, detailing Conway's path from non-belief to faith, then from faith to doubt, and finally from doubt to a reaffirmation of his faith. This provides the context for part 2 ("Answering Today's Biggest Objections"), which comprises five sections, covering twenty-one questions that appear to challenge Christianity.

In part 1, Conway tells his story. During his early years, he had limited exposure to God or the gospel. Amid this void, he experienced academic challenges and a difficult post-high school transition. A friend then introduced him to the good news of salvation, and through the ministry of Greg Laurie he received Christ. But because of a struggle with alcoholism, he had a rocky start as a young Christian. However, a series of events led him to a deeper personal surrender, which prompted him to attend Bible college and seminary. It was in seminary, however, that he first encountered doubt after reading and trying to reconcile a harmony of the Gospels. Then, while pursuing his second doctorate in the philosophy of religion, these doubts returned. He highlights two reasons for this: first, he had too shallow a theological foundation; and second, he was trying to know everything. In the end, it was returning to a child-like faith that led him out of his season of doubt. Conway's background serves as a connection point with Christians who may be facing similar challenges as they read and reflect on the answers that he provides in part 2 of the book.

The first section of part 2 answers questions about scandals in the church. Conway argues that while scandals can harm the credibility of the church's witness, they do not affect the validity of the Christian faith. While he employs some persuasive syllogisms to help make his points, the section reads a little like a practical approach to thinking about sin in the church and, in some respects, how to prevent these transgressions from happening.

The second section responds to the accusation that "The Church Is Nonaccepting." Conway argues that Western culture has shifted because of the influence of various philosophical ideas. For this reason, he rejects the charge that Christianity is oppressive. For example, addressing LGBTQ issues, he affirms that "Christians must lovingly refuse to bow to cultural pressure to affirm what the Bible condemns" (p. 62). From a similar perspective, he answers questions about gender identity, racism, equality for women, and abortion.

In the third section, Conway addresses the age-old problem of evil and suffering. He argues that the price of a world without evil would be the relinquishing of our freedom. To emphasize his point, he proposes the following question: "Which freedoms would you be willing to give up?" (p. 90). Conway wonders why some Christians make excuses for God and suggests that this is the result of either being ill-equipped to defend their faith or not having strong beliefs. He reminds readers that God does not want us to make excuses for him but instead to trust him and proclaim his wisdom. To illustrate, he provides an example of an elderly man he knew personally, who, despite his suffering, maintained a joyful countenance.

Section 4 addresses questions about the exclusivity of the gospel. Conway begins by arguing that every religion is exclusive in its own way. In that sense, Christianity should not be singled out. However, consistent with his rejection of Calvinism, Conway believes that Christianity is characterized by "soft exclusivism." He explains:

> Soft exclusivism, which is the view I believe makes the best sense of the biblical data, teaches that one's salvation is always and only on account of Christ and his atoning work; therefore, people who have never heard the gospel message but who respond positively to God's general revelation in creation (Romans 1) and conscience (Romans 2) may possibly be saved apart from specific knowledge of Christ—even though they are explicitly saved on the basis of Christ's atoning death. (p. 107)

On the issue of hell, he argues that our understanding of love is too narrow and often excludes the element of justice, which is essential to understanding God's judgment. He also reminds us that judgment is based on God's standards and not ours. In addition, hell is only for those who refuse God's generous gift. Conway concludes the section by countering the notion that the church is shrinking due to the rise of the "nones" and by exploring the relationship between cultural spirituality and Christianity.

The last section of the book addresses what Conway calls "The Science Problem." Here, he provides a brief introduction to four apologetic methods: Reformed, fideist, evidential, and classical. He advocates that faith and science are not conflicting and that faith is not a leap in the dark. Conway then offers five reasons why atheism has not buried God and why Christianity is the best worldview option. As evidence for God's existence, he introduces the cosmological argument, the design argument, the moral argument, and testimony from a transformed life. He concludes this section by presenting a case for miracles and argues for Jesus's resurrection on the basis of Old Testament prophecy, the empty tomb, his post-resurrection appearances, and the transformation of the disciples.

In the conclusion, Conway recounts four reasons why Christianity still makes sense to him. First, despite his seasons of doubt, he could not explain away all the evidence. Second, even while doubting, the work of the Holy Spirit provided him with assurance. Third, he could not disregard previous experiences in his faith journey. Fourth, he could not ignore the cumulative case for Christianity. In the end, however, he acknowledges that faith, simple faith in the God of the gospel, drew him out of his maze of doubts.

For the Christian who wants to be introduced to apologetics without being overwhelmed, *Does Christianity Still Make Sense?* provides a helpful starting point. The structure of the book makes it accessible. The chapters are short, with questions and responses grouped by sections. One can read the entire book cover to cover or, if seeking answers to a specific issue, turn to that section and focus there. The listing of key points in some chapters helps readers concentrate on the main ideas. However, some areas (notably, the problem of evil and suffering) could benefit from more robust arguments and greater

biblical support, and Conway's "soft exclusivism" (while only tentatively expressed) may be too inclusive for many. Also, a resource list for the reader who would like to go further would have been helpful.

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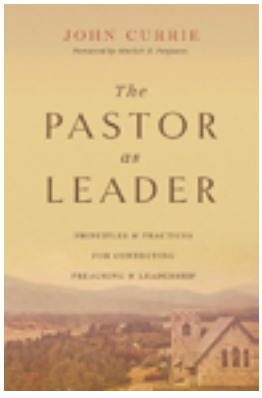
John Currie. *The Pastor as Leader: Principles and Practices for Connecting Preaching and Leadership*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2024. £14.99/$19.99.



"Many pastors feel an irreconcilable disconnect between the priority of preaching and the pressing responsibilities of leadership, and conclude that they must choose between the two" (pp. 1–2). So writes John Currie, Professor of Pastoral Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, in the opening pages of *The Pastor as Leader: Principles and Practices for Connecting Preaching and Leadership*. In so doing, he identifies both a "disconnect" and dilemma that I (and doubtless many others) have often felt. Better still, he has written an accessible and thoughtful response to it.

Currie is well-placed to write such a book. His wisdom has been gained and honed in the realms of both the church and the academy. This is evident from the theological and intellectual rigour with which he writes and from his deeply pastoral and practical applications of the principles of his book.

The intention of this book is stated at the outset: "The *Pastor as Leader* seeks to equip pastors to effectively steward their responsibilities as leaders in Christ's cause while being unashamedly committed to preaching as the primary means by which Christ extends his church's mission in the world" (p. 1). He is clear about the way the disconnect and decision mentioned earlier harms the effective work of God's people in their mission. His answer to it is likewise clear: "pastoral leadership by appointment of Christ and in union with Christ that prioritises preaching the word of God on the mission of God … because Christ leads his kingdom through his word preached, *preaching is leadership* and preachers are leaders in God's cause" (p. 5). This is the key conviction that Currie argues for throughout the book.

At its heart the book is a motif that is driven home through both chapter titles and content: "a man of God." Currie defines what he means by this expression, as follows: "In the Scriptures a man was God's man sent to proclaim God's word to lead God's people into God's purposes. He was a *preacher-leader*" (p. 7, emphasis original). Jesus is "the man of God" *par excellence*. Jesus is also the template for preaching as leading. And so, out of this motif, and this man of God, Currie first establishes "Principles" in Part 1 (chs. 1–5) and then the "Practices" in Part 2 (chs. 6–10) that necessarily emerge from those principles.

The focus of each chapter is helpfully established by the chapter titles and subtitles. In part 1, a man of God is described in terms of the principles of his "mission" (ch. 1), "leadership" (ch. 2), "identity" (ch. 3), "power" (ch. 4), and "example" (ch. 5). In summary, the man of God who leads God's people pastorally is committed by being united to Christ and to the mission of Christ. This mission is

> to extend the rule of God for God's glory, by proclaiming Christ in his death and resurrection for sinners from all of Scripture, so that multitudes of disciples are made

> from all nations, through repentance and faith, who submit all of their lives to the rule of Christ and his commands (Matt 28:18–20; Luke 24:46–48). (pp. 22, 151)

In this mission, the man of God, like his master, is identified as a "preacher-leader." Also like his master, he needs to be empowered by the Holy Spirit in both his practice and productivity. Finally, he must be a man of godly character—one who is continually reshaped and reformed by God through the work of the Spirit.

In part 2, the practices that emerge from the principles of Part 1 are unpacked. Currie rightly starts with *prayer*—and, again, is particularly sharp in his examination of the prayer life of the man of God. He then turns to *preaching*. And preaching is inseparable from the clarity of *vision* and *strategy*, as well as *example*.

Currie is a particularly clear writer. This clarity is evident in five ways that make this an extremely valuable book. First, he is unashamedly Christocentric. Jesus is at the heart of everything that Currie writes, examines, suggests, and advises. This focus on Christ is clearly connected to Currie's excellent handling of God's word. Second, Currie is very good at definitions that are both biblical and intelligible. While his prose can be wordy at times, his definitions provide great clarity about the topics being discussed. Third, I appreciated the way that Currie connected vision and strategy to both the structure and content of preaching programmes within God's people. The vision and strategy did not dominate the preaching, but neither were they disconnected from it. And this connection was both sharp enough to be practical but also flexible enough to be adaptable to context. Fourth, Currie provides helpful reflection sections at key points in the book. These build on his ability to identify and ask searching questions throughout the book. And, finally, Currie is consistent in addressing the main issue he has identified. He explains the model he has laid out in a way that is faithful to God's word and able to be implemented in the life of God's church.

I have now read this book twice this year. It has helped me better understand the disconnect I knew was there. It has placed me on a path of biblical reflection. And it has focused my eyes and practice on Jesus as "the man of God." Could we ask for more from a book of this kind?

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Stephen Driscoll. *Made In Our Image: God, Artificial Intelligence and You*. Sydney: Matthias Media, 2024. 230 pp. $19.99.

6,768. That is the number of days between August 29, 1997, and March 10, 2016. The number of days between the fictional date of the sentient rise of Skynet in the movie, Terminator 2, and the actual date on which Google DeepMind's AI program, AlphaGo, made an "unthinkable" play against famed professional Go player, Lee Sedol.

In what is now known as "Move 37," AlphaGo defied the assumed logic and number-crunching statistical options available in a board game far more complex than chess, making a play that the commentator could only describe breathlessly as "Beautiful."

"Move 37" made no sense—initially. But that was the beauty and terror of it. Non-sentience acted counter-intuitively and ended up winning the match. Like a wily thief feigning injury in order to mug an unsuspecting tourist, AlphaGo deliberately suckered in Lee Sedol with a seemingly less than optimal move.

Beauty or terror, which is it? Or, as Stephen Driscoll argues in his award-winning book, *Made in Our Image: God, Artificial Intelligence and You*, why can't it be both?

Driscoll's book deservedly won the Sparklit Australian Christian Book of the Year 2025. It provides urgent biblical insight into our current civilizational moment. Big tech and governments are pumping trillions of dollars into artificial intelligence. It is no longer possible to ignore the fact that the world is set for massive disruption because of machine learning.

Yet as Driscoll observes, it's too early to tell where things might head. All sorts of airy predictions are made, but there is little certainty: "We invent things that change our world, and yet the exact impact is usually not what you would have predicted. There's the invention and then a time of expectation. The futurologist guesses, but history is never quite what we expect" (p. 11).

As a late adopter, that gives me all sorts of excuses for ignoring AI, or dismissing its ability to seamlessly replicate my writing, or indeed to garner all the information required to find a cure for cancer. But resistance, Driscoll insists, is futile. The AlphaGo machine that made "Move 37" was subsequently beaten 100 games to zero a few years later by a successor model. Yikes!

If you, too, are a late adopter, *Made in Our Image* provides an accessible and informative breakdown of how artificial intelligence actually works. We are not talking mere number-crunching but self-building neural networks that reshape and refine learning pathways, constantly searching for alternate and increasingly economic ways to employ data.

They think! Or do they think? Who knows. What's important is that many of us now think they are thinking. And that changes everything.

Driscoll's writing snaps and pops with verve. He employs great illustrations and, having heard him speak on this topic, writes in a manner that reflects his personality. The humanness of Stephen Driscoll comes through. "I'm not an artificial intelligence," he humorously insists. "I am (or believe that I am) a human" (p. 3).

Which is perhaps the point. Driscoll's central thesis is that there is an intrinsic difference between humans made in God's image and machines made in our image. Simply put, conflating the two is a

category error. Yet, without a theological framework, many today are making that error. And as AI increases in power and possibility, many more will also.

Driscoll has a keen theological eye. Having established AI's possibilities, exploring the sociological promises and threats on the horizon, he organises the rest of the book around the familiar yet immensely helpful four-fold framework: Creation, Sin, The Cross of Jesus, and The New Creation (p. 29). In other words, basic biblical theology.

Basic, perhaps, but applied deftly. Driscoll examines how each sector of the framework intersects with the sociological, cultural, and existential churn of the modern world, before offering a biblical and Christocentric response.

The chapter on creation is entitled "Identity Implosion." Our angst around AI is significantly underpinned by our angst around ourselves. Many modern people no longer have a solid understanding of who we are socially or individually. We are facing this radical new technology with no identity coin in the bank. Is AI replacing us? What do we even mean by "us"?

Driscoll unpacks what it means to be made in God's image. He explains that as those called to live in the creation under God's rule, to subdue and fill the creation, and indeed to be sub-creators ourselves, we do not have the option of ignoring technological advancements. Yet this does not mean an uncritical acceptance of all technologies as merely neutral tools which are at our disposal. We have been created with wisdom and discernment. What will lead to our good and to human flourishing? A good theology of creation means that we neither fear nor venerate new technologies.

The chapter on sin, "Less Dead than Others," is a fine example of applied theology, with Driscoll trawling through the biblical accounts of technology being used for both good and evil before landing in the modern world. God has given us a good creation, but sin has marred it and us. We should expect mixed—and missed—results.

These two chapters provide a helpful counterpoint to the almost naïve assumption of the tech gurus such as Peter Thiel, who in an interview (in July 2025) with New York Times' columnist Ross Douthat, a conservative Catholic, struggled to affirm any desire for humans to be involved in the future of planet earth. Douthat finally wrestled him into a concession, but it's clear that less theologically minded souls see the answer to the world's problems lying in technology, not theology. And if humanity—augmented or supplanted—is required to achieve this, then so be it.

Driscoll provides solid advice for individuals and churches in dealing with, and teaching on, the issues that AI will continue to throw at us. What about deep fake? What about the loss of trust when information is manipulated? How do we deal with the promise of transcending the "surly bonds" of our corporeality?

Then, in a chapter significantly titled "Intellect Overthrown," Driscoll turns to the cross of Jesus. Faced with all this crazy tech and scary smart blokes, it is convenient to forget that the cross confounds earthly ideas about how to resolve our problems. This chapter is the highlight of the book. Driscoll explores not only how the mind of God supplants the mind of humans but also how the love of God safeguards us from technology's rapid race to better the planet. In this regard, he notes that

> AI could also be a threat to us if we ever made an intelligence that was righteous, holy and good. Such an entity would be against our total depravity, against what we do, and against what we are. The best we could expect from this intelligence would be justice and judgement, which will not end well for us. Yet no entity will ever match the mercy and grace of God. (p. 140)

The denouement of *Made in Our Image* is that of all AI hopefuls: a new creation. Of course, it is instructive that, while the technologists of our era all promise an eschaton, they fail to explain how anything made in our image will not ultimately reflect our own withered goals and reductionist dreams—not to mention our corrupt natures. In other words, no matter how many iterations machine learning will be removed from actual humans in another 6,768 days, it will still contain the smudgy fingerprints of its creators. And that will be both its beauty and its terror.

In the end, Driscoll insists, the new creation we need—one that will satisfy all desires and deal with all evil—cannot be brought about by something made in our image, but only by the Someone who has made us in His.

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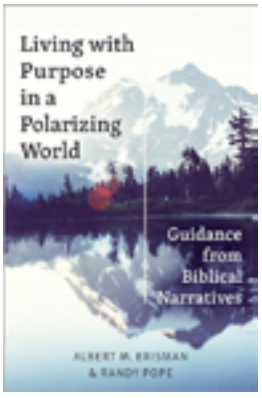
Albert M. Erisman and Randy Pope. *Living with Purpose in a Polarizing World: Guidance from Biblical Narratives*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2024. xvii + 256 pp. £18.04/$19.95.



In a time marked by political division, cultural confusion, and social upheaval, *Living with Purpose in a Polarizing World* steps into the growing tension that many Christians feel today. Authors Albert Erisman, a retired Boeing executive from Seattle, and Randy Pope, a veteran city attorney from Mississippi, bring together their unique professional backgrounds and experiences to promote and explore the intersection of faith and work, seeking to chart a faithful path forward. Rather than reacting in panic or anger to the challenges that confront us, they invite readers to consider how a variety of men and women we meet in Scripture responded to cultural hostility by living with courage, conviction, and grace. Drawing on twelve biblical narratives, Erisman and Pope argue that generational faithfulness in the face of adversity provides a time-tested model for living with purpose in our fractured world. Their message is clear: the way forward for the church is not fear or force, but faithfulness.

The book begins with an explanation of the five reductive reactions of believers in modern Western society: *resignation and assimilation* (blending in with the culture); *withdrawal and retrenchment* (isolating ourselves from the culture); succumbing to *fear*; attempting to reclaim influence through seeking *power*; and reacting in *anger*. These postures, though understandable, all fall short of the biblical model. The authors encourage Christians to understand that they are first and foremost citizens of heaven, and so to "seek the peace of the city" (Jer 29:7 KJV) by following Micah's admonition to "do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God" (Mic 6:8 NKJV).

Focusing on twelve biblical figures (Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Esther, Job, Joseph, Ruth, Daniel, Peter, Paul, and ultimately Jesus), the authors demonstrate how God's people, historically, have made an impact on their world while remaining faithful to him. Each chapter follows a consistent pattern that begins with a clear (but not necessarily comprehensive) retelling of a biblical narrative, thoughtfully placed within its cultural and spiritual context. From there, the authors move into theological reflection, drawing out key principles often framed by scriptural commands or themes. Finally, they connect the

text to modern life by sharing real-world examples from their professional experiences in business, law, and civic leadership, offering practical insight into how these biblical truths can be lived out today.

In the book's conclusion, Erisman and Pope reiterate their central message and offer practical suggestions for implementing the truths that have been taught. They emphasize the importance of humbly examining conflicts with other believers and stress the value of unity and community over individualism, thereby maintaining the unity that Christ has provided. These suggestions are not new or ground-breaking, but they assist the reader in moving forward in their walk with Christ.

The afterword offers practical encouragement and, in part, a personal reflection from the authors on their own efforts to live out the book's message. They acknowledge ongoing disagreements and challenges, even between themselves, as evidence that pursuing unity and purpose is a continual, sometimes messy, process. The authors conclude with the assurance that God is at work in and through the imperfect efforts of his people, urging readers to persist in living humbly and faithfully as they navigate the complexities of living in a fallen, and often hostile, world.

The book's diagnostic framework is its most substantial contribution. As noted earlier, Erisman and Pope effectively identify five problematic Christian responses to cultural polarization that are too often witnessed in our Christian communities. This framework offers helpful language that can guide both personal reflection and thoughtful discussion within the church community. It provides individuals and groups with a means to identify and reflect on their responses to cultural challenges, promoting greater self-awareness and cultivating a more intentional, biblically grounded approach to engagement with the world.

Another strength of the book is its demonstration of how to bridge the gap between ancient biblical narratives and modern moral dilemmas. Erisman and Pope model an approach to cultural engagement that is shaped by a commitment to serve the common good and to seek justice within their communities. This is reinforced by insights from their professional lives in law, city affairs, business, and ethical leadership, and evidenced by the fact that the book includes endorsements by unbelievers! Erisman and Pope's example grounds their message, enabling them to speak persuasively about Christianity's role in fostering public virtue and to invite meaningful conversations with those holding different beliefs, all without adopting adversarial or combative postures.

For Christians, *Living with Purpose in a Polarizing World* offers practical guidance. Readers can learn how to communicate and collaborate effectively with those who do not share their beliefs, maintaining strong faith commitments without withdrawing or compromising their principles. The book further encourages believers to engage in public discourse with humility, honesty, and competence, demonstrating that Christian witness is most compelling when it prioritizes respectful engagement and the pursuit of shared societal goods.

For preachers and teachers, Erisman and Pope model how to show the relevance of biblical stories and how narrative preaching can move beyond abstract doctrine to encourage embodied, ethical living. Their emphasis on relational and ethical themes, such as integrity, courage, and community engagement, illustrates the transformative power of biblical narrative when applied thoughtfully to today's world. The book's accessible format, which includes discussion questions and practical applications, further enhances its usefulness for those teaching in group settings or leading adult education classes.

It is important to note that *Living with Purpose in a Polarizing World* is not a technical manual on hermeneutics, homiletics, or narrative pedagogy. It does not delve into the finer points of homiletical theory, story-crafting, or advanced exegetical methods. Nevertheless, Erisman and Pope are careful

not to allegorize or misrepresent the text and even include a brief admonition to the reader regarding the interpretation and application of biblical narratives (pp. 201–2). That said, there are times when they force a modern concern, such as Joseph being perceived as just a dad by his sons (p. 31) or Esther struggling because she was marginalized by her society (pp. 92–93), onto the biblical narrative. But these moments of eisegesis are the exception, not the rule.

Although the book's approach is more inspirational than technical, *Living with Purpose in a Polarizing World* will be especially beneficial for all who need assistance connecting biblical stories to contemporary life. Its clear structure and discussion-oriented format also make it useful for small group leaders and educators who wish to foster narrative engagement and practical application within classes or study groups. Additionally, those new to narrative preaching will appreciate its accessible style and well-chosen case studies, which together provide a gentle and effective introduction to using biblical narrative as a teaching tool. The book delivers what its subtitle promises, guiding readers as to how the biblical narratives address contemporary challenges and foster ethical reflection so that we might live faithfully in a polarizing world.

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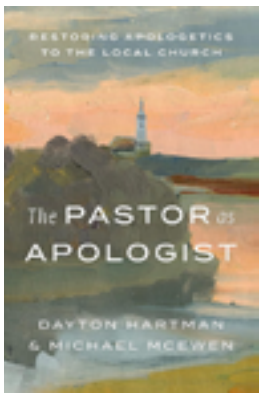
Dayton Hartman and Michael McEwen. *The Pastor as Apologist: Restoring Apologetics to the Local Church*. Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024. xi + 148 pp. £17.99/$17.99.



Dayton Hartman and Michael McEwen's *The Pastor as Apologist: Restoring Apologetics to the Local Church* presents a compelling case that apologetics is fundamentally a pastoral task, integral to the health and mission of the local church, and not something to be relegated to the academy or parachurch ministries. The authors contend that the New Testament and early church both demonstrate that, historically, pastors were the primary apologists—engaging the culture and defending the gospel not from ivory towers but from church pulpits. They assert, "God's plan for the advancement of the gospel is the local church, and pastors … are called to help serve the local church in apologetic roles" (p. 2). This thesis challenges the modern bifurcation between pastoral ministry and apologetics, calling for a robust reintegration of apologetic engagement within congregational discipleship.

Hartman and McEwen adopt a multi-disciplinary approach that combines biblical exegesis, historical survey, theological reflection, and practical ministry applications. Their descriptive and prescriptive methodology establishes the biblical and historical foundations for pastoral apologetics before engaging with the practical tools and strategies necessary in contemporary ministry contexts. Consequently, the book is structured to progressively build a case for pastoral apologetics, beginning with Scripture (ch. 1), moving through church history (ch. 2), then providing a practical handbook for preaching apologetics (ch. 3), and finally offering strategies for implementing apologetics within a local church (ch. 4). The appendices further support the practical outworking of their thesis with liturgical apologetics and curated apologetic resources.

Chapter 1 ("Apologetics in Scripture") grounds the book's thesis biblically, focusing on 1 Peter 3:15 as a foundational text that commands believers to "give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Pet 3:15 CSB). Hartman and McEwen emphasize that apologetics is "a humble yet honest demonstration of the truths of Scripture in winsome and holistic ways" (p. 7), highlighting the need for gentleness and respect in engagement. This chapter contributes a nuanced biblical theology of apologetics that balances intellectual objectivity with pastoral sensitivity.

Chapter 2 ("Apologetics in Church History") surveys key apologists from the early church, such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, medieval theologians like Thomas Aquinas, and contemporary pastor-preachers like Timothy Keller. Hartman and McEwen argue that apologetics has historically been "the work of churchmen, not public intellectuals" (p. 21), with pastors serving as defenders and teachers of the faith within their congregations. The chapter's historical overview amply demonstrates that apologetics was never meant to be a standalone profession but was intertwined with pastoral ministry and ecclesial responsibility.

Chapter 3 ("A Practical Handbook for Preaching Apologetics") is a hands-on guide for pastors seeking to incorporate apologetics into their preaching. It addresses several common apologetic issues—such as the problem of evil, the cosmological argument, and the resurrection of Jesus—providing important theological insights and helpful homiletical suggestions. For example, on the problem of evil, the authors recommend a presuppositional approach, urging pastors to "raise the problem of evil in a manner consistent with [skeptics'] own worldview" to expose its inconsistencies (p. 48). This chapter fills a practical gap for pastors who desire to preach apologetically but lack formal training in apologetics.

Chapter 4 ("Apologetics in Your Church") moves beyond preaching to explore strategies for embedding apologetics in the life of a local church. The authors describe worldview formation as a long-term, intentional process crucial for shaping congregants' thinking in a skeptical culture (pp. 101–2). They share a case study from Redeemer Church's (Manhattan, NY) apologetics institute, which offers rigorous classes, single-evening events, and ongoing "apologetic drip" teaching to build biblical literacy and cultural discernment (pp. 105–12). The chapter also highlights the importance of small groups, book giveaways, and strategic ministry partnerships to create a culture of apologetic engagement.

Hartman and McEwen excel in their integration of biblical theology, historical awareness, and practical ministry. Their insistence that apologetics is not an abstract academic exercise but a pastoral mandate is refreshing and urgently needed in contemporary evangelicalism. The authors' pastoral hearts shine through, especially in chapter 3, with sermon starters and pastoral advice that balance intellectual engagement with pastoral care and humility.

Their historical survey is another highlight, providing pastors with a sense of continuity and legitimacy by connecting modern pastoral apologetics to historic figures and practices. The detailed practical recommendations in chapter 4 offer a blueprint for churches seeking to embed apologetics beyond the pulpit, emphasizing community, consistency, and cultural engagement.

While the book's pastoral focus is its strength, it occasionally glosses over the diversity of apologetic methods. The authors favor a presuppositional approach, particularly in discussions of logic and the problem of evil, citing Cornelius Van Til and Greg Bahnsen extensively (e.g., pp. 15, 139). However, they offer limited engagement with or critique of alternative apologetic methods, such as classical or evidential apologetics, which may be more accessible or effective in certain contexts and in addressing certain questions. A more balanced and holistic discussion could better equip pastors to discern the best approach to issues for their congregations.

Additionally, the book's treatment of post-Christian culture, while insightful, would have benefited from a deeper engagement with sociological and philosophical insights. For instance, "post-Christian" is introduced as a cultural descriptor without extensively exploring its interpretations and implications (pp. 21–22). A more robust cultural analysis would sharpen the apologetic strategies recommended later.

Lastly, the book assumes a degree of pastoral capacity and resources that may not be available in all church contexts. While Redeemer Church's apologetics institute provides an excellent model, smaller or resource-limited churches might struggle to implement such programs fully. More attention to scalable models and low-resource approaches would increase the book's applicability.

The Pastor as Apologist makes a timely contribution to evangelical pastoral ministry. The book's clear thesis, that pastors are uniquely called to teach and model apologetics, is convincingly argued and richly illustrated through biblical exegesis, historical exemplars, and ministry case studies. Its pastoral heart and practical wisdom make it a valuable resource for pastors seeking to integrate apologetics into their preaching and discipleship. In an age of rising skepticism and cultural hostility toward Christianity, the book issues a clarion call for pastors to equip their congregations not only to be able to give a reason for their hope but to do so, as 1 Peter 3:16 goes on to add, "with gentleness and respect" (p. 7). This task is vital, for as the authors remind and challenge readers to affirm, "The local church is God's plan to reach the nations, preach the truth, and defend the faith once and for all delivered to the saints. Do you believe it?" (p. 116).

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Bradley D. Newbold. *The Worship Target: Growing Gracious and Holy Affections through Congregational Worship*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2024. xxii + 148 pp. £20.00/$24.00.

In *The Worship Target*, Bradley Newbold contends that worship music must be reevaluated in light of its "real purpose"—"growing in our gracious and holy affections for Christ." His central thesis, stated early in the book, is that the music we choose for corporate worship should reflect and reinforce that purpose, and that by "focusing on this target through the power of the Holy Spirit," today's churches can be transformed (p. xxi). Newbold's burden is to guide worship leaders in targeting these affections as the desired outcome of their musical and liturgical decisions.

Newbold grounds his discussion in the teaching of Scripture. Chapter 2 surveys "Old Testament Foundations," using the life of David and Psalm 22 to prepare for chapter 3's discussion of New Testament worship and Christ's multifaceted roles in worship. This reviewer wondered how Newbold would harmonize two of his claims: if "True worship expresses the submission and homage of a person of lower rank before a superior" (p. 3), then how could Christ worship the Father (pp. 29, 62)? Later, chapter 8 discusses "The Pattern of Worship" with lessons on false and true worship taken from a number of biblical vignettes. Throughout

the book, readers benefit from the richness of Newbold's interactions with Scripture. Newbold has not come lately to these Bible passages or these truths, so his insights are hard-won and worthwhile.

Newbold's fourth chapter briefly situates his argument within a historical context. By this account, Christian theologians spoke in a unified voice about passions and affections until the Enlightenment changed the terms and emphasis of the account (p. 44). From this telling, the dilemma is a contemporary one, occasioned and heightened by cultural shifts and aesthetic confusion. Few discussions of contemporary worship undertake this effort, and Newbold should be commended for this historical perspective. The reach of his historical review may have exceeded his grasp, however, as surveys this cursory are often Procrustean. Is the crisis Newbold diagnoses uniquely modern or does it reflect the perennial human struggle east of Eden? Perhaps the deeper issue is not the fault of the Enlightenment's relativistic turn but sinful anthropology. Church leaders in every era have wrestled both with hearts that are prone to wander and with congregants who mistake social excitement for spiritual renewal.

This emphasis on affection is both timely and deeply theological. The meatiest portions of Newbold's contribution—three lengthy chapters—are indebted to Jonathan Edwards's work on *Religious Affections*, applied with a pastoral sensitivity to those who plan and lead weekly services. Newbold's quotations drove me back to Edwards's text, then frustrated me by using the "Feather Trail" edition rather than standard editions from Yale or Banner of Truth. Nonetheless, the book's guiding question—"How do I target truly gracious and holy affections in the worship times that I lead?" (p. xxii)—drives Newbold's argument forward with clarity and urgency.

Yet this focus also raises questions that deserve scrutiny. Newbold's proposal prompted this reader to ask whether these affections are best understood as the *target* of biblical worship or as its *byproduct*. From my perspective, this distinction matters. If we treat gracious affections as our aim, I worry that we risk reducing worship to emotional technique, no matter the purity of our intentions. But if we treat them as the Spirit's fruit—graciously granted by the Lord as we behold his glory through his word and ordinances—then we maintain the primacy of God's self-revelation over human affective response. I feel certain Newbold would agree.

The final section of the book contains Newbold's practical advice to local church worship leaders. Here, the book crescendoed to its triumphant finale. Calling for congregational music that is both beautiful and singable, Newbold provides a clear articulation for local church service planners and leaders that will lead their people into healthy practices. Overall, Newbold embraces the Regulative Principle, though the strictest RP adherents might blench at some of the elements his church includes (p. 94).

The book is eminently useful for worship leaders, especially those formed in traditions where emotional expression is either viewed suspiciously or pursued uncritically. Newbold exhorts churches to align their musical choices with the telos of sanctified affection. This exhortation rings true, and his commitment to Christ-centered worship is commendable.

The Worship Target is a thoughtful contribution that invites worship leaders to reflect carefully on what they are aiming for when they lead God's people in song. I commend the book as a wonderful example of a thoughtful worship practitioner sharing his biblical reflections and best practices with others. I am unsure who the target reader of this book is, but it hit its mark with me.

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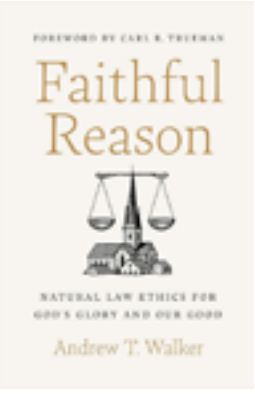
Andrew T. Walker. *Faithful Reason: Natural Law Ethics for God's Glory and Our Good*. Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024. xvi + 413 pp. £34.99/$34.99.



Andrew Walker presents a thorough and compelling argument for the importance of natural law within the tradition of Christian ethics. The essential thesis of the book is as follows: "The primary reason Christians should care about natural law is that it gives us rational, coherent ways of understanding the structure of God's creation order" (p. 42). Walker goes about making this argument in two parts. Part 1 is an extended development of a framework for natural law. Part 2 is the application of that framework to contemporary moral issues.

The book begins with an argument for the importance of natural law. For Walker, natural law provides believers with a reasoned moral foundation that contributes to their discipleship. He then places his construction of natural law within the context of worldview discussions and the wider natural law debate. Having carefully defined the concept of natural law, in chapter 4, Walker explores the significance of reason and its relationship with faith. This is a key chapter within his argument, as it demonstrates the importance of morality being both reasonable and knowable. The last four chapters of part 1 make philosophical, biblical, and theological arguments for natural law. Part 2 of the book, which is comprised of four chapters, is relatively short and serves as a brief example of how to apply natural law in a way that can then be carried into a wide range of other topics. Walker addresses various moral issues under the categories of the goods of life, relations, and order.

In outlining his argument for natural law, Walker provides several complementary definitions. He begins with a shorter definition to highlight the main aspects of his framework: "That is all the natural law is at its essence—determining moral goods, moral duties, and moral norms as rational creatures and acting in harmony to obtain them" (p. 6). He also gives a considerably more thorough definition that outlines all the various parts of his understanding of natural law:

> Natural law is the God-ordained, God-upheld system of moral order engraved upon an image-bearer's conscience that enables them to rationally perceive moral goods and moral wrongs by interacting with their world through sapiential investigation. The natural law directs rational creatures to know what actions to do and what goods to fulfill consistent with their natural and supernatural ends, and correspondingly, what actions to avoid and vices to shun. The principles of natural law morality are principles that have no prior proof of their intelligibility apart from obedience to these norms and the experiences of these goods as goods and ends pursued for their own sake. (pp. 28–29)

Walker develops the various aspects of this definition throughout the book. First, natural law is grounded in an objective, God-ordered creation. Thus, as image bearers, all people can perceive moral goods and wrongs through rational engagement with that order. Since natural law is objectively grounded and can be rationally known, it is universal, empirical, and intelligible. At the center of Walker's definition are the two foundational principles of his ethic: natural law is aimed at natural and supernatural ends, our good and God's glory. Walker states,

> Therefore, Christian ethics must simultaneously be organized around a concern for the ultimate horizons (God's glory) while reflecting back on penultimate horizons (our good). It is a formula at the heart of Christian ethics. We will never be fully happy unless we are holy. Ethics is thus a measure of our joyful conformity to God's moral law, a law that is good and teaches us to live in accordance with his holiness. To practice holiness is to reflect the nature of God (1 Pet 1:14–15). (p. 31)

Two particular issues need further attention as they are key to the overall work. The first is the contribution of natural law to Christian discipleship or catechesis. This aspect of the book is crucial, particularly in relation to how Walker understands the role of Scripture. Although he contends that "Christian morality is ratified by the canons of reason" (p. 99), he is equally insistent that reason is subordinate to Scripture. His point, however, is that there is not only no conflict between "what Scripture teaches" and "properly ordered reason" (p. 107), but that both provide "an epistemological foundation for knowledge of the natural law" (p. 100). Proper moral discipleship helps Christians to understand "the intelligibility and cogency of their own ethics for the sake of ethical catechesis" (p. 45) and, in turn, to apply the Bible to "an ever-expanding number of issues that the Bible does not, on its surface, address" (p. 247). While I agree with Walker's overall point here, I do wonder whether he overemphasizes the problem. Indeed, he spends a significant time addressing it in several chapters. If not read carefully, this emphasis makes it too easy to come away with a sense of Scripture's insufficiency rather than an encouragement to pursue a more holistic moral catechesis that draws on "a larger field of action from which to understand how the Bible speaks ethically" (p. 247).

Second, the relationship between Christian ethics and natural law is important to the book. Unfortunately, the relationship is, at least at times, confusing. Walker rightly presses his readers to see the harmony between Christian ethics at large and natural law. Natural law provides a baseline moral ontology by supplying a creational and rational grammar that undergirds moral reasoning. Christian ethics serves as a broader category, including the authoritative witness of special revelation and the redemptive realities of the gospel. While I greatly appreciate the relationship between natural law and Christian ethics that he develops, it is not always clear within the book. Sometimes it seems as if those terms, or ideas, have collapsed into one another. This is not in fact the case, but the reader must be careful to track how Walker frames these two categories in harmony alongside each other. Nonetheless, in my view, it would have been helpful if this distinction were more prominent throughout the book.

Two aspects from part 2 of the book stood out as particularly valuable and significant. First, there is an excellent section on whether it is ever permissible for the moral good of life to be forfeited. Often, people jump to the idea that abortion or euthanasia is wrong without doing the background work on the issue of the loss of life. Walker does an excellent job working through a complex topic within his natural law framework. Second, he places his extended discussion of the family within his chapter on order and the natural law. A common assumption is that this would fit within the construct of relationships, which it does. However, Walker makes a very compelling case for understanding the role of the family within the structure of the natural order of creation. In my view, this perspective is not only insightful but also biblical.

Faithful Reason is a highly informative book on natural law that is well worth the time it takes to read for anyone interested in the specific subject or the field of ethics more broadly.

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Angie Ward. *Beyond Church and Parachurch: From Competition to Missional Extension*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2025. iii + 205 pp. £15.99/$20.00.

There have been few book-length explorations of the theological and practical issues that bear upon the relationship between church and parachurch. It was a sense of this lack that led to the composition of my *The Vine Movement: Supporting Gospel Growth beyond Your Church* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2023). Angie Ward's *Beyond Church and Parachurch* also aims to address this need and is a welcome addition to this field.

In two introductory chapters, Ward surveys current realities of church, parachurch, and the broader dynamics of not-for-profit participation to demonstrate that we are "clearly living in a time of major redistribution, a transitional period, a liminal space with no clear idea of where everything—including perhaps our own organizations, even ourselves—will land" (pp. 27–28). In other words, the world is in flux, the church is in decline, and we are at a time in history when a reassessment of everything, including parachurches, is needed.

In animated prose, Ward provides a rich overview of the topic, proposes her own terminology and theological framework for parachurch ministry ("missional extension"), and lays out many practical recommendations. Her concern is integration: to bring together various disciplines of study and various perspectives and agendas. Her desire is that we might see ourselves "as part of a larger, interconnected ecosystem" (p. 15).

The book surveys the history of church and parachurch ministry from the apostolic age to today (chs. 3–4); considers ecclesiology (chs. 5–6); discusses the issues and challenges for church and parachurch partnership (chs. 7–8); and then offers a proposal and works out its implications in the final three chapters (chs. 8–10).

Ecclesiology is complex because theological considerations are entangled with conceptions of social and political order, which in turn are influenced by economic and technological factors. In chapters 3 and 4, Ward describes the apostolic bands in the book of Acts, the monastic movements of mediaeval Christianity, and then the new Protestant organizational forms that emerged after the Reformation disestablished monasteries and other Roman Catholic organizations. Her overview corrects Ralph Winter's overly positive portrayal of a "medieval synthesis" between *modality* (local congregations) and *sodality* (missional structures) within Christianity (pp. 43–46, 62; see Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," *Missiology* 2.1 [1974]: 127–30).

Ward points to factors that help explain why parachurch ministry has proliferated rapidly since the last quarter of the twentieth century, including technological developments, world war disruptions, and global population mobility. Ward argues that an isolationist and pessimistic outlook stimulated

by premillennialism led to a shift in emphasis in evangelical activism, away from charitable and social voluntary societies, towards church and evangelism. A 1936 change to the United States' tax code, allowing tax-deductible gifts to not-for-profits, also incentivized the founding of parachurches. The swelling number of megachurches since the 1970s also strengthened non-denominational identity and parachurch organizations (pp. 51–57).

Ward's work lacks some theological precision, however, even while insisting "the people of God suffer from a fundamental deficit in ecclesiology" (p. 6). At the end of two chapters on ecclesiology, she defines the church as

> the divinely established, called out, and sent collection of all the people of God around the world, animated and united by the work of Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, who gather regularly in locally embodied community to re-center their lives around God and who seek to live out kingdom values in their relationships with one another and with the world. (p. 89)

This definition and its exposition invite critique at several points. First, the earthly church is not sufficiently grounded in the heavenly church. Ward incorrectly identifies the visible church as the "'big C' or 'universal' church" (p. 72). In the same chapter, she critiques and seems to dismiss the concept of the universal church as a later theological development—again defined by her as "the church … throughout the world as a whole." While recognizing that "Paul and the writer to the Hebrews speak of the idea of the church consisting of all believers across time and space" (p. 72), the theological primacy of the heavenly assembly gathered around Christ is not made foundational. Before quoting from Donald Robinson's entry on "Church" in the *New Bible Dictionary*, she writes "the collection of assemblies constitutes the one *ekklēsia*," thus misrepresenting his view that the heavenly church is manifested in local assemblies, not comprised of them (p. 74).

Second, regarding how the church is sent, Ward follows David Bosch's broad conception of mission, "far broader than just evangelism or conversion. It is all-encompassing redemption, and it is rooted in the very nature of God" (p. 78). Bosch's missiology can be critiqued for conflating providence and salvation, soteriology and missiology, the local church and the people of God, and the great commission and the greatest commandments.

Third, there is little attention given to local churches as divinely-ordered human institutions with recognized membership and leadership, and so requiring discipline and ordination. The centrality of the ministry of the word and sacraments is also insufficiently emphasized.

Nevertheless, Ward rightly critiques narrow definitions of parachurch ministry that see them as necessarily not-for-profit, non-denominational, independent of local churches, or single-purpose (pp. 95–98) and, as noted earlier, helpfully challenges Ralph Winter's influential essay, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission." Her criticisms of Winter's framework include its lack of biblical support, its primary focus on missionary societies, and its neglect of the functional complexity of denominational structures (pp. 104–5).

The book argues that questions of structure and authority ought not dominate our parachurch theory and practice but instead aims to put "apostolic [missionary] function" at the center (p. 105). The church has been entrusted with a holistic mission, and "that mission can and must be accomplished through a wide variety of activities, forms, and organizational structures" (p. 107). However, while this functional emphasis is welcome, it does not alleviate the need to explore traditional questions of polity, such as ordination and church discipline.

Ward finally proposes her own term and corresponding framework to replace the term parachurch: "missional extensions." This conceptualizes individuals, local churches, denominations, and missional organizations all with respect to the mission of God. The term, she believes, "gets rid of the institutional framework and communicates relationship in continuity: not side by side with walls between but as nodes on a global network, the whole church for the whole world" (p. 114).

This proposal assumes a unique place for the local church in God's purposes. It does not conceive of churches and parachurches as simply different kinds of essentially the same entity. However, when seen from the perspective of God's mission, they are each necessary elements of the mission.

Ward's model encourages a holistic, collaborative approach to ministry and mission, over and against undue concern for control and recognition that interferes with fruitful work. While focusing on functional matters, Ward also upholds the distinct importance of local churches. However, the missional extensions framework relies on a broad definition of mission which, as I've argued above, ought to be questioned. Furthermore, while the word "extension" implies some source from which the extension comes, it neither makes clear that local churches are not always the origin of these extensions nor does it explain why congregations are not themselves extensions.

The closing chapters of the book move to many practical recommendations and case studies. In seeking healthy collaboration, chapter 8 urges a move from confusion to clarity, from scarcity to generosity, from institution to movement, from empire to kingdom, from control to freedom. Chapter 9 gives case studies of the kind of practice she envisions. Chapter 10 concludes with five practical encouragements: to elevate ecclesiology, to update our vocabulary, to equip and release laity, to redesign structures, and to commit to collaboration.

Beyond Church and Parachurch makes a valuable contribution to a crucial area of ecclesiology, drawing together key issues from history, sociology, theology, and missiology, and offers some insightful critiques of alternative paradigms. While not beyond criticism itself, its practical proposals and gospel-hearted outlook makes it a useful and inspirational work.

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— MISSION & CULTURE —

Ken L. Davis. *Foundations for Fruitful Church Planting: Essentials Before You Launch*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2023. 331 pp. £35.00/$44.00.

There has been a significant proliferation of church planting literature over the past few decades, reflecting the rise of networks, conferences, training programs, and denominational initiatives aimed at revitalizing local expressions of Christianity, particularly within evangelical and missional circles. Much of this writing, while extremely valuable, has placed a heavy emphasis on pragmatic entrepreneurial models, marketing strategies, launch team structures, and facility operations. Unlike many books that emphasize such contemporary techniques or paradigms, Ken L. Davis's *Foundations for Fruitful Church Planting* shines a laser-focused spotlight on the critical underpinnings that ensure the spiritual health and long-term viability of new churches. As the subtitle of the book suggests—*Essentials Before You Launch*—this book is not a "how to" manual or a quick start-up guide (p. xvii); instead, it is a carefully constructed call to pause. Its purpose is to guide planters, teams, and mentors into the slower, deeper effort of laying some fundamental and vital groundwork before planting begins. He insists that these invisible foundations are more important than any visible structure, so he calls planters to slow down, examine themselves, and anchor their ministry in the eternal truths of Scripture, theology, and mission.

From the outset, Davis signals his primary aim, which is to prepare planters for longevity, not merely for launch. His thesis is simple but profound: no methodology, however innovative or compelling, can substitute for the theological and spiritual foundations necessary for planting churches that are not only successful in terms of growth but are also faithful in terms of gospel witness, kingdom influence, and spiritual impact. Davis is certainly not against sound strategy and effective methodologies, but he recognizes that lasting fruit emerges from deep roots (p. 191).

This book benefits from Davis's decades of church planting efforts as the former director of Project Jerusalem at Clarks Summit University and a long-time church planting coach and missionary with Baptist Mid-Missions. Because of his extensive experience, Davis writes with conviction, and his heart for biblically grounded and spiritually vibrant congregations pervades the book. He organizes the book around six major categories of foundational preparation—biblical, theological, ecclesiological, missiological, spiritual, and practical. However, rather than isolating these topics, Davis repeatedly points out the interconnectedness of all six foundations. For instance, mission flows from theology (p. 153); healthy practice depends on biblical convictions (p. 3); team dynamics are shaped by spiritual maturity (p. 144). This integrative approach models the kind of thinking church planters and their sending churches desperately need.

Davis's discussion of ecclesiology (chs. 5–6) is one of the book's most important contributions. He presents the church as a covenant community shaped by the Word and a commitment to Christ's mission. His concern is not simply about launching a church but about forming a biblically faithful one. The chapters on missiological and spiritual foundations are equally compelling. Davis urges planters to view their mission fields through the lenses of both biblical fidelity and cultural sensitivity. Contextualization is necessary, Davis believes, but never at the expense of theological truth or godly character. While

the concluding section of the book is devoted to practical foundations such as team development, vision clarity, and support raising, Davis consistently subordinates these to the spiritual and theological framework he so carefully lays out. He presses potential planters to ask difficult questions: Am I called? Am I spiritually ready? Have I cultivated the discipline of prayer? Have I embraced the cross before I attempt to gather others under it? (p. 221). These are not peripheral concerns but central to the book's purpose, which is to shape planters who can endure the pressures of ministry over decades. Each section of the book includes reflective questions, exercises, and recommended resources, inviting planters and their teams to move from information to application. These helpful aids can form the basis for study groups or supervised coaching.

No book is without its limitations, so readers seeking a step-by-step guide for planting churches may feel frustrated by the lack of detailed methodology; however, this limitation should be viewed more as a reflection of the book's stated purpose rather than a weakness in its content. Others may wish Davis had engaged more with cross-cultural church planting realities, since the majority of examples and applications are tailored to a North American context. Finally, for readers looking for a concise primer, the book's length (nearly 280 pages of tightly packed text) may seem a bit overwhelming, but Davis does not sacrifice depth at the altar of speed. Fully incorporating and appreciating the lessons from this text is well worth the investment of time required to read it.

Foundations for Fruitful Church Planting provides readers with a rigorous, theologically grounded, and strategically reflective resource. Its pastoral tone, theological clarity, and strategic insight make this book a valuable resource for seminary students, sending churches, and prospective planters. While Davis passed into glory on May 27, 2023, this book will endure because it addresses perennial issues: What is the church? What is the gospel? How do we discern readiness? How can we build communities that last? These questions will remain central, regardless of cultural trends. This work fills a significant gap in church planting literature for those committed to planting healthy, sustainable, and reproducing congregations that reflect the kingdom of heaven. For this, we owe Davis a great debt of gratitude for his faithful service.

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Larry W. Caldwell. *The Bible in Culture: Reading the Bible with All the World Using Ethnohermeneutics*. Littleton, CO: Carey, 2025. xxxv + 381 pp. £29.99/$34.99.

Caldwell's The Bible in Culture draws on the author's vast experience as a Bible teacher in diverse cultural contexts. To provide the impetus for the book, Caldwell notes that his years as a professor in the Philippines helped him recognize that Western hermeneutics did not always translate well in other regions of the world. Instead of using Western assumptions and methods for reading biblical texts, there is a need to read the Bible with the world. The practice of reading with the world is termed "ethnohermeneutics." Caldwell asserts that colonization and paternalism have influenced hermeneutics, such that this discipline, often assumed to be conducted from a universal perspective, is generally approached from a Western perspective (pp. 7–8). Caldwell separates his argument into two main discussions.

The first half of the book (part 1) is more theoretical in nature. In setting the need for a "receptor-oriented" hermeneutical approach, Caldwell laments the limits and parochial nature of the historical critical method (which he characterizes as the dominant Western exegetical practice throughout the rest of the book). Caldwell also delves into multiple examples of midrash and the use of targums to establish the historical precedent for receptor-oriented interpretations. In an example from Pseudo-Jonathan, Caldwell asserts, "The original Old Testament text is midrashically actualized for the present context of the targumist's audience" (p. 86).

In chapter 4, Caldwell argues that Jesus used "many different interpretive approaches depending on his audience," including sometimes being concerned with the original context of the Old Testament text, sometimes allegorizing, and sometimes relying on Pharisaical exegetical rules (p. 94). Caldwell adds that Paul, like Jesus, uses hermeneutical methods that grow out of his own cognitive environment. Caldwell asserts that modern readers would do well to follow their example (p. 118). In the final chapter of part 1, Caldwell attempts to reclaim a multiple-meanings approach, making way for ethnohermeneutics. Drawing on examples from church history (Irenaeus, Origen), Caldwell appeals to the "divine author" as the primary concern of biblical interpretation. God knows and understands multiple cultures (past and present; Western and non-Western). Due to its divine author, the Bible anticipates multiple meanings and multiple reading contexts (p. 150).

Chapters 6 and 7 provide the foundation for the ethnohermeutical process that Caldwell puts into practice throughout part 2 of the book. In these chapters, Caldwell introduces and argues for an ethnohermeutical grid to gauge the value of biblical interpretations. Composed of four quadrants, the grid rates interpretations on a "high-low" scale based on whether biblically appropriate and/or culturally appropriate meanings have been discerned. In the latter chapter's explanation of the grid, Caldwell relies on missiologist Tom Steffen's "Stool" for cultural exegesis. In this interaction, Caldwell advocates for the significant effect that the receptor culture (described as "anthropology, pedagogy, theology, and curricula") has on the interpretive process (pp. 211–17). In the next two chapters, Caldwell examines the value of "oral hermeneutics" in non-Western cultures and how the Bible itself imposes limits on the range of possible interpretations of a biblical text.

The final chapter is the payoff for Caldwell. Building on the theological premises of "sola Scriptura" and the priesthood of the believers, the work of the Holy Spirit in individual believers, and the roles of the Holy Spirit and local faith communities in biblical interpretation, Caldwell offers an "alternate model" that has seven steps to biblical interpretation (pp. 309–13). The seven steps he suggests are light on textual interaction and draw more significantly on "cultural exegesis" or even cultural application. For many evangelical readers, this paucity of dealing with the textual features with an eye to the biblical (human) author's intention devalues Caldwell's contribution. By providing an example of working through Revelation 3:20 with each step, the implications of Caldwell's approach (positively and negatively) are more evident.

Three big questions always shape one's hermeneutical approach. How one understands the significance of the biblical author, the nature of the biblical text, and the role of the biblical reader ultimately forms the core components of a hermeneutical approach. Sometimes in Caldwell's engagement with these three questions, he overemphasizes the role of the biblical reader (as a member of a particular culture). Furthermore, in Caldwell's discussion, the most significant identifying mark of the Bible reader is perhaps their indigenous culture. Caldwell shows much missiological and pastoral concern for non-Western "readers" of the biblical text. He reminds his readers of the influence of cultural thinking on how Christians read and interpret the biblical text. Though Caldwell's solutions are wanting, some of his questions are worth consideration.

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Timothy Paul Jones, ed. *Understanding Christian Apologetics: Five Methods for Defending the Faith*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2025. £24.99/$24.95

In this delightful volume, five Christian apologists present five distinct approaches to defending the faith. Despite their differences, these defenders of the faith agree that the church ought not to neglect critical but constructive and harmonious discourse on the question of apologetic method since, as editor and contributor, Timothy Paul Jones, says, "we are all apologists now" (p. 1).

Melissa Cain Travis opens the discussion with a defense of classical apologetics. Insisting on a more agile version of this approach, she points out that there is no "one-size-fits-all protocol for effective engagement with a nonbeliever," therefore, any worthwhile approach must be mindful of contextual and personal nuance (p. 22). Accordingly, while Travis stands by the well-known two-step strategy, which aims first to establish "the plausibility of God's existence" and then defend "Christian doctrines," she proposes a "*holistic* classical apologetics" (p. 23). Travis's holistic approach is designed to engage not only the mind but also the "imagination, conscience, aesthetic sensibilities, and innate existential longings," in addition to "the continual guiding role of the Holy Spirit in a person's journey to faith" (p. 23). Travis's exposition consists of a brief review of apologetic uses of natural theology throughout church history, followed by a few documented instances of the classical method in action, with considerable attention given to the conversion of novelist and screenwriter Andrew Klavan.

Sean McDowell ably expounds the evidential approach. He says rightly that "Christianity is rooted in a public, testable historical event: the resurrection of Jesus" (p. 51). McDowell offers a brief theoretical exposition of his approach, including an attempt to recover W. K. Clifford's evidentialist dictum from Alvin Plantinga's critique, among others, along with a claim to a *via media* between William Lane Craig's view of the primacy of the inner testimony of the Holy Spirit and the need for actual historical data to believe in. Believers "can *know*" through the testimony of the Spirit as well as on the basis of public evidence. "It is not either/or. It is both/and" (p. 55). McDowell then rehearses key instances of evidential defense of true faith throughout both the Old and New Testaments.

Next, James Anderson explains presuppositional apologetics. This method, associated with Cornelius Van Til and others, engages the unbeliever at the level of implicit convictions, or "presuppositions," regarding ultimate reality (metaphysics) and ultimate authority (epistemology and ethics). As Anderson explains, the presuppositional method consists of exposing the unbeliever's implicit convictions to the light of scrutiny, demonstrating their incoherence (legitimately *ad hominem* in some cases), and then presenting Christian presuppositions as a more viable alternative. The third step, in fact, involves presenting Christian theism as such, along with a call to repentance. Indeed, Christian theism cannot be simply affirmed; one must accept it on authority, which means accepting the authority structures of Christianity. Accordingly, Anderson explains the authority and self-attestation of the word of God as he develops a revelational epistemology. At the end of the day, presuppositionalism presents a simple choice between God and man as ultimate authority and claims that only one of these is a coherent, functional, and defensible option.

Cultural apologetics, as defended by D. A. Horton, is a relatively new addition to discussions of apologetic method. As Horton points out, his cultural method is not exclusive of other methods; instead, it incorporates them. This incorporation happens via a broad repertoire of cultural contact points with unbelief, including philosophy (classical and presuppositional apologetics) and science (evidential apologetics). Horton's cultural apologetics seeks to engage in dialogue from a common cultural experience and then redirect attention to Christ as the source of all that is good and beautiful in human culture, as opposed to the sinful misdirection of the good things of God's creation. This "dialogical" approach should be carried out, Horton says, "in collaboration with the Holy Spirit" (p. 113). Horton works from Acts 17 and Justin Martyr to make his case.

Finally, editor Timothy Paul Jones explains what he calls an "ecclesial apologetics" in which the Christian presents the exceptional moral character of the people of God as both outstanding and as basically impossible to account for by natural means alone. Jones suspects that over the course of the history of the church, apologetics has succumbed to various distractions and wandered from its very simple biblical mandate, namely, to put our heavenly Father on display by doing good works (Matt 5:16). Jones joins Carl Trueman and Michael Kruger in calling for a retrieval of the early church's spirit of witness to the gospel of the one true God through a moral integrity so unusual that no earthly explanation will suffice.

One strength of this volume is its sensitivity to changing circumstances and to the peculiarities of our day, in particular, the lamentably aggressive tone of public discourse. This sensitivity is evident in the inclusion of cultural and ecclesial apologetics, as well as in the various ways in which each apologetic method acknowledges the strengths of other methods and strives to be flexible and responsive to contexts and individuals. A second notable strength is the abundant interaction. Each presentation is followed by no fewer than four critical but constructive responses.

This later strength, however, draws attention to a potential weakness of the book, namely, that at several points the content feels underdeveloped. One sees this in the responses, which generally fall short of being exciting and fresh, possibly because the presentations themselves at times lack a self-critical edge. Furthermore, the frequent attempts to update and augment methods threaten to dissolve the unique character of each approach. In such moments, there is a risk of implicitly conceding the inadequacy of one's preferred method. Upon reflection, it is possible that in striving for accessibility, this study has not quite delivered the vitality that such a discussion deserves, given the abundance of relevant literature. Nonetheless, overall, this text is a welcome revitalization of what I consider the very important question of apologetic method.

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Collin Hansen, Skyler R. Flowers, and Ivan Mesa, eds. *The Gospel After Christendom: An Introduction to Cultural Apologetics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2025. xiii + 202 pp. £20.00/$26.99.

According to the Keller Center's "2024 Year-End Report" (https://tinyurl.com/yfm5yhwa), the Center wants "to help church leaders around the world through three approaches: our convening, our cohorts, and our content." *The Gospel After Christendom: An Introduction to Cultural Apologetics*, edited by Collin Hansen and Skyler R. Flowers, is a welcome delivery on their "content" promise. The editors should be commended for marshaling the Keller Center Fellows around this important project, as it will surely be a gift to the church for years to come.

As the name indicates, this volume serves as an introduction to the field of cultural apologetics. This is an emerging field of apologetics and ministry being defined in real time. This book is well-positioned to influence the direction of the field, as many of its contributors are seasoned practitioners and thought leaders working on the front lines. Naturally, as an introduction, the book aims to define what cultural apologetics is, explain how it's done, describe its concerns, and determine its boundaries. They do this across thirteen essays divided into four parts. Their stated hope is to "inspire cultural apologists in local churches, in their neighborhoods, in their classrooms, and in their workplaces" (p. 10), as well as to "reawaken the memory of Christianity and the hope of a new heaven and new earth to come with Christ" (p. 196).

Part 1 brings together a series of essays that define the field. Here, cultural apologetics is presented as a tool to be used (Trevin Wax), authorized by biblical testimony (Christopher Watkin), and developed over the centuries (Joshua Chatraw). Part 2 is oriented around issues of methodology. Alan Noble argues that cultural apologetics should not fall into the twin ditches of either accommodation or condemnation. Instead, what is needed is "a posture of grace [that is] bold and humble, confident and gentle, wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (p. 72). Unlike many works that emphasize what cultural apologetics accomplishes, why it is needed, or what it hopes to achieve, Daniel Strange's "subversive fulfillment" instead describes how it actually works (p. 81).

Part 3 addresses the concerns of cultural apologetics, specifically truth, goodness, and beauty. Rebecca McLaughlin, with her typical erudition, exposes the common belief among secular people that Christianity, in general, and Christian ethics, in particular, are the foil to everyone's plotlines. She demonstrates that Christianity has been a driving force behind much of the good accomplished in Western civilization (pp. 122–25). Rachel Gilson offers the profound insight that "our emotional responses to beauty reveal who we are" (p. 129). Insights like this are Gilson's way of illustrating the connection between our aesthetic sentiments and moral compass. Finally, Derek Rishmawy insists that Jesus cannot be reduced to a mere truth claim, for his truth extends to all of reality. In chapter 10, he writes, "Presenting Jesus as the whole Truth … is a way of ensuring that people are confronted with the fullness of what they are being asked to trust in" (p. 150).

In the last section, part 4, each chapter aims to establish the boundaries of cultural apologetics by grounding the discussion in concrete contexts. James Eglinton develops the metaphor of "front porches" as "half-way places between the insides of the homes and the streets" (p. 175), highlighting apologetics as a relational endeavor that should often occur in highly relational contexts. Sam Chan closes the final part of the volume with a consideration of everyday cultural "texts"—films, books, habits—as sites of engagement.

The Gospel After Christendom succeeds in presenting cultural apologetics as a necessary and distinctive form of witness in our secular age. Its strengths lie in its definitional clarity, its emphasis on posture and narrative, and its appeal to truth, beauty, and goodness. The editors articulate a clear vision in the introduction: "to define cultural apologetics, explain its biblical and historical grounding, and demonstrate how it is important for the church today" (p. 10). The essays largely cohere with this vision. The four-part heuristic is effective, moving readers from conceptual foundations to practical outworking. The volume feels like more than just a collection of standalone essays, which should be considered an editorial success.

Having said that, there are different areas where the book could have been stronger. The most pressing of these is its lack of sustained theological substructure. Cultural apologetics typically relies on specific frameworks that were not fully developed here: natural law, with its attendant nature–grace distinction; hamartiology, or the doctrine of sin; and the neo-Calvinist tradition, which has profoundly shaped this approach and undergirded much of Keller's own work. A fuller engagement with these categories would have grounded the volume's vision more securely. It would have been helpful, for instance, to see a chapter devoted explicitly to these themes or to see them woven more substantively through select chapters where they naturally apply. Without this kind of theological ballast, cultural apologetics risks leaning too heavily on cultural theory without clarifying the theological foundations that make such engagement possible.

This introduction will serve as a helpful entrée into the conversation as it stands. It will help the attendant reader learn the language and categories of the field. Most of all, though, it will point future practitioners to the most needed areas of attention in bringing about a spiritual renewal in the post-Christian West.

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