



themelios

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

Volume 40 Issue 3 December 2015

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DESCRIPTION

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EDITORIAL

On Disputable Matters

— D. A. Carson —

D. A. Carson is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and general editor of Themelios.

Every generation of Christians faces the need to decide just what beliefs and behavior are morally mandated of all believers, and what beliefs and behavior may be left to the individual believer's conscience. The distinction is rooted in Scripture: for example, the practice of certain kinds of behavior guarantees that a person will not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9–10), but other kinds of behavior are left up to the individual Christian: "One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God" (Rom 14:5–6).

The matters where Christians may safely agree to disagree have traditionally been labeled *adiaphora*, "indifferent things." They are not "indifferent things" in the sense that all sides view them as unimportant, for some believers, according to Paul, view them as very important, or view their freedom from such behavior as very important: "Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind." They are indifferent matters in the sense that believing certain things or not believing certain things, adopting certain practices or not adopting them, does not keep a person from inheriting the kingdom of God. Today there is a tendency to refer to such *adiaphora* as "disputable matters" rather than as "indifferent matters"—that is, theologically disputable matters. On the whole, that terminology is probably better: in contemporary linguistic usage "disputable matters" is less likely to be misunderstood than "indifferent matters."

In the easy cases, the difference between indisputable matters and disputable matters is straightforward. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an indisputable matter: that is, this is something to be confessed as bedrock truth if the gospel makes any sense and if people are to be saved (1 Cor 15:1–19). If Christ did not rise from the dead, our faith is futile, the witnesses who claimed they saw him are not telling the truth, we remain in our sins, and we are of all people most to be pitied because we are building our lives on a lie. By contrast, Paul allows people to differ on the matter of honoring certain days, with each side fully persuaded in its own mind.

Immediately, however, we recognize that some things that were thought theologically indisputable in the past have become disputable. Paedobaptism was at one time judged in some circles to be so indisputably right that Anabaptists could be drowned with a clear conscience: if they wanted to be immersed, let us grant them their wish. Until the last three or four decades, going to movies and drinking alcohol was prohibited in the majority of American evangelical circles: the prohibition, in such circles, was indisputable. Nowadays most evangelicals view such prohibitions as archaic at best, displaced by a neat transfer to the theologically disputable column. Indeed, such conduct may serve as

a possible sign of gospel freedom. Mind you, the fact that I qualified the assertions with expressions like “most evangelicals” and “majority of American evangelical circles” shows that the line between what is theologically indisputable and what is theologically disputable may be driven by cultural and historical factors of which we are scarcely aware at the time. Moreover, some things can cross the indisputable/disputable divide the other way. For example, in the past many Christians judged smoking to fall among the *adiaphora*, but their number has considerably shrunk. Scientifically demonstrable health issues tied to smoking, reinforced by a well-embroidered theology of the body, has ensured that for most Christians smoking is indisputably a no-no.

Since, then, certain matters have glided from one column to the other, it cannot come as a surprise that some people today are trying to facilitate the same process again, so as to effect a similar transfer. Doubtless the showcase item at the moment is homosexual marriage. Yes, such marriage was viewed as indisputably wrong in the past, but surely, it is argued, today we should move this topic to the disputable column: let each Christian be fully persuaded in their own mind, and refrain from making this matter a test of fellowship, let alone the kind of matter on which salvation depends.

What follows are ten reflections on what does and does not constitute a theologically disputable matter.

(1) That something is disputed does not make it theologically disputable, i.e., part of the *adiaphora*. After all, there is no cardinal doctrine that has *not* been disputed, and not many practices, either. When the troublemakers who followed in Paul’s train argued that in addition to Christ and his death, it was necessary to be circumcised and take on the burden of the law if one was to be a Christian under the Jewish Messiah, Paul did not suggest that everyone was entitled to their own opinion. Rather, he pronounced an *anathema*, because outside the apostolic gospel, which is tied to the exclusive sufficiency of Jesus, there is no salvation (Gal 1:8–9). When some in Corinth gave the impression that certain forms of fornication could be tolerated in the church, and might even be an expression of Christian freedom, Paul insisted on the exercise of church discipline all the way to excommunication, and emphatically taught that certain behavior, including fornication, inevitably means a person is excluded from the kingdom (1 Cor 5–6). Across the centuries, people have disputed the doctrine of the Trinity, the deity of Christ, his resurrection from the dead, and much more, but that does not mean that such matters belong in the disputable column. In short: just because something is in fact disputed does not mean that it is theologically disputable. If this point were not valid, *any* doctrine or moral stance could be relativized and placed in the *adiaphora* column by the simple expedience of finding a few people to dispute its validity.

(2) What places something in the indisputable column, then, is not whether or not it is disputed by some people, or has ever been disputed, but what the Scriptures consistently say about the topic, and how the Scriptures tie it to other matters. At the end of the day, that turns on sober, even-handed, reverent exegesis—as Athanasius understood in his day on a different topic. Athanasius won the Christological debate by the quality and credibility of his careful exegesis and theological integration. Similarly today: even if one disagrees with this or that detail in their arguments, the kind of careful exegetical work displayed at a popular level by Kevin DeYoung and at a more technical level by Robert A. J. Gagnon represents a level of detail and care simply not found by those who wish to skate around the more obvious readings of the relevant texts.¹ To put these first two points together: That some still argue that

¹Kevin DeYoung, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015); Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001).

the New Testament texts sanction or even mandate an Arian Christology, disputing the point endlessly, does not mean that we should admit Jehovah's Witnesses into the Christian community today—they are exegetically and theologically mistaken, and their error is so grievous, however enthusiastically disputed, that the deity of the Word-made-flesh, of the eternal Son, cannot ever legitimately be transferred out of the indisputable column. Exactly the same thing must be asserted regarding the Bible's prohibition of homosexuality, however complex the pastoral issues. In short: the most fundamental tool for establishing what is or is not an indisputable, is careful, faithful exegesis.

(3) My third, fourth, and fifth observations about disputable matters arise from a close reading of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1. In 1 Corinthians 8, Paul does not assert that Christians should not eat meat that has been offered to idols. Rather, he insists that the meat has not been contaminated; there is nothing intrinsically wrong with eating such meat. Nevertheless, Christians with a “weak” conscience—that is, Christians whose connections with idolatry in the past are so recent that they think that eating such meat is sinful, even though there is nothing sinful about the action itself—must *not* eat such meat, lest they do damage to their conscience.² Eating the meat that has been offered to idols is not intrinsically wrong, but violating one's own conscience is wrong. The conscience is such a delicate spiritual organ that it is easily damaged: to act in violation of conscience damages conscience, it hardens conscience—and surely no Christian who cares about right and wrong wants to live with a damaged conscience, an increasingly hardened conscience. If we violate our consciences when we *think* that what we are doing is wrong (even though, according to Paul, the action itself is not wrong), then we will find it easier to violate our conscience when the envisaged action *is* wrong, with the result that our conscience will be less able to steer us clear of sin. Of course, on the long haul one hopes and prays that “weak” Christians will, by increased understanding of right and wrong derived from careful reading of Scripture, transform their “weak” consciences into robust “strong” consciences. There is no particular virtue in remaining perennially “weak,” for that simply indicates that one's moral understanding has not yet been sufficiently shaped by the Word of God.

(4) Meanwhile, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 8, Christians with a “strong” conscience—that is, Christians who rightly see that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with eating food that has been offered to idols, and whose consciences are therefore untroubled if they do so eat—rightly perceive the intrinsic innocence of the act of eating such meat. Nevertheless, Paul insists, the demands of love require that they refrain from such eating if by going ahead and eating they wittingly or unwittingly encourage those with a weak conscience to follow suit. In short, the love of the “strong” Christian for the “weak” Christian may place the former in a position where he or she will choose not to do something that is not itself intrinsically wrong. In other words, an action that properly belongs in the disputable column, leaving the Christian free to engage in that action, may, because of the Christian's obligation to love the weaker believer, become off limits to the stronger believer. This does not mean that the action has shifted to the indisputable column: that would mean, in this case, that the action is always wrong, intrinsically so. So we are driven to the conclusion that an action belonging in the disputable column is not necessarily one that Christians are free to take up. Rather, Christians may rule the action out of bounds either because they admit they have weak consciences, or, knowing their consciences are strong, because they voluntarily put the action aside out of love for weaker believers.

²On these matters, see Andrew David Naselli and J. D. Crowley, *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

Incidentally, one should not confuse the logic of 1 Corinthians 8 with the stance that finds a strong legalist saying to a believer who thinks that eating meat offered to idols is acceptable, “You may think that such action is legitimate, but every time you do it you are offending me—and since you are not permitted to offend me, therefore you must not engage in that activity.” The person who utters words to that effect, however, is in no danger of being swayed by the actions of those who engage in the activity. They are using a manipulative argument to defend a misguided position in which they are convinced that the act of eating meat that has been offered to idols is invariably wrong. In other words, they operate out of the conviction that this activity lies in the indisputable column—and thus they find themselves at odds with Paul’s wisdom and insight.

(5) How, then, does the argument of 1 Corinthians 8 relate to the argument of 1 Corinthians 10:14–22, where it appears that the apostle Paul absolutely forbids eating the sacrifices of pagans, which is nothing other than participating in demonic worship? It is difficult to be absolutely certain, but it appears that in 1 Corinthians 8 what is permitted in principle is the eating of meat that has been offered to idols, while in 1 Corinthians 10 what is prohibited is eating meat that is part of participating in any service or worship or cult or rite that is tied to pagan deities. And this affords us another insight: actions that may belong to the *adiaphora*, i.e., that are rightly judged disputable, may in certain cultural contexts become absolutely condemned, thus now belonging in the indisputable column. More briefly: in the right context, what belongs in the disputable column gets shifted to the indisputably bad column. On the basis of Romans 14 and what Paul says about some viewing one day above another, and others viewing all days the same, Christians may disagree about whether it is appropriate for their children to play in soccer matches on the Lord’s Day. At some point, however, if those soccer matches mean that neither the child nor the parents are meeting regularly with the Lord’s people in corporate worship and for biblical instruction and edification, what appears as a disputable matter becomes indisputably bad (Hebrews 10:25).

(6) That leads us to a still broader consideration. Sometimes the theological associations of an action, in a particular context, establish whether an action is right or wrong. In one context, it may be absolutely right or wrong, and thus belong in the indisputable column; in another context, the action may belong to the *adiaphora*. Consider the strange fact that Paul absolutely refuses to allow Titus to be circumcised (Gal 2:1–5), but circumcises Timothy (Acts 16:3). On a superficial reading, it is small wonder that Paul’s opponents dismiss him as a people pleaser (Gal 1:10) who sniffs the wind and adopts any position that seems convenient at the moment. But a little probing discloses Paul’s reasoning in both instances. In the context of Galatians 2, Paul’s opponents seem to be saying that a Gentile must be circumcised and come under the law of Moses if he or she is to be saved by the Jewish Messiah. If Paul agreed with such reasoning, it would mean that Jesus’s sacrificial death and resurrection are an insufficient ground for Gentiles to be accepted before God: they must also become Jews. That jeopardizes the absolute sufficiency of Christ and his cross-work and resurrection. The gospel is at stake. Paul and the other apostles ensure that Titus is not circumcised: the issue is non-negotiable; the prohibition lies in the indisputable column. In the case of Timothy, however, no one is claiming that Timothy must be circumcised to be saved. Rather, because of his mixed parentage, he was never “done,” and if he is circumcised at this stage it will make mobility in Jewish homes and synagogues a little easier, thus facilitating evangelism. It’s not that Timothy must *not* be circumcised, and it’s not that he *must* be circumcised. Rather, this is the outworking of the apostle’s cultural flexibility for evangelistic purposes: he becomes a Jew to win the Jews, and becomes like a person without the law to win the Gentiles (1 Cor 9:19–23).

(7) Under the new covenant, there is a deep suspicion of those who, for the sake of greater spirituality or deeper purity, elevate celibacy or who prohibit certain foods or who inject merely human (i.e., biblically unwarranted) commands, or who scrap over minor points (e.g., Mark 7:19; 1 Tim 4:3–4; 1:6; 2 Tim 2:14, 16–17; Tit 1:10–16; cf. Rom 14). Such people try to elevate matters that should never be placed in the indisputable column to a high place in the hierarchy of virtues. Paul has no objection to celibacy, and in the right context he can extol its advantages (1 Cor 7), but he resolutely sets his face against those who prohibit marriage, thinking, perhaps, that celibacy signals a higher spirituality. Almost always these topics that some individuals want to make indisputably mandated are at best relatively peripheral, external, or clearly presented in Scripture as optional or temporary.

(8) Some have argued that since Romans 14:5–6 sets the observance of days into the disputable column, and since the days in question must include the Sabbath, and since the Sabbath is part of the Decalogue, and since the Decalogue summarizes moral law, therefore even moral law can change with time as new insights are uncovered. So perhaps it is time to say that the moral prohibition of homosexual marriage should also be revisited. If one moral law (which, one would have thought, lies in the indisputable column) is by New Testament authority shifted to the disputable column, why should we not consider shifting other moral laws, too? The subject, of course, is huge and complex, but a few reflections may clarify some of the issues. (a) Not a few scholars think that the days in Romans 14 refer to Jewish feast days that are tied to ceremonial laws, but not to the Sabbath (e.g., Passover, Yom Kippur). (b) Others allow that the Sabbath is included in the days mentioned in Romans 14, but think the flexibility that Paul there allows means that the shift to Sunday is sanctioned. In that reading, the form of the Sabbath law is flexible, but not its one-in-seven mandate. (c) Although many believers hold that the Decalogue is the perfect summary of moral law³ others argue that the category of moral law, as useful as it is, should not be deployed *a priori* to establish what continues from covenant to covenant, but as an *a posteriori* inference.⁴ In that case, of course, the argument that because the Sabbath law is included in the Decalogue it must be moral law, falls to the ground, yet the category of moral law is retained. (d) In any case, in the Bible there is no text whatsoever that hints that homosexual marriage might in some cases be acceptable. The pattern of prohibition is absolute. As for days, we *do* have a text that indicates a change of approach to their observance, even if we may dispute exactly what it means.

(9) Some draw attention to the argument of William J. Webb in his influential book, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals*.⁵ Webb argues that the Bible establishes trajectories of moral positions, and it is these trajectories that ultimately lead the church to condemn slavery, and ought to lead the church today to egalitarianism. Webb himself advances reasons why he would not allow the same argument to extend to blessing homosexual marriages—but of course that is the line of argument promoted in some circles today. This leads to the curious position that the morality attained centuries *after* the New Testament is complete and circulating is higher than what God himself gives in the biblical documents. The most

³ See, most recently, the book by Philip S. Ross, *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (Fearn: Mentor, 2010).

⁴ E.g., D. A. Carson, “The Tripartite Division of the Law: A Review of Philip Ross, *The Finger of God*,” in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis: Essays in Honor of G. K. Beale*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 223–36.

⁵ William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press: 2001).

robust critique of this position is doubtless the lengthy review article by Wayne Grudem.⁶ In brief: considerable insight into Christian belief and Christian conduct, in particular what is mandated and what is disputable, is to be gained by following the trajectories *within* the Scriptures, but that does not justify treating the trajectories *beyond* the Scriptures as normative, the more so when such trajectories undermine what the Scriptures actually say.

(10) A great deal of this discussion could be construed as a probe into what Christians are *allowed* to do—or, more cynically, what they can get away with. None of the discussion is *meant* to be taken that way (see, especially, the fourth point), but so perverse is the human heart that it would be surprising if no one took it that way. Yet surely serious Christians will be asking another series of questions: What will bring glory to God? What will sanctify me? What conduct will enable me to adorn the gospel? What does it mean to take up my cross and follow Jesus? What contributes to preparing me for the new heaven and the new earth? What will contribute to fruitful evangelism? What conduct effervesces in love, faith, joy, and peace? What beliefs and conduct nudge me back toward the cross, and forward to loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength, and my neighbors as myself? Again: What will bring glory to God?

So suppose a Christian is trying to decide whether to go to a movie that is not only R-rated but has a well-deserved reputation for laughing sleaze. Assessing the choice along the lines of this editorial—whether banning the film is an indisputable obligation of Christian morality or belongs to the *adiaphora*—is a useful exercise. One might acknowledge, for instance, that some with a “weak” conscience really shouldn’t see it; that those with a “strong” conscience shouldn’t see it if they might influence those with a “weak” conscience; and so forth, as we work our way through the various points. But surely Christians will want to ask a different set of questions: Will watching this film adversely affect my desire for purity, or will it fill my mind with images I don’t want to retain but cannot expunge? What are alternative things that I might be doing? If Jesus were here, would I invite him along? Is there any way in which watching this film glorifies God?

⁶ Wayne A. Grudem, “Review Article: Should We Move Beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic? An Analysis of William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*,” *JETS* 47 (2004): 299–346. See also Benjamin Reaoch, *Women, Slaves, and the Gender Debate: A Complementarian Response to the Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2012).

OFF THE RECORD

Is the Wrath of God Extremist?

— Michael J. Ovey —

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We have had enough, proclaims re-elected UK Prime Minister David Cameron, of ‘passive tolerance’. By ‘passive tolerance’ Cameron means the tolerance that puts up with what people say provided it remains within the law. No matter that traditional definitions of political toleration would have majored precisely on leaving people alone if they obey the law, Cameron’s point is that this tradition is inadequate. For we can no longer be content with passive tolerance because there are those in the UK and the West who radicalise others, especially the young, by teaching and preaching that carefully remains within the law but which erodes commitment to, in the UK’s case, ‘British values’. People who do that kind of teaching are extremists. And extremists are dangerous. Cameron’s preferred term is ‘non-violent extremists’, but even a non-violent extremist is dangerous.

Just to be clear, Cameron is not talking about speakers who incite or encourage others to criminal acts. What is dangerous is opposition to ‘British values’, an inclusive term covering democracy, the rule of law, human rights. But since this is an inclusive term, no-one quite knows how much wider this may go. You don’t have to advocate violence yourself, you just have to have said something which can contribute to the radicalisation of someone else towards violence. You have provided, so to speak, the ideological bricks from which a terrorist ideology can be constructed, even if you have not incited such violence.

It will no doubt be tempting to see this as a purely British problem. In fact, it seems to me symptomatic of something deeper in western culture at the moment, certainly in its European form and I fear incipiently in its American form.

At root, Cameron and others are reflecting the idea that religion is dangerous—toxic— although this is not openly voiced. The character Dr Maxted in J. G. Ballard’s superb dystopian novel *Kingdom Come* catches this sentiment well as he says of Islam and Christianity that they are ‘vast systems of psychopathic delusion that murdered millions, launched crusades and founded empires. A great religion spells danger.’ Maxted’s words ring bells with Europe’s chattering intelligentsia.

Now, in a sense this is nothing new. The case has been argued that monotheism is inherently violent, given that the totalising implication of monotheism means that the dissident non-believer can, so the argument runs, only be demonised. Less extreme versions are found in Jürgen Moltmann’s contention that our views of God (is he hierarchical or egalitarian?) will work their way through to how we organise church, family and state.¹ Where does patriarchy come from in those institutions? Not least

¹E.g. Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, trans. J. Bowden (London: SCM, 1991), 2.

from a patriarchal idea of God, Moltmann argues.² Moving wider, the argument is also made that the idea of God found in the mediaeval Islamic thinker al-Ghazali (ca. 1058–1111) helps explain some of the political currents in Islam and why violence can have plausibility to Muslims world-wide.³ For al-Ghazali is an extreme divine voluntarist in the sense that the divine will is God's sole primary attribute and is not constrained by any external norm, nor, it seems, by any internal nature. God's will is so free that he can will something as good at one point and then will the opposite.

Then comes the awkward moment. I can quite see that al-Ghazali's divine voluntarism takes you logically down a line of thought that says arbitrary political or other rule is not necessarily bad. I am, though, also clear that al-Ghazali did not have in mind how extreme divine voluntarism could re-enforce arbitrary political rule at the expense of democracy. Do I think al-Ghazali is responsible for some of the worst currents Islamist ideology? In a sense, yes. This is one of those cases where a religious idea—even if it was originally peacefully advocated—is dangerous, given its logical consequences. And I wonder if we are not ethically bound to think through as far as we can the logical consequences of our arguments.

Now obviously some would say that a Calvinist like me has the same kind of understanding of divine power as al-Ghazali does. God can do what he wills, and what he wills, happens. However, conventional Calvinists do not think the divine will is God's only primary attribute. We think his will is primary, but then too so are his goodness and love. God cannot stop being good, and to that extent his goodness is not contingent and not merely a product of his will. Athanasius made just this point in the Arian debate (*Contra Arianos* III.58ff).

Can I then smugly sit back and let contemporary followers of al-Ghazali take the heat for the 'religion is toxic danger' fear. Not really. For there is another line of argument to bear in mind, this time about God's wrath.

Some years ago the English emergent church leader Steve Chalke argued that those talking about penal substitution were 'telling the wrong story about God'.⁴ For they were talking about an angry God, and this was in part because they were angry people. However, the idea of an angry God then re-enforced their own anger. Thus there was a sort of feedback loop between human anger and the idea of divine anger.

At this point an obvious line of argument appears. I should not preach about an angry God because this is dangerous. It is dangerous because it re-enforces anger in myself and those who listen to me and our anger can all too readily lead to violence. Hence, even if I do not advocate violence and possibly even speak against it at one level (Cameron's 'non-violent extremism'), at the deeper level my teaching about God's wrath puts public order and safety in danger. What is more, if I think al-Ghazali is at some level responsible for some of the outcomes of extreme divine voluntarism, then why should I not be held responsible if some-one does become enraged on God's behalf as I describe God's anger at sin? After all, as I write this, I can at least foresee the possibility. Perhaps I genuinely have not taken responsibility for what I teach and how people may not just hear but *mishear* it as seriously as I should. Perhaps when I foresee a *deservedly* criminalised act as the foreseeable outcome of my utterances I should be far more careful and circumspect and qualified. Perhaps sometimes I might even consider being silent.

² Ibid.

³ E.g. Robert R. Reilly, *The Closing of the Muslim Mind: How Intellectual Suicide Created the Modern Islamist Crisis* (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2014).

⁴ From an address at a symposium on penal substitution held at London School of Theology July 2005.

There are, though, a number of other features about the argument that religious ideas are toxic and dangerous which bear reflection.

To begin with, this affects the current *chic* claim that the secularisation thesis has been disproved and religion is thriving. The secularisation thesis, crudely put, predicted the demise of religion in modern society, but in fact religion thrives, although it does so pluralistically in a modern state. It is not the case, so the argument goes, that modern society is anti-religion. Notably, the comparatively slow growth of dogmatic atheism is sometimes cited as a comforting factor in these debates.

This, though, mistakes what is happening. Here Cameron's antipathy to 'non-violent extremism' comes to the fore. It may well be true that dogmatic atheism is not winning as many converts as it might wish (not surprising since its arguments are actually frequently quite poor). But dogmatic atheism was insisting religion was not *true*. Cameron and others are not adjudicating on truth: their misgiving is not whether a religious idea is true or not, but whether it is *dangerous* to public order. Something can be true and 'dangerous'. In that way, the 'religion is toxic danger' argument is as anti-religious as anything David Hume came up with. In fact, I wonder if in the long run it is not more dangerous. At least we can read Hume's argument on miracles, analyse it, and then demonstrate rationally why it is not true. Showing my words could never be *dangerous* is far trickier than showing they are *true*.

Secondly, the Cameron approach I have outlined sounds extraordinarily illiberal in a political sense to a Christian. We do not plan to break the laws as we teach about God's wrath and don't want others to do so. Why then treat us the same as those who do? However, secular western ears will be tone deaf to the illiberalism, for it has framed the question to itself essentially as an application of the 'harm' principle set out by John Stuart Mill in his influential essay *On Liberty*. The state foresees harm in the long run from a set of ideas in terms of people being more inclined to violence: to avoid this clear 'harm', the freedom of speech of some (the religious) must be constrained.

Thirdly, it is no surprise the argument about what one can say is framed in this way about danger. Zygmunt Bauman persuasively argues that if a society is full of 'liquid' relationships (relationships which are infinitely malleable according to the will of the individual involved), then there are consequences.⁵ For sure, constructing and changing my relationships may be exciting and an expression of autonomy, but it is also destabilising: it is no wonder, Bauman suggests, that ours is an anxious society, worried about diffuse threats and dangers precisely because so much is liquid and uncertain. Hence, in part, why legislation and rules proliferate in what is theoretically an increasingly liberal society. Paradoxically, the urge to control 'dangerous' speech can be related to the same urges to control and regulate dangerous substances like coffee that is served too hot.

And the tragedy here in current western discourse is that some speech is indeed dangerous. And Cameron's inability to draw the line rightly about where danger falls should not blind me to my own ethical duty to make intellectual arguments that are not only true and honest, but logically thought-through and carefully expressed precisely so I am not a 'danger to others'. Conceivably this will make me less attractive and charismatic as a speaker and writer, as my words lose the thrill of being transgressive for my audience. Conceivably, though, I will only be presenting the same kind of dangers to the public good as the apostles did, but who were still charged with turning the world upside down (Acts 17:6). I must continue to provide that kind of danger, but labour to provide no more.

⁵A point Bauman makes in several places but at length in *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Polity 2007).

More than a Game: A Theology of Sport

— Jeremy R. Treat —

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Abstract: Sports have captured the minds and hearts of people across the globe but have largely evaded the attention of Christian theologians. What is the meaning of sports? There seem to be two polar responses: some dismiss sports as merely a game, while others worship sports as nearly a god. This essay argues that when viewed through the lens of Scripture, sports are more than a game, less than a god, and when transformed by the gospel can be received as a gift to be enjoyed forever.

Whether in the pub or in the pew, there is one question you can always count on hearing: “Did you see that game?” Sports are prominent in culture and relevant to life, which is why the average sports show often spends as much time talking about ethics, racism, crime, and sexuality, as it does athletics. In many ways, sports are a microcosm of life.

And yet, while sports have captured the minds and hearts of people across the globe, they have evaded the attention of theologians.¹ Finding a scholar who has thought deeply and critically about sports from a distinctly Christian perspective is as likely in the church as a triple play on the diamond. This is a surprising phenomenon considering not only the prevalence of sports globally but also that historically many sports began and developed in overtly religious settings.² Thankfully, there is a budding field of scholarship on religion and sports emerging today, and Christian theologians are finally getting into the game.³

¹ According to Nick J. Watson and Andrew Parker, there is a “general agreement that academics outside the traditional social-science sports studies disciplines, such as theologians and philosophers of religion, have been slow to recognize the cultural significance of modern sports” (“Sports and Christianity: Mapping the Field,” in *Sports and Christianity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Nick J. Watson and Andrew Parker, Routledge Research in Sport, Culture and Society 19 [New York: Routledge, 2013], 9).

² For example, the Mayans and Minoans played ball near their temples sites, tennis began in a French monastery, and a Presbyterian minister in the Young Men’s Christian Association invented basketball. For an insightful and concise summary of the history of sports, see David G. McComb, *Sports in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

³ Michael Novak’s seminal work, first published in 1967, was the first systematic study of the sport-faith interface (*Joy of Sports: End Zones, Bases, Baskets, Balls, and the Consecration of the American Spirit*, rev. ed. [Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1994]); For an excellent introduction to the field of sports and faith, and an overview of the recent scholarship, see Watson and Parker, “Sports and Christianity.”

What is the meaning of sport? There seem to be two polar responses: some dismiss sports as merely a game, while others worship sports as nearly a god. The first response minimizes sports as a childlike activity, good for passing time but largely insignificant for the deep matters of life. The second response deifies sports, expressing religious devotion and offering sacrifices of money and time at the altar of winning.

When viewed through the lens of Scripture, however, we will see that sport is more than a game, less than a god, and when transformed by the gospel can be received as a gift. Since the discussion of theology and sport is rather new (at least for Christian theologians), this essay aims to provide a broad overview of a theology of sport, grounded in the unfolding narrative of redemption as revealed in Scripture. But first, let us acknowledge that we are not the first to talk about faith and sports, and therefore locate ourselves within the broader conversation by surveying the history of the church's attitude toward sports.

1. Faith and Sports in the History of the Church

The church has always struggled to rightly understand the role of games in God's greater purposes. The Apostle Paul seemed to appreciate sports, or he was at least familiar with them, using athletic metaphors such as running the race (1 Cor 9:24), fighting the good fight (1 Tim 6:12), and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16).⁴

In the first few centuries of the church, however, Christians were largely against the sports of the day, albeit for understandable reasons.⁵ The early Olympic games were dedicated to pagan gods like Zeus and Nike and athletes usually competed in the nude. Moreover, the most popular sporting event—the gladiator games—involved throwing Christians into the ring with wild bears and lions.

Broadly speaking, throughout history the church has had an overall negative or dismissive view of sports—the devil's workshop at worst and a secular means to an evangelistic end at best.⁶ John Calvin played a bit of bocce ball, Dietrich Bonhoeffer a little tennis, but in the early years of America the serious-minded Puritans put sports almost completely outside of God's will.⁷

Up until the late eighteenth century, sports were for the most part recreational. The industrial revolution, however, laid the railroad tracks for the professionalization of sports, with the train pulling into the station in the latter half of the twentieth century. With the professionalization and popularization

⁴Scholars disagree, however, whether Paul supported the sports of his day or whether he was merely using sports terminology as part of a rhetorical tradition. For a brief overview of the debate, see Victor C. Pfitzner, "We Are the Champions! Origins and Developments of the Image of God's Athlete," in *Sport and Spirituality: An Exercise in Everyday Theology*, ed. Gordon R. Preece and Rob Hess (Adelaide, Australia: ATE, 2009), 49–64.

⁵Tertullian, for example, was vehemently against the games, claiming that they "are not consistent with true religion and true obedience to the true God" (*Spect.* 1 [ANF 3:79]).

⁶According to Robert Ellis, while the ancients viewed sport as a vehicle for communion with the divine, Christians from the early church to the Reformation understood sport as a distraction from religion, and after that, as a mere instrument with potential for religious purposes (*The Games People Play* [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014], 1–33).

⁷*Ibid.*, 24; cf. Lincoln Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport* (London: SCM, 2014), 49–53.

of sports today, Christians have jumped on board, to say the least, seeing sports as a potential classroom for morality and a platform for evangelism.⁸

How, then, ought followers of Jesus think of sports today? Athletes or fans regularly invoke the name of God as an expletive of frustration in sports, but rarely think about whether God has anything to do with the game at all. Does God care about sports? Does his word offer insights for athletics? The way one answers these questions is largely dependent upon their understanding of the broader narrative within which we live. The narrative of the American Dream that culminates in individual happiness offers a starkly different framework for sports than the story of God’s kingdom as told by the Jewish messiah. To that narrative, we now turn.

2. More than a Game

As a child growing up in the church, my pastor had a small rotation of canned jokes, his favorite of which went something like this: “The Bible does talk about sports, you know? It’s actually in the very first verse of the Bible: ‘In the *big inning* God created the heavens and the earth.’” The notable feature of this (bad) joke is that the punch line is dependent on the assumption that God’s Word does not, in fact, address the world of sports, and especially not in the opening—and therefore very important—chapters of the Bible. No—the line of thought goes—certainly sports are “just a game” and part of the “secular world” which lies outside of God’s eternal purposes. Scripture, however, presents a different story.

2.1. Created to Play

The biblical story begins in the garden, where God placed Adam and Eve. But contrary to popular opinion, God did not give Adam and Eve a vacation, he gave them a task: God’s image bearers were to work and keep the garden and to fill the earth and develop it on God’s behalf (Gen 1:28; 2:15). This is often called the cultural mandate, because the command to work and keep the garden is essentially a command to create culture. As John Stott says, “Nature is what God gives; culture is what we do with it.”⁹ What, then, were Adam and Eve supposed to do with it?

First, God’s stewards are called to *develop* his creation. God did not create the earth as a finished product but rather as an unfinished project. It was made with potential that needed to be developed. Adam’s task as a gardener was a prototype for all culture-making: take the raw materials of the earth and cultivate them for the good of society. Furthermore, the son and daughter of the Creator-King were not only called to cultivate the garden, but also to extend the order of the garden and the blessings of God’s reign to the ends of the earth. Eden was a lush and beautiful garden, but the rest of the earth was untamed and wild. Adam and Eve were called to Edenize the world.

Second, Adam and Eve were not only commanded to *develop* God’s creation, they were also called to *delight* in it. God says, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” (Gen 2:16–17). Unfortunately, many have focused so much on the

⁸ The key moment in the coming together of faith and sports was when Christians began using sports for moral training, a movement that became known as Muscular Christianity. For an introduction to this movement, see Donald E. Hall, *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁹ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today*, ed. Roy McCloughry, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 222–23.

prohibition of the one fruit that they have overlooked the invitation to feast upon all the other fruits. The God who abounds in love and kindness created a world of delights and placed his beloved image bearers in it with an invitation to enjoyment. Creation is not merely a resource to be used for productivity, it is a gift to be received and enjoyed.

This is where the idea of “play” comes in, which is implicit in humanity’s calling to develop and delight in God’s creation. To play is to creatively enjoy something for its own intrinsic good. Building upon Johan Huizinga’s classic definition of play, Erik Thoennes says, “Play is a fun, imaginative, non-compulsory, non-utilitarian activity filled with creative spontaneity and humor, which gives perspective, diversion, and rest from necessary work of daily life.”¹⁰ At the core of the definition of play is that it is autotelic; it is for its own purposes. Play need not be justified by its effects, be it psychological (peace of mind), physical (better health), social (learning teamwork), etc.; it is simply creatively delighting in and enjoying God’s good creation for its own sake.¹¹

In short, we are created to play. Like a father who builds a sandbox for his children, God is honored and takes joy when his sons and daughters delight in his workmanship. The world is—as it has been said—the theater of God’s glory¹²; but it is also the playground of God’s goodness.

2.2. Play, Sport, and Competition

Of course, playing in the garden of Eden is a long way from the playoffs in Madison Square Garden. God did not give Adam and Eve a court and a ball, but he did give them a natural instinct to play that would inevitably develop into something more.¹³ So while technically one does not find sport in Genesis 1–2, we can speak of play with the potential and even intention toward sport. We must remember that a biblical doctrine of creation is not merely about what happened in Genesis 1–2, but about the way the world was meant to be.¹⁴ In other words, creation is not just about what God did “in the beginning,” but also about what God intended from the beginning.

¹⁰Erik Thoennes, “Created to Play: Thoughts on Play Sport and the Christian Life,” in *The Image of God in the Human Body: Essays on Christianity and Sports*, ed. Donald Deardorff and John White (Lampeter, Wales: Mellen, 2008); Huizinga’s work on play has been foundational for discussions on sport. He defines play as “a free activity standing quite consciously outside ‘ordinary’ life . . . but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained from it. It proceeds within its own boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner” (Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* [Boston: Beacon, 1955], 13).

¹¹ While Huizinga and others have made the anthropological point about play, Jürgen Moltmann rightly grounds it theologically. Humans are *homo ludens* because they are made in the image of *Deus ludens*. Moltmann points out that God did not create the world out of necessity or obligation, nor is there any purposive rationale for why something exists rather than nothing. Creation, therefore, must have its ground in the good will and pleasure of God. “Hence the creation is God’s play, a play of groundless and inscrutable wisdom. It is the realm in which God displays his glory” (Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, trans. Reinhard Ulrich [New York: Harper & Row, 1972], 17).

¹² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, LCC (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1.6.2.

¹³ McComb calls this natural instinct the “athletic imperative” (*Sports in World History*, 9).

¹⁴ Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew demonstrate that “‘creation’ had a much broader scope of meaning for Old Testament Israel than it often does for us today. Creation includes the cultural and social endeavors of human beings and thus covers the whole of human life—personal, social, cultural” (*Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008], 39).

There is a trajectory to Genesis 1–2 and when we take that playful instinct, add competition and rules, then we have sport. However, we must be careful and precise with definitions of play, games, sport, and competition; and how one relates to the others.¹⁵ Play, as noted above, is the unstructured, autotelic activity that creatively enjoys the gift of creation. Play turns into a game when rules are added and teams are formed (in some cases). Sport, then, is when the rules of a game are universalized and there is the added element of *agon*, moving it from a mere game to a contest.¹⁶ Robert Ellis defines the jump from play to sport in the following way: “Sport gathers up elements of the definition of play and adds to it that it is a bureaucratized embodied contest involving mental and physical exertion and with a significant element of refinable skill.”¹⁷ C. Clifford and R. M. Feezell offer a similar and yet more concise explanation: sport is “a form of play, a competitive, rule-governed activity that human beings freely choose to engage in.”¹⁸

Competition has often been one of the most difficult aspects of a Christian understanding of sport. Can one love their neighbor while trying to block their shot, tackle them behind the line of scrimmage, or check them into the boards? The etymology of the word “competition” is helpful, for the Latin *competito* literally means “to strive together,” rendering sport a “mutually acceptable quest for excellence.”¹⁹ As iron sharpens iron, competition enhances play. Michael Goheen and Craig Bartholomew rightly argue that it is cooperation, not rivalry, that is at the heart of competition: “In sports, teams or individuals agree cooperatively to oppose one another within the stated goals, rules, and obstacles of the game.”²⁰

In sum, God’s image bearers are called to develop God’s creation for the good of others *and* to delight in God’s creation because of its intrinsic good. Within this context of playfully developing and delighting in God’s creation we can say that *sports are part of God’s intention and design for creation*.

2.3. The Intrinsic Good of Sports

Building upon the above argument that sports are a part of God’s intended design for his created order, I will now argue more specifically that sports were intended as a *good* part of God’s design.

¹⁵ In the following paragraph I am drawing especially from Ellis, *The Games People Play*, 2–3, 125–29.

¹⁶ I need to clarify at this point that by “sport” I do not necessarily mean what we think of with modern professionalized sport. It is debated whether that counts as “play” by definition, and in many ways modern sport is more about entertainment and business than about playful delight. The complex issues of sport and economics, culture, and sociology are not easily detangled from the games themselves, and engaging these aspects of the *professional* world of sports is beyond my scope.

¹⁷ Ellis, *The Games People Play*, 129.

¹⁸ Quoted in Nick J. Watson, “Special Olympians as a ‘Prophetic Sign’ to the Modern Sporting Babel,” in *Sports and Christianity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Nick J. Watson and Andrew Parker, Routledge Research in Sport, Culture and Society 19 (New York: Routledge, 2013), 169.

¹⁹ Stuart Weir, “Competition as Relationship: Sport as a Mutual Quest for Excellence,” in *The Image of God in the Human Body: Essays on Christianity and Sports*, ed. Donald Deardorff and John White (Lampeter, Wales: Mellen, 2008), 101–22; See also Watson and Parker, who add, “Etymologically, sport competition can be understood as a ‘mutual striving together for excellence’ (Greek, *arête*) in which opponents honor their opponents and cooperate to bring out the best in one another” (“Sports and Christianity: Mapping the Field,” 32, cf. 53).

²⁰ Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 154. Ellis adds an important point regarding competition: “If competition is an evil that Christians should avoid or discourage such a judgment would place a ban on a great deal more than our sporting activity. It would affect business (and the creation of wealth) and education very clearly, but its impact would have much wider reverberations” (*The Games People Play*, 198–99).

Claiming that sports were created good might not sound like a revolutionary statement, but it goes against the grain of the way most Christians think about sports. There are two common views that oppose the goodness of sports in God's design for creation, both based on dualistic thinking. First, an ascetic body/soul dualism portrays sport as bad. Second, a sacred/secular dualism portrays sport as merely neutral, neither good nor bad.

The ascetic view is based on a body/soul dualism that understands anything spiritual as good and anything physical as bad (or at least inferior). The word *ascetic* comes from the Greek ἄσκησις, which is often translated *exercise* or *training*. The ascetic mindset, generally speaking, seeks to abstain from worldly pleasures and to discipline the body for the pursuit of spiritual and heavenly fulfillment.

The ascetic view rightfully emphasizes the call of Jesus as one of self-denial, but often wrongly confuses the denial of the sinful nature with the denial of God's good creational gifts. As we saw above, God made the world good and is to be received for the enjoyment of his people (see Titus 1:15; Col 2:20–23). Denial of the “flesh” (σάρξ) is not a denial of our physicality, but a denial of our sinful nature. This dualism, rooted in Greek thought and inherited in part by the monastic movement of the early church, has endured into evangelicalism and often been the foundation for a view of sports as “worldly” or a distraction from religion.

The second enemy of the goodness of sports in God's design for creation is the type of dualism that divides God's creation into two categories: sacred and secular. According to this view, God cares about prayer, Bible studies, and church, but the activities of work, sports, and art are neutral and only matter to God if they are used for higher spiritual purposes such as evangelism. While common in Christian thought today, this way of thinking resembles a type of otherworldly Greek dualism more than God's will being done on earth as it is in Heaven.²¹

Scripture clearly says that after God finished his work of creation, he proclaimed that it was *all* very good (Gen 1:31). This declaration of goodness does not merely pertain to the physical matter of creation (dirt and trees) but also to the cultural fabric of creation (developing and delighting). God cares about baptism *and* business, redemption *and* romance, sabbath *and* sport. Playing sports was not meant to be a neutral activity, but was designed as a good part of the broader vision of humanity cultivating and cherishing God's creation. Although sin and the fall certainly have done their damage to sports, one thing is clear: sports were made good and were part of God's plan for human flourishing.

This leads to a significant point regarding whether and why God values sports. The common view is that sports are neutral in and of themselves but they have the potential to be good *if* they are used for higher spiritual purposes such as moral training or evangelism. This is the world where the end-all be-all of faith and sports is thanking God after the game (usually only when they win). According to this view, sports only have *instrumental* value; they are good if they are used as an instrument for evangelism. But as we learned from the doctrine of creation, God's image bearers are called to develop God's creation for the good of others, but are also called to simply delight in God's creation itself. Sports can be used for many good things, but they are also made good in and of themselves. In other words, sports do not only have *instrumental* worth, they have *intrinsic* worth.

It makes sense that sports would be instrumentalized in cultures—like American culture—that assign value to something based largely on its productivity or utility. For this reason, Protestants in the

²¹ “The Greek dualistic philosophy of Plato, as used especially in the writing of church father Origen (c. 182–251), have been extremely influential in denigrating the worth/sacredness of the body and thus sport and physical education . . . in the last two millennia.” Watson and Parker, “Sports and Christianity,” 17.

West often have a great work ethic but lack a play ethic. When a culture identifies value with utility then it assumes that if something is not productive then it cannot be meaningful; it does not even have categories to talk about such an activity. But that is precisely the category that play fits into. As Huizinga argues, play is “meaningful but not necessary.”²² Play and sport matter to God and have value for society regardless of whether they meet a need or produce a cultural good.

This raises the important question of whether sports only have intrinsic good or whether there is also instrumental good. Lincoln Harvey works hard to protect the intrinsic value of sport, but I would agree with Johnston, who argues for “non-instrumentality which is nevertheless productive.”²³ Sports can be a platform for evangelism or a classroom for morality, but they are first and foremost a playground for receiving and enjoying the goodness of the Creator.

3. Less than a God

Sports are more than a game; they are a part of God’s good design for the flourishing of his image bearers as they develop and delight in God’s creation. But, of course, things are not the way they are supposed to be. In a world ravished by sin, sports are not outside of its devastating effects. Sin not only fractures our relationship with God, it shatters the goodness of God’s created order, including God’s design for play and sports. But how does sin affect sports? The answer is twofold because all sin amounts to either taking a good thing and twisting it into a bad thing (sin as immorality) or taking a good thing and making it an ultimate thing (sin as idolatry).²⁴ Both aspects are crucial to understand how the fall affects sports.

3.1. The Immorality of Sports

First, the effects of the fall on sports can be seen through the destructive behavior of athletes. Sports are good, but when used for sinful purposes can become very bad. Ethical problems in sports have grown as quickly as Mark McGwire’s arms before the 1998 season and seem to be more prominent each year. In a world marred by sin, sports become a playground for violence (bench-clearing brawls), cheating (corked bats, deflated footballs, etc.), injury (especially life-threatening and brain-damaging injuries), and performance-enhancing drugs (haunting whole sports such as baseball, cycling, and track).

The effects of sin, however, are not limited to the individual immorality of athletes, but also extend to the systemic brokenness of sports teams, cultures, and industries. Modern professional sports are a powerful engine in the machine of American consumerism, greed, and narcissism. In many ways, modern professional sports simply represent the cultural brokenness of the society at large, but they also further shape the society as well. Sin shapes sport culture in a variety of systemic ways, such as the win-at-all-costs mentality that leaves in its wake broken families, compromised integrity, and wounded friendships.

²² Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 9.

²³ R. K. Johnston, *The Christian at Play* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 42. Here I clearly disagree with Harvey’s thesis, “Sport is understood to be the only thing that is not worship” (*A Brief Theology of Sport*, 96).

²⁴ I have benefited much in understanding idolatry as the root of sin from Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Dutton, 2009). Keller himself has been greatly shaped on the topic of idolatry by Martin Luther and John Calvin.

3.2. The Idolatry of Sports

Talking about immoral behavior, however, is only scratching the surface. There is a deeper problem yet. Sin is not merely doing bad things, it is making a good thing an ultimate thing. The Bible calls this idolatry. People are made to love God, be satisfied in him, and find their identity in him. An idol is anything that seeks to take God's place in fulfilling those very needs, whether it be a physical object or an idol of the heart. As John Calvin says, "Scarcely a single person has ever been found who did not fashion for himself an idol or specter in place of God. Surely, just as waters boil up from a vast, full spring, so does an immense crowd of gods flow forth from the human mind."²⁵

So how does idolatry relate to sports? As we saw from Genesis 1–2, sports are a good thing. But in a fallen world, rather than enjoying sports as a gift from God, sports are often used to replace God or even, ironically, compete with God. In other words, many look to sports for what is meant to be found in God: identity, meaning, and even salvation.

3.3. The Religious Nature of Sports

My claim is not that sports are an organized religion, akin to the major world religions. Rather, many today look to sport for that which people traditionally found in religion. Sports are religious in nature; they are a vestige of transcendence in what Charles Taylor has called "the malaise of immanence."²⁶ Peter Berger argues that in the face of such a secularized, disenchanting society, play can function as a "signal of transcendence."²⁷ When a player is "in the zone"—what sociologists call "flow"—they are having a spiritual experience that begins with their physical body but connects them to something beyond the physical realm. And this is true not only for the athlete, but for the fan as well. As Allen Guttman says, "many sports spectators experience something akin to worship."²⁸

Ellis finds historical evidence for sports competing for religious fervor by observing that the year 1851 marks the decisive moment in both the decline of organized religion and the emergence of modern sport;²⁹ a trend which has also been noticed recently within the United States.³⁰ Surely there are more factors at play in these studies, but Shirl Hoffman is right to conclude that "sports . . . compete for our religious sensibilities."³¹

If not fully convinced yet that sin can turn sports into an idol—a God substitute—then one ought to consider the overtly religious overtones that pervade professional sports today.³² It is not figurative

²⁵ Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.5.12.

²⁶ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 308.

²⁷ Peter Berger, *A Rumor of Angels* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 64–70; Novak, *The Joy of Sports*, 20.

²⁸ Allen Guttman, *Sports Spectators* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 177.

²⁹ Ellis, *The Games People Play*, 82, see pgs. 104–5, 122.

³⁰ Recently Chris Beneke and Arthur Remillard have argued that there is a direct correlation between the decline of traditional religion in America and the rise of devotion in sports ("Is Religion Losing Ground to Sports?" *The Washington Post*, January 31, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/is-religion-losing-ground-to-sports/2014/01/31/6faa4d64-82bd-11e3-9dd4-e7278db80d86_story.html).

³¹ Shirl Hoffman, *Good Game: Christianity and the Culture of Sports* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010), 273.

³² There is a vast amount of literature on sports as religion. See, for example, Joseph L. Price, *From Season to Season: Sports as American Religion* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001).

to say that fans today have a type of religious devotion to their favorite teams and players. It is easy to look back to the Old Testament and scorn Israel for worshipping a golden calf, but are people really that different today? Modern people would *never* worship a golden image with such religious fervor. Or would we?

Imagine a modern religion where people worship a golden image (in this case, the NBA Finals trophy). They gather regularly at the temple (The Staples Center), where they take up an offering (ticket purchases) and worship with emotive expression (cheering fans). Of course, as with any religious service, they make sacrifices (their time, their money, and often their families). The high priest (the coach) oversees the activities, and those involved have a series of rituals they perform to prepare (team huddles and chest-bumping), all beneath the icons of the saints of old (retired jerseys in the rafters). There are strict programs of discipleship, learning about the gods so they can become like them (which is why they wear their jerseys and buy their shoes).

Maybe, just maybe, it is not that far-fetched that sport can function as a religious idol, a God-substitute to which people turn for identity, meaning, and salvation.³³ The hard truth, however, is that sport is not a good god because it, like all idols, always lets its worshippers down. When a good thing becomes an ultimate thing it eventually turns into a destructive thing. Sports are more than a game, but they are certainly less than a god.

4. Transformed by the Gospel

There is hope for sports; God has not given up on his creation. Sports are more than a game and less than a god, but when transformed through the gospel can be received as a gift—a gift to be enjoyed for its intrinsic worth and stewarded for the glory of God and the good of others.³⁴

To have a gospel-transformed perspective on sports, however, one must have the right understanding of the gospel itself. The good news is not merely that Jesus is saving souls but that he is renewing his entire creation as its king. Through his life, death and resurrection, Jesus is restoring his design for the world and his purposes for his people. Goheen and Bartholomew rightly demonstrate the relation between one's understanding of the gospel and their view of sports:

If one embraces a narrow, world-negating view of the gospel, one will have little place for sports and athletic competition. But since the gospel is a gospel about the kingdom of God, sports and competition cannot so easily be jettisoned from a Christian view of things, for these too are gifts of God in creation, to be richly enjoyed with thanksgiving.³⁵

³³ For a general explanation of the religious nature of “secular” liturgies, whether in the mall or the arena, see James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).

³⁴ It is important here to acknowledge the distinction between common grace and saving grace, both of which apply to sports. I understand common grace as preserving in part the goodness of creation and restraining the effects of sin, whereas saving grace is the restorative grace that flows from the gospel and brings in advance the effects of God's renewal of creation.

³⁵ Goheen and Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads*, 153.

How, then, does the gospel relate to sports? The gospel will not necessarily increase one's batting average or their vertical leap, but it will give the sportsperson a new purpose, a new identity, and a new ethic.

4.1. A New Purpose

Why do people play sports? On the one hand, men and women play sports because they are created to play and want to use their gifts to glorify God. On the other hand, people often play sports as a way to justify themselves; to prove themselves to the world. Many can identify with the scene in *Chariots of Fire* where the Olympic runner Harold Abrahams, while preparing for the 100m dash, says that he has "ten lonely seconds to justify my whole existence." Just as sports were created good but can become twisted by sin, many people begin playing sports with a love for the game but then turn to using sports for a deeper love of fame, money, or accomplishments. Sports begin as a gift but can easily evolve into a god.

Thankfully, Jesus saves not only from forensic guilt but also from false gods. When sinners understand that they are justified by the blood of Christ, this frees them from having to justify themselves through their accomplishments. Sports then become a gift; they no longer bear the pressure of being the way that we prove ourselves to the world. Because of grace, God's people are motivated not by guilt but by gratitude. Through the gospel, athletes can stop looking to sports to justify themselves and play sports as they were designed to be, as a gift to be enjoyed for their intrinsic good and to be stewarded for the good of others.

4.2. A New Identity

Second, the gospel gives the sportsperson a new identity. Sports go deeper than what we *do*, they speaks to who we *are*. The identity-shaping power of sports is evident, for the sport that one plays often shapes the way they dress, the music they listen to, and the friends they spend time with. None of these are bad in and of themselves, unless they have worked their way into the center of a person's identity. It is fine for one to identify themselves by the sport they play, but a sport cannot bear the burden of defining the core identity of a person.

The core identity of a Christian is that he or she is "in Christ" by the work of the Spirit. This truth flows from the fountain of the gospel: the Christian's identity is based not on their performance but on God's grace. One is not a soccer player who happens to be a Christian. He or she is a Christian who plays soccer. The follower of Jesus does not need to build an identity through their accomplishments, for they have been given an identity because of Jesus's accomplishment. Sports matter, but they must be understood from the right perspective. Because of the gospel, we are not defined by our sin nor by our success, but by our savior.

4.3. A New Ethic

The gospel gives the sportsperson a new purpose, a new identity, and lastly a new ethic. The win-at-all-costs mentality of modern sports (where winning is an idol by which the athlete is willing to sacrifice anything else) comes at a high price to the integrity of sports. Sports ethics plays out on the field and off the field.

On the field, steroids and performance-enhancing drugs have cast a shadow over the last two decades of baseball. In other sports, players have bullied their own teammates and even been paid by

coaches to physically injure their opponents. Off the field, the stories are endless: dog fighting, sexual promiscuity, spousal abuse, and even murder. But the temptation to sacrifice integrity is not only true of players at the highest level.

Bob Goldman, a physician from Chicago, asked 198 athletes if they would take a banned drug if they were guaranteed to win and not be caught. 195 out of 198 said, “yes.” Goldman then asked if they would take a performance-enhancing substance if they would not be caught, win every event they entered in the next five years, and then die from the side effects? Over half said, “yes.”³⁶

The Christian approaches sport with a different ethic, and as Oliver O’Donovan demonstrates, “Christian ethics must arise from the gospel of Jesus Christ.”³⁷ Those who are justified in Christ are called to seek justice and righteousness, on and off the field. And as O’Donovan rightly emphasizes, the bodily resurrection of Christ is God’s reaffirmation of his creation and his purposes for his people. Just as God intended play (and sport) to be in harmony with his design for human flourishing, the gospel restores God’s people into those very creation purposes. The church does not need more athletes who cut corners so they can get to the top and thank God, but rather athletes with integrity who are unwillingly to compromise their conduct because they care more about what God thinks of them than what the world does.

5. Sports in the New Creation

In the classic sports movie *Field of Dreams*, John Kinsella walks onto an idyllic baseball field and asks his son, Ray (played by Kevin Costner), “Is this Heaven?” “It’s Iowa,” responds the son. And John, still with a glimmer in his eye, retorts, “I could’ve sworn it was heaven.” John’s awe at the heavenliness of his sports experience not only made for a classic movie scene, but it raises an important question: will there be sports in the new heaven and new earth?

5.1. Salvation as the Restoration of Creation

The answer to the question of whether there will be sports in the new creation all depends on one’s view of salvation. If Jesus is tossing his fallen creation and saving souls into a disembodied heaven, then the shot clock is winding down on our sport experience. But the story of redemption in Scripture is not one merely of rescuing souls *from* the fallen creation but rescuing embodied souls and renewing all of creation (Col 1:15–20; Rom 8:18–25). The final vision of salvation is the enthroned Jesus declaring “Behold, I am making all things new” (Rev 21:5). Salvation is the restoration of creation, and if creation included God’s design for play and sport, then there will certainly be sport in the new creation. As Herman Bavinck says, “The whole of re-creation, as it will be completed in the new heaven and the new earth, is the fruit of the work of Christ.”³⁸ Certainly the re-creation will include recreation.

It is no surprise then that when Scripture wants to prophetically stir up the imagination of God’s people for the consummated kingdom that it appeals to images of play. The prophet Zechariah says, “And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets” (Zech 8:5). Isaiah prophesies

³⁶ As told in McComb, *Sports in World History*, 107.

³⁷ Oliver O’Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 11.

³⁸ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 380.

that when the earth is finally full of the knowledge of God, “The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder’s den” (Isa 11:8). Harvey is right: “Though the heavenly city may have no temple, Christians can be confident that it will have a stadium where we can continue to chime. Sport is here to stay. We can enjoy it forever.”³⁹

What will sports be like in the new creation? This is a question that can only lead to the most fruitful kind of speculation. One can only begin to imagine a volleyball rally between players with glorified, resurrection bodies. Although it is somewhat speculative, 1 Corinthians 15:35–49 does provide some guardrails for such dreaming. Those raised to eternal life will receive a glorified, resurrection body that will have both continuity and discontinuity with their fallen bodies. The analogy of sowing a seed is appropriate. Play and sport as we understand them today will blossom in the new creation to be something beyond what we can imagine and yet will feel exactly the way it was supposed to be.

5.2. Sport Foreshadows the Playful Joy of the Consummated Kingdom

Jürgen Moltmann once asked whether it is appropriate for Christians to be playing games while war is ravishing the nations, children are starving, and the innocent are being oppressed.⁴⁰ It is a weighty question, but I concur with Moltmann when he answers with a resounding “yes,” because in playing we anticipate the eschaton, a time when there will be no war, a time when sin will not corrupt the goodness of which we are to delight, and a time when we our longing for freedom and childlike joy will be satisfied. Play foreshadows the joy of the kingdom when Christ reigns over all, and decay, disease, and death will be no more. This is not merely a glimpse of the future; it is the in-breaking of the future. As Ben Witherington says, “*The foreshadowing of better times is itself a foretaste of better times, and this is in part the theological function of play.*”⁴¹

6. Conclusion

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once sat in a prison cell and wondered whether the church could regain its position of providing a robust understanding of activities such as play, friendship, art, and games. For far too long the church (and specifically its scholars) have passed on such an endeavor. Thankfully today Christian theologians are seeking to regain such a position. Hopefully, the church will be able to fulfill its theological task with the confidence with which Bonhoeffer expressed, for he concludes that for such meaningful activities, it is “only the Christian” who has the resources to provide a robust view.⁴² I agree that Scripture and the Christian theological tradition provide an overwhelming set of resources for followers of Christ to think deeply and critically about God’s intention for sports and their current role in society today. Sport is more than a game, less than a god, and when transformed by the gospel, can be received as a gift to be enjoyed forever.

³⁹ Harvey, *A Brief Theology of Sport*, 114.

⁴⁰ Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, 2.

⁴¹ Ben Witherington III, *The Rest of Life: Rest, Play, Eating, Studying, Sex from a Kingdom Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 57.

⁴² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, ed. Eberhard Bethge (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 198.

The Amorality of Atheism

— Rob Smith —

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Abstract: This essay explores the question: Can there really be such a thing as objective morality in an atheistic universe? Most atheists (both old and new) are forced to admit that there can't be. On atheism, objective morality is necessarily an illusion. Yet due to the reality of human moral experience, many atheistic philosophers feel compelled to provide a naturalistic account of "the universally experienced phenomenon of the ought." Such an enterprise is self-defeating, as it can only be achieved by maintaining a position that is intellectually incoherent or by redefining 'good' and 'evil' in a decidedly non-moral way. The atheist thus faces a tough choice: maintain atheism and embrace amorality or maintain morality and embrace theism.

The first time I heard Phillip Jensen speak was at a mission at Sydney University in the mid 1980s.¹ The title of the mission, "Knowing God," was engaging enough. The title of Phillip's message, however, was intriguing and provocative: "The Stupidity of Atheism." My impression, then, to borrow words once used of the great Scottish Reformer, John Knox, was that whilst "others snipped the branches, this man strikes at the root." This has been the courageous character of Phillip's ministry for the last half century: like a good surgeon he routinely cuts straight to heart of the matter in order to excise the cancer of unbelief in all its various forms.

In recent years, both in his preaching and in his writing (particularly his weekly "From the Dean"), Phillip has been particularly keen to expose the moral implications (indeed, moral vacuity) of atheism.² This essay explores this theme—*firstly*, by looking at a range of atheist admissions that if atheism is true, then objective morality is an illusion and, *secondly*, by examining a number of atheist attempts to ground objective morality in evolutionary naturalism. In the *final* part of this essay I will briefly argue that the failure of these attempts not only strengthens the case for theism, but that absolute morality requires the existence of the God of the Bible.

¹ This essay originally appeared in *Let the Word Do the Work: Essays in Honour of Phillip D. Jensen*, ed. Peter G. Bolt (Camperdown, NSW: The Australian Church Record, 2015), 197–214.

² See, for example, "Bertrand Russell" (2 September, 2008), "A Christian Nation" (18 September, 2009) and "An Atheist's Conversion" (19 March, 2011). All articles found on line at <http://phillipjensen.com/articles>.

It ought to be clear, then, that the question I'm pursuing is not: Can atheists behave morally? Evidently, many do. Nor is it: Can atheists formulate ethical systems? Clearly, many have. Nor is it the vexed question of whether secular societies are more "moral" than religious ones.³ The question is simply whether there can be such a thing as "objective morality" without God.⁴ In the words of the late "father of secular humanism," Paul Kurtz: "The central question about moral and ethical principles concerns their ontological foundation. If they are neither derived from God nor anchored in some transcendent ground, are they purely ephemeral?"⁵

1. Atheist Admissions

A long string of atheistic philosophers have answered Kurtz's question with a resounding "Yes": morality is illusory. To begin with one recent example, Joel Marks, Professor Emeritus of Philosophy at the University of New Haven in West Haven, Connecticut, puts the issues simply and succinctly:

[T]he religious fundamentalists are correct: without God, there is no morality. But they are incorrect, I still believe, about there being a God. Hence, I believe, there is no morality.⁶

The roots of such thinking, at least in the modern period, can be readily traced back to the nihilism of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Whilst it is true that Nietzsche didn't completely reject the possibility of a kind of "higher morality" that would guide the actions of "higher men," he was dismissive of all universal and transcendent ethical systems—whether grounded in the natural world, human psychology or a Divine Being. All such systems, in Nietzsche's thought, are merely man-made customs, for "*there are no moral facts at all*. Moral judgement has this in common with religious judgement, that it believes in realities which do not exist."⁷

The ethical consequence of this is that the distinction between good and evil is neither absolute, nor objective, but relative, arbitrary and ultimately illusory. As Nietzsche writes in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

One has taken the value of these "values" as given, as factual, as beyond all question; one has hitherto never doubted or hesitated in the slightest degree in supposing "the good man" to be of greater value than "the evil man," of greater value in the sense of furthering the advancement and prosperity of man in general. . . . But what if the reverse were true?⁸

³ As has been argued, for example, by Phil Zuckerman, "Atheism, Secularity, and Well-Being: How the Findings of Social Science Counter Negative Stereotypes and Assumptions," *Sociology Compass* 3 (2009): 949–71.

⁴ The word "objective" needs defining. I'm using it in the sense of 'independent of the human mind for existence' or, in other words, transcendent. "Objective," therefore, implies absoluteness, universality and normativity.

⁵ P. Kurtz, *Forbidden Fruit* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus, 1988), 65.

⁶ J. Marx, "An Amoral Manifesto, (Part I)," *Philosophy Now* (Sept/Oct 2014), https://philosophynow.org/issues/80/An_Amoral_Manifesto_Part_I.

⁷ F. Nietzsche, "VII. The 'Improvers' of Mankind," *Twilight of the Idols* (1889; repr., Oxford: OUP, 1998), 36. Italics original.

⁸ F. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887; repr., New York: Vintage, 1969), 20.

Nietzsche's answer to this question is that "everything evil, terrible, tyrannical in man, everything in him that is kin to beasts of prey and serpents, serves the enhancement of the species "man" as much as its opposite does."⁹ Such a conclusion is necessary, for humanity is, in the final analysis, driven by an impersonal, irrational and decidedly amoral "will to power." As Nietzsche expressed it in *Beyond Good and Evil*:

[Anything which] is a living and not a dying body . . . will have to be an incarnate will to power, it will strive to grow, spread, seize, become predominant—not from any morality or immorality but because it is *living* and because life simply *is* will to power. . . . "Exploitation" . . . belongs to the *essence* of what lives, as a basic organic function; it is a consequence of the will to power, which is after all the will to life.¹⁰

The upshot of such a view of human "progress" is complete moral meaninglessness. Nietzsche confessed as much in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*: "Over all things stands the sky 'Accident,' the sky 'Innocence,' the sky 'Chance,' the sky 'Mischief.'"¹¹ The ethical price for such an admission, however, is exceedingly high. For, as Arthur Holmes points out, "[i]f nothing in life has meaning, no moral interpretation of the world can survive. Nihilism means that every ordered world we posit will fail; that every unchanging being is a deception, psychologically based and therefore nothing; that science has it all wrong; that both natural and economic order are anarchy; that history is blind fate."¹²

While nowhere near as relentless as Nietzsche in following the logic of his own position, and finally articulating a view more akin to classical utilitarianism, a remarkably similar end point was reached by the British logician, Bertrand Russell (1872–1970). In what is arguably his best-known essay, "A Man's Free Worship" (1903), he wrote:

That Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the débris of a universe in ruins—all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy which rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built.¹³

But built to what end? By what rule? In his *Autobiography*, Russell concedes that there is no such thing as ethical knowledge, and that (following Hume) "reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions." Consequently, ethical theories cannot appeal to objective moral facts, but only to subjective

⁹ F. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886; repr., Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1955), 44.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹¹ F. Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (1892; repr., Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 132.

¹² A. F. Holmes, *Fact, Value, and God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 166.

¹³ B. Russell, "A Man's Free Worship" in *Mysticism and Logic* (New York: Anchor, 1957), 45.

emotions and feelings. He thus admits “the impossibility of reconciling ethical feelings with ethical doctrines”, and that ethics is “reducible to politics in the last analysis.”¹⁴

Numerous other voices may be added to those of Nietzsche and Russell. For example, Canadian atheistic philosopher, Kai Nielson, despite a valiant attempt to construct a utilitarian ethic without God, eventually concludes his quest as follows:

We have not been able to show that reason requires the moral point of view, or that all really rational persons, unhoodwinked by myth or ideology, need not be individual egoists or classical amorality. . . . Pure practical reason, even with a good knowledge of the facts, will not take you to morality.¹⁵

Indeed, “the very concept of moral obligation”, wrote the atheistic ethicist, Richard Taylor, is “unintelligible apart from the idea of God.”¹⁶ In other words, the spectre of nihilism lurks behind every form of ethical naturalism.¹⁷ This is why Alex Rosenberg (professor of philosophy at Duke University) happily wears the label “nihilist” and argues that all honest atheists should do the same. Lest any uncertainty remain about what this means for morality, Rosenberg spells out the implications:

Nihilism rejects the distinction between acts that are morally permitted, morally forbidden, and morally required. Nihilism tells us not that we can’t know which moral judgements are right, but that they are all wrong. More exactly, it claims they are all based on false, groundless presuppositions. Nihilism says that the whole idea of “morally permissible” is untenable nonsense. As such, it can hardly be accused of holding that “everything is morally permissible.” That too, is untenable nonsense.

Moreover, nihilism denies that there is really any such thing as intrinsic moral value. . . . Nihilism denies that there is anything at all that is good in itself or, for that matter, bad in itself.”¹⁸

Our question, then, would seem to have been answered clearly and unequivocally by a great cloud of atheistic witnesses. There can be no “objective morality” without God. In short, notwithstanding Rosenberg’s comment above, Dostoyevsky was surely right: “without God . . . everything is permitted.”¹⁹

¹⁴ B. Russell, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2000), 523–24. Ironically, Russell found such a view “incredible,” because it was unlivable. His atheism led him to the conclusion that morality was nothing more than personal taste, but his moral experience suggested otherwise. “I do not know the solution,” he finally confessed. B. Russell, “Letter to *The Observer*,” *The Observer*, October 6, 1957.

¹⁵ K. Nielson, “Why Should I Be Moral?” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984): 90.

¹⁶ R. Taylor, *Ethics, Faith, and Reason* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1985), 84.

¹⁷ See the argument of C. Stephen Evans in, *Philosophy of Religion: Thinking about Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1985), 72–74. For an atheistic attempt at following naturalism to its logical conclusion, see D. Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* (Oxford: OUP, 2006).

¹⁸ A. Rosenberg, *The Atheist’s Guide to Reality: Enjoying Life Without Illusions* (New York: Norton, 2011), 97–98.

¹⁹ F. Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. R. Pevear and L. Volokhonsky (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 589.

2. *Atheist Delusions*

But not so fast. Even Rosenberg can't resist trying to find a silver lining to the nihilistic cloud. For despite affirming the meaninglessness of moral judgments, he yet believes "[t]here is good reason to think that there is a moral core that is almost universal to almost all humans".²⁰ The "good reason" is one that both theists and atheists agree on: it's what Bernard Ramm referred to as "the universally experienced phenomenon of the *ought*."²¹ Of course, a theistic explanation for this phenomenon is off the table for Rosenberg. So the only other possible explanation is naturalistic evolution.²² But if that is so, how can it be anything other than illusory? Rosenberg answers as follows:

Natural selection can't have been neutral on the core moralities of evolving human lineages. Whether biological or cultural, natural selection was relentlessly moving through the design space of alternative ways of treating other people, animals, and the human environment. . . . As with selection for everything else, the environment was filtering out variations in core morality that did not enhance hominin reproductive success well enough to survive as parts of core morality.²³

Leaving aside the "intelligence" that Rosenberg paradoxically accords to natural selection, how does he account for moral disagreements on this model? These are the result of people embracing different "factual beliefs".²⁴ He even goes so far as to claim that the Nazis shared the same core morality as the millions they annihilated! Their problem, he avers, was that they suffered from false beliefs about their victims!²⁵ But, thankfully, help is at hand: "scientism" (the belief that all facts—including moral ones—are determined by physical facts) can sort all this out and set us straight.²⁶ So, Rosenberg assures us, we have nothing to fear from (what he terms) "nice nihilism."²⁷

If the utter naïveté of such a conclusion is not already apparent, one need only look at the history of 19th century Russian nihilism, which was based on a combination of utilitarianism (the doctrine that the value of anything is determined solely by its utility) and scientific rationalism (the doctrine that science can answer all questions and cure all social problems) to see where such a philosophy can lead

²⁰ Ibid., 108.

²¹ Ramm insists, however, that "one must make a distinction between divergent ethical systems and the universally experienced phenomenon of the *ought*. Man is incurably moral not in the sense that all cultures have the same ethical principles but that in all cultures there are moral systems; there are rights and wrongs; there is the universal experience of the *ought*." B. L. Ramm, *The Right, the Good and the Happy: The Christian in a World of Distorted Values* (Waco, TX: Word, 1971), 22.

²² A. Rosenberg, *The Atheist's Guide to Reality*, 109.

²³ Ibid., 107–8.

²⁴ Ibid., 105. For a very different account of the reasons for moral disagreements, see J. Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion* (London: Penguin, 2012).

²⁵ Ibid., 105–6.

²⁶ Ibid., 113.

²⁷ Ibid., 115ff. Toward the end of his book, Rosenberg tells us that "Nice nihilism has two take-home messages: the nihilism part—there are no facts of the matter about what is morally right or wrong, good or bad—and the niceness part—fortunately for us, most people naturally buy into the same core morality that makes us tolerably nice to one another" (286).

and the kind of social and political chaos it can create.²⁸ Indeed, the effects of nihilism can be traced through the history of anarchism, to the rise of modern terrorism, and on to such philosophical trends as existentialism and deconstructionism.²⁹ Moreover, although Nietzsche is known to have distanced himself from the anti-Semitism of his mentor, Richard Wagner, can Rosenberg really be unaware of Hitler's reliance on Nietzsche's philosophy or the Nazis' use of Nietzsche's writings in their propaganda?³⁰

Historical connections aside, the fundamental problem with Rosenberg's proposal is its sheer incoherence. In fact, he knows it and can't, in the end, let himself get away with it. His commitment to naturalism drives him to admit that "[o]ur core morality isn't true, right, correct, and neither is any other. Nature just seduced us into thinking it's right."³¹ In other words, ultimately there are no "moral facts" and therefore we must "give up the idea that core morality is true *in any sense*."³² Human beings may be incurably moral, but all we finally have, as Jean-Paul Sartre saw, is "the bare valueless fact of existence."³³ Objective morality, therefore, is an illusion.

Nevertheless, the neuroscientist cum philosopher, Sam Harris, is unwilling to concede the point. In fact, he claims he has little time for "the overeducated atheistic moral nihilist" who refuses to regard atrocities like female genital mutilation as being objectively wrong.³⁴ So how does he build his case? In a manner akin to Rosenberg, Harris begins by arguing that *homo sapiens* have developed and refined a sort of "herd morality" that effectively serves to perpetuate our species. But he is aware that this doesn't provide a foundation for affirming objective moral values. For if atheism is true, we are (as Dawkins has famously put it) "machines for propagating DNA,"³⁵ and machines, needless to say, do not have ethical obligations!

What, then, is Harris's solution to the "value problem" inherent in his worldview? Typical of consequentialist approaches to ethics, he simply redefines the terms "good" and "evil" in a transparently non-moral way: "good" is that which supports the flourishing of conscious creatures, "evil" is that which does not.³⁶ "Questions about values", then, "are really questions about the well-being of conscious

²⁸ See, for example, R. Hingley, *Nihilists: Russian Radicals and Revolutionaries in the Reign of Alexander II, 1855–81* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969); V. Broido, *Apostles Into Terrorist: Women and the Revolutionary Movement in the Russia of Alexander II* (New York: Viking, 1977).

²⁹ See E. Rose, *Nihilism: The Root of the Revolution of the Modern Age* (Platina: St Herman Press, 1994).

³⁰ See, for example, W. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*. New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc., 1960; S. Aschheim, "Nietzsche, Anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust" in *Nietzsche & Jewish Culture*, ed. J. Golomb (New York: Routledge, 1997); W. Santaniello, *Nietzsche, God, and the Jews* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); C. Bambach, *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press), 2003.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 109.

³² *Ibid.*, 113. Italics mine.

³³ Cited in W. L. Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 75.

³⁴ S. Harris, *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 198.

³⁵ R. Dawkins, "The Ultraviolet Garden," Lecture 4 of 7 of the *Royal Institution Christmas Lectures* (1992), <http://physicshead.blogspot.com/2007/01/richard-dawkins-lecture-4-ultraviolet.html>.

³⁶ S. Harris, *The Moral Landscape*, 12.

creatures.”³⁷ What’s more, because human well-being depends entirely on states of the human brain, it can be measured neuro-scientifically.³⁸ In such a way, Harris believes, science can provide objective answers to our moral questions.³⁹

The problems with Harris’s proposal are essentially the same as those that afflict all forms of ethical naturalism. First of all, he runs blithely into the “Is-Ought Problem” (otherwise known as “the naturalistic fallacy”). As David Hume (1711–1776) long ago pointed out, because there is an epistemological chasm between every “is” and every “ought” (often called “Hume’s law” or “Hume’s guillotine”), we cannot coherently move from descriptive statements (about what *is*) to prescriptive ones (about what we *ought to do*). Therefore, what is usually happening when people claim that a scientific “is” entails a moral “ought” is that they’ve smuggled in values from somewhere else.⁴⁰ That doesn’t mean that science can tell us nothing about human flourishing. Clearly it can—just as it can tell us about the flourishing of cane toads and cancer cells! There’s just no “ought” embedded in such findings. To assume an inherent bridge between “brute facts” and ethical values is to fall headlong into the naturalistic fallacy.

A second set of problems may be highlighted by the following questions: What exactly is well-being? What is the right way to measure it? How is it to be maximized? Why should it be maximized? Whose well-being matters most? Does the well-being of the individual trump that of the group? Or is some kind of aggregate the ideal? If the former, who counts as an individual—human beings only or animals too? If the latter, are human beings more important than animals? Are some human beings more important than others?⁴¹ Most of these questions, on principle, cannot be answered by scientific means. Harris concedes this, yet insists that “none, however, proves that there are no right or wrong answers to questions of human and animal wellbeing.”⁴²

Where, then, might such answers be found? In the end, Harris is forced to appeal to “intuitions.” This enables him to simply assert that “we are right” to “care more about creatures that can experience a greater range of suffering and happiness . . . because suffering and happiness (defined in the widest possible sense) are all that can be cared about.”⁴³ But what is the ontological basis for such intuitions? Why “ought” we to care for others? Indeed, why not pursue the kind of ethical egoism advocated by

³⁷ Ibid., 1.

³⁸ Ibid., 2.

³⁹ Harris’s view is nothing more than an updated version of the hedonistic utilitarianism advocated by Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832). This is clear from the opening sentences of Bentham’s *An Introduction to the Principles of Morality and Legislation*, where he writes: “Nature has placed mankind under the guidance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand, the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think.” (J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morality and Legislation* (1823; repr., Oxford: OUP, 1907), 1.

⁴⁰ In responding to criticism of his view, Harris actually admit this problem, but (conveniently) sees it as a ‘philosophical cul-de-sac’ that is not worth going down. See S. Harris, “Toward a Science of Morality” (May 10, 2010), <http://www.npr.org/blogs/13.7/2010/05/10/126666704/toward-a-science-of-morality>.

⁴¹ The preceding questions are adapted from S. Carroll, “You Can’t Derive ‘Ought’ From ‘Is’ (May 3, 2010), <http://www.preposterousuniverse.com/blog/2010/05/03/you-cant-derive-ought-from-is>. Accessed 9 December, 2014.

⁴² S. Harris, “Toward a Science of Morality.”

⁴³ Ibid.

Ayn Rand?⁴⁴ More importantly, why, in an atheistic universe, would anyone have a “moral obligation” to maximize anyone’s (or even their own) well-being?

Harris’s atheism can provide him with no answers. For if the “laws” of the universe are impersonal and the existence of conscious creatures is just the accidental byproduct of some chance combination of mindless mutation and natural selection, then Dawkins’s conclusion cannot be gainsaid: “There is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pointless indifference.”⁴⁵ Thus, concludes William Lane Craig:

Harris has failed to solve the “value problem.” He has not provided any justification or explanation of why, on atheism, objective moral values would exist at all. His so-called solution is just a semantic trick of providing an arbitrary and idiosyncratic redefinition of the words “good” and “evil” in nonmoral terms.⁴⁶

3. *The Folly of Atheism*

So is objective morality an illusion? Are our moral intuitions utterly groundless at the end of the day? Given an atheistic evolutionary framework, the philosopher of science, Michael Ruse, believes such a conclusion is unavoidable. He writes:

The position of the modern evolutionist is that humans have an awareness of morality because such an awareness is of biological worth. Morality is a biological adaptation, no less than our hands and feet and teeth. Considered as a rationally justifiable set of claims about an objective something, ethics is illusory.⁴⁷

This conclusion, however, is unacceptable to the vast majority of secularists, and (as we’ve seen) even some of atheism’s most outspoken proponents are determined to account for their moral intuitions in some objective, if not absolute, way. This is an odd state of affairs and places us at a unique point in history. As Tim Keller suggests: “our culture differs from all the others that have gone before. People still have strong moral convictions, but unlike people in other times and places, they don’t have any viable basis for why they find some things to be evil and other things good. It’s almost like their moral intuitions are free-floating in mid-air—far off the ground.”⁴⁸

So how can an atheist escape the net of ethical relativism, when moral experience is meaningless without an objective moral order and an objective moral order is meaningless without God? The answer is simple: abandon atheism and accept that only theism can satisfactorily account for such intuitions and anchor them in an objective and absolute moral reality.⁴⁹ Ludwig Wittgenstein saw this clearly:

⁴⁴ A. Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism* (New York: Signet Books, 1964).

⁴⁵ R. Dawkins, *River Out of Eden* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 133.

⁴⁶ W. L. Craig, “Navigating Sam Harris’ *The Moral Landscape*,” 2012, <http://www.reasonablefaith.org/navigating-sam-harris-the-moral-landscape#ixzz3LN4ZjXOV>.

⁴⁷ M. Ruse, “Evolutionary Theory and Christian Ethics,” in *The Darwinian Paradigm* (London: Routledge, 1989), 262, 268.

⁴⁸ T. Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Scepticism* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), 145.

⁴⁹ This is the kind of “postulational thinking,” advocated by Immanuel Kant, “in which we move from an indubitable experience to those deeper convictions which are required if the indubitable experience is not to be denied

“Ethics, if it is anything, is supernatural.”⁵⁰ Indeed every attempt to maintain both morality and atheism is simply an exercise in intellectual incoherence. So there’s the choice: maintain atheism and embrace amorality or maintain morality and embrace theism.

But not just any kind of theism. As John Frame rightly argues, “we must leave the realm of impersonal principles and turn to the realm of persons,” for obligations only arise “in the context of interpersonal relationships.”⁵¹ What’s more, if only persons can be moral authorities, then only an absolute person can be an absolute moral authority. Frame puts it like this: “Moral standards . . . presuppose absolute moral standards, which in turn presuppose the existence of an absolute personality.”⁵² In short, objective morality requires the existence of a God who is necessary, personal, powerful and good, and the only God who truly fits this bill is the God and Father of Jesus Christ, the God of the Bible.⁵³

What this means, in theological terms, is that human moral experience is part of God’s general revelation (Rom. 2:14–15). It has, therefore, the same purpose and effect as human cosmological experience: it reveals God sufficiently so as to leave people without excuse (Rom. 1:19–20, 32).⁵⁴ If there is a difference between the two, it is, as Alfred Taylor long ago observed, that “[i]n Nature we at best see God under a disguise so heavy that it allows us to discern little more than that someone is there; within our own moral life we see Him with the mask, so to say, half-fallen off.”⁵⁵

This further highlights the ultimate folly of atheism—not simply it’s philosophical incoherence or failure to follow where the chain of evidence leads, but its denial of ultimate moral reality, the reality of God himself. Worse still, it produces a hardness to God’s special revelation: especially to the fact that

or made meaningless.” D. Elton Trueblood, *Philosophy of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1957), 107.

⁵⁰ L. Wittgenstein, “A Lecture on Ethics,” *Philosophical Review* 74 (1965): 7.

⁵¹ J. M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1994), 98.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 100. C. Stephen Evans agrees: “the existence of moral obligations makes more sense in a universe in which the ultimate reality is a moral Person than it does in a universe where persons are a late and insignificant by-product of impersonal forces.” Evans, *Philosophy of Religion*, 74.

⁵³ The logic of this argument has, quite legitimately, been extended to point to a broad range of necessary divine attributes. For example, aseity (i.e., self-existence), eternity, omnipotence and sovereignty are necessary entailments of absoluteness. Knowing, planning, revealing, loving and judging are necessary entailments of personhood. Goodness, justice, wisdom and love are necessary entailments of morality. Furthermore, following this line of thought, Frame argues that the very notion of absolute personhood implies divine tri-unity. Otherwise God’s personhood would not be necessary or eternal, but only relative to the world. In making this point, Frame is not suggesting that fallen human beings are capable of deducing God’s triune nature apart from special revelation. Rather he is underscoring the point that the only “god” who can make sense of human moral experience is the triune God of the Bible. See J. M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God*, 46–50, 100.

⁵⁴ As with the *sensus divinitatis* (the knowledge of God’s being revealed in creation), the *sensus moralitatis* (the knowledge of God’s will implanted in the conscience) is of a general nature. There is thus no room in Scripture for the idea that human beings can obtain a detailed knowledge of God’s will apart from special revelation. Nevertheless, as Calvin rightly saw, there is an interdependence between the *opera Dei* (the works of God) and the *oracula Dei* (the words of God); so much so that to neglect the former “would be to neglect also the Scriptures, where we learn the meaning of them.” Whereas to “contemplate them is not to depart from Scripture, but on the contrary to be obedient to Scripture.” See T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 50.

⁵⁵ A. E. Taylor, “The Vindication of Religion,” in *Essays Catholic and Critical*, ed. E. G. Selwyn (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 62.

there will come a day when, through Jesus Christ, God will judge the secrets of all and righteously and impartially repay each person according to what they have done (Rom. 2:5–6, 16). Most tragic of all, it leads to a rejection of the only way for both brazen sinners and sanctimonious hypocrites to be saved from the wrath to come—that is, by turning to the one who died to procure our forgiveness and rose again to grant the free gift of eternal life to all those who believe in him: Jesus Christ.

It is this good news of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that Phillip Jensen has spent his life tirelessly and fearlessly proclaiming. For it is this gospel, and not our apologetic ingenuity, that is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom. 1:16). Nevertheless, exposing the folly of idolatry and unbelief clearly has its value, as is evidenced by apostolic practice (e.g., Acts 17:16–34) and as Phillip himself has very helpfully argued.⁵⁶ It shuts off false alternatives and forces people to face facts. Phillip’s attacks on atheism, therefore, far from being arrogant or cruel, are the ‘wounds of a friend’ or (more accurately) the pleas of a fellow sinner who has found the ‘pearl of great price’ and so desires to share it with others that he is compelled to take every thought captive for Christ. For such a ministry and for setting such an example, we are in his debt.

⁵⁶ See P. D. Jensen (with Colin Marshall and Tony Payne), “Two Ways to Apologise,” *The Briefing* 50 (July 1990), 3–6; “An Apologetic Armoury,” *The Briefing* 51 (July 1990), 3–6.

Beyond Christian Environmentalism: Ecotheology as an Over-Contextualized Theology

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Abstract: When Christian theology fails to adapt to the cultural context in a healthy manner, it can lead to a loss of cultural relevance. Proper contextualization is essential. This essay argues that ecotheology, which is a form of liberation theology, is an example of a contextual theology that is more closely linked to the contemporary context than it is to traditional forms of Christian doctrine. To argue this thesis, the essay will first provide an overview of ecotheology, demonstrating its consistency with praxis theology using an ecocentric hermeneutics of suspicion. Then the essay will offer critiques of ecotheology to show where the movement presents a helpful corrective and where it becomes over-contextualized.

All theology is, to some degree, contextual. Theology is bound to time and space through language, technology, and other forms of human culture. Language changes. Technology alters perceptions of the world and of the human condition. New cultural expressions are exposed to the light of the gospel. In the midst of this, Christians must discover how to integrate new data with their worldview. As witnessed in the controversy over the application of the regulative principle and the implementation of a contemporary worship style in Reformed circles, this can be a painful process, where dearly held traditions are evaluated, found wanting and discarded.¹ It can also be a joyful experience as innovative expressions of the gospel are generated and demonstrated, providing ways to demonstrate the wonder of God's creation through human ingenuity.

¹For example, see the controversy surrounding John Frame's advocacy for a revised order of worship. John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth: A Refreshing Study of the Principles and Practice of Biblical Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1996). Frame's move away from a traditional style of worship was subsequently rejected by Darryl G. Hart, "It May be Refreshing, But is it Reformed?" *CTJ* 32 (1997), 407–23.

The ability of Christianity to adapt across cultural and temporal boundaries is a testament to its power and the grounding of its truth in a Being higher than any human culture.² Contextualization is thus necessary because the God of the Bible is a God of all cultures. Theology, as the study of God, should reflect the truth of the Creator rather than the time-bound sub-creations of a particular group of God's creatures.

When Christian theology fails to adapt to the cultural context in a healthy manner, it can lead to a loss of cultural relevance and the shrouding of the gospel light. Proper contextualization is essential. Within a model of healthy contextualization, there is room for debate over which elements of the Christianity of the gospel-bearers are gospel-essential and which are simply an artifact of the surrounding culture imported into worship. However, there are cases in which an effort is made to contextualize the gospel to a particular time and culture such that essential elements of gospel truth are denied, resulting in syncretism.³ Connections between such forms of Christianity and the greater Christian tradition often become tenuous. The attempts to correct real or perceived errors in traditional⁴ forms of Christian theology may in fact result in the destruction of the meaningful connections with authentic Christianity that efforts in contextualization were intended to salvage.

A recent book by Daniel Brunner, Jennifer Butler and A. J. Swoboda makes the argument that ecotheology is a valid form of properly contextualized evangelical theology. They base their claim to evangelicalism on a loose interpretation of David Bebbington's evangelical quadrilateral, as they claim their ecotheology satisfies the criterion of *conversionism, activism, biblicism, and crucicentrism*.⁵ By defining the terms broadly the three ecotheologians seem to have a valid claim, but when the methodology of ecotheology is considered it becomes clear ecotheology is not consistent with evangelicalism as Bebbington describes it.⁶ In fact, ecotheology, which is a form of liberation theology, is an example of a contextual theology that is more closely linked to the contemporary context than it is to traditional forms of Christian doctrine.

1. Overview of Ecotheology

Ecotheology refers to a version of contextual theology, much like feminist and Latin American liberation theologies, which interprets Scripture and Christian tradition through a controlling paradigm.⁷

²This can be seen in Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996).

³Paul G. Hiebert, "Critical Contextualization," *Missiology* 12 (1984): 290.

⁴"Traditional" is a term used by Praxis theologians to distinguish their views and is not intended as a pejorative.

⁵Daniel L. Brunner, Jennifer L. Butler, and A. J. Swoboda, *Introducing Evangelical Ecotheology: Foundations in Scripture, Theology, History, and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 5.

⁶See especially David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 2–17.

⁷Conradie comments that ecological theology is the next wave of contextual theology and likens it to black liberation theology, feminist theology, etc. Ernst M. Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 3–4.

As a form of contextual theology, ecotheology can be cataloged within the Praxis Model.⁸ As Stephen Bevans notes in his seminal work, *Models of Contextual Theology*, the Praxis Model “start[s] with the need either to adapt the gospel message of revelation or to listen to the context.”⁹ Theologies in the Praxis Model “take inspiration from neither classic texts nor classic behavior, but from present realities and future possibilities.”¹⁰ As a form of praxis-oriented theology, ecotheology is consciously framed as differentiated from traditional forms of theology, which are often viewed as Western or European—thus foreign to much of the world and, according to White’s hypothesis, bent on domination of ecosystems.¹¹

Bevans lists several presuppositions of the Praxis Model.¹² The most critical presupposition is epistemological, which Bevans lauds as the main strength of the Praxis Model. Praxis theologians begin from an understanding that “the highest level of knowing is intelligent and responsible doing.”¹³ Clodovis Boff describes the ideal methodology of praxis theology, where right action is evaluated as the ultimate criterion of truth.¹⁴ He is not uncritical of this approach, noting, “To posit praxis as a criterion of truth implies empiricism and leads to pragmatism. It conjures away not only the theoretical problem, but the ethical one as well, which consists in asking *which* praxis and *which* theory are being referred to when this thesis is advanced.”¹⁵ In other words, a movement from oppressive orthodoxy to liberating orthopraxy as a criterion of truth merely shifts the point of theorizing and empowerment; it does not eliminate the existence of theory. Praxis must not, then, be confused with a mere practical theology.

Another key presupposition of the Praxis Model is that God’s revelation is not static, being contained in a finished canon; rather, God works throughout history in new and surprising ways.¹⁶ Revelation is available to all people at all times in the same way; no longer is God’s special revelation solely defined by male authors of previous millennia.

1.1 Ecotheological Distinctives

Ecotheology as a theological movement is consistent with Bevans’s description of the Praxis Model. It is a theology that includes right action as a necessary component in its epistemic foundation. Ecotheology also emphasizes liberation but in a way distinct from Latin American, black, or feminist versions of liberation theology. The starting point of ecotheology provides the most significant differentiation from other liberation theologies. According to Nesson, “The starting point of liberation

⁸ The term “praxis” is difficult to define. Nesson identifies several key elements in a praxis form of theorizing: (1) contrast orientation to the life and experience of a particular population; (2) the use of social sciences for theological analysis; (3) reflection upon a population’s conditions based on Christian tradition; and (4) actionable proposals for changing the present reality. Craig L. Nesson, *Orthopraxis or Heresy: The North American Theological Response to Latin American Liberation Theology*, AARAS (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 56–61.

⁹ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 70. Bevans argues that all liberation theologies are praxis theologies, but not all praxis theologies are liberation theologies.

¹⁰ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 70.

¹¹ See Nesson, *Orthopraxis or Heresy*, 3.

¹² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 77.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁴ Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 195, emphasis in the original.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 231, emphasis in the original.

¹⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 75–76.

theology is most definitely the human situation.”¹⁷ For ecotheology, the starting point is in the condition of the created order, which requires a different set of theological presuppositions. A representative articulation of the theological presuppositions of ecotheology can be found in the Earth Bible Project’s six ecojustice principles:

1. the principle of intrinsic worth: The universe, Earth and all its components have intrinsic worth/value;
2. the principle of interconnectedness: Earth is a community of interconnected living things that are mutually dependent on each other for life and survival;
3. the principle of voice: Earth is a subject capable of raising its voice in celebration and against injustice;
4. the principle of purpose: The universe, Earth and all its components are part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design;
5. the principle of mutual custodianship: Earth is a balanced and diverse domain where responsible custodians can function as partners with, rather than rulers over, Earth to sustain its balance and a diverse Earth community;
6. the principle of resistance: Earth and its components not only suffer from human injustices but actively resist them in the struggle for justice.¹⁸

A *prima facie* consideration of these six principles raises concerns about the use of such presuppositions when approaching the interpretation of Scripture and theological tradition.¹⁹ The method for choosing the presuppositions seems to be the more significant question. Ernst Conradie, largely supporting the approach, writes,

The Earth Bible team acknowledge this danger but argue that each interpreter approach a text with a set of governing assumptions that often remain unarticulated and subconscious and that are therefore even more dangerous. The danger of reading into the text randomly may be avoided if the articulation of such ecojustice principles is done in conjunction with historical, literary and cultural modes of analysis.²⁰

As Conradie notes, these principles certainly direct the interpreters toward consistent readings of the text that resonate with the “perspective of justice for the earth.”²¹ Whether that perspective is in line with the divine or human authorial intent, traditional interpretations of the canon, or the theological underpinnings of historic Christianity is another question.

¹⁷Nessan, *Orthopraxis or Heresy*, 13.

¹⁸Norman Habel, “Introduction,” in *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, ed. Norman C. Habel and Peter L. Trudinger (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 2.

¹⁹Liberation theologies tend to accept Bultmann’s critique of attempts to exegete without presupposition. See Rudolf Bultmann, “Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?” in *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 1985), 242–48.

²⁰Conradie, “Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics: A Review Essay on the Earth Bible Project,” *Scriptura* 85 (2004): 128.

²¹Norman Habel, “The Earth Bible Project,” *Ecotheology* 5.7 (1999): 123.

Ecotheological hermeneutics is a method of interpreting the Bible that regards the text with suspicion.²² As such, the reader is called to believe the intentions of the human authors are corrupted by their context; thus the text of Scripture cannot have a meaning that can be directly applied by the contemporary reader.²³ This leads Conradie to comment, “The interpretation of the Bible cannot merely focus on the meaning of the texts themselves.”²⁴ Rather, “Interpretation is the event in which we respond to the significance of the signs, for us, today.”²⁵ This second statement sounds similar to instructions that might be given to divinity students in an evangelical setting except for the substitution of the word “signs” for “text.” Conradie is demonstrating an attitude toward revelation consistent with Bevans’s description, specifically that revelation is “a personal and communal encounter with divine presence” or “the presence of God in history.”²⁶ This leads to Conradie’s criticism of Christians with a more conservative attitude toward Scripture:

Some fundamentalist Christians sometimes talk as if they believe in the Bible itself, as if the Bible itself is God. They attribute divine characteristics to the Bible. The Bible is regarded as equally trustworthy, authoritative, and inspiration compared to Godself.²⁷

Inspiration is at best the inspiration of the human authors of the biblical text and not of the text itself. Inspiration points toward the encounter a sinful human had with God and the resultant text reflects their tainted musings on the experience. The text of Scripture must, then, be regarded with suspicion. Ecotheologians do, however, hold out hope for retrieving useful instructions from the Bible.²⁸

1.2 Recovering the Earth’s Voice

In his outline of ecotheological hermeneutics, Norm Habel recommends attempting to retrieve the voice of Earth from each biblical text. This may take the form of reconstructing the text with Earth as the narrator. Habel notes, “Such a reconstruction is, of course, not the original text, but it is a reading as valid as the numerous readings of scholars over the centuries.”²⁹ Habel demonstrates this difficulty in his attempt to retrieve ecotheological meaning from Gen 1:26–28—notably one of the more difficult passages of Scripture for ecotheologians to redeem. In that passage, the author clearly describes God giving instructions to the primal couple to subdue creation and rule over the other

²² Ernst M. Conradie, *Angling for Interpretation: A First Introduction to Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2008), 31–32; Habel, “Introduction,” 4.

²³ Conradie writes, “Authors, texts and readers are not ‘innocent’ or neutral” (*Angling for Interpretation*, 104). That the reader is not neutral is not controversial. That the authors may have been biased or clouded is also not questionable. However, the concept that the text itself is corrupt, even in the *autographa*, brings into question a great deal of Christian tradition.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 75.

²⁷ Conradie, *Angling for Interpretation*, 73.

²⁸ Nesson notes that despite the desire of liberation theologians to ascribe authority to Scripture, “they are vulnerable to misusing biblical authority. Because the theologians of liberation insist so strongly that commitment to the cause of liberation must come prior to theological reflection, they are subject to the charge that their theology is ‘the mere rationalization of positions already taken’” (*Orthopraxis or Heresy*, 283).

²⁹ Habel, “Introduction,” 5.

creatures. Since the passage is so clear, Habel simply questions the bias of the author, describing the passage as anthropocentric. This passage, he argues, gives rise to the ethical acceptance of domination and subjugation of the created order.³⁰ He then goes on to rewrite the passage, describing the cultural mandate from the perspective of the earth:

This story claims that the god-image creatures belong to a superior ruling class or species, thereby demeaning their nonhuman kin and diminishing their value. Instead of respecting me as their home and life source, the god-image creatures claim a mandate to crush me like an enemy or a slave.³¹

The message of Gen 1:26–28 is so distorted in Habel’s retelling it is not clear how it can be described as connected to the actual Christian Scriptures. As Conradie notes of the Earth Bible project, “The assumed sacred authority of the Bible must therefore be questioned.”³² If only the approach of Habel and the Earth Bible team is considered, it becomes difficult to accept Scripture as a source for ecotheology.

In contrast, Conradie does not recommend such a radical approach to reading Scripture. Though suspicious of the text of the Bible, Conradie recommends the use of doctrinal keys for interpreting the text. He writes, “Doctrinal keys are comprehensive theological constructs which may be used to establish a relationship between the biblical texts and a contemporary context.”³³ Doctrinal keys are “usually derived from the dominant beliefs or an interpretive community.”³⁴ He notes multiple different movements, most within orthodox Christian tradition, that have some overarching theme they draw from the text. Examples include sin and grace in Augustine, kingdom of God in Calvin, and gifts of the Spirit among charismatics. Conradie argues, “In each case, a particular doctrinal key not only provides an explanation of the historical meaning of the biblical texts; it also provides the parameters for contemporary Christian living in the continued presence of God.”³⁵ Conradie’s critique is valid in those instances where it is apparent the interpreters overreached the actual content of the text, reading their doctrinal key *into* the text rather than *from* the text. Conradie comments that traditional forms of Christian theology, which rely on agreed upon doctrinal categories, are no less guilty of eisegesis than he; the difference, according to Conradie, is his self-awareness of the doctrinal keys.³⁶

Liberation theologians accept the circularity of their theological method, though more recent proponents describe it as a spiral.³⁷ Conradie admits to a methodological circularity in his Scriptural interpretation. He argues for a theological method that encompasses three elements: Source, Message, and Receiver. A spiral-like circularity exists as the Source produces a Message, which is then received by the Receiver. The Receiver then becomes a new Source producing a new Message and the cycle

³⁰ Ibid., 5–7.

³¹ Ibid., 8.

³² Conradie, “Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics,” 85.

³³ Conradie, “The Road Towards an Ecological Biblical and Theological Hermeneutics,” *Scriptura* 93 (2006): 306.

³⁴ Ibid., 307.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 308.

³⁷ Regarding liberation theology and the hermeneutical circle: Boff, *Theology and Praxis*, 135–39; Nessian, *Orthopraxis or Heresy*, 62–63.

continues.³⁸ According to this model the pattern allows interpreters to appropriate biblical texts through the lens of their community of faith, their theological traditions, and the contemporary context. In a simplified interpretive model, Conradie describes the process as alternating between input from the text and from the context. The spiral pattern describes the progression in history as God continues to participate in history.³⁹ The unspoken assumption behind this methodology is that the contemporary context is superior to historical contexts. Ecotheological interpretation of Scripture lacks a mechanism to critique the reader's own context. The fluidity of doctrines, however, does not trouble ecotheologians, because the essence of true Christianity is something other than right belief.

1.3 Reinterpreting Tradition

Not only is ecotheology suspicious of the content of Scripture, it is also suspicious of traditional Christian doctrines. Conradie outright rejects the notion of "abiding propositional truths or values [from Scripture] which can be appropriated directly within a contemporary context."⁴⁰ This has led to an emphasis on pragmatic aspects of faith in the ethics of Willis Jenkins; good theology is doing things that resonate with an accepted set of values rather than those that match a set of dogmatic commitments.⁴¹ Jenkins downplays the distinctiveness of Christian doctrines to the extent that he anticipates authentic expressions of true Christian praxis outside of confessional accord with basic Christian doctrines.⁴² More than simply arguing for common grace, Jenkins is arguing that those that do not know Christ may be right with God due to their actions. According to Jenkins, "Social responsibility is not an expression or outreach of the church, then; it is partaking in Christ."⁴³ As Bevans notes in his description of the Praxis model, "The highest level of knowing is intelligent and responsible doing."⁴⁴ True theology, then, is not found in scholarly products or certain faith commitments, but in right living.⁴⁵ Theological tradition is secondary to approved behavior that is consistent with the contextual presuppositions. For ecotheology, these presuppositions will reflect an environmentally friendly lifestyle.⁴⁶

Ecotheology claims to be critiquing theological tradition, which is a necessary task. Uncritical acceptance of historical theological interpretations is not a worthy goal for any Christian. Contemporary

³⁸ Conradie, "Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics," 129–30. Conradie's description and his diagram are very similar to the diagram in Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 76.

³⁹ Conradie, "Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics," 130.

⁴⁰ Ernst M. Conradie, "On the Theological Extrapolation of Biblical Trajectories," *Scriptura* 90 (2005): 903.

⁴¹ Willis Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics: Sustainability, Social Justice, and Religious Creativity* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2013), 158–62.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁴⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 73.

⁴⁵ Nesson differentiates the idea of praxis-based theologies from academic theologies. According to Nesson, the purpose of praxis is to establish a true consciousness instead of a false one, maintain a continuing stream of theological reflection, and motivate the audience to sustained behavioral transformation. Nesson, *Orthopraxis or Heresy*, 408–10.

⁴⁶ The tendency to see environmental concerns as a crisis that requires action, no matter the motivation, is growing. Lucas Johnston argues positively for the role of religion—any religion—in the environmentalist movement. Lucas F. Johnston, *Religion and Sustainability: Social Movements and the Politics of the Environment* (Bristol, CT: Equinox, 2013).

theology should be done in conversation with historical theology, which implies that historical theology be allowed to critique contemporary trends. However, there is no place in the methodology of ecotheology for the historic to influence the contemporary culture. Despite this, Bevans argues the Praxis model has “deep roots in theological tradition.”⁴⁷ Nessian affirms this assessment, arguing that liberation theologies are “deeply rooted in the Christian tradition” because they use the Christian Scriptures as a source for theology and due to “constant references to past formulations of the Christian tradition in articulating its own position.”⁴⁸ Still, for ecotheologians theology is not “a generally applicable, finished product for all times and in all places, but an understanding of and wrestling with God’s presence in very particular situations.”⁴⁹ There is a direct and inseparable tie between the substance of ecotheology and the context in which it is developed. That tie is closer than the connection to traditional Christian formulations.

In the ecotheological project, tradition is viewed with suspicion and referenced as a point of departure. Thus, as Conradie admits in his introduction to a volume discussing Abraham Kuyper’s influence, he selected Kuyper as a conversation partner *despite* his disagreement with Kuyper’s position on most issues. However, Conradie notes, “There were nevertheless some catch phrases in Kuyper’s theology that were very appealing to me.”⁵⁰ Conradie goes on to discuss how these catch phrases were appropriated, like mottoes, while the greater substance of Kuyper’s theology was rejected. Much like the canon of Scripture, theological tradition is useful as a jumping off point for new, creative interpretations, instead of providing a critique of current theological tendencies.

The Marxist roots of liberation theologies insist that all traditions and structures are attempts to seize and exercise power. Like liberation theology’s rejection of power structures, the main thrust of ecotheology is to subvert structures that oppress the earth. Using a postmodern approach to truth, ecotheology is an attempt to give a voice to the marginalized. However, such attempts neglect the irony that by subverting the existing power structure, they have created a new power structure. The oppressed is seeking to become the oppressor by enforcing an all-encompassing concern for liberation of the earth on the global community. According to the logic of this system, it is a moral duty to emphasize the voice of those marginalized. However, once the voice of the earth is liberated and the voice of orthodoxy muted, their new power structure, with the liberated earth at its heart, should be undermined, perhaps by a retrieval of authentic and faithful readings of the text and orthodox tradition. The movement seems somewhat self-defeating.

Ecotheology has the stated goal of reformulating Christian doctrines along environmentalist lines.⁵¹ Ecotheologians claim to be improving Christianity and adapting it to meet the needs of the contemporary context. However, in their attempt to renew biblical interpretations and revise Christian doctrines, they bring into question whether ecotheology has so reinterpreted tradition as to weaken the links between the traditional sources of meaning that have provided continuity and community for Christians across the millennia. In this way, ecotheology has created a theology that is more closely related to the contemporary cultural context than the historic content of traditional forms of Christianity.

⁴⁷ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 78.

⁴⁸ Nessian, *Orthopraxis or Heresy*, 402–03.

⁴⁹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 78.

⁵⁰ Ernst M. Conradie, “Revisiting the Reception of Kuyper in South Africa,” in *Creation and Salvation: Dialogue on Abraham Kuyper’s Legacy for Contemporary Ecotheology*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 24.

⁵¹ Conradie, “Towards an Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics,” 133.

2. Critiques and Over-Contextualization

In their effort to create a Christianity that positively relates to contemporary contexts, ecotheologians have demonstrated the ability to critique traditional forms of theology in a sometimes helpful way. In many cases, study of ecotheology is helpful because it illuminates and counters weaknesses in certain forms of traditional theology. However, because of the distantiation of ecotheology from traditional theologies, those points of critique have led to overcorrections, which further the separation of ecotheology and traditional forms of Christian theology. They represent points of over-contextualization and syncretism. As Paul Heibert has argued, contextualization must be done critically, in a way that critiques both traditional and contemporary cultural expressions of Christianity. This prevents syncretism and a loss of distinct Christian identity.⁵² It is not clear that ecotheologians have developed such a critical mechanism. This section will discuss eight points of theological correction made by ecotheology, showing how these eight points of critique have resulted in theological overcorrections due to the failure to critically contextualize.

2.1 Re-Reading History and Culture

The first point of correction by ecotheology, as with liberation theologies in general, is the unification of history. For ecotheologians, there is no difference between salvation history and ordinary history.⁵³ All of history is evidence of God working in time and space. That God is working in new and surprising ways throughout all of creation history is an essential aspect of an ecotheological understanding of revelation. This enables a missional emphasis among ecotheologians.⁵⁴ Arguably, ecotheology began with a 1954 Joseph Sittler essay, “A Theology for Earth,” and came into the international theological spotlight when he delivered his essay, “Called to Unity,” at the World Council of Churches, which was then only 14 years old.⁵⁵ Since that point, there has been a consistent witness to ecotheology with a view to participating in God’s ongoing work in all of the created order. In fact, many of the strongest voices among evangelicals in support of a robust environmental ethics share a unified understanding of history with liberation theologies. The weakness of many liberation theologies, including ecotheology, is a tendency “to collapse all of history into the imperious Now; to forget the paradoxical and serendipitous character of historical change; to downplay the provisionality of our historical moment and the partiality of our historical perspective.”⁵⁶ Ecotheology, because of its emphasis on the importance of the contemporary context, often fails to truly listen to the voices of Christian tradition.

As a second correction to some versions of traditional Christianity, ecotheologians offer a positive perspective on human culture. Ecotheologians strongly appreciate common grace, which is one reason

⁵² Paul G. Hiebert, “Critical Contextualization,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11 (1987): 109–11.

⁵³ Richard John Neuhaus notes this regarding liberation theologies in general, but it is applicable in particular to ecotheology, in “Liberation as Program and Promise: On Refusing to Settle for Less,” *CurTM* 2 (1975): 94.

⁵⁴ The work of Christopher Wright and Willis Jenkins indicate some of the confluence in the movement with radically different theological outcomes. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 415–16. Willis Jenkins, “Missiology in Environmental Context: Tasks for an Ecology of Mission,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 32 (2008): 176–84.

⁵⁵ See Bakken’s argument in Joseph Sittler, *Evocations of Grace: The Writings of Joseph Sittler on Ecology, Theology, and Ethics*, ed. Steven Bouma-Prediger and Peter W. Bakken (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1–10.

⁵⁶ Neuhaus, “Liberation as Program and Promise,” 97.

that Conradie interacts heavily with Abraham Kuyper.⁵⁷ The positive view of human culture is so strong that Willis Jenkins expects to find authentic expressions of the Kingdom of God outside of the body of Christ. In other words, he not only expects the unregenerate to do good things sometimes, he believes non-Christians may be a greater part of God's mission than those inside the universal Church.⁵⁸ For Jenkins, the important thing is that the actions are right, particularly along environmental lines, rather than that the beliefs are distinctively Christian.⁵⁹ This requires ecotheologians to accept, or at least ignore, some behaviors that are directly contrary to a consistently Christian ethic, but the ecocentric nature of ecotheology allows for a more narrowly focused ethic than more holistic forms of Christian theology.⁶⁰ This attitude toward ethics relies on such a positive view of human culture that it minimizes the impact of human sin on the created order and sees sinfulness as a weakness to be overcome rather than a tragic condition that warrants punishment from God.

2.2 Eschatological Engagement

Third, ecotheologians demonstrate an appreciation for God's continued working in the world. Ecotheologians see Scripture pointing toward God's working to redeem all things. Conradie argues eschatology may be the key to an ecological anthropology.⁶¹ However, because of the concerns of anthropocentrism, ecotheology tends to strip eschatologies of their significance for the human portion of the created order. When ecotheologians address eschatology directly, it is to refute the idea of a final conflagration of earth, leading to its utter destruction and a new creation. Beyond a rejection of a dispensational view of eschatology, ecotheologians tend to ignore aspects of judgment and discontinuity in eschatology, focusing on hope in cosmic restoration, though the nature of this is presented in varying degrees of opacity.⁶² This is due in part to their strong view of the continuity of history; not only are salvation history and ordinary history united, but there are no discontinuities within salvation history. To ecotheologians, just as the fall is a myth that represents the human experience of sin,⁶³ so the future

⁵⁷ Ernst M. Conradie, "Creation and Salvation: Revisiting Kuyper's Notion of Common Grace," in *Creation and Salvation: Dialogue on Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for Contemporary Ecotheology*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 95–136.

⁵⁸ Jenkins, *The Future of Ethics*, 104.

⁵⁹ Jenkins discusses his post-foundationalism and personal emphasis on right action over right belief in the introduction. The concept is woven throughout the book, but most clearly stated here (*ibid.*, 6). See also his chapter, "Global Ethics: Moral Pluralism and Planetary Problems" in *ibid.*, 111–48.

⁶⁰ See for example, Conradie's delicate rejection of traditionally understood Christian sexual ethics in *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, 234–36.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶² Conradie wrestles with the tension between already-not yet in *ibid.*, 223–30. He emphasizes, however, continuity over discontinuity.

⁶³ Reuther's idea of sin is telling in this regard: "My understanding of what sin is does not begin with the concept of alienation from God, a concept that strikes me as either meaningless or highly misleading to most people today." Rosemary R. Reuther, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*, Introduction in *Feminist Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998), 70. Reuther goes on to argue that the primary concern is reconciliation of the horizontal (creature to creature) relationship, in *ibid.*, 71–80.

judgments in the eschaton are representative of a type of redemption that is more progressive than cataclysmic.⁶⁴

Ruether deals with eschatology in her book, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*, but she rejects a traditional Christian understanding of the coming Kingdom of God, where all things are made new. Instead, she posits a view of time that sees all existence in a cyclical manner, eternally changing. Thus, hope is not in renewal of creation and bodily resurrection. Rather, “As we surrender our ego-clinging to personal immortality, we find ourselves upheld by the immortality of the wondrous whole, ‘in whom we live and move and have our being.’”⁶⁵ According to Carl Braaten, in liberation theologies,

Eschatology is reduced to ethics. The kingdom of God arrives as a result of the ethical achievements of mankind. The gospel of the kingdom of God is removed to the future as a goal to be attained by the right kind of ethical activity. The gospel is not thought of as a present reality in history, already prior to human action, in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.⁶⁶

For ecotheologians, the Kingdom is not now, but it is not a distant reality to be realized only by dramatic intervention by God. The emphasis on this-worldly hope rather than judgment and renewal in the eschaton is likely a fulfillment of the evolutionary presuppositions of many ecotheologians, where the concept of a blemishless creation and subsequent original sin is discarded.⁶⁷ As Neuhaus points out, such a vision of the Kingdom, with hope for salvation largely dependent on right living by humans, is illusory and worthy of critique.⁶⁸ Ecotheology is, then, “in danger of transforming the gospel into a new synergistic scheme of salvation, a new form of revolutionary works righteousness.”⁶⁹

2.3 Seeking Unity and Right Living

A fourth correction of some versions of traditional Christianity offered by ecotheology is the rejection of a dualistic vision of the created order. There are some streams of Christianity, particularly popular Christianity, which have a view of the created order more consistent with a neo-Platonic perspective than a biblical perspective.⁷⁰ According to some ecofeminists, a large influence toward such

⁶⁴ Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism, and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 73.

⁶⁵ Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*, 120.

⁶⁶ Carl E. Braaten, “Gospel of Justification Sola Fide,” *Dialog* 15 (1976): 208. Also cited in Nesson, *Orthopraxis or Heresy*, 277.

⁶⁷ Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, 30–31. Bouma-Prediger, *The Greening of Theology*, 150–54.

⁶⁸ Neuhaus, “Liberation as Program and Promise,” 92. For an extended critique of liberation theology in general on this point, see Nesson, *Orthopraxis or Heresy*, 270–83. Nesson works through the critiques of Neuhaus and Braaten in some detail.

⁶⁹ Nesson, *Orthopraxis or Heresy*, 277. Nesson is here summarizing the critiques offered by others of liberation theologians.

⁷⁰ See Ruether’s discussion of this: Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Religious Ecofeminism: Healing the Ecological Crisis,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 363–67.

a false dualism is Augustine's theology.⁷¹ However, Rowan Williams points out, this is a misreading of Augustine, because differentiation between body and soul or material and immaterial is interpreted by Augustine's accusers as disparaging the created order.⁷² In response to this, ecotheologians have a tendency toward a unification of all things. In the case of Conradie, this results in a diminished or absent view of heaven. In his anthropology, he espouses a materialism that seems to reject the possibility of an afterlife.⁷³ In Reuther's work, her materialism maintains a spiritual aspect, but it appears to have more resonance with a pantheistic description of reality, where souls of the dead rejoin a cosmic energy. In Reuther's accounting, this destiny is common for all people.⁷⁴ Pantheism and panentheism are constant temptations to ecotheologians, as they erase distinctions between physical and spiritual conditions.⁷⁵ In large part, the departure from an orthodox understanding of the Creator-creature distinction does not result from a direct pursuit of traditionally unacceptable views, but rather a weakening hold on those traditional views caused by an emphasis on action instead of doctrine.

Fifth, ecotheology critiques forms of Christianity that do not result in right living. Christians that are influenced by ecotheology cannot, without disregarding the most basic tenets of the system, be left with their behavioral patterns untransformed; because the very heart of liberation theology is praxis, ecotheologians are not merely hearers, but doers of the Word (Jas 1:22). This is a positive attribute, and it is a compelling one. In a collection of essays entitled *Sacred Acts*, Christians present numerous examples of communities of faith in action consistent with ecotheological principles. In one case, a church used creative funding methods to raise money for an array of solar panels on their roof.⁷⁶ To emphasize their right action, the church has a widget on their website which allows the solar output of the array to be viewed from anywhere in the world at any time.⁷⁷ The emphasis on orthopraxy is not without cost, however. In many cases, focus on right actions takes the place of right living. In other words, individual acts that are ecologically sensitive can replace a more holistic approach to the Christian life. Concern for the proclamation of the gospel sometimes wanes. The same church that broadcasts the volume of power they generate fails to clearly broadcast the importance of faith in Christ on their website. Orthodoxy is neglected for an emphasis on orthopraxy.

A sixth point of critique by ecotheology is the emphasis on right living toward the environment. This is a positive, as it tends to curb sinful consumerism and wasteful habits and to emphasize limiting unnecessary uses of the earth's resources. The positive effects of these efforts can contribute to healthier

⁷¹ For example, Elaine H. Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988), 99. Anne Primavesi finds hierarchicalism, especially in the "patriarchal anthropology" in Augustine, which she argues is detrimental to the environment and leads to destructive human behaviors. Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis*, 100–05.

⁷² Rowan Williams, "Good for Nothing? Augustine on Creation," *AugStud* 25 (1994): 11.

⁷³ Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, 23–26.

⁷⁴ Ruether, *Introducing Redemption in Christian Feminism*, 119–20.

⁷⁵ For example, see Van Wieren, *Restored to Earth*, 78–80.

⁷⁶ Fletcher Harper, "Beyond Belief: Effective Religious Leadership on Energy and Climate Change," in *Sacred Acts: How Churches Are Working to Protect Earth's Climate*, ed. Mallory D. McDuff (Gabriola Island, BC: New Society, 2012), 36–38.

⁷⁷ Current solar panel output information from the United Methodist Church of Red Bank, New Jersey can be obtained at: <http://linux.umcredbank.org/panelstatus.php>.

populations⁷⁸ and ecosystems that more clearly represent native conditions.⁷⁹ However, ecotheologians, and environmentalists in general, sometimes fail to discern when some harm to the environment is justified for the preservation of human life and health. For example, Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* was written, in part, to encourage the banning of DDT as a pesticide. As a result of the environmental movement, international pressure has increasingly restricted aid to nations that use DDT. Unfortunately, this has resulted in the limited availability of a relatively inexpensive pesticide in certain developing nations, particularly those in Africa. Thus, a valuable method of chemically controlling the mosquito population has been eliminated and the lives of many impoverished humans have been made more difficult.⁸⁰ Ecotheology, since it classifies all human impact on the environment as sin, lacks the ability to discern when some impact to the environment is acceptable.⁸¹ This, in the end, has potentially detrimental implications for a Christian environmental ethics, because it fails to consider a biblical vision for compassion on humans.

2.4 Inclusion and Contextualization

Ecotheology is also very inclusive, which is a seventh correction offered to traditional theologies. Since ecotheology emphasizes bringing oppressed voices into the conversation, theologians that would otherwise not be included are often brought into projects. In *Ecotheology: Voices from the North and the South*, there are a number of contributions from sources that would not typically be heard in the European or American theological publishing establishment.⁸² The impetus for inclusion and theological exploration among ecotheologians is a positive, improving the variety of voices. However, the search for new voices that were previously pushed to the margins combined with a decreased emphasis on right doctrine sometimes affords a central role in a theological conversation to those who are only, according to traditional categories, marginally Christian.⁸³ David Hallman notes his desire to resource ecotheology, even beyond the boundaries of Christianity, through indigenous religions because "insights from the traditions of indigenous peoples are . . . critically important for the emerging ecotheology."⁸⁴ Thus, some of the articles Hallman includes in the volume are explicitly non-Christians, with themes that run counter to the gospel. It seems in this project a marginal voice has been given primacy over

⁷⁸ One study that touts the health benefits for the global population for carbon emission reduction is, Justin V. Remais and others, "Estimating the Health Effects of Greenhouse Gas Mitigation Strategies: Addressing Parametric, Model, and Valuation Challenges," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 122 (2014): 447–55.

⁷⁹ Van Wieren, *Restored to Earth*, 69–74.

⁸⁰ The debate about DDT use is still ongoing. One recent article argues for continuing to use DDT for mosquito control, due to its positive impact on the community. Hindrik Bouwman, Henk van den Berg, and Henrik Kylin, "DDT and Malaria Prevention: Addressing the Paradox," *Environmental Health Perspectives* 119 (2011): 744–47.

⁸¹ One example of this is Delores S. Williams, "Sin, Nature, and Black Women's Bodies," in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ed. Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993), 24.

⁸² One example is Tsehai Berhane-Selassie, "Ecology and Ethiopian Orthodox Theology," in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 155–72.

⁸³ Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, 31–34. Indeed, this is a major project of ecofeminism, which, though it still often ties into Christian theology, has been largely paganized by Reuther and others. Carol J. Adams, "Introduction," in *Ecofeminism and the Sacred*, ed. Carol J. Adams (New York: Continuum, 1993), 4–5; Primavesi, *Making God Laugh*, 14–17.

⁸⁴ David Hallman, "Beyond 'North/South Dialogue,'" in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, ed. David G. Hallman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 6.

more established voices not because of the quality but the cultural situation of the marginal voice. This reflects a failure by ecotheologians to contextualize critically. It results in a form of syncretism.

Eighth, the emphasis on contextualization in ecotheology offers a needed critique of forms of Christianity too firmly associated with their cultures. Contextualization by ecotheologians is central to their method, according with Bevans's assertion that "contextualization is an imperative."⁸⁵ Ecotheology is an attempt to contextualize *for* the good of the environment and those affected by environmental degradation. Willis Jenkins explains the importance of his ethical methodology, for the protection of both the environment and underprivileged populations. He claims minorities are more substantially impacted by environmental degradation, particularly due to the placement of polluting commercial establishments in more rural, often poorer areas. Thus, environmentalism is also an attempt to liberate minority populations from oppression. However, ecotheology is typically done by middle-class to affluent scholars in developed nations.⁸⁶ As one author notes, the global recession of 2009 lowered interest in environmental causes because economic concerns became a more present reality.⁸⁷ Ecotheology is a methodology best suited to theologians whose main concerns are excesses due to consumeristic temptations, rather than communities who are concerned about disease, starvation, and invasion. Additionally, as Habel describes it, ecotheology seeks to be a contextual theology for the earth.⁸⁸ However, as Bevans notes, there is a sense in which a contextual theology must be done from within the contextualized population.⁸⁹ Conradie in particular emphasizes the alien nature of humans in the created order, thus it is questionable whether an eco-centric contextual theology on behalf of the earth is possible.⁹⁰ Ecotheology is contextual but the authenticity of the contextualization leaves something to be desired.

There are other points of critique within ecotheology that provide helpful corrections. In many of these areas, the critically-driven contextual theology has created an opposite and equal error. One might expect, then, ecotheology to be the subject of another round of criticism, in which tradition is allowed to critique, and creedal formulations are restored to a place of central consideration. There is evidence from the theological method of ecotheology that such a critique is unlikely. As Neuhaus pointed out, liberation theologies are dominated by the tyranny of the present.⁹¹ Bevans argues that by nature, theologies of praxis "cannot be conceived in terms of books, essays, or articles."⁹² Yet the historical sources of theology are in books, essays, and articles. Additionally, to have a theological conversation with those outside of earshot requires distilling theoretical aspects into static, written forms. By undermining the connection to the sources and methods of traditional Christian theologians, ecotheologians have restricted historical sources to contributing "catch phrases" and notions that can

⁸⁵ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 11.

⁸⁶ For example, see Jenkins, "North American Environmental Liberation Theologies," 273–78.

⁸⁷ Peter Heltzel, "The World House: Prophetic Protestantism and the Struggle for Environmental Justice," *USQR* 63 (2010): 26.

⁸⁸ Norman Habel, "Introducing the Earth Bible," in *Readings from the Perspective of the Earth*, ed. Norman Habel (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2000), 33–34.

⁸⁹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 19.

⁹⁰ Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology*, 9.

⁹¹ Neuhaus, "Liberation as Program and Promise," 97.

⁹² Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 74.

be used to drive their social ethics.⁹³ The product is a theological method that may be self-sustaining, but results in a theology that has stronger connections to its contemporary context than to traditional forms of Christian theology.

3. Conclusion

Ecotheology is an approach to liberation theology that has its roots in Christianity and the various forms of the environmental movement. Though it still draws on the authority from the Bible and the Christian tradition, ecotheology has deeper roots in the contemporary context of ecological concern than in Christianity. In an attempt to broaden the impact of its praxis and create a greater sense of co-belligerence with others engaged in environmental activism, ecotheologians have, in large part, blurred the lines of Christianity. For many ecotheologians, united concern over environmental degradation is a more important bond than united concern over historical Christian doctrines.

The most extreme versions of ecotheology are sometimes so syncretistic that they raise questions about claims to sharing in the common Christian heritage. Charity enables initially accepting the claims of ecotheologians and beginning a critique from that point. Still, the relative dearth of focus on central Christian doctrines and the radical revision of the message of Scripture bring into question the trajectory of ecotheology. Based on the current emphases of ecotheology, it is not clear whether the next generation of disciples of an ecotheological Christianity can present a coherent witness to the gospel of Christ. It seems that an insufficiently critical contextualization may lead to a syncretism with the ecological movement that will require a renewed effort toward contextualized evangelism of ecotheologians by traditional forms of Christian theology.

For evangelical Christians the task of engaging the important cultural issue of environmental stewardship is made more difficult by a relative dearth of comprehensive, academic treatments of the topic from a biblically faithful foundation. The exegetical and theological work done by Richard Bauckham represents the best treatment from an evangelical perspective. His two volumes, *The Bible and Ecology* and *Living with Other Creatures*, offer a carefully orthodox reading of Scripture looking for application to the human-environment relationship.⁹⁴ Beyond Bauckham's contribution there is a need for new research and writing in environmental ethics from a theologically conservative perspective in order to present a positive, biblical environmentalism for Christians and to resist unhealthy approaches like ecotheology.

⁹³ "Catch phrases" is Conradie's term for what he finds useful in Kuyper. Conradie, "Revisiting the Reception of Kuyper in South Africa," 24.

⁹⁴ Richard Bauckham, *The Bible and Ecology: Rediscovering the Community of Creation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010); *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011).

Rooted and Grounded? The Legitimacy of Abraham Kuyper's Distinction between Church as *Institute* and Church as *Organism*, and Its Usefulness in Constructing an Evangelical Public Theology

— Daniel Strange —

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Abstract: The question of the precise nature and scope of the church's mission has been both perennial and thorny. In recent years many evangelicals have made positive reference to Abraham Kuyper's distinction between the church as 'institute', and the church as 'organism' noting this is a helpful and necessary way of distinguishing between the organised church with its own particular and specific roles and responsibilities, and the church understood as Christians in the world, living out their God-given vocations in all spheres of life. This article describes and critiques Kuyper's distinction asking whether it is a help or a hindrance, and offering possible other ways of delineating and distinguishing the mission of the church.

To successive classes full of super-zealous, conservative evangelicals training for pastoral ministry in the UK, justifying a module entitled *Evangelical Public Theology* has not been an easy task. While such a subject might be 'interesting' and even important, for a seminary theological curriculum, isn't the theological reflection on the relationship of and responsibilities between evangelicals and their society, a peripheral or even 'luxury' subject? Worse, might public theology distract from and dilute not only the main responsibilities of the pastor, but more widely the mission of the church? In such a 'harsh' environment, discovering Abraham Kuyper's distinction between the church as *institute* and church as *organism* was something of an oasis. Distinguishing between 'the body of Christ gathered around word and sacraments for worship and discipline' (institute), and 'the body of Christ in the totality of its multidimensional vocations in the world' (organism),¹ enabled me to allay the fears of students, while keeping public theology on the agenda. In other words I could confidently say to my students that they

¹ John Bolt, *A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 248n100.

will need to be doing *exactly* what they thought they would be doing as pastors: a delimited set of roles and responsibilities prescribed in the New Testament. However, I could also open their eyes to a more expansive vista stating that their ministry will always have public theology implications, albeit indirectly through their congregations. Theologically it seemed to be a distinction which could simultaneously promote the primacy of word and sacrament and the ultimacy of evangelism and discipleship in the ministry of the local church, *and* the need for Christian world-view thinking, vocation, cultural engagement and more broadly, the societal and cosmic implications of the gospel.

I am not the only one who has found Kuyper's distinction helpful. As public theology impinges upon the perennial and thorny debate concerning the precise nature and scope of the church's mission, scholars and pastors such as Tim Keller, Don Carson, Jim Belcher, Kevin DeYoung and Michael Horton, have all made positive references to something like Kuyper's distinction. I say 'something like' because contemporary theologians often employ the terms 'institute' and 'organism' with subtly different meanings than Kuyper's original construal.

Of course such usage is not illegitimate, but would not an *ad fontes* exercise be helpful here, especially given the stature of the architect? This article wishes to offer a closer inspection of Kuyper's construal, concluding that his own understanding of the distinction was more complicated, ambiguous and even confused, not to the point of it being rendered useless for us, but needing some crucial modifications.² The nature of these modifications will depend upon broader theological commitments at work, commitments which clash in current debates such as the intra-Reformed 'two-kingdom' versus 'transformationalist' models.³ Certainly without these modifications, Kuyper's construal appears to fall into a theological no-man's land, and is certainly not the bridge on which two-kingdom and transformationalist proponents can shake hands. To return to our earlier image, the seeming ecclesiological oasis of the institute/organism distinction may actually be more of a mirage.

After noting some important contextual factors, I will describe Kuyper's institute/organism distinction noting earlier and later phases in the development of the distinction. I will then offer a number of lines of comment and critique particularly of the later stage, before offering some conclusions as to the validity of the distinction in the development of an Evangelical Public Theology.

1. Kuyper's Context: A Man of His Time

As soon as one plunges beneath the surface of Kuyper's institute/organism iceberg, one discovers a particular nexus of the personal, social, theological and ideological which in terms of context is extremely important to grasp. In more ways than one, Kuyper (1837–1920) truly was a man of his time.⁴ First, is Kuyper's polymathic life and seemingly gargantuan work ethic.⁵ His interests and accomplishments do not need to be rehearsed again, save to point out that his move from pastor to politician appears to run

² There are several Dutch language studies of Kuyper's ecclesiology and the institute/organism distinction. One of the main studies in English is Henry Zwaanstra, "Abraham Kuyper's Conception of the Church," *CTJ* 9 (1974): 149–81.

³ I have outlined the contours of both these models (using slightly different terminology) in a previous article, "Not Ashamed! The Sufficiency of Scripture for Public Theology," *Them* 36 (2011): 238–60.

⁴ James Bratt's recent, magisterial Kuyper biography is especially illuminating here, *Abraham Kuyper: Modern Calvinist, Christian Democrat* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

⁵ Permeated, I should add, by several nervous breakdowns.

in parallel with the development of the institute/organism distinction, whereby, and as we shall argue, the organism was increasingly given prominence at the expense of the institute.⁶

Second, a large part of Kuyper's voluminous output was dramatic, rhetorical and 'poetic' in nature.⁷ He was an activist, a brilliant orator and writer who wanted to affect his audiences. As Bacote notes, 'his work was produced in the midst of many ideological, ecclesiological, and political battles. His primary aim was not to articulate a mammoth systematic text on a theology of public engagement but to develop and present a theologically grounded approach to public engagement for the various challenges of his day.'⁸ Kuyper's main expositions of the institute/organism distinction, what Bolt calls the 'cornerstone of his public theology',⁹ are contained in an inaugural sermon to his third pastorate 'Rooted and Grounded' (1870) and his six-year newspaper serialisation on Common Grace (published in *De Herald*) finally published as *De Gemeene Gratie*.¹⁰ For a construct that was so axiomatic to his ecclesiology and indeed cultural agenda, a detailed sustained treatise on it is conspicuous by its absence in his writings. Moreover, and perhaps precisely because it never received a systematic treatment, it is perhaps not surprising that Kuyper's discussion of the distinction is arguably not without ambiguity.¹¹ Those wanting scholastic precision will be disappointed in the sometimes florid and suggestive style. Without doubt there is development between earlier and later articulations, and this is not entirely due to the very different occasions that prompted them.

Third, are the theological and philosophical influences which shaped Kuyper's thought. Zwaanstra notes that Kuyper was a child of the nineteenth century but that 'although intellectually Kuyper drank widely and at times, deeply from a variety of courses, within his own system of thought everything bore the mark of Kuyper's genius and originality.'¹² Bratt notes that in his ecclesiology Kuyper attempted to mix different thought worlds, 'The older set came from the tradition of Reformed scholasticism, while the others were the idiom of nineteenth-century organic thinking rooted in Idealist thinking and Romantic poets.'¹³

⁶ That said, Kuyper's manual on church polity, *Our Worship* (1910) is a late work and demonstrates the need not to make simplistic judgements on someone like Kuyper. To make matters more complicated, I recognise that I am only consulting English translations of Kuyper's work. His prolificity is pretty overwhelming. As Bratt notes, 'He authored over twenty thousand newspaper articles, scores of pamphlets and numerous multivolume treatises' *Abraham Kuyper*, xiii. See, Tjitze Kuipers, *Abraham Kuyper: An Annotated Bibliography 1857–1910*, trans. Clifford Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

⁷ To use John Bolt's term. See John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation: Abraham Kuyper's American Public Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 3–80.

⁸ Vincent Bacote, *The Spirit in Public Theology: Appropriating the Legacy of Abraham Kuyper* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 154–55.

⁹ John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*, 427.

¹⁰ *De Gemeene Gratie*, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Hoveker & Wormser, 1902–1904). For this article I am using James Bratt's selected translations in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 165–201. In 2014, The Christian Library Press began publishing a full English translation of the work under the editorship of Jordan Ballor and Stephen Grabill, <http://www.clpress.com/publications/series/common-grace>.

¹¹ John Bolt, *A Free Church, A Holy Nation*, 427.

¹² Zwaanstra, "Abraham Kuyper's Conception of the Church," 149.

¹³ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 183.

Kuyper's ecclesiology is a fascinating and heady mix. In direct continuity with his confessional tradition, there is Calvinistic/Reformed creedal orthodoxy e.g. his explicit assent to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession and WCF 25/1).¹⁴ Added to this are new developments and creativity on this tradition (e.g. sphere sovereignty and common grace which underpin his ecclesiology) for which others, both then and now, would critique him as illegitimately 'speculative' and lacking Scriptural warrant. Finally there are other influences and trends ingrafted in: Schleiermacher, Schelling, Idealism, Romanticism, nationalism, a social evolutionary view of progress and improvement with race science overtones. It is both ironic and sobering that although Kuyper was a theocentric, cross-centred, Bible-believing Christian, who extolled the crown rights of King Jesus, who stressed antithesis and was stalwart against modernity, appears to have been influenced precisely by the modern zeitgeist he so often vehemently set himself against.

Finally, as a non-Dutch speaking British Baptist (albeit Reformed, covenantal and sympathetic to cultural engagement), I recognise myself to be something of an 'outsider' looking into the theologically complex and sometimes bewildering world of Dutch Reformed theology past and present. While I might be critical of certain aspects of Kuyper's project, there is so much rich marrow in this tradition which can strengthen evangelicalism. If it achieves little else, I hope this article might pique interest in the *Themelios* reader to get stuck in to the works of Kuyper, Schilder, and their theological progeny.¹⁵

2. The Institute/Organism Distinction

With this backdrop painted, we come then to the institute/organism distinction itself. As already mentioned, we will focus mainly on Kuyper's sermon 'Rooted and Grounded' and his work on 'Common Grace,' but also briefly mention some other works.

2.1. 'Rooted and Grounded' (1870)

Kuyper's sermon 'Rooted and Grounded' not only explores how the church is both divine and human, but also offers an apologetic for the role of church in public life from the context of disestablishment. The Roman Catholic stress on institution, and modernism's ambitions to usurp the church and so do away with institution (i.e. Christian living continues only as an organism) are twin dangers to be avoided. Both of these can be avoided by a return to Scripture and the Apostle's description in Ephesians 3:17 of the church as being both 'rooted' ('a description of organic life') and 'grounded' ('the requirement of the institution').¹⁶ Kuyper distinguishes between the more 'organic' scriptural metaphors (plant, vine and body), and those which are more 'constructed' and the work of human hands (e.g. temple and house). The church is both grown and built, with both metaphors being necessary and inextricably linked.

¹⁴ WCF 25/1: 'The catholic or universal Church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect, that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all.'

¹⁵ Richard Mouw has been an 'evangelist' in this regard for some time now. For example see Richard Mouw, *Abraham Kuyper: A Short and Personal Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011); "Klaas Schilder as Public Theologian," *CTJ* 38 (2003): 281–98.

¹⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *Rooted and Grounded*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2013), Kindle edition, loc. 318.

Kuyper breaks down each metaphor in more detail. God is the sovereign creative and supernatural source of the church, a Body ‘rooted in election.’¹⁷ The organism ‘is the heart of the church’ and has its origin in a miracle of grace: ‘A church cannot be manufactured; a polity no matter how tidy, and a confession no matter how spotless, are powerless to form a church if the living organism is absent.’¹⁸ However, ‘the church cannot lack the institution, for the very reason that all life among human beings needs analysis and arrangement.’¹⁹ The institute is still established by God for it ‘manifests not merely the organism, but the institution is a means supplied by God for feeding and expanding that organism. . . . From the organism the institution is born, but also through the institution the organism is fed.’²⁰ Kuyper employs another metaphor here:

The organism of the church is the nourishing source for that stream, but the institution is the bed that carries its current, the banks that border the waters. Only in this way is there development, only in this way is the progress of the Christian life conceivable. It is the church that makes us stand upon the shoulders of those who went before us, and preserves our harvest for the generation that comes after us. Only through the institution can the church offer us that unique life sphere where the ground we tread, the air we breathe, the language we speak, and the nourishment of our spirit are not those of the world but those of the Holy Spirit. That institution positions itself between us and the world, in order to protect the uniqueness of our life with the power supplied by that unanimity and that order. . . . For that reason we have such an institution that is itself thoroughly formed, that works formatively upon the individual, structurally upon the family, directly upon society, and chooses the Christian school as its vestibule. An institution that calls into being, from the root of its own life, a unique science and art, that strives in its confession for a more correct expression of the eternal truth and for an ever purer worship of the Holy One. An institution, finally, that preserves discipline and justice, and is nevertheless flexible, tender, and supple, adapting to the nature of each, accommodating itself to every nation, and in every age adopting the language of its time—behold what the church of Christ needs desperately as she needs her rootedness in God.²¹

Kuyper answers the question as to whether the visible church should be identified with the kingdom of God. Here he uses another metaphor. The church on earth is like scaffolding appearing as defective and misshapen but necessary for a time, because of sin, in the creation of a glorious temple. ‘But one day . . . then that scaffolding will be removed, then that church on earth will fall away, and then that glorious temple will shimmer in its eternal beauty—a temple that hitherto had not existed, but that the builders had been building while supported by that church.’²²

On the uniqueness of the church and its antithetical contrast to the world, Kuyper writes:

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, loc. 440.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, loc. 440.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, loc. 451.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, loc. 484.

²¹ *Ibid.*, loc. 499.

²² *Ibid.*, loc. 537.

The marketplace of the world not the church, is the arena where we wrestle for the prize, the race track where we wage the contest for the wreath. Far from being the battlefield itself, the church is rather like the army tent of the Lord where soldiers strengthen themselves before that battle, where they treat their wounds after the battle, and where one who has become 'prisoner by the sword of the Word' is fed at the table of the Lord.²³

Finally we return to the relationship between the two metaphors. As Kuyper summarises, 'first rooted, and then grounded', but both together at their most inner core! . . . The organism is the essence, the institution is the form. To say it once again with Calvin, 'What God has joined together, you O man, may not be put asunder.'²⁴

2.2. Lectures on Calvinism

Kuyper's most well-known work, *Lectures on Calvinism*, delivered at Princeton in 1898, do not explicitly refer to the institute/organism distinction, but the second lecture, "Calvinism and Religion" does speak of the essence, manifestation and purpose of the church. It thus forms a helpful bridge between 'Rooted and Grounded' and 'Common Grace'.

The Church 'is a spiritual organism having at present its center and the starting-point for its action, not upon earth but in heaven.'²⁵ Human beings have a prophetic, priestly and kingly role to consecrate the cosmos for God's glory. Kuyper continues:

He [God] so loves His world that He has given Himself to it, in the person of His Son, and thus He has again brought our race, and through our race, His whole cosmos, into a renewed contact with eternal life. To be sure many branches and leaves fell off the tree of the human race, yet the tree itself shall be saved; on its new root in Christ, it shall once more blossom gloriously. For regeneration does not save a few isolated individuals, finally to be joined together mechanically as an aggregated heap. Regeneration saves the organism, itself, of our race. And therefore all regenerate human life forms one organic body, of which Christ is the Head, and whose members are bound together by their mystical union with Him.²⁶

In terms of the form of the church, it comprises of 'local congregations of believers, groups of confessors, living in some ecclesiastical union, in obedience to the ordinances of Christ.'²⁷ The church comprises of those in Christ and who adhere to the church's ordinances of Word, sacraments and discipline.

Finally the purpose of the church, is not 'to prepare the believer for heaven' but to 'magnify God's glory.'²⁸ Kuyper moves into the area of morality, strenuously countering the view that Calvinism, with its stress on predestination, is neither antinomian, nor nomistic. He continues:

²³ Ibid., loc. 595.

²⁴ Ibid., loc. 514.

²⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 59.

²⁶ Ibid., 59.

²⁷ Ibid., 62.

²⁸ Ibid., 66, 68.

But it remained the special trait of Calvinism that it placed the believer *before the face of God*, not only in the church, but also in his personal, family, social, and political life. The majesty of God, and the authority of God press upon the Calvinist in the whole of his human existence. He is a pilgrim, not in the sense that he is marching through a world with which he has no concern, but in the sense that at every step of the long way he must remember his responsibility to that God so full of majesty, who awaits him at his journey's end.²⁹

In contrast to the Anabaptist separatism, there is one world, created, fallen, redeemed and saved by Christ and which will pass through judgement into glory:

For this very reason the Calvinist cannot shut himself up in his church and abandon the world to its fate. He feels, rather, his high calling to push the development of this world to an even higher stage, and to do this in constant accordance with God's ordinance, for the sake of God, upholding, in the midst of so much painful corruption, everything that is honourable, lovely and of good report among men.³⁰

2.3. Common Grace (1902–1904)

Thirty years on from 'Rooted and Grounded' Kuyper returns to the institute/organism distinction in his treatment of the doctrine of common grace. Before coming to this later articulation of the distinction, a longer run-up is needed.

First, Kuyper's understanding of common grace seen negatively as 'restraint' is in continuity with the Reformed tradition, although expanded. However it is in the more 'positive' aspect of common grace where Kuyper significantly develops the tradition. His agenda is clear from the outset:

The doctrine of common grace proceeds directly from the Sovereignty of the Lord which ever is the root of all Reformed thinking. If God is Sovereign, then his Lordship *must* remain over *all* life and cannot be closed up within church walls or Christian circles. The extra-Christian world has not been given over to Satan or to fallen humanity or to chance. God's sovereignty is great and all-ruling also in unbaptized realms, and therefore neither Christ's work in the world not that of God's child can be pulled back out of life.³¹

Second, Kuyper notes that it is 'undeniable' that special grace presupposes common grace and 'that everything happens for Christ's sake, that therefore the *body of Christ* is the all-controlling central element in history, and on that basis the church of Christ is the pivot on which the life of humanity hinges,'³² However, Kuyper is keen to stress and particular Christocentric ordering: 'all things exist for the sake of Christ and only as a corollary for his *Body* and the *Church*—hence not for *you* and then the

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 69, emphasis in the original.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 73. Bringing us back down to earth with a bump, Kuyper finishes this chapter with some brief comments on card playing, theatres, and dancing!

³¹ James Bratt, "Common Grace," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James Bratt (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), 166.

³² *Ibid.*, 170

Church and so also for the *Body* of Christ and finally for the *Christ*. No: Christ, by whom all things exist including ourselves, is before all things.³³ He concludes here,

In that sense, then, we must acknowledge that common grace is only an emanation of special grace and that all its fruit flows into special grace—provided it is understood that special grace is by no means exhausted in the salvation of the elect but has its ultimate end only in the Son’s glorification of the Father’s love, and is in the aggrandizement of the perfection of our God.³⁴

Third, is Kuyper’s construal of the relationship between nature and grace. Christ is Reconciler and Re-Creator of both soul and body, of the spiritual and natural realm. One must ‘not run the danger of isolating Christ from your soul’ and viewing ‘life in and for the world as something that exists outside your Christian religion not controlled by it.’³⁵ Although it was the incarnate Word who created the world, not the Son of Man, Christ connects nature and grace because he is Creator and Re-creator. However, Kuyper makes a crucial distinction at this point: ‘The Reformed principle produces a much purer distinction between the things that originate from the Creation and things that originate from the Re-creation.’³⁶ Thus, ‘Creation’ is to be associated with common grace working on the ‘original’ and ‘Re-creation’ with special grace which is ‘new’ cannot be explained by the old, though linked to it. Furthermore, and in what seems a further extension to the previous point, there appears to be a certain autonomy given to common grace in its purpose to bring the world to consummation ‘There is beside the great work of God in *special grace* also that totally other work of God in the realm of *common grace*.’³⁷

Kuyper finally returns to his institute/ organism distinction when articulating the ecclesiological implications of all this. The church as institute is touched upon but only briefly and described rather ‘coolly’ as ‘apparatus’ ‘temporally constructed’ ‘having real substance only insofar as the mystical body of Christ lies behind it and manifests through it.’³⁸ When one comes to the organism, the ‘organic’ is stressed:

We are thoroughly misguided, therefore, if in speaking of the church of Christ (not as *institute* but as *organism*) we have our eyes fixed almost exclusively on elect persons or initiates and deliberately close them to the rich and many-sided combinations which, the final analysis, unite the multiplicity of members into the unity of the Body. This exclusive interest in persons is the curse of nominalism that still lingers on in present-day Liberalism. Christianity is more than anything *social* in nature. Paul has pointed graphically and repeatedly to these three: *body*, *members*, and *connective tissue*. The church as organism has its center in Christ; it is extended in its mystical body; it individualizes itself in the members. But it no less finds its unity in those original ‘joints,’ those organic connections, which unite us as human beings into one single human race, and it is on those joints that the spirit of Christ puts its stamp. Though it is true that

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 172.

³⁶ Ibid., 174.

³⁷ Ibid., 176.

³⁸ Ibid., 187–88.

these Christianized connections serve in common grace to restrain sin and to advance general development, their Christianization is rooted in special grace and they find their original and primary goal in the propagation of special grace.³⁹

Kuyper continues his description in distinguishing his ecclesiology from that of the national church. Both national church and free church recognise that the church works directly for the well-being of the elect, and indirectly for the well-being of the whole society. However, whereas the national church includes civil society in the church, 'we place the church as a city on a hill amid civil society.'⁴⁰ Kuyper wishes to affirm a pure free church which has public influence. The national church only recognises church as institute but Kuyper distinguishes between two circles. The first is the objective church, the circle of the covenant which displays the marks of the 'true church' (Belgic Confession, 29):

But we cannot stop here. The institute does not cover everything that is Christian. Though the Christian religion only burns within the institute's walls, its light shines out through its windows to areas far beyond, illumining all the sectors and associations that appear across the wider range of human life and activity . . . that illumination will be stronger and more penetrating as the lamp of the gospel is allowed to shine more brightly and clearly in the church institute.

Aside from this first circle of the institute and in necessary connection with it, we thus recognise another circle whose circumference is determined by the length of the ray that shines out from the church institute over the life of people and nation. Since this second circle is not attached to particular persons, is not circumscribed by a certain number of people listed in church directories, and does not have its own office-bearers but is interwoven with the very fabric of national life, this extra-institutional influence at work in society points us to the *church as organism*. That church, after all, exists before the institute, it lies behind the institute, it alone gives substance and value to that institute. The church as organism has its center in heaven, in Christ; it encompasses all ages from the beginning of the world to the end so as to fulfil all the ages coming after us. *The church as organism may even manifest itself where all personal faith is missing but where nevertheless some of the golden glow of eternal life is reflected in the ordinary facades of the great edifice of human life.*⁴¹

Kuyper puts all this together by proposing a typology or 'spectrum'⁴² of four terrains. The first is a pure common grace terrain untouched by special grace, a world living in the power of the evil one (1 John 5:19). His example is China. The second terrain is the institutional church arising purely from special grace and whose members limit themselves to their own task. The third is the terrain of common grace, influenced by special grace, of which there are many examples in Europe and America. Here Kuyper refers once again to church being the city on the hill. The fourth terrain is that of special grace utilizing common grace. Here Kuyper talks about common grace being controlled by the principles of divine revelation and 'Christian' in a stricter sense than the third terrain. Here the biblical reference is

³⁹ Ibid., 189.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 190.

⁴¹ Ibid., 195, italics added.

⁴² Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 202.

the yeast in the dough (Matt 13:33). Kuyper goes on to distinguish these latter two terrains. The city on the hill is different from the yeast in the dough (Matt 13:33): ‘the former is based on external contact, the latter on internal kinship.’⁴³

2.4. Later Writings

Finally, and almost by way of postscript, we should finish our description by noting some other works by Kuyper in this later phase which touched on ecclesiological matters: his *Encyclopedia* and the *Locus de Ecclesia*, works which, to the best of my knowledge, are not available in English. We rely therefore on Zwaanstra here:

In still later writings, Kuyper further elaborated his views on the visible manifestations of the church outside the life of the church as institute. These visible appearances he called the *ecclesia apparens*, or the church appearing as a visible organism and reflecting the life of regeneration in all areas of life. . . . The *ecclesia apparens* represented all the temporal and visible evidences and effects of the spiritual power residing in the mystical body of Christ. The body of Christ visibly manifested itself in the palingenesis, or Christian metamorphosis, of all aspects and spheres of human life: in persons, families, nations, and all cultural activities. In Kuyper’s opinion, therefore, all Christian activity arose out of the soil of the church and could flourish only on that soil. But then, the church has to be understood as the total life of humanity, including the cosmos, which had been restored through palingenesis, and not as the institute whose sphere of activity was strictly limited by its offices.⁴⁴

3. Analysis and Critique

Having sketched Kuyper’s use of the distinction I would like to offer some lines of critique. While there is so much to appreciate in Kuyper’s Reformed presuppositions, creativity and vision, and given the contextual caveats already noted, there are questions that must be raised concerning the legitimacy and usefulness of Kuyper’s own construal of church as institute and church as organism. I would like to focus on a number of ways Kuyper is more speculative and less Scriptural in his distinction.

First, we return to ‘Rooted and Grounded’. While James Bratt may be right that this 1870 sermon ‘valorized the institutional church as nowhere else in the rest of Kuyper’s work,’⁴⁵ and while Kuyper is at pains to stress the inseparability of institute and organism, is the basic conceptualisation even valid? Notwithstanding the fact that Ephesians 3:17 seems to be referring to individual Christians and not the church collectively, while there are certainly metaphors that are ‘organic’ and ‘constructed’, can they be distinguished so neatly to demonstrate divine and human agency respectively? Sometimes organic images like the body are described as having to work if growth is to happen (Eph 4:1–16). Conversely the eschatological institutional ‘city’ of Hebrews 11:10 is not built by human hands but by God. Other examples could be cited with the ‘living stones’ of 1 Peter 2:5 being especially evocative.

⁴³ Kuyper, “Common Grace,” 200.

⁴⁴ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper’s Conception of the Church,” 179.

⁴⁵ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 176.

On interpreting biblical models of the church, Edmund Clowney notes that ‘there is a difference between a metaphor and a model.’⁴⁶ Kuyper has delineated two ‘families’ of biblical *metaphor*—one ‘rooted,’ the other ‘grounded’—and from them constructed his organic/institute *model*. However as Clowney warns, ‘the metaphor that would be extended for use as a model must be such that other scriptural metaphors and non-metaphorical statements can be included in it.’⁴⁷ Kuyper’s distinction is overly neat and simplistic. Rather than describing two discreet conceptions of church, however inseparable, might it not be better, conceptually, to think of one reality that is the church that has been divinely revealed to us in many different metaphors all of which qualify the other. What God has joined together let not Kuyper separate.

Second, with the distinction between institute and organism ‘set’ in Kuyper’s thinking, even though ‘Rooted and Grounded’ notes the indispensability of the church as institute, there are hints even here that the spiritual ‘organism’ has some kind of primacy. This is confirmed in later writings as the organism is valorised to the detriment of the institute, particularly when Kuyper appears to be speaking of the visibility of the organism, the *ecclesia apparens*. Bratt himself notes that in the later Kuyper, ‘his theory moved from his earlier institute-organism distinction to an institute-organism opposition.’⁴⁸ But what is the biblical evidence for a visible organic church? We do not have the space to go into a full-blown doctrine of the church. However a few modest ‘basics’ can be established which I hope are broad enough to have the consent of those of us who might have different ecclesiological sensibilities.⁴⁹ While not denying a spiritual and eschatological ‘now and not yet’ character to the church in that it is the Risen and Ascended Lord Himself who gathers a people from heaven,⁵⁰ the New Testament usage of ἐκκλησία ‘refers almost exclusively to the concrete assembly of Christians at a specific place.’⁵¹ This ‘specific place’ is either the local gathering of believers or the universal, heavenly and simultaneously eschatological gathering of all believers around the throne/Mount Zion. Apart from the much discussed reference in Acts 9:31, there does not seem to be a proliferation of ἐκκλησία being used to describe all the believers alive on earth at any one point in time, nor all those believers in a particular geographical region, nor is it used in the singular to refer to the aggregate of a multitude of local churches.

By separating of institute from organism, prioritising the organic over the institute, and focusing in later writings on the ‘visible organic church,’ Kuyper was in danger of departing from these, what I think are quite broad and generous, biblical contours, evacuating the word ‘church’ of any notion of ‘the gathered’ and of dislocating the visible organic church from any concrete congregation. As Zwaanstra notes, ‘By placing the church as institute alongside the church as a visible organism and assigning specifically different tasks to each, the conceptual unity of the church as an historical existing reality was seriously compromised, if not lost.’⁵² Even in Kuyper’s day one of his critics noted that the character

⁴⁶ Edmund P. Clowney, “Interpreting the Biblical Models of the Church: A Hermeneutical Deepening of Ecclesiology,” in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church*, ed. D.A. Carson (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), 78.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴⁸ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 186.

⁴⁹ I am thinking here of Independents, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians.

⁵⁰ See, for example, David Peterson, “The ‘Locus’ of the Church—Heaven or Earth?” *Churchman* 112 (1998): 199–213.

⁵¹ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 137.

⁵² Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper’s Conception of the Church,” 181.

of the visible or local church was damaged and its destiny lowered by conceiving it as ‘a phenomenon of only passing significance’ and placing it on the same plane as other social institutions.⁵³

Moreover, there appears to be further dislocation between visible organic church and humanity. I am sympathetic to the cosmic work of Christ and his Kingly reign over all creation, sympathetic to a holistic anthropology which does not dichotomize physical and spiritual, and sympathetic to the social, political and cultural implications of putting all things under the Lordship of Christ. However, to call all this ‘church’, to use the body of Christ language in terms of ‘joints’ and ‘connective’ tissue, and to talk about church as organism manifesting itself ‘where all personal faith is missing’, is speculatively poetic and pseudo-mystical.

As indicated above, I do not want to be guilty of a pendulum swinging overstatement here, which looks like some form of ecclesiological ‘minimalism.’ As Volf notes:

Doubtless . . . the life of the church is not exhausted in the act of assembly. Even if the church is not assembled, it does live on as a church in the mutual service its members render to one another and in its common mission to the world. The church is not simply an act of assembling; rather it assembles at a specific place (see 1 Cor. 14:23). It is the *people* who in a specific way assemble at a specific place. In its most concentrated form however, the church does manifest itself concretely in the act of assembling for worship, and this is constitutive for its ecclesiality.⁵⁴

There is a ‘covenantal’ aspect to the nature of the church which one might (probably unhelpfully now) call ‘organic.’ In other words, the covenantally constituted church does not simply blink out of existence when it is not gathered. However whatever this aspect is and is called, it is inextricably tethered to the visible gathered local church, and it is this visible gathered and local church which is most natural and normative, in terms of biblical usage.

What lies behind Kuyper’s prioritising of the organic? I have already noted Kuyper’s change of context from pastor to politician. Bratt, Zwaanstra and others note in this later period the philosophical influences of Idealism and Romanticism, and in particular Schelling, on Kuyper’s thought.

A central feature to this thinking was the prioritization of essence over manifestation ‘and it’s marked elevation of the (free) organic over the (artificial) mechanism’ which ‘Kuyper took as axiomatic—and as an agenda.’⁵⁵ Such organic essentialist thinking can be traced right back to Kuyper’s doctoral dissertation, which compared Calvin and Johannes a Lasco’s ecclesiology, strongly favouring the latter. As Zwaanstra notes, ‘According to Kuyper, the essence of the invisible church lies in God, as a church-forming power or operation imminent in Him.’⁵⁶ This explains Kuyper’s stress on supralapsarian election being at the core of his ecclesiology: ‘In eternity the church was constituted as the mystical body of Christ and ultimately characterized in its most distinctive quality as an organism.’⁵⁷

⁵³ Quoted in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 191. Strangely, Bratt does not name the individual here.

⁵⁴ Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 137.

⁵⁵ Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper*, 184.

⁵⁶ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper’s Conception of the Church,” 153.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 156.

As has been observed, ‘the problem with organicist thinking is that it valorizes an abstract ‘totality’ outside the experience of individuals.’⁵⁸ Zwaanstra makes the point that Calvin too spoke of the church as an organism but in the sense of an historically existing community of believers, ‘Kuyper’s conception of the church is speculative and metaphysical rather than historical.’⁵⁹ As an aside, it is interesting to compare Van Til’s claim in his analysis of Kuyper’s position on common grace, that Kuyper’s epistemology displays Platonic and Kantian traits with its stress on abstract universals. I am not the first to notice that Kuyper appears to have had some difficulty in moving from God in eternity to God’s contingent action in creation. If there is not a chasm here, Kuyper may have dug himself a ditch.

At this point Kuyper does not seem particularly rooted and grounded in Scripture. Zwaanstra concludes that Kuyper made a serious error in suggesting there were many historical forms of the body of Christ, of which the institutional church was just one. Kuyper might have avoided this error by calling these other forms ‘Christian’ or evidences of the Kingdom of God, rather than ‘church.’⁶⁰

Moreover, I think that David Van Drunen is correct when he notes that Kuyper’s priority for the organic was curiously self-defeating:

Kuyper saw the organic church, whose task it was to pervade all of life’s spheres with Christian influence, as existing before, lying behind, and alone giving substance and value to the institutional church. Because, according to Kuyper’s own claims, the means of grace—the preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments—are received only in the institutional church, one might wonder how, apart from the institutional church, the organic church would attain any resources to support its own existence.⁶¹

Finally, it is well worth noting here that Klaas Schilder (1890–1952), the Reformed theologian who in his book *Christ and Culture* advocated an expansive theology of Christian cultural development, appears pointedly to take issue with Kuyper’s distinction, wanting to ‘protect’ the institutional church but *for the sake of cultural development*. He notes that, ‘the Church should not be even in the smallest direct centre of culture, but she *must* be the greatest indirect cultural *force*.’⁶² He expands this, I think very helpfully thus:

In the Head of the Church the sum of all things is drawn up. This statement destroys the theory according to which the Church itself is a cultural state or is allowed to become one. No encouragement is here given to any suggestion that the Church—which always, as institute, is to be instituted and therefore never gives away the name of Church to whatever else, in order to characterize the Christian communion in school, family, social life, political life, etc. is falsely called ‘the church as organism’—is *directly* a practical cultural business, let alone an exponent of culture. This sort of concept of the church would murder her, violate her. In a service in which the word is preached, the Church

⁵⁸ Duncan Heath and Judy Boreham, *Introducing Romanticism* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2005), 34.

⁵⁹ Zwaanstra, “Abraham Kuyper’s Conception of the Church,” 157n17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁶¹ Van Drunen, “Abraham Kuyper and the Reformed Natural Law and Two Kingdoms Traditions,” *CTJ* 42 (2007): 305.

⁶² Klaas Schilder, *Christ and Culture*, trans. G. van Rongen and W. Helder (Winnipeg: Premier Printing, 1977), 107, http://www.reformed.org/webfiles/cc/christ_and_culture.pdf, emphasis in the original.

does not present a direct lecture on culture that goes into all sorts of technical details, a thinly disguised university of the peoples. But, on the other hand the administration of God's Word does put the whole of life under promises and norms. . . . From the Church, where the Spirit of Christ distributes the treasures of grace obtained by Him, the people of God have to pour out over the earth in all directions and unto all human activities, in order to proclaim over all this, and also to show in their own actions, the dominion of God, the Kingdom of heaven. From the Church the fire of obedience, the pure cultural glow included, must blaze forth all over the world.⁶³

4. Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to describe and critique Kuyper's distinction between church as institute and organism. While I agree with much of Kuyper's Reformed presuppositions, vision, and urgency for public theology and public engagement, I do not think that the institute/organism distinction, *as Kuyper understood it*, is a safe vehicle in which to carry this agenda forward, for it creates a forced distinction in describing the church, separates the 'organism' from the 'institute', and then stresses the organism to the detriment of the institute, ironically leading to the withering of what the 'organism' is meant to represent and achieve. It would seem safer for us to stick more closely and precisely to the New Testament understanding of ἐκκλησία. Let me re-iterate: this is not to deny Christ's cosmic work and kingship, or even the aspiration to see Kuyper's third and fourth terrains realised.⁶⁴ It is simply that it is unhelpful to directly, and without heavy qualification, call any of this 'church.' We need to work on creating a better conceptual framework, *not ditch public theology*.

If we *do* have to make a distinction, then we need to make one which stresses that it is the gathered church of redeemed believers that, in the words of Cornelius Plantinga, 'serves as witness to the new order, as agent for it, and as first model or exemplar of it.'⁶⁵ The means or 'engine' of any social, cultural or political agenda must be focused upon men and women being converted through the special grace

⁶³ Ibid., 105, emphasis in the original. It is worth noting that in parallel to these observations concerning the separation of the organism from the institute, is the debate over Kuyper's doctrine of common grace and whether he gave, first, an autonomy, stability and progressive power to common grace apart from special grace; and second whether such an autonomy is legitimate or illegitimate. There are similar Christological implications in a separating of Christ's work in creation and re-creation. This discussion obviously takes us beyond the scope of this paper save for noting that a broader placing of Kuyper in the Reformed tradition at this point is difficult. Whether one agrees with his overall sympathies or not, I think Van Drunen is correct in noting enough tensions and ambiguity in Kuyper's ecclesiology and the relationship between common grace and special grace, to conclude that he sits uncomfortably in both 'transformationist' and 'two-kingdom' camps. I mention this all here because it is on the issue of common grace and culture that Schilder in *Christ and Culture* is critical of Kuyper. For a detailed analysis of both Kuyper and Schilder on this topic see Henry Van Til's important 'classic', *The Calvinistic Concept of Culture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), with a foreword by Richard J. Mouw.

⁶⁴ Here I'm happy to reveal my own cards as one who holds to a congruity between cultural mandate and Great Commission. In this area, I think I am becoming more and more sympathetic to a position like that of Schilder. Branson Parler leans on Schilder in his critique of both Van Drunen's 'two kingdoms' model and Kuyper's view of common grace in his essay "Two Cities or Two Kingdoms?: The Importance of the Ultimate in Reformed Social Thought," in *Kingdoms Apart: Engaging the Two Kingdoms Perspective*, ed. Ryan McIlhenny (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2012), 173–200.

⁶⁵ Cornelius Plantinga, "The Concern of the Church in the Socio-Political World," *CTJ* 18 (1983): 203.

of the gospel proclaimed, being nurtured in the gathered church, learning to apply Christ's Lordship to all areas of life, and sent out.⁶⁶ I think Carson is right in the following: 'when Kuyperianism, a branch of European Reformed Theology, becomes the intellectual structure on which we ground our attempts to influence the culture yet cuts itself loose from, say, the piety of the Heidelberg Confession, the price is sudden death.'⁶⁷

Carson himself ends up distinguishing between church *as church*, and church *as Christians*. Not fancy but helpful. Similarly, Michael Horton highlights the Reformed distinction between the public ministry of the church and the church as people scattered in their various vocations:

In the former sense, the Body of Christ is served, enjoying its Sabbath rest from secular callings and commitments, to be fed at Christ's banquet and filled with the Spirit. In the latter sense, the same body loves and serves its neighbors in the world. However, if the church is not first of all the place where Christians are made, then it cannot become a community of witnesses and servants.⁶⁸

To finish, because I'm happy to talk about cultural transformation, because of my own post-Christian British situation, and because of a certain temperament within conservative British evangelicalism,⁶⁹ I would like to suggest us channelling some of Kuyper's front-foot belligerence and poetic rhetorical power. In his address on 'sphere sovereignty', Kuyper concludes:

Could we permit a banner that we carried off from Golgotha to fall into enemy hands so long as the most extreme measures had not been tried, so long as one arrow was left unspent, so long as there remained in this inheritance one bodyguard—no matter how small—of those who were crowned by Golgotha? To that question . . . a 'By God, Never!' has resounded in our soul.⁷⁰

What can I say to my seminary students about their role and the role of public theology? What about this for a clarion call?

On behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ, Christians are engaged in a battle with the world. The gathered church is the heavenly, anticipatory eschatological army tent of the Lord and you pastors in training are going to be field medics, strengthening the troops, treating their wounds after battle, feeding them with God's word and sending them back out to take every thought captive for Christ.

⁶⁶ While I think it might be little too 'neat', I have some sympathy with Peter Bolt's conclusion in his survey of 'mission' in Acts concluding that 'The concept of the "mission of the church" ought to be laid to rest. Acts does not present 'the church' as an institution which is sent. A particular church may send individuals to a particular work (cf. 13:1–4), but the church itself is not sent.' Peter Bolt, "Mission and Witness," in *Witness to the Nations: The Theology of Acts*, eds. D. G. Peterson and I. H. Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 210–11.

⁶⁷ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2008), 216.

⁶⁸ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 898.

⁶⁹ Given recent history, I have some sympathy with American Evangelicals being uncomfortable with 'culture war' language and wanting to retreat from it. However in my context, I would like conservative evangelicals in the UK to recognize that there is a culture war going on around us and to engage it at the cultural apologetic level.

⁷⁰ Abraham Kuyper, "Sphere Sovereignty," in Bratt, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, 490.

And the distinction to be made? How about church 'gathered' and church 'going'? Or, maybe better still: 'church gathered' and 'church dismissed' (but *never* dismissed!).⁷¹

⁷¹ A shorter version of this article was presented as a paper at the ETS Annual Meeting, San Diego, November 2014. I would like to acknowledge my former MTh student, Matthew Banks, whose dissertation on Kuyper's distinction has been of great assistance in the writing of this article.

“Not to Behold Faith, But the Object of Faith”: The Effect of William Perkins’s Doctrine of the Atonement on his Preaching of Assurance

— Andrew Ballitch —

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Abstract: The Elizabethan Puritan, William Perkins, is accused of exclusively pointing people inward to signs of repentance or to their sanctification for assurance of salvation. It is assumed that he was bound to this strategy because he affirmed particularism in the atonement. Both Perkins’s accusers and defenders have tended to amass evidence from Perkins’s writings explicitly on assurance and, as such, there is a need to look at his actual practice. While Perkins certainly did point individuals toward themselves in his preaching, this article will show that he also pointed doubters to Christ and gospel promises for assurance.

William Perkins (1558–1602) began to displace John Calvin, Theodore Beza, and Heinrich Bullinger at the end of the sixteenth century as the most read champion of Reformed orthodoxy in England. Perkins was also the first English theologian after the Reformation to gain an international reputation.¹ Among English Reformed theologians of his generation, Perkins alone discussed the atonement at length, and he approached the topic with his characteristic clarity and force.² Perkins was committed to particularism in the atonement, yet in his preaching he directed people to look outside themselves and to Christ for assurance. However, he is accused of pointing people to their sanctification for assurance and only after, if at all, to Christ. Some argue that this practice flowed from his affirmation of “limited atonement.”³ While Perkins did employ the practical syllogism and encour-

¹Ian Breward, “The Significance of William Perkins,” *JRH* 4 (1966): 113–16.

²W. Robert Godfrey, “Reformed Thought on the Extent of the Atonement to 1618,” *WTJ* 37 (1975): 147.

³R. T. Kendall, “The Puritan Modification of Calvin’s Theology,” in *John Calvin, His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 205. “Limited atonement” is an anachronistic and problematic designation. For a nuanced explanation, see Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 76–77.

aged people to look inward for assurance, this was not exclusively his tactic.⁴ To support this conclusion, first, I will explore Perkins's view of the atonement. He maintained a classic reformed understanding but did not often employ the "sufficient for all, but efficient for the elect" distinction, though this was his view. He explicitly affirmed the particularity of redemption, primarily on the basis of Christ's intercession and divine intention. Second, his professed preaching method reveals his aim to offer the promises and comforts of the gospel to wounded consciences. Third, and most significant for Perkins's vindication in this case, he often pointed people to Christ for assurance in his sermons, apart from stressing the particularity of Christ's death for them. Perkins remained steadfast to particular redemption and preached assurance by Christ and gospel promises.

Many have accused Perkins of directing the attention of those seeking assurance of their salvation in an inward direction only, in search of signs of sanctification.⁵ They level this charge directly or implicitly through indicting the stream of the Reformed tradition of which Perkins was a part.⁶ This accusation tends to come from those who have dogmatic reasons to polarize Calvin and the later Reformed tradition. Basil Hall asserted that Calvin's followers altered Calvin's own balanced synthesis of complimentary doctrines found in the *Institutes*. He saw William Perkins, Theodore Beza, and Jerome Zanchius as primarily to blame for this distortion of John Calvin.⁷ R. T. Kendall brought the general thesis of pitting Calvin against Calvinists to a head of debate when he traced the doctrine of faith from Calvin to Perkins, then to the Westminster Assembly and concluded that the Westminster divines followed Reformed orthodoxy rather than Calvin himself. He drove a wedge between Calvin and the later Reformed tradition on two counts: one was the extent of the atonement and the other was the ground of assurance.⁸ This "Calvin against the Calvinists" thesis has been undergoing revision for decades. Paul Helm responded to Kendall by showing continuity between Calvin, Perkins, and Westminster. He saw increased precision and a tightening of theology in the later Reformed tradition, but continuity of content.⁹ Richard Muller has devoted much of his impressive corpus to changing this

⁴The practical syllogism was a line of reasoning, which included a major premise of God's promise, a minor premise of personal testimony, with the application of the promise of salvation as the conclusion. The major premise normally centered on sanctification or a desire to repent and believe. For example, the reasoning often went that God promises salvation to those who desire to repent and believe, if one has such a desire, then one can have confidence in the application of that promise. For more on the practical syllogism, see Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Lang, 1991), 113–14. Assurance was a crucial question for both Perkins and his hearers and readers. For this reason, his sermons and treatises are often dominated by the topic. See Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Cape, 1967), 434–35.

⁵R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); Robert Letham, "Faith and Assurance in Early Calvinism: A Model of Continuity and Diversity," in *Later Calvinism* (Kirkville: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994): 355–84.

⁶R. N. Frost, *Richard Sibbes God's Spreading Goodness* (Vancouver: Cor Deo, 2012); M. Charles Bell, *Calvin and Scottish Theology: The Doctrine of Assurance* (Edinburgh: Handsel, 1985).

⁷Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. G. E. Duffield, Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology 1 (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay, 1966), 20–29.

⁸Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 2.

⁹Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982). See also Andrew A. Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2012); Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009);

discussion entirely, arguing that "the Reformed tradition is a diverse and variegated movement not suitably described as founded solely on the thought of John Calvin or as either a derivation or a deviation from Calvin."¹⁰ Muller and those influenced by him see development in the Reformed tradition rather than strict continuity or discontinuity.¹¹

Few are as clear in their criticism of Reformed orthodoxy in general and Perkins in particular as Kendall. He asserts that like Theodore Beza, Perkins "pointed men to their sanctification" if they doubted their election. Beza and Perkins "could not point people directly to Christ because Christ did not die for all; Christ died only for the elect."¹² He intensifies his claim by alleging that for Perkins, "the practical syllogism became the ground of assurance. Perkins did not point people to Christ but to this reflection of oneself." This was "an enterprise in subjectivism and introspection. Never did Perkins direct people to Christ before they satisfied the demands of the practical syllogism first."¹³ Assertions like this derive from assumptions about what Perkins must have done as a result of his view of the atonement. Proponents of such positions have overstated their case and failed to account for what Perkins actually did in practice.

While Perkins affirmed a definite redemption, particular in the intention of God and application, this did not stop him from pointing doubters to Christ and to the promises of the gospel for assurance.¹⁴ He used the practical syllogism to encourage doubters and would point them inward in search of signs of sanctification or tokens of the Spirit, but again, this does not account for the totality of his practice. There are those who have taken issue with such comprehensive claims, but both sides of this debate have a common tendency to amass evidence from Perkins's various treatises that deal overtly with the problem of assurance.¹⁵ This focus has been helpful because Perkins wrote so much and in such a

Willem J. van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2011); Shawn D. Wright, *Our Sovereign Refuge: The Pastoral Theology of Theodore Beza* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2004).

¹⁰Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 9. See also Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008); idem, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); idem, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); idem, *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹¹Carl R. Trueman, "The Reception of Calvin: Historical Considerations," *Church History and Religious Culture* 91 (2011): 20–21.

¹²Kendall, "The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," 205. Beza did not hold to the same understanding of the extent of the atonement. He preferred to do away with the sufficient and efficient distinction. See Godfrey, "Reformed Thought on the Extent of the Atonement to 1618," 141–42.

¹³Kendall, "The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," 208.

¹⁴Roger Nicole argues that Calvin shared this view of redemption. See "John Calvin's View of the Extent of the Atonement," *WTJ* 47 (1985): 197–225

¹⁵Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*, 106–15; Paul R. Schaefer, *The Spiritual Brotherhood: Cambridge Puritans and the Nature of Christian Piety*, Reformed Historical-Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 56–59 and 92–97; Mark R. Shaw, "Drama in the Meeting House: The Concept of Conversion in the Theology of William Perkins," *WTJ* 45 (1983): 50–65. Treatises on conscience by Perkins include *Whether a Man be in the Estate of Damnation, or in the Estate of Grace; A Case of Conscience; A Discourse of Conscience; A Graine of a*

sophisticated way on the topic, but little has been done by way of looking at Perkins's actual practice in preaching. I intend to help fill this gap with what follows.

1. Perkins's Understanding of the Atonement

Perkins articulated his thoughts on the atonement over the course of the final decade of the sixteenth century.¹⁶ He gives the doctrine sustained attention in three important works. The first Latin edition of *A Golden Chaine*, deemed his magnum opus, was published in 1590. *An Exposition of the Symbole*, Perkins's explanation of the Apostles Creed and the closest he came to a systematic theology, came out in 1595. *A Christian and Plaine Treatise of Predestination*, originally in Latin, went through its first printing in 1598. While Perkins addressed the topic in other writings, these represent a systematic articulation over a significant breadth of time. An analysis of these works will provide a meaningful sketch of Perkins's view of the atonement.

1.1. A Golden Chaine

Perkins wrote *A Golden Chaine* to explain salvation as a work of God from beginning to end; one link in this chain is the work of Christ. When this treatise is mistaken for a systematic theology it largely distorts the purpose and misrepresents the genre.¹⁷ The work is a practical or pastoral analysis of the order of salvation.¹⁸ Perkins was not trying to rob people of the possibility of assurance; in fact, he was laying the foundation for the opposite effect.¹⁹ He defines theology as the science of living blessedly forever, after which he briefly discusses God and then spends the rest of the work treating the work of God in salvation.²⁰ For Perkins, the atonement must be considered in light of God's sovereign choice in electing individuals unto salvation and the understanding that the goal of both salvation and reprobation is the glory of God.²¹

Perkins describes the atonement in terms of Christ's satisfaction and intercession, under the heading of Christ's office of priest. He says "Christ is a full propitiation to his Father for the Elect."²² He

Mustardseed. All are included in volume one of William Perkins, *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the University of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London: John Legatt, 1616–18).

¹⁶ Godfrey, "Reformed Thought on the Extent of the Atonement to 1618," 147.

¹⁷ See, e.g., Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," 29–30.

¹⁸ Richard A. Muller, "Perkins' A Golden Chaine: Predestinarian System or Schematized Ordo Salutis?," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 9 (1978): 68–81. Muller not only explains the nature of Perkins's work, but compares and contrasts it with Beza's *Tabula*. He concludes that the primary difference is Perkins's christocentrism.

¹⁹ Perkins actually addresses assurance directly in this treatise several times. Toward the end of his discussion of salvation he deals with the problem of doubt. He argues that the spirit stirs up faith and increases it and that the remedy to doubt is beholding, not faith itself, but the object of faith, which is Christ. See Perkins, *Workes*, 1:87. Then, after his discussion of reprobation, describing the application of predestination, he concludes that the elect are made sure of their election first by the testimony of the Spirit and second by sanctification. See *ibid.*, 1:113.

²⁰ Perkins, *Workes*, 1:11.

²¹ H. C. Porter, *Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), 297.

²² Perkins, *Workes*, 1:27. When quoting Perkins I use the modern lower case "s" and switch the letters "u" and "v" to reflect modern spelling. Otherwise, spelling and grammar follows the 1616–18 edition.

satisfied God's anger for the offense of man through his perfect obedience to the will of God according to his humanity, and according to his divinity there was added a special merit and efficacy to that obedience. The satisfaction includes both his passion and his fulfilling the law. His passion is that "by which, he having undergone the punishment of sinne, satisfied Gods iustice, and appeased his anger for the sinnes of the faithfull."²³ After describing all of the things that Christ underwent, Perkins highlights five circumstances of his passion. These include (1) the agony experienced in the garden, made visible through the sweating of blood, caused by conflicting desires of obedience and avoidance of the wrath of God, (2) the sacrifice, "which is an action of Christ offering himselfe to God the Father as a ransome for the sinnes of the elect," (3) the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice, (4) humanity's sin imputed to Christ, the Father accounting him as a transgressor and translating the burden of humanity's sin to his shoulders, and (5) his humiliation, consisting in his making himself of no repute with respect to his divinity and his becoming "by the law accursed for us," part of which was death.²⁴

Perkins carries on the theme of particularity in his discussion of the second aspect of Christ's atonement, intercession. He claims Christ's priestly role as intercessor is his being "an advocate & intreater of God the father for the faithful."²⁵ This intercession is made according to both natures. In his humanity he appears before the Father in heaven, "desiring the salvation of the Elect."²⁶ According to his deity he applies the merit of his death and makes requests "by his holy spirit, in the hearts of the Elect, with sighes unspeakable."²⁷ Christ's intercession is such that all who are justified by his merits are kept by it. This intercessory work "preserveth the elect in covering their continuall flips, infirmities, and imperfect actions."²⁸ Christ not only saves, but he keeps people just and makes their works acceptable unto God.

Perkins does not use particular language alone, but is comfortable using biblical categories that seem to be universal. In discussing Christ's satisfaction, he says "God powred upon him, being thus innocent, such a sea of his wrath, as was equivalent to the sinnes of the whole world."²⁹ He goes on to quote 1 Timothy 2:6, immediately following a statement of Christ's passion as a perfect ransom for the sins of the elect, and concludes "it was more, that Christ the onely begotten Sonne of God, yea, God himselfe, for a small while should beare the curse of the lawe, then if the whole world should have suffered eternal punishment."³⁰ However, he is quick to combat a universal understanding of the atonement. He perceives that if Christ were reconciler of all people, making satisfaction for the sins of all people, it would follow that the sins of all are blotted out. Because this is not the case, Perkins sees the esteem of Christ's mercy measured not by how many receive it, but in its efficacy and dignity. In response to passages that speak of the benefits of Christ being for "all" or the "world," he sees the

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 1:28.

²⁵ Ibid., 129.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 1:28.

³⁰ Ibid., 1:29.

referents of such categories as “all kinds” or the “elect of many nations.”³¹ In this work, Perkins embodies the tension he observed in Scripture.

1.2. An Exposition of the Symbole

An Exposition of the Symbole is Perkins’s systematic, extensive comment on the Apostles’ Creed.³² He discusses the doctrine of the atonement within the larger context of the person and work of Christ, which accounts for largest section of the exposition. Perkins argues that Christ is only the savior of his people, the elect. If he were the savior of all people, he would have made satisfaction to God’s justice for everyone’s sins. God’s justice being fully satisfied, he would not be able to righteously condemn anyone. All people would be blessed, because satisfaction and pardon are inseparable. The means of salvation are Christ’s merit and his efficacy. His merit is in his obedience to the law and the satisfaction made by his passion. This freed his people from death and reconciled them to God. His efficacy is that he gives his Spirit to apply his merit to his people.³³ This concept of Christ’s effectual sacrifice supports particularity. The fruit of Christ’s sacrifice is concrete. It removes all sin from the believer, both original and actual. It justifies the sinner before God and purges the conscience from dead works. Finally, it procures liberty to enter into heaven. These results are not made possibilities through Christ’s sacrifice, but are effectually accomplished.³⁴

Perkins refutes a conditional decree based on universal election, redemption, and vocation, but is not opposed to biblical categories and language in describing Christ’s atonement. Again, his doctrine of redemption must be understood in light of his view of God’s sovereignty in salvation. It is simply not an option that Christ died for all people, because he does not intercede universally. Christ cannot die for those who are condemned; this would be an assault upon the justice of God. Perkins asserts that “universal Redemption of all and every man, as well the damned as the elect, and that effectually, we renounce, as having neither footing in Scripture, nor in the writings of any ancient and orthodoxe divine, for many hundred yeares after Christ, his words not depraved and mistaken.”³⁵ Just before this conclusion, however, he concedes the idea of universal redemption, universal pertaining to universality among the elect. He is very careful to guard the value of Christ and his sacrifice. He says that the “passion is to bee ascribed to the whole person of Christ God and man: and from the dignity of the person which suffered, ariseth the dignitie and excellencie of the passion.”³⁶ His dignity is so great that Christ’s suffering stands in the place of eternal damnation. When “the sonne of God suffered the curse for a short time, it is more then if all men and angels had suffered the same for ever.”³⁷ While refuting universal redemption, he says, “wee graunt that Christs death is *sufficient* to save many thousand worlds:

³¹ Ibid., 1:108–9.

³² In his discussion of predestination, Perkins explicitly addresses assurance. Here he recommends one not try to determine election objectively, but subjectively. He proposes looking inward and using the practical syllogism, which he equates with the testimony of the Spirit with the believer’s spirit. The evidences of election are inward tokens, which include godly sorrow, combat between flesh and Spirit, care to prevent sin, desire for reconciliation, and affection for Christ, and outward fruit, which is new obedience. See Perkins, *Workes*, 1:284–86.

³³ Ibid., 1:187.

³⁴ Ibid., 1:220.

³⁵ Ibid., 1:296–97.

³⁶ Ibid., 1:187.

³⁷ Ibid.

we graunt againe it is every way most *effectuall* in itselfe."³⁸ He proceeds to deny that it is effectual for every individual human being. This denial is founded on the lack of application. Here Perkins employs the traditional scholastic distinction of infinite sufficiency and limited efficacy in an attempt to remain faithful to biblical language.

1.3. Treatise on Predestination

In *A Christian and Plaine Treatise of Predestination*, Perkins provides his most careful articulation of the extent of the atonement. This is also his most academic piece on the subject, providing an extended polemic against Arminianism and drawing from the church fathers to support his positions. Perkins places this discussion in the larger context of the person and work of Christ. Christ as mediator pays the price of redemption, which with respect to merit is infinite.³⁹ However, one must distinguish its merit as either potential or actual. The potential efficacy of the payment is, "whereby the price is in itselfe sufficient to redeeme every one without exception from his sins, albeit there were a thousand worlds of men."⁴⁰ Regarding the actual efficacy, "the price is payd in the counsell of God, and as touching the event, only for those which are elected and predestinated."⁴¹ Perkins's reasoning for this is based on Christ's intercession, for "the Sonne doth not sacrifice for those, for whom he doth not pray."⁴² Intercession and sacrifice are conjoined. Further, on the cross there was a real transaction. Christ bore the sins of his people and "stood in their roome."⁴³ His resurrection attests to the actual absolution of the sins for which he died. Those who die with him are raised with him. For Perkins, this can only be said of the elect. Absolution effectually brings about salvation.

Defending particularity in the intention of God and the infinite sufficiency of Christ's death, Perkins responds to four objections. His contention is that "wee doe very willingly acknowledge that Christ died for all (the Scripture averring so much): but we utterly deny, that he died for *all and every one alike in respect of God*."⁴⁴ The denial is based on the obvious fact that most of humanity does not share in adoption, sanctification, and other aspects of salvation. The first objection is that Scripture affirms that Christ redeemed the world. Perkins's response is that the word "world" in apostolic literature does not mean every person, but rather some from every nation. The next objection is that God wills all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Perkins answers by denying the idea of two wills of God and offers several explanations, including that "all men" means people in the age to come, all people who are saved, or some of all estates and conditions. The third objection is that everyone is bound to believe that Christ effectually redeemed them, which must be true because people are only bound to believe what is true. Perkins shows that what is true according to the intention of God and therefore binding is not always true according to the event.⁴⁵ Everyone is obligated to believe the gospel, but the elect are bound to believe, thereby partaking in election, while the reprobate are without excuse because of their

³⁸ Ibid., 1:296. Emphasis in the original.

³⁹ Porter, *Reformation and Reaction*, 298.

⁴⁰ Perkins, *Workes*, 2:609.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2:621, emphasis in citation.

⁴⁵ E.g., Jonah's message to Nineveh was binding yet not true according to the event, which never took place.

unbelief. The inability of the reprobate to believe is voluntary and cannot be excused, because it is not infused by God, but by birth. The final objection is that the church fathers rejected this understanding of the atonement. Perkins answers that they made the same distinction between universal sufficiency and particular efficacy.⁴⁶ Once again, in this sophisticated and nuanced explanation, Perkins does not avoid the language he finds in the Bible, but qualifies it according to his understanding of the overarching picture of redemption.

1.4. Summary

Through varying degrees of clarity and across multiple genres of writing, Perkins was consistent in his doctrine of the atonement. He did not use the language of “limited” or even “atonement,” preferring to employ categories of redemption and satisfaction. While trying to remain faithful to the language he found in Scripture, he used the traditional distinction of infinite sufficiency and particular efficacy, even if implicitly at times. The particularism he saw in the atonement was based on the intention of God, the application of the benefits, and the intercession of Christ.⁴⁷ Perkins thought it absurd that Christ would die for those whom God had not elected, to whom he would not apply the benefits of salvation, or for whom Christ would not intercede. He also resisted any attempt to limit the sufficiency of Christ’s death. Perkins was unwavering in his affirmation of the infinite value of Christ’s satisfaction based on the infinite dignity of his person. However, it would be unfair to dismiss the accusation against Perkins as a matter of semantics. Even if Perkins’s view of Christ’s work does not fit into the anachronistic category of “limited atonement,” he explicitly and regularly denied a universal and conditional conception of the atonement. Therefore, some charge him with being unable to consistently point people outside of themselves, namely, to Christ and the promises of the gospel, for assurance of salvation, as it would be impossible to determine objectively whether one was among the number for whom Christ died. Moreover, based on this presupposition, he is indicted for not pointing people outside of themselves for assurance in practice.⁴⁸ Whether or not he could consistently hold his formulation of the atonement and point doubters to Christ for assurance is a dogmatic question beyond the scope of this study, which must be referred to theologians and the fields of systematic and applied theology. In practice, he did direct troubled consciences to the promises of the gospel in his preaching.

⁴⁶ Perkins, *Workes*, 2:621–25.

⁴⁷ Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 38–43. This is contrary to those who give predestination primacy in interpreting Perkins’s particularism. See Dewey D. Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 55–61.

⁴⁸ Kendall (“The Puritan Modification of Calvin’s Theology,” 205, 208) asserts that Perkins “could not point people directly to Christ because Christ did not die for all” and that “never did Perkins direct people to Christ before they satisfied the demands of the practical syllogism first.”

2. Perkins's Express Method of Preaching Assurance

In *The Arte of Prophesying*, Perkins lays out his hermeneutical and homiletical principles.⁴⁹ He defines preaching as speech "pertaining to the worship of God, & to the salvation of our neighbor."⁵⁰ Integral to the task of preachers is skillful application. Part of Perkins's project is pointing out that there are different kinds of hearers. His direction for reaching three of these categories of hearers provides insight into his express method for preaching to those troubled by lack of assurance.

Perkins sees the preacher as addressing those who have already been humbled, and he sees churches as made up of both believers and unbelievers. First, to those who are in a state of full humility, one should proclaim faith and repentance and offer the comforts of the gospel. Second, churches consist of diverse people, so the preacher must assume that he is speaking to both sincere Christians and nonbelievers. Perkins sees the role of the pastor as proclaimer of both law and gospel. Likewise, the Old Testament prophets denounced the wicked, speaking judgment and destruction upon them, while at the same time promising deliverance to those who repented. When individuals fall into despair, they must be helped to hear the voice of the gospel applied to them.⁵¹ In either the case of humility or despair, Perkins directs pastors to point people to the promises of the gospel, even to offer and apply them.

Those who have fallen back occupy another category of hearer. By those who have fallen back, Perkins means those who in part fall from the state of grace in either faith or obedience. To those who fail to apprehend Christ, i.e., those in desperation, the remedy must be applied from the gospel. There are five evangelical meditations to offer and frequently impress: (1) sin is pardonable; (2) the promises of grace are to all who believe; (3) the very will to believe is faith; (4) sin does not abolish grace, but rather illustrates it; (5) all the works of God are done by contrary means. The second aspect of the remedy applied to those who have fallen back is to encourage them to stir up the faith that has lain dormant, namely, to reassure themselves of forgiveness and earnestly pray. Those who are afflicted in conscience should be pointed first to the promises of the gospel and then to action.⁵²

While Perkins is not as forward with his method of preaching assurance as one might hope, he does leave the reader several patterns or principles. First, the preacher should only point those hardened or in need of instruction to the law. Perkins recommends that those in a state of humility or despair be pointed to the gospel. He does not advocate that afflicted consciences look to their humility, despair, works, sanctification, or the fact that they are under conviction for relief or hope. Whether they are believers or unbelievers, those in such a state are to look to Christ, whose work is described in the gospel, in repentance and faith. Second, Perkins assigns the preacher the task of determining if the humility is godly, in the case of those already humbled, and deciding if the individual is in a state of grace, in the

⁴⁹ Perkins's method is threefold: interpretation, analysis, and application. Interpretation begins with grammar, rhetoric, and logical analysis. The goal is to bring out the one, full and natural sense of the text. The means, or key considerations, are the analogy of faith, the context of the passage, and the comparison with other passages. The analysis or "resolution" is the drawing out of the passage various doctrines. These doctrines are then applied. The key for application is determining whether the passage is law or gospel. Law points out sin and gospel teaches what is to be done or believed. Perkins articulates seven spiritual conditions or ways of applying. This sophisticated breakdown allows application to be specific and pointed. See Ian Breward, introduction to William Perkins, *The Work of William Perkins*, ed. Ian Breward (Abingdon: Sutton Courtenay, 1970), 102.

⁵⁰ Perkins, *Workes*, 2:646.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2:667–68.

⁵² *Ibid.*

case of the fallen. It must be noted that this task is given to the preacher as pastor and counselor, who is to mention nothing about it to the humbled or fallen individual. Additionally, Perkins did not give this advice in light of the extent of the atonement, but with the intention of keeping preachers from offering cheap grace. He understood grace to be free, but conditioned upon repentance and faith. Perkins's proposed method of preaching to afflicted consciences was not to point them exclusively inward. Not only did he recommend that preachers point people outside of themselves and to the gospel, he modeled such practice in his own preaching.

3. Perkins's Preaching of Assurance

Perkins's preaching was the most extensive and endearing part of his ministry. He was known for powerful preaching and remembered for it long after his death.⁵³ He served as lecturer at Great St. Andrew's Church in Cambridge for almost twenty years, from 1584 until his death in 1602.⁵⁴ Not all of his sermons survive, but a large number of them do.⁵⁵ By looking at select sermons, which demonstrate that Perkins pointed people outside of themselves for assurance—sermons from Matthew, Galatians, Hebrews, and Revelation—we will have a representative sample of the breadth of Perkins's preaching ministry.⁵⁶

3.1. Matthew

While commenting on Matthew 4:3,⁵⁷ Perkins argues that people are able to gain assurance from outside themselves, from the word of God. He sees one of the applications of this verse as moving people to labor for assurance of adoption. Part of this is having "our consciences assured out of Gods word."⁵⁸ Perkins understands 2 Peter 1:10 as first speaking of the assurance sealed upon the heart by God, which then leads to transformation. When Satan tempts one to doubt, every foundation will fail

⁵³ Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans: Containing a Biographical Account of Those Divines Who Distinguished Themselves in the Cause of Religious Liberty, from the Reformation under Queen Elizabeth, to the Act of Uniformity in 1662* (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), 130; John Brown, *Puritan Preaching in England: A Study of Past and Present*, Lyman Beecher Lectures 1899 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1900), 72.

⁵⁴ Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 471.

⁵⁵ See Perkins, *Workes*, for his surviving sermons. These include expositions of Zeph 2:1–2, Matt 4, Matt 5–7, Gal 1–5, Heb 11, Jude, and Rev 1–3.

⁵⁶ The sermons dealt with in what follows were intentionally selected from a range of the collections of Perkins's expositions and because they explicitly address the issue of assurance. The list is by no means exhaustive. Perkins does often point doubters to observe their hearts and lives for assurance. In his discussion of Gal 4:6, he calls the practical syllogism the testimony of the Holy Spirit and walks his audience through how to apply it, both in terms of belief and sanctification. See Perkins, *Workes*, 2:278. While expounding Matt 5:6, he points doubters to their displeasure with doubt and sin and desire to believe and be reconciled and says these are counted by God as faith. In this instance, however, he explicitly denies universal grace as a ground of comfort and offers instead the promise of God that those who desire righteousness will find it. See *ibid.*, 3:10–11.

⁵⁷ "Then came to him the Tempter, and said, If thou be the Sonne of God, command that these stones may be made bread" (*ibid.*, 3:379), Perkins's own translation. All subsequent Scripture references will be his translation.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:382.

except "that assurance onely which is rightly founded upon the word of God."⁵⁹ Perkins concludes by explicitly affirming the possibility of assurance.⁶⁰ He says, "this is the undoubted truth of God, that a man in this life may ordinarily be resolved and assured of his salvation."⁶¹ There is no disclaimer about sanctification or the necessity of inward tokens of the Spirit in this application, but simply that people are first to look to God's word in the battle against the temptation to doubt.

Perkins comforts those who are struggling with unbelief by directing them to the object of their faith in his exposition of Matthew 6:30.⁶² He does distinguish between measures or degrees of faith. The greatest degree is full assurance, but there is also weak faith, which is often mingled with doubt. Any degree of true faith is saving according to Perkins. He argues "that no man is saved by his faith, because it is perfect without doubting; but because thereby he laieth hold on Gods mercy in Christ."⁶³ So if weak faith does this imperfectly and without the comfort accompanied by strong faith, doubting or unbelief cannot condemn it, because the deciding factor in salvation is the laying hold of God's mercy in Christ. The Christian is still to endeavor to come to full assurance of faith, but the foundation of such an endeavor is not one's weak faith, but God's mercy.

3.2. Galatians

In his discussion of Galatians 1:15–17,⁶⁴ Perkins offers assurance by bringing the doubter's attention to God's golden chain of salvation. In looking at the efficient causes in Paul's conversion, Perkins deduces the order and dependence of the causes of salvation. The order is election, vocation, obedience, and everlasting life. Perkins uses Paul's chain to combat the error "which beginnes our salvation, in the prevision of mans faith, & good works." Works of sanctification take last place and because salvation is founded upon the vocation of God, it "is more sure, then the whole frame of heaven and earth."⁶⁵ Another use of this chain is that by observing it, "we may attaine to the assurance of our election."⁶⁶ If God calls someone and he responds, election to everlasting life is assured, "because this order is (as it

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ See David Hoyle, *Reformation and Religious Identity in Cambridge, 1590–1644* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2007), 99. He understands Perkins's overall position on the subject to be that Christian assurance is real assurance and that it will not fail the elect.

⁶¹ Perkins, *Workes*, 3:382. This contradicts those that claim Perkins was unable to offer true assurance to the ordinary believer because of his understanding of temporary faith and ineffectual calling. See Kendall, "The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," 205.

⁶² "Wherefore if God so cloath the grasse of the field. Which is today, and tomorrow is cast into the oven: shall he not doe much more unto you, O ye of little faith?" (Perkins, *Workes*, 3:184). Note that the page numbers for Perkins's sermons on Matt 5–7 are independent of the rest of volume three.

⁶³ Ibid., 3:185.

⁶⁴ "But when it pleased God (which had separated me from my mothers wombe, and called me by his grace.) To reveale his Sonne in me (or to me) that I should preach him among the Gentiles, immediately I communicated not with flesh and blood. Neither came I to Hurusalem, to them which were Apostles before me, but I went into Arabia, and turned againe to Damascus" (ibid. 2:176).

⁶⁵ Perkins, *Workes*, 2:176. For a helpful, but brief discussion of Perkins's understanding of grace, faith, and works in justification more generally, see Paul R. Schaefer, "Protestant 'Scholasticism' at Elizabethan Cambridge: William Perkins and a Reformed Theology of the Heart," in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 156–61.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2:177.

were) a golden chaine, in which all the linkes are inseperably united.”⁶⁷ So the only way that assurance is even possible is that it has for its foundation God’s election. Election is made apparent by the chain of salvation, of which there is never even one link present without the whole.⁶⁸ This is a promise found in the gospel of God’s grace; the calling is according to the sovereign will of God, not human apprehension.

3.3. Hebrews

From Hebrews 11:1,⁶⁹ Perkins argues that faith gives such an assurance of things that are hoped for, but unseen, that they seem present to the believer. Among things hoped for, yet unseen, are everlasting life and glorification. Perkins defines saving faith as “a special perswasion wrought by the holy Ghost in the heart of the those that are effectually called, concerning their reconciliation and salvation by Christ.” This faith has the power to give being to the promises of salvation in the heart and a sense of real possession of them. The result, not the ground of this reality, is a sensation that “overwhelmeth the feeling of a worldly miserie.”⁷⁰ Perkins interprets the idea of faith as evidence to mean “faith so convinceth the mind, understanding, and iudgment, as that it cannot but must needs, yea it compelleth it by force of reasons unanswerable, to beleeeve the promises of God certainly.”⁷¹ Perkins claims that faith itself, not only by arguments grounded upon the word and promises of God, makes eternal life a reality in the believer’s mind.⁷² He is aware of times when God takes away the feeling of his favor. When one feels nothing but wrath, when reason would call for doubt and provide no hope in despair, the recourse is to “call to minde Gods mercifull promises, and his auncient former love; and cast thy selfe upon that love, though thou canst not feele it.”⁷³ Perkins does not direct those who have every reason to despair to their past works or present sanctification, but to the promises and love of God.

Perkins picks up the idea that faith is best shown when there is no cause for belief in his comments on Hebrews 11:29.⁷⁴ There are times when both one’s conscience and Satan will charge the soul with being damned; in this state of total despair, one must simply believe. Believing at such a time “is a wonderfull hard thing, and a miracle of miracles.”⁷⁵ Faith of the smallest degree, even if hidden, “will make him to hope, and waite for mercie and life at the hands of Almightye God.”⁷⁶ Despite one’s circumstances or feelings, Perkins argues that one must look to the mercy and promises of God and simply trust them. In a state of despair, looking for signs of grace within will bring no comfort or assurance.⁷⁷

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 268.

⁶⁹ “Now Faith is the ground of things which are hoped for: and the evidence of things not seene” (Perkins, *Workes*, 3:2).

⁷⁰ Perkins, *Workes*, 3:2.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² This is contrary to those who see a sharp distinction between faith and assurance in Perkins’s thought, such as Kendall, “The Puritan Modification of Calvin’s Theology,” 209.

⁷³ Perkins, *Workes*, 3:4.

⁷⁴ “By faith, they passed through the redde Sea, as by drie land: which, when the Egyptians had assaied to doe, they were drowned” (ibid., 3:157).

⁷⁵ Ibid., 3:158.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ John Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 175–76.

3.4. Revelation

Perkins appeals to Christ's prophetic office in his discussion of assurance from Revelation 1:5.⁷⁸ Part of this prophetic office is "to assure men in their consciences, that the promises of the Gospel, with all the benefits therein contained, as Iustification, Sanctification, and life eternall, which in the word be generally expounded, doe belong unto them particularly."⁷⁹ This assurance is wrought by the word preached, for by this, coupled with the inward work of the Spirit, the promises are applied specifically. The Spirit testifies with the believer's spirit that God has adopted him. Perkins concludes by stating strongly that those who deny that men can be assured of their salvation by faith are "wicked and damnable."⁸⁰ For Perkins, to deny that assurance is possible through the word and Spirit, apart from works, is to deny Christ's prophetic office.

4. Conclusion

Perkins held a nuanced view of particularism with regard to the atonement, but did not exclusively point people inward or to their sanctification for assurance in his preaching. His view of the atonement can be summed up in the traditional formula, "sufficient for all, efficient for the elect," but this does not capture his view entirely. More specifically, he saw Christ's death as particularly redeeming the elect because of the intention of God, the application of the benefits of redemption, and Christ's intercession.⁸¹ So he affirmed that Christ's death was effectual for the elect only. Despite the fact that human beings cannot comprehend the mind of God or uncover the mystery of predestination, Perkins held that assurance of salvation was possible. He did point people inward in search of tokens of the Spirit and to examine their lives for sanctification. However, both his professed preaching method and actual preaching practice demonstrate that this was not the only balm for afflicted consciences that Perkins used. Perkins often pointed people outside of themselves, to the promises of the gospel and to Christ, to remedy their doubt.

Perkins's actual practice of preaching is impossible to reconcile with the claim of Kendall and other proponents of the "Calvin against the Calvinists" thesis that the decree of election, which determined the efficacy of Christ's sacrifice, dominated his applied theology. Perkins would have disagreed with caricatures of his teaching that declare "the task of those who counted themselves to be elect, or those who were striving to discover their election, was to demonstrate their election through obedience."⁸² For Perkins, this was neither exclusively nor primarily their task. It may be true that "if changed behaviors are the object of the soul's gaze, faith raises no higher than those behaviors," and that "this makes human

⁷⁸ "And from Iesus Christ, which is a faithful Witsnesse, and first begotten of the dead, and Lord over the kings of the earth: unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sinnes in his owne blood" (Perkins, *Workes*, 3:219).

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:220.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ See Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 106. Here he observes that sixteenth and seventeenth century debates over the atonement were within the language of Dort. Sufficiency, efficiency, and universal proclamation of salvation to all who believe were agreed upon. He asserts, "the debates were concerned with the divine intentionality underlying the sufficiency or infinite value of Christ's death and its relation to the universal of indiscriminate preaching of the gospel."

⁸² Ronald N. Frost, "Richard Sibbes' Theology of Grace and the Division of English Reformed Theology" (PhD thesis, University of London, 1996), 173.

behaviors the actual objects of faith,” but Perkins did not put behavior alone before doubting souls.⁸³ He consistently directed their gaze toward Christ and the promises of the gospel made available through his death.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 159.

PASTORAL PENSÉES

The Duty of a Pastor: John Owen on Feeding the Flock by Diligent Preaching of the Word

— Matthew Barrett —

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Abstract: In the twenty-first century the pastor is expected to fulfill an incredible amount of ministry responsibilities. Too often, unfortunately, the proclamation of God's Word becomes just another duty in an unending list of ministry assignments. In order to counter such a trend, this article looks to the Puritan, John Owen, who reminds pastors that their first priority is to "preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:2). After a brief exploration of Owen's own pastoral ministry, we will examine a sermon Owen gave at an ordination service in 1682 in order to understand why, exactly, Owen believes everything hinges upon gospel-proclamation. In doing so, we will probe four pillars Owen affirms as indispensable to such a task, as well as identify the specific tools Owen says every pastor must possess and utilize. Whether one is a brand new pastor, a seasoned shepherd, or a professor training others for future ministry, Owen sheds invaluable light upon the most important undertaking in the church, namely, feeding the people of God the Word of God.

"The first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word." —John Owen¹

"He is no pastor who doth not feed his flock." —John Owen²

¹"The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government," in *The Church and the Bible*, The Works of John Owen 16, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 74.

²"The Duty of a Pastor," in *Sermons to the Church*, The Works of John Owen 9, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 453.

What is the main duty of a pastor? In the twenty-first century the answer to such a question will no doubt intimidate any future pastor from entering the ministry. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge capture such a point precisely when they describe what is expected from a contemporary pastor:

The modern pastor is expected to be a preacher, counselor, administrator, PR guru, fund-raiser and hand-holder. Depending upon the size of the church he serves, he may have to be an expert on youth, . . . something of an accountant, janitor, evangelist, small groups expert, and excellent chair of committees, a team player and a transparent leader.³

Truth be told, many graduates from seminary enter into churches where this is exactly what is expected of them. Sadly, too often proclamation takes a back seat. The modern pastor is so busy marketing the church's identity, raising funds for the next building campaign, or overseeing business meetings that preaching the Scriptures becomes secondary or, even worse, tertiary in its importance. In the midst of these many responsibilities, Paul's pastoral imperative to Timothy sounds foreign and archaic: "preach the Word" (2 Tim 4:2).

Yet, one is hard pressed to find a pastoral responsibility in the NT that takes priority over the preaching of God's Word (e.g., 1 Tim 4:13–16). When we compare the NT emphasis on the proclamation of the Word to twenty-first century priorities in ministry, it must be asked, "Has preaching become just another duty in a long list of ministry chores?" Pastor Brian Croft believes this is the danger pastors face today: "Time to study in preparation for preaching often gets squeezed out of a pastor's busy schedule."⁴ However, the NT provides the modern pastor with an entirely different agenda: "Amid the competing demands of ministry, the study and preaching of the word of God should be the *central* focus of every faithful pastor's ministry."⁵

Croft's admonition certainly reiterates wisdom from the past. In light of the serious temptation the modern pastor faces to downplay the proclamation of Scripture in his ministry, the voice of an old Puritan pastor-theologian like John Owen can be insightful and refreshingly biblical.⁶ Puritans like Owen asked the same question ("What is the main duty of a pastor?"), but came to a very different kind of answer than many do today. For Owen, the main duty of a pastor is to preach God's Word to God's people, as a shepherd feeding his sheep. For Owen, there was no higher priority (or privilege) in ministry.

Allegedly, John Owen once said to King Charles II, "Could I possess the tinker's abilities, please your majesty, I would gladly relinquish all my learning."⁷ This "tinker" was none other than John Bunyan, author of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Though it is difficult to verify the historicity of this anecdote, if it is true it displays not only Owen's high regard for those whom God had gifted in preaching his Word, but also Owen's great esteem for the proclamation of the Word of God. What higher calling could one receive

³D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge, *Letters Along the Way* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 127.

⁴Brian Croft, *The Pastor's Ministry: Biblical Priorities for Faithful Shepherds* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 37.

⁵Ibid., emphasis added.

⁶For a full study of Owen's theology, see Matthew Barrett and Michael A. G. Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

⁷John Asty, *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of John Owen* (London: 1721), 3.

than preaching the Word of God to the people of God? Indeed, Owen was willing to trade all of his education and academic regalia to possess the ability Bunyan had in proclaiming the gospel.

What many don't know, however, is that Owen himself was a preacher whose sermons influenced many for the cause of Christ. Few have drawn attention to Owen as a preacher. In part, this may be because in our own day we are captivated by Owen's many theological and polemical writings. However, if we are to have a balanced picture of Owen, we must not ignore his sermons or his ability to exposit Scripture. Therefore, in what follows not only will we fill a lacuna by bringing to the surface Owen's pastoral role, but we will specifically focus on what Owen believed was the "principal duty" of a pastor.⁸ As we proceed, we will (1) begin with a brief introduction to Owen's pastoral pilgrimage in order to bear witness to his credibility in ministry, and then (2) turn to examine Owen's own advice at an ordination service as to the principal duty of a pastor. In doing so, we intend to sit as pupils at the feet of Owen as he prunes our view of the pastor's priorities and reconfigures them around the proclamation of the gospel.

1. Owen as Pastor

Owen first began what would become a very prolific career by penning his famous *A Display of Arminianism* (1643), dedicating it to the Committee of Religion (appointed by the House of Lords). As a result, they bestowed on Owen the living of Fordham in Essex.⁹ Owen's own perception of his preaching was all too meager. On one occasion Owen even confessed that his ministry did not seem to benefit many in his congregation.¹⁰ However, in putting Owen's own self-estimation aside, history tells us a different story. It seems that Owen thought too low of himself as a preacher. As Ferguson observes, Owen's preaching "drew influential congregations, and throughout the course of his life was helpful to many people."¹¹ Ferguson attributes Owen's despair to the people he was preaching to and pastoring each week. "Perhaps overawed by the learning and spiritual insight of their young pastor, the people mistakenly felt that it was unnecessary to express their appreciation of his ministry. Perhaps they appreciated him too little."¹² Regardless, Owen was very much a pastor concerned with teaching God's Word to those entrusted to his care. For example, Owen himself says he recognized that his people were

⁸ To understand Owen's pastoral context better, see Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011); Ryan Kelly, "Reformed or Reforming? John Owen and the Complexity of Theological Codification for Mid-Seventeenth-Century England," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), 3–30; Robert W. Oliver, "John Owen—His Life and Times," in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2002), 9–39; Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973); Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 1–19.

⁹ Terminologically, it is most accurate to say (as I have above) that a "living" was bestowed on Owen, not a congregation. However, a "living" was being a pastor of a congregation. Nevertheless, terminologically a distinction needs to be made. One should note, though, that the church register reads, "John Owen, *Pastor*. Ann.Dom. July 16:1643." Ferguson observes that Owen's signature as "Pastor" shows he was already "opposed to the outward formalities of contemporary ministerial life" and had a "dislike of the expression 'parson.'" Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 3. Also see Toon, *God's Statesman*, 17.

¹⁰ See W. Orme, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Religious Connexions of John Owen, D.D.* (London: T. Hamilton, 1820), 118; Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 3.

¹¹ Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*

“grossly ignorant” of the person of Christ and the gospel.¹³ Therefore, says Owen, he set out to write a lesser catechism for the children and a greater catechism for the adults.¹⁴ According to Owen’s own testimony, therefore, he was motivated, at least in part, by a desire to teach the truths of the Scriptures to those under his ministry.¹⁵

As Owen’s ministry at Fordham ended in 1646, Owen was asked to preach before Parliament on April 29. This opportunity would be just one of many others to come in which Owen’s preaching would have a great influence not only on the local body of Christ, but also on those in political office, governing the country. Later in 1646 Owen would pastor St. Peter’s in Coggeshall, a congregation of over two thousand people, and a distinguished position at that. Owen’s reputation as a preacher was beginning to blossom.

In June of 1648 Colchester was inundated by General Fairfax, and Owen was to preach before the soldiers, his text being Habakkuk 3:1–9. Shortly thereafter, on January 30, 1649, King Charles I was sentenced to death for treason and executed, sending the country into an entirely new direction. In the midst of these massive political waves, Owen preached to them the day after the execution of Charles I. His text being Jeremiah 15:19–20, Owen’s sermon has been called by Peter Toon a most “appropriate message in a difficult hour.”¹⁶ And as Ferguson notes, it was “one of the most signal tokens of the esteem in which he was already held that, although young in years, the Commons should look to him on such an occasion for spiritual wisdom and guidance.”¹⁷

In April Owen would preach to Parliament once again but this time he caught the attention of Oliver Cromwell and a relationship between the two was formed, one that resulted in Owen becoming Cromwell’s chaplain.¹⁸ Cromwell relieved Owen of his pastoral duties at Coggeshall and he traveled with Cromwell to Ireland as chaplain from August 1649 to February 1650. War left its scarring mark on Owen no doubt. Ferguson describes the horror: “The holocaust stirred something within the depths of Owen’s soul, and on his return he pleaded with Parliament for mercy to follow this justice.”¹⁹ In a sermon titled “The Steadfastness of the Promises, and the Sinfulness of Staggering,” Owen passionately exhorted his audience: “How is it that Jesus Christ is in Ireland only as a lion staining all his garments with the blood of his enemies; and none to hold him out as a lamb sprinkled with his own blood to his friends.”²⁰

¹³ See Owen’s dedicatory letter in “The Lesser Catechism,” in *The Glory of Christ*, The Works of John Owen 1, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 465. Such a point is also made by Sinclair Ferguson, “John Owen and the Person of Christ,” in *John Owen*, ed. Robert Oliver, 76–77.

¹⁴ John Owen, “Two Short Catechisms,” in *The Glory of Christ*, The Works of John Owen 1, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 463–94.

¹⁵ Ferguson, “John Owen and the Person of Christ,” 76.

¹⁶ Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 34.

¹⁷ Also see Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 6.

¹⁸ See John Owen, “The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth: A Sermon Preached to the Honourable House of Commons in Parliament Assembled, April 19, 1649,” in *Sermons to the Church*, The Works of John Owen 8, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 243–79.

¹⁹ Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 8.

²⁰ John Owen, “The Steadfastness of the Promises, and the Sinfulness of Staggering,” in *Sermons to the Nation*, The Works of John Owen 8, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 235. To clarify, historians believe the date 1649 (listed previously) is incorrect. The correct date should be 1650 for the sermon assumes Owen has returned from Ireland. See the “Prefatory Note” on 208.

Owen goes on to say that the “tears and cries of the inhabitants of Dublin after the manifestations of Christ are ever in my view.” Owen longed that there be one “gospel preacher for every walled town in the English possession in Ireland.” One can sense the crackling in Owen’s own voice and the tears in his own eyes as he trembles at the thought that “the people perish for want of knowledge.”²¹ What they need, pleads Owen, is Jesus Christ and him crucified. Therefore, says Owen, be faithful in this: “do your utmost for the preaching of the gospel in Ireland.”²² This sermon not only demonstrates the power of Owen’s preaching in light of his contemporary context, but his ability to keep the gospel of Jesus Christ first priority even in the midst of the most difficult and sometimes horrific of circumstances. While he was certainly a man in allegiance to his motherland, nevertheless, for Owen, the gospel transcends race, language, and any other barrier, penetrating to Jew and Gentile, yes, even England and Ireland alike, calling all men to repentance and faith in Christ as Savior.

In 1650 Owen was appointed to Whitehall, but one year later he became Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, only later to be appointed Vice-Chancellor of the University (1652). There Owen preached on a consistent basis to young men in their teenage years. He also joined Thomas Goodwin at St. Mary’s on certain Sundays, and it was there that his works *On the Mortification of Sin* and *On Temptation* began to evolve.

Everything would change, however, with the fluidity of the political climate. After the death of Cromwell in 1658, certain Puritan leaders were afraid Britain might be falling into anarchy. Therefore, they asked the exiled Charles II to return to England as her monarch. That same year, Owen moved to Stadhampton where he pastored. However, events would spiral downward with the Great Ejection of 1662. Over two thousand Puritans were exiled from their churches on St. Bartholomew’s Day, August 24. Nevertheless, despite the Five Mile Act (1665), which prohibited pastors from returning to their congregations, Owen continued to preach God’s Word even with the threat of the government hanging over his head. They could take away his congregation—which undoubtedly would have been a dagger in Owen’s heart, removing this shepherd from his sheep—but Owen would not give up God’s Word, nor the exposition of it to those who were starving.²³ Owen had plenty of offers—for example, he was invited to pastor John Cotton’s First Congregational Church in Boston, and the presidency of Harvard College tempted him as well. But Owen remained where he was, persevering in the midst of these difficult times, continuing to preach the gospel whenever he was able, and seeking the ecclesiastical liberty he so desired.

2. The Principal Duty of a Pastor

Like other Puritan pastors, Owen was both an advocate of national righteousness and guardian of the souls entrusted to him. But first and foremost, he was a preacher. He was a preacher because he rightly knew that through the Holy Scriptures God had brought the Church into existence in the first century, kindling faith in the hearts of men and women (see, e.g., Jas 1:18 and 1 Pet 1:22–25), and that it was through this self-same Word that God had brought about the Reformation, which earlier Puritans,

²¹ *Ibid.*, 235.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ As Ferguson observes, “The spoiling of his goods he might allow, and even do so with a measure of joy that he was counted worthy to suffer for the sake of the gospel; but the spoiling of the flock was his greatest sorrow, and one beyond recompense” (*John Owen on the Christian Life*, 15).

of the 1560s and 1570s, could remember first-hand. And it was by the Word that God enabled men and women to live lives that glorified him, a key theme in Owen's thought. Therefore, says Owen, the "first and principal duty of a pastor is to feed the flock by diligent preaching of the word."²⁴

The Reformation had involved a major shift of emphasis in the cultivation of Christian spirituality. Medieval Roman Catholicism had majored on symbols and images as the means for cultivating spirituality. The Reformation, coming as it did hard on the heels of the invention of the printing press, turned back to the biblical emphasis on "words" as the primary vehicle of cultivating spirituality, both spoken words and written words, and, in particular, the words of the Bible. As a faithful child of the Reformation, Owen simply continued this Word-centeredness. It involved him in conflict, but he contended for his convictions and stood fast. Thus, when men like William Laud, who was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633 and eventually executed in 1645, began to emphasize that the Lord's Supper was due greater reverence than the Word,²⁵ Owen knew that he had to stand against him and assert the priority of the Word in preaching.²⁶

An excellent avenue into Owen's thinking about preaching can be found in a sermon he preached on September 8, 1682, at an ordination service, which is entitled "The Duty of a Pastor."²⁷ The sermon text was Jeremiah 3:15, "And I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding." The reason this sermon stands out above the rest is that in it Owen instructs this young preacher on the nature of preaching itself. Owen's aim in this sermon is not to give an exhaustive list of duties a pastor must attend to. Rather, as he himself explains at the beginning of his sermon, his purpose is simply to lay down those duties that are especially incumbent upon the pastor, and first place among them is the proclamation of the Word of God. These duties get at the very essence of what it means to be a pastor who faithfully shepherds the sheep Christ has purchased.

3. Feed the Gospel to the Sheep

What is the duty of the pastor? First and foremost, the pastor's duty is to feed the sheep the gospel of Jesus Christ. Appealing to Jeremiah 3:15, Owen recognizes that the pastor is to feed the sheep "knowledge and understanding." "This feeding," says Owen, "is by preaching of the gospel." "He is no pastor who doth not feed his flock."²⁸ Here Owen echoes the Reformers before him. Not only is it the

²⁴ John Owen, "The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government," in *The Church and the Bible*, The Works of John Owen 16, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 74.

²⁵ See William Laud, *A Speech Delivered in the Star-Chamber . . . at the Censure, of John Bastwick, Henry Burton, & William Prinn; Concerning pretended Innovations in the Church*, The Works of William Laud VI/I (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1857), 57.

²⁶ That they did not thereby neglect the importance of the Table can be seen from Owen's "Sacramental Discourses," in *Sermons to the Church*, The Works of John Owen 9, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 517–622.

²⁷ In *Sermons to the Church*, The Works of John Owen 9, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 452–62. Many of the principles in this sermon can also be found in Owen's "The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government," 1–210. Unfortunately, we know very little about the exact historical context in which Owen penned his 1682 sermon. We do know, however, that this sermon is a little less than one year prior to his death. The closer Owen came to death the harder it was for him to preach given his severe asthma. It is hard to determine if severe health problems plagued Owen when he delivered this ordination sermon.

²⁸ Owen, "The Duty of a Pastor," 453.

case that a church is no longer a true church if it abandons the gospel, but so also is a pastor no pastor at all if he fails to feed his people the gospel.

Owen sees support for such a bold claim in Acts 6:4, where the apostles are described as those committed to giving themselves “continually to the word.” The pastor, as Paul tells us in 1 Timothy 5:17, is one who labors “in the word and doctrine,” in order to “make all things subservient to this work of preaching and instructing the church.”²⁹ Likewise, Paul, speaking of his own preaching and the design behind it, says in Colossians 1:28 that we preach Christ, “warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus”³⁰ How, asks Owen, does Paul do this? The answer comes in verse 29: “Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.” Paul, in other words, strives as a man running a race, or as a wrestler who is fighting to win the championship. And he does so by the power of God. It is God, it is his mighty power, that is at work in Paul. Owen captures the spirit of Paul in his paraphrase: “I labour diligently, I strive as in a race, I wrestle for victory,—by the mighty in-working power of Christ working in me; and that with great power.”³¹

Owen lists several ways the pastor can, through preaching, feed his congregation both knowledge and understanding. First, spiritual wisdom comes through knowing the gospel. If one knows and understands the mysteries of the gospel, not only will he, as a pastor, find spiritual wisdom, but he will then be able to feed the gospel to those he is ministering to so that they also may mature and grow in godliness. As Owen advises, “There is spiritual wisdom in understanding the mysteries of the gospel, that we may be able to declare the whole counsel of God, and the riches and treasures of the grace of Christ, unto the souls of men” (cf. Acts 20:27; 1 Cor 2:1–4; Eph 3:7–9).³² Owen perceives how the early church grew and thrived because they had “great insight into spiritual things, and into the mysteries of the gospel.”³³ Certainly Paul desires this to be true of all, for he prays that “the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:17–18).

Owen acknowledges, however, what a difficult task this is. But everything, he insists, must begin with the pastor himself. “If there be not some degree of eminency in themselves, how shall we lead on such persons as these to perfection?” Stated otherwise, if the pastor is not ignited by the gospel, impassioned by the gospel, transformed by the gospel, then he will be of no help to those under his care. Therefore, we “must labour ourselves to have a thorough knowledge of these mysteries, or we shall be useless to a great part of the church.”³⁴ We, as pastors, are required to have a spiritual wisdom and understanding of the mysteries of the gospel.

Second, authority comes from the Spirit. There must be authority in one’s teaching and preaching, otherwise the sheep will disregard one’s instruction and, as a result, fail to grow in both knowledge and

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Unless otherwise noted, Scripture passages are taken from Owen’s own quotations in his sermon, drawn from the KJV.

³¹ Owen, “The Duty of a Pastor,” 454.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

understanding. Such authority, however, is not in the external, but is to be found within, specifically through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Or as Owen explains, it matters not if one has the proper “office.” What is needed is “unction.” To be clear, Owen is not ranting against formal education or offices in the church. He understands their importance and benefitted from them firsthand. However, what Owen is warning against is the assumption that merely obtaining a certain office or title is sufficient for authority and effectiveness in ministry. In contrast, Owen believes something more is needed, namely, the work of the Holy Spirit within the preacher. “The scribes had an outward call to teach in the church,” Owen remarks, “but they had no unction, no anointing, that could evidence they had the Holy Ghost in his gifts and graces.”³⁵ Or consider Christ: “Christ had no outward call; but he had an unction,—he had a full unction of the Holy Ghost in his gifts and graces, for the preaching of the gospel.”³⁶ No doubt this is evident in Mark 9:28 and Matthew 7:29, where the scribes question Jesus, asking him on what authority he does these things. His authority, however, is not in an external or formal office, nor is it by the power of man; rather, it is an authority from God himself, one that the scribes lacked.

Therefore, insists Owen, pastors must preach with this unction from God. It is an unction that comes not from ourselves, but from the Holy Spirit. One only has as much authority, says Owen, as that which is given to him by God.³⁷ He can preach the Word all day long, but if it not be accompanied by the Spirit, and if it not be through the Spirit, it is done in vain.

Third, one must preach, but first and foremost preach to himself. Should one fail to feel the conviction of his own message, how can he then expect his congregation to be moved by the knowledge he has impressed upon them? The pastor, therefore, must have a genuine, true, and real experience of the “power” of those things he is preaching to others. “I think, truly, that no man preaches that sermon well to others that doth not first preach it to his own heart.”³⁸ The pastor who does not first feed and digest the message he is preaching by applying it in his own life, so that he is convicted of its truth, may be, as far as he knows, poisoning his people. Unless “he finds the power of it in his own heart, he cannot have any ground of confidence that it will have power in the hearts of others.”³⁹

Be not mistaken, Owen warns, this takes work! It is far easier, says Owen, for the pastor to preach with his head, and not with his heart. “To bring our heads to preach, is but to fill our minds and memories with some notions of truth, of our own or other men, and speak them out to give satisfaction to ourselves and others: this is very easy.” On the other hand, says Owen, “to bring our hearts to preach, is to be transformed into the power of these truths; or to find the power of them, both before, in fashioning our minds and hearts, and in delivering of them, that we may have benefit; and to be acted with zeal for God and compassion to the souls of men.”⁴⁰

Fourth, one must have skill to divide God’s Word rightly. Given what has been said so far, one might think that all one needs is the Spirit, as if everything else is irrelevant. Not true. Owen does not ignore the significance and necessity of the ordinary. Yes, without unction one’s preaching has lost its authority. But without the practical skills of biblical interpretation, one will easily mislead the people of

³⁵ Ibid. 454–55.

³⁶ Ibid. 455.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

God. Therefore, “practical wisdom” is enormously important. The ability to rightly divide the Word of God keeps the pastor from feeding his people in such a way that they are malnourished. God’s people may begin with milk, but it is not long until they need meat. The pastor who fails to utilize the tools of biblical interpretation will have no meat to offer his hungry congregation.

Fifth, one must know his flock. One can have the skills needed to divide God’s Word, but if one does not know how to then apply what was gleaned from God’s Word to his congregation, in all of its uniqueness, then those skills have done him little good. Effective application, in other words, is the true test as to whether or not a proper knowledge of God’s Word has pierced the hearts of the people. However, such piercing application cannot take effect if the shepherd is unfamiliar with the sheep under his care. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that a pastor knows and considers the state of his flock. “He who hath not the state of his flock continually in his eye, and in his mind, in his work of preaching, fights uncertainly, as a man beating the air.”⁴¹ The pastor is to know his people’s temptations. He is to be familiar with those areas where they are spiritually decaying and withering. The pastor who does not consider these things, warns Owen, “never preaches aright unto them.”⁴²

Sixth, one must preach with a zeal for God’s glory and a compassion for God’s people. In other words, the pastor’s focus must be both vertical and horizontal. It is vertical in that his mind is consumed with the glory of God. It is horizontal in that his love is directed towards the health of those God has entrusted to him. Should he do the former, the latter should naturally follow. In other words, if he is truly concerned with God’s glory, then he will be occupied with the state and progress of God’s people. A pastor’s fixed gaze upon the glory of God, therefore, is instrumental to the continual advancement of God’s people in their knowledge of the gospel and love for one another.

Everything Owen has said so far has had a primary focus on the pastor as preacher. It would be a mistake to think, however, that none of this involves the congregation. The congregation’s concern should be for her pastor(s). These six principles should be on her mind, and she should seek in every way to encourage her pastor in them. One way the church can do this, says Owen, is through prayer. Not only does the pastor desperately need to be on his knees in prayer on a daily basis, but the people to whom he is ministering need to be doing likewise. “We have great need to pray for ourselves, and that you should pray for us. Pray for your ministers.”⁴³

4. Pray Continually

Could there be anything more important than the minister meeting with God on a daily basis if he is going to lead God’s people in the right direction? It is the duty of the pastor to be in continual prayer for the churches over which Christ hath made them overseers.⁴⁴ Owen gives four reasons why the pastor ought to pray and another three things he ought to pray for. First, no “man can have any evidence in his own soul that he doth conscientiously perform any ministerial duty towards his flock, who doth not continually pray for them.”⁴⁵ If he does not pray for those he preaches to, having a “spirit

⁴¹ Ibid., 456.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

of prayer” continually for them at all times, then he can have no assurance that he is truly a minister, shepherding the flock, nor a confidence that his work is “accepted with God.”⁴⁶ Second, when the pastor prays for his people, he also blesses his people. Therefore, a pastor should pray often for his people, seeking to bless them with his prayers. Third, the pastor who does not pray for his people does not or at least cannot maintain a love for his people. “He will meet with so many provocations, imprudences, and miscarriages, that nothing can keep up his heart with inflamed love towards them, but by praying for them continually.”⁴⁷ Prayer, says Owen, will “conquer all prejudices.”⁴⁸ Fourth, it is through praying for the people that God teaches the pastor what he should preach to them. When the pastor prays he is considering the condition of his people and in doing so God teaches the ministers of the gospel how to apply his Word to the flock. “The more we pray for our people,” says Owen, “the better shall we be instructed what to preach to them.” This is why the apostles, in Acts 6:4, “gave themselves to prayer and the word.”⁴⁹

So we have seen, through Owen’s lenses, why the pastor must pray. But the question remains: What shall we pray for? Owen gives three things every pastor should pray for. First, a pastor is to pray that the Word preached would be successful in the hearts of those preached to. “We are to pray for the success of the word unto all the ends of it; and that is, for all the ends of living unto God,—for direction in duty, for instruction in the truth, for growth in grace, for all things whereby we may come to the enjoyment of God.”⁵⁰ If we do not, then we “sow seed at random, which will not succeed merely by our sowing.”⁵¹ Using the analogy of a farmer and his field, Owen paints a picture: The farmer breaks up the fallow ground and then sprinkles his seeds. But unless rain comes down the seed will not grow! And if it does not grow, then the farmer has no crop. Likewise, though the pastor puts his hands to work, casting the seed of the gospel, if the “showers of the Spirit” do not come, then there will be no growth or profit. “Therefore, let us pray that a blessing might be upon the word.”⁵²

Second, a pastor is to pray that Christ would be present whenever his people meet together. Indeed, everything hinges upon whether or not Christ is truly with us. The efficacy of the gospel itself, exclaims Owen, entirely depends upon the presence of Christ.⁵³ And the pastor has every reason to believe Christ will be present with his people, for Christ himself, just prior to ascending into heaven, promised he would be with us and would not leave us or forsake us (Matt 28:20). Not only should we trust this promise, but we should eagerly pray in faith that Christ would be present whenever we assemble together. Therefore, one of the main duties of a pastor is to consistently pray and ask Christ that he accompany his people. To be clear, warns Owen, the efficacy of ordinances like preaching and prayer do not depend upon anything in us, whether it be our gifts or even our fervency. Instead, they entirely depend upon the presence

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 457.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

of Christ and the power he brings. In that light, Owen commands, “Make this your business, to pray mightily for it in the congregation, to make all these effectual.”⁵⁴

Third, the pastor is to pray always with a mindset towards the state and condition of the church. A good minister is one who not only knows the mysteries of the gospel, but how to “conduct the best of the congregation unto salvation.”⁵⁵ He knows their weakness and their temptations.⁵⁶ He knows when they are experiencing adversity or prosperity.⁵⁷ He knows, in other words, how things are with his people. Therefore, when he prays he knows what to pray for. He knows what things he must direct his attention to when he prays. In doing so, says Owen, the praying pastor is one who trusts that “Christ himself will come in to recover them who are fallen, to establish them who stand, to heal them who do backslide, to strengthen them who are tempted, to encourage them who are running and pressing forward to perfection, to relieve them who are disconsolate and in the dark.”⁵⁸

5. Preserve the Truth and the Gospel

Thus far we have seen that Owen presents teaching one’s congregation the gospel and praying for those who have been entrusted to one’s care as two pillars of pastoral ministry. The third pillar is to protect, defend, and preserve the truth and the doctrine of the gospel against all opposition. In reality, Owen clarifies, this is the responsibility of the entire church and everyone in the church. However, it is something that must especially characterize pastors and teachers.

Owen turns immediately to Paul’s instructions on the importance of guarding the gospel. He says, “O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust” (1 Tim 6:20), and that “good thing that is committed to thee keep by the Holy Ghost, which dwelleth in us.” This charge, says Owen, is given to all ministers and it is not to be taken lightly.⁵⁹ Like Timothy, pastors are to keep the truth, namely, the glorious gospel that God has committed to their trust (1 Tim 1:11). “The church is the ground and pillar of truth, to hold up and declare the truth, in and by its ministers.”⁶⁰

The pastor, says Owen, is like a shield, defending the truth against all who oppose it. And he is in good company, since church history reminds us that God has preserved his gospel against countless threats through the ministers that have come before us. Otherwise, the truth of the gospel would have been lost long ago.

There are several requirements, though, to being a shield that blocks the gospel from those who would seek to destroy it with their fiery darts. To begin with, the pastor must clearly apprehend what doctrinal truths he is supposed to defend. “Truth may be lost by weakness as well as by wickedness: if we have not a full apprehension of the truth, and that upon its own proper grounds and principles, we shall

⁵⁴ Ibid., 457–58.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 458.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

never be able to defend it.”⁶¹ Owen reminds pastors everywhere that one attains this clear apprehension through persistent prayer and study. These two disciplines enable us to “stop the mouth of gainsayers.”⁶²

Additionally, the pastor must love God’s truth; otherwise, he will never “contend earnestly for the truth,” but will instead compromise the truth rather than guard it. Much like preaching, in order to defend the truth, there must be a “sense and experience of it in our own souls.”⁶³ Owen insightfully observes that truth is lost, not because there is a lack of “light, knowledge, and ability,” but because there is a lack of love.⁶⁴

Moreover, the pastor must always be on guard against the temptation within himself toward novel ideas. Owen warns, “Let us take heed in ourselves of any inclination to novel opinions, especially in, or about, or against such points of faith as those wherein they who are gone before us and are fallen asleep found life, comfort, and power.”⁶⁵ Owen knows that though certain ideas may seem new and attractive, they can be poisonous, not only undermining right doctrine, but also the very life and soul of the believer. And lest the pastor point his finger at his people, he should keep in mind that often times false doctrine begins with the pastor and trickles down to the people.

Owen gives several examples from his own day: “Who would have thought that we should have come to an indifferency as to the doctrine of justification, and quarrel and dispute about the interest of works in justification; about general redemption, which takes off the efficacy of the redeeming work of Christ; and about the perseverance of the saints; when these were the soul and life of them who are gone before us, who found the power and comfort of them?”⁶⁶ Owen goes on to warn that unless we find great comfort in these doctrines, as so many did before us, then we will not fight for them, defend them, and maintain them.⁶⁷ Therefore, Owen admonishes, let us “be zealous and watchful over any thing that should arise in our congregations,” and not merely in our congregations, but within us, as pastors and

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 459.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Owen points to doctrines he believes are lost and not loved in his own day: “What were these doctrines?—the doctrines of eternal predestination, effectual conversion to God, and the obduration of wicked reprobates by the providence of God. These truths are not lost for want of skill, but for want of love. We scarce hear one word of them; we are almost ashamed to mention them in the church; and he that doth it will be sure to expose himself to public obloquy and scorn: but we must not be ashamed of truth. Formerly we could not meet with a godly minister, but the error of Arminianism was looked upon by him as the ruin and poison of the souls of men: such did tremble at it,—wrote and disputed against it. But now it is not so; the doctrine of the gospel is owned still, though little taken notice of by some among ourselves, the love of it being greatly decayed,—the sense and power of it almost lost. But we have got no ground by it; we are not more holy, more fruitful, than we were in the preaching those doctrines, and attending diligently unto them.” *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ “I have lived,” Owen reminisces, “to see great alterations in the godly ministers of the nation, both as to zeal for and value of those important truths that were as the life of the Reformation; and the doctrine of free-will condemned in a pray, bound up in the end of your Bibles. But now it is grown an indifferent thing; and the horrible corruptions we suffer to be introduced in the doctrine of justification have weakened all the vitals of religion.” *Ibid.*, 460.

ministers of the gospel.⁶⁸ “Take heed lest there be men arising from ourselves speaking perverse things; which is to make way for grievous wolves to break in and tear and rend the flock.”⁶⁹

Finally, if a pastor is to recognize opposition to the gospel, skill and ability are required. The pastor must train himself to be able to identify and oppose adversaries who deceive the church with their cunning sophistry. How is a pastor to guard the church from such adversaries? He is to guard the church through persistent prayer and watchfulness, always protecting the gospel from those who would seek to distort, twist, and undermine its beauty and power in the church.⁷⁰

6. Labor Diligently for the Conversion of Souls

The fourth, and final, pillar of pastoral ministry is laboring for the salvation of the lost. The preacher, in other words, is the means “of calling and gathering the elect in all ages; and this they principally are to do by their ministry.”⁷¹

Owen makes a fascinating observation at this point. For the apostles, preaching the gospel to the lost was their “chief work.”⁷² Unlike most ministers today, they were taking the gospel outside of Jerusalem and to the nations for the very first time. Once lost souls were converted, however, they also did the work of teaching believers, making disciples as Christ commanded, bringing them into the ministry of the church. Nevertheless, at this stage in redemptive-history their chief priority always remained the proclamation of the gospel to the unevangelized. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:17, “Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel.” It is not that baptism was unimportant to Paul. Indeed, it was very important. But Paul’s principal work, as a missionary to the Gentiles, was to proclaim the gospel to those who had not heard (see Rom 10:14–17).⁷³

However, Owen argues that the reverse order is true of most ministers living after the apostolic era, for now that the gospel has gone out it is necessary that they devote themselves to specific congregations. As Owen explains, “The first object of our ministry is the church,—to build up and edify the church.”⁷⁴ Does this entail, then, that pastors are to neglect preaching that aims to convert souls? Not at all. That work remains essential, even if the pastor’s primary role is to care for the sheep God has entrusted to him.⁷⁵ So both the building up of believers and the proclamation of the gospel to the lost are important. However, Owen argues that the former is primary for the pastor as he is responsible for the flock God has put under his care.⁷⁶

⁶⁸ Ibid. Owen goes on, and seems to speak from experience: “Bring one man into the congregation who hath a by-opinion, and he shall make more stir about it than all the rest of the congregation in building up one another in their most holy faith.”

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. Owen does not deny that there are other means used by God to convert the lost.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 461.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Owen believes that preaching to the lost does take place when the pastor preaches to his own congregation, as there are typically unbelievers mixed in. However, he also encourages congregations to allow their

7. *God Strengthen Us*

At the end of his sermon, Owen laments that he does not have enough time to explore other pastoral duties, such as administering baptism and the Lord's Supper, or comforting the consciences of believers, the latter of which he says requires great "prudence, purity, condescension, and patience."⁷⁷ Certainly one would benefit from mining the depths of Owen's other sermons and theological treatises to see these emphases. Nonetheless, his sermon "The Duty of a Pastor" provides a foundation that is built upon and centered on the importance of gospel-proclamation in the life of the pastor.

Unmistakably, Owen exemplified the priority of gospel-proclamation in his own pastoral ministry. As seen already, Owen desperately longed to see Christ in Ireland not as a lion, but as a sacrificial lamb. Such a heart for gospel-proclamation, however, did not appear for the very first time when Owen set foot in Ireland. Owen's intercession on behalf of lost souls in Ireland was rooted in his past ministry within the church, where he shepherded souls week after week, long before he caught Cromwell's eye. Therefore, whether he was a lowly country pastor or Vice-Chancellor, Owen's first concern was to faithfully proclaim the Scriptures for the glory of God and the edification of the saints. By looking at his pastoral ministry as well as his sermons, it is apparent that Owen did not seek human applause (something too often characteristic of preachers today), nor was he, to borrow a phrase from J. C. Ryle, a "jellyfish preacher" (i.e., changing his doctrine wherever the political and ecclesiastical winds blew).⁷⁸ Rather, Owen was a redwood, with roots firmly planted in the ground, digging themselves deep into the soil of timeless biblical truth.⁷⁹ And because his foundation lay in Christ, his branches were able to stretch long and far, providing shade and protection for those who found Jesus to be their greatest treasure.

Therefore, I leave you, pastor, with Owen's words of exhortation by which he encouraged both the pastor being ordained, and the congregation under his care: "Who is sufficient for these things? Pray, pray for us; and God strengthen us, and our brother, who hath been called this day to the work! It may not be unuseful to him and me, to be mindful of these things, and to beg the assistance of our brethren."⁸⁰

pastor a season to preach elsewhere for the purpose of converting souls to Christ.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 462.

⁷⁸ By "jellyfish preacher" I am referring to those preachers who have no appetite for doctrine or dogmatic conclusions. As J. C. Ryle said of preachers in his own day, "They have no definite opinions . . . they are so afraid of 'extreme views' that they have no views at all." As quoted in J. I. Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness: The Witness of J. C. Ryle* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 72–73.

⁷⁹ I am taking this illustration from J. I. Packer, though Packer has in mind the height of the gigantic redwoods, whereas I am referring to their deep roots. J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990) 11–12.

⁸⁰ Owen, "The Duty of a Pastor," 462.

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— OLD TESTAMENT —

D. A. Carson, ed. *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 2912 pp. £33.34/\$49.99.

The English language has an embarrassing wealth of study Bibles. As I hold the recently-released 2015 *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* in my hands, the first question is: Why? Why another study Bible? In answering this question, we find not only justification for another study Bible—but particular recognition for the unique contributions of this fine work.

As most readers of *Themelios* are aware, virtually all modern Bible translations are constantly being updated. The NLT and ESV, for example, have been incorporating a host of committee-vetted changes every decade or so.

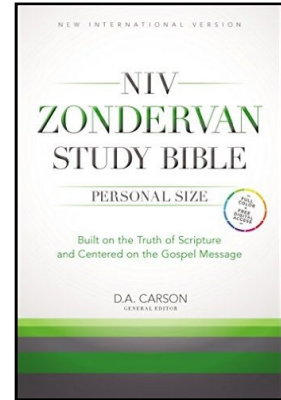
After the release of the full version (OT and NT) of the NIV in 1978, the translation gradually acquired dominance in the evangelical world. The 1984 update gained near *Textus Receptus* status in some circles. (And thus Zondervan provoked significant ire when the 1984 NIV translation recently went out of print!) The *NIV Study Bible* (1985, with subsequent revisions) also came to command a prominent, if not preeminent, place on the shelves of serious evangelical students, pastors, and scholars.

With the 2011 major revision of the NIV, the notes from the older NIV study Bible no longer sufficiently matched the text. Indeed, the text revision alone justifies a new study Bible (not a revision) based on the updated NIV text. While some voices have censured the 2011 NIV for its “gender neutral” translation method, additional dialogue has muted much criticism. As Dave Brunn has shown in *One Bible, Many Versions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013), the supposedly erroneous translation techniques which were utilized by the NIV translators (e.g., rendering singular Greek forms as plural English forms) can be found in every major translation, and the actual practices of formal-equivalent Bible translation committees (e.g., NASB) are often broader than their publicized standards. Evangelicals will disagree on the right blend of functional and formal equivalence in a translation, but let us agree to be charitable and humble in that disagreement.

Other justifications for a new study Bible include the need to answer new questions, to provide a platform for the current teachers whom God has raised up for his church, and to make the best use of the most recent technology. We will now briefly consider these three contributions of the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* in succession.

First, new questions about the Bible and its teachings are constantly swirling in academia, the church, and the broader culture. In its study notes, articles, and book introductions, the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* evinces such an attentiveness to current biblical scholarship and societal trends. For example, the note on Gal 2:16 has an accessible explanation of the *pistis christou* (Greek for “faith[fulness] of/ in Christ”) debate. Similarly, the article on a “Biblical-Theological Overview of the Bible” begins by helpfully distinguishing the three current “faces” of biblical theology.

Second, the new study Bible provides an instructional platform for the gifted Bible teachers whom God has raised up for this generation (Eph 4:11). Certainly, at our local congregations, none



of us want to sit in pews and watch videos of sermons from the 1960s. Likewise, in our study Bibles, we want to be instructed and challenged by those gifted individuals whom God has raised up in our day. The list of contributors to the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* is an impressive, gold-standard list of respected evangelical scholars. I note as well the wise and careful inclusion of some scholars whose broader institutions or denominations might have been initially critical of the 2011 revision. Clearly the editors sought to represent accurately the broad swathe of committed, orthodox, evangelical biblical scholarship. D. A. Carson is the General Editor and his name is prominently displayed on both the Bible and in various marketing materials. In emphasizing Carson's name so prominently, Zondervan is in essence holding up a flashing neon sign that says, "In this study Bible, we are committed to having the best of reverent, evangelical, redemptive-historical reflection." Carson is also known for being generally Reformed in his theology, but non-Reformed scholars also are contributors to the work (e.g., John Oswalt of Asbury Theological Seminary).

Third, when the original *NIV Study Bible* came out in 1985, the Internet was, except to military specialists or Al Gore, unknown. Technological advances now allow for greater access and functionality in a study Bible. Each print edition of the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* comes with an access code that allows for free digital access of the entire work in Olive Tree or The Bible Gateway. I, a non-technophile, found accessing the digital materials easy—and anticipate the benefit of being able to view the study Bible on my phone or iPad via the Olive Tree Bible Study App. (The study Bible is also available for additional purchase from Logos Bible Software.) I also see the potential of adapting photos, maps, and other figures into classroom or church presentations.

Some readers of this review are likely thinking, "I already own the *ESV Study Bible* and the *HCSB Study Bible*. Why do I need another study Bible?" Of course, one could equally ask, "I've got Douglas Moo's commentary on Romans. Why do I need Thomas Schreiner's?" While there are several other excellent study Bibles available, the quality of the contributors to the *NIV Zondervan Study Bible* alone warrants its addition to your shelf. Also, the new study Bible intentionally draws from a broad spectrum of evangelical scholars, and it is often helpful to read believing, reverent scholarship outside of one's particular ecclesiological or theological community.

In preparing this review, I read portions from various randomly-selected sections of the Bible—study notes, book introductions, and articles. I found the materials to be consistently well-written, informative, based on good scholarship, and faithful to the biblical text. Illustrations, charts, photos, and maps were both accurate and aesthetically pleasing. Without reservation, I give my enthusiastic endorsement to the 2015 *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*.

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BibleWorks 10. Norfolk, VA: BibleWorks, LLC. \$389.00.

Over the last several decades Bible software has become increasingly sophisticated, so much so that it has become virtually a necessity for the student, teacher, and preacher of the Scriptures. My original choice for Bible software was BibleWorks (BW), and I have kept up with this daily companion of mine through the latest versions as soon as they became available. Any version of BW from version 7 to the current version 10, when used properly, would be a significant aid for anyone who works with the original languages of the Bible. And for seminary students in particular, it can be a means of helping them keep up on Greek and Hebrew after leaving school. As before, the program is lightning fast.



A complete list of new features in version 10 may be found on the BW website (www.bibleworks.com/content/new.html). Some new databases will be especially helpful for students and scholars. The Nestle-Aland 28th edition is included as the most up-to-date edition of the Greek New Testament. For the Old Testament, the new English translation of the Septuagint in the NETS database is an important tool. It translates the Göttingen Septuagint based on critical editions that are superior to the Rahlfs edition, providing the student with improved readings and more comprehensive documentation of textual variants. NETS is already available online, but it is convenient to have it in BW10 where it can be compared directly with Rahlfs.

An exciting new feature for more advanced study in the Hebrew Bible is the color facsimile of the Leningrad Codex. It opens to precisely the verse under study, uses markers to identify where the verses begin on that page in the manuscript, and may be zoomed up to 300% size for closer inspection. Another new feature is a User Lexicon tab that enables one to record notes about individual words in any English version or morphologically tagged Greek or Hebrew database.

For textual study in the Greek New Testament, BW10 now includes a critical apparatus from the Center for New Testament Textual Studies (CNTTS). This apparatus makes it possible to track variants in different manuscripts, even to the point of viewing photographs of some of the manuscripts themselves. The online help videos on “Comparing Versions and Manuscripts” amount to a basic course in New Testament textual criticism.

A few items are no longer included in version 10, most notably the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Barry Beitzel’s *Moody Bible Atlas* has been replaced by the *ESV Concise Bible Atlas* edited by David Barrett and John Currid (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). If upgrading from BW9, activation codes are provided to make these and a few other excluded works available. On the other hand, additional modules in BW10 are available for an extra cost. Notably, the Stuttgart Original Languages [SOL] Module (Old Testament) promises the *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* at no additional cost to the current price of the module (\$149.00). It is unclear whether that means each fascicle will be made available as it appears (several have already appeared, e.g., Proverbs) or only when the entire Hebrew Bible is completed. Either way, the price is a bargain. The SOL module for the New Testament includes the apparatus for the Nestle-Aland 28th edition, and the SOL module for the Old Testament has an apparatus for the current *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

I have been running a scaled-down version of BW10 on an ASUS tablet with Windows 8.1, which I then upgraded to Windows 10. BW10 still works well and looks great on Windows 10. For Mac users, three options are listed on the website for running BW9 or BW10. One of these options, the “native”

mode which does not involve using a Windows virtual machine, involves the tradeoff of no additional cost but slightly limited functionality. When I surveyed my students with Mac computers, one replied that his experience of BW9 is “satisfactory” but does have some issues. BW10 should be an improvement for how it works on a Mac. Limitations are indicated on the website, and BW10 comes with a “30-day money back guarantee.”

The user interface has always seemed reasonably intuitive to me. BW10 has an expanded interface with some icons that are new, but simply moving the mouse pointer over an icon brings up a description of what clicking on it does. A welcome new feature is the ability to select different colors for highlighted text in the “Browse Window” or for search results. More importantly, it is now possible to color-code hits by morphology. For example, every verb that shows up in the results of any search can be assigned its own color, making it stand out clearly.

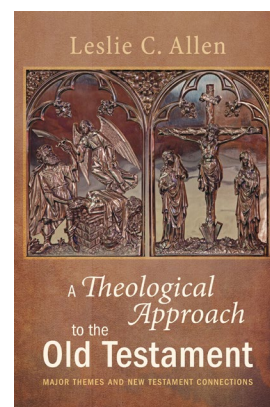
BW10 offers a relatively inexpensive way to make full use of English, Greek, and Hebrew Bibles, along with a plethora of Bibles in other languages. In my experience, the customer service is outstanding and it is easy to get help. In addition to useful help files within the program itself, a whole library of easy-to-follow online help videos (on YouTube) illustrate virtually all aspects of how to use BW10. If even more assistance is needed, email requests are normally answered within a day or two. I highly recommend BW10 as the premier Bible software program for computers running Windows.

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Leslie C. Allen. *A Theological Approach to the Old Testament: Major Themes and New Testament Connections*. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014. 206 pp. £17.00/\$25.00.

Leslie Allen is Senior Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He has published commentaries on Psalms, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Chronicles, and a number of Minor Prophets. Since the present work of biblical theology started as a Doctor of Ministry lecture series presented at Fuller in 2012, it is primarily intended for pastors as an overview of Old Testament theology. He aims to help readers make inter-canonical connections for important OT themes. Each chapter works through the three divisions of the *Tanakh* and seeks to understand the OT like the authors of the NT would have understood it (p. 7).

He organizes the book thematically into nine chapters: (1) an introduction, (2–7) six themes, (8) a theological discussion connecting these themes, and (9) a hermeneutical discussion on bridging from the OT to the NT. Allen’s presentation begins with two major themes, creation and covenant. The first major theme (i.e., creation) corresponds to the subtheme of wisdom. The second major theme (i.e., covenant) has three subthemes: Israel’s religion, the Davidic covenant, and internationalism (i.e., God’s relationship to the nations). This theme-subtheme style of presentation is similar to other recent works, such as R. W. L. Moberly’s *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013) and Robin Routledge’s *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013). Allen argues that



tracing themes across the canon does the most justice to the whole of the OT and allows all genres of text to contribute to the discussion (p. 6). Nevertheless, his thematic approach tends to lack coherence, for though Allen provides a short chapter seeking to unite the major themes, each chapter reads like an independent, topical essay. By way of contrast, Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum offer a more cohesive structure in tracing the redemptive-historical trajectory of the entire Bible (*Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012]). Nevertheless, Allen does provide an accessible overview of the main themes of the OT.

The theological perspective undergirding this presentation stands in the tradition of the canonical approach to biblical theology that is most associated with Brevard Childs. Allen writes in the preface, “The final form of OT literature is the basis of discussion, with a postcritical perspective that accepts moderate historical criticism” (p. ix). Thus, his canonical approach to biblical theology does not hesitate to postulate how the development and redaction of the text may have influenced its theological message. Allen also takes this approach in his OTL commentary on Jeremiah (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), in which he examines the final form of Jeremiah in a manner agreeable to those who use it in religious worship. At the same time, the proposed earlier stages of the text remain important for Allen since the final form is “no less than the sum of its successive parts” (*Jeremiah*, 2). Even as the book of Jeremiah has a rather unique textual history among OT books, Allen makes the questionable decision of taking the same view of the rest of the OT canon in *A Theological Approach*.

Allen’s concluding essay on NT connections should also be approached with caution. He outlines a number of ways in which the NT relates to the OT literature: promise-fulfillment, typology, analogy, and *peshet*. The first three interpretive schemes are commonly advocated by evangelicals and have overlapping characteristics. But Allen’s fourth proposal is more troublesome. The Aramaic term *peshet* simply means “interpretation” (e.g., Dan 2:4; 5:17), but the way in which scholars apply this term to works of the Second Temple period is far from simple. Allen thus describes his use of the term: “OT texts are *given a directly predictive role*, though from an exegetical perspective the texts are talking about something else” (p. 161, italics added). By way of example, Allen’s *peshet* reading of Matt 11:10 understands Jesus investing Mal 3:1 with “a predictive role” concerning John the Baptist, as if the text did not originally have such a role (pp. 161–62). A more conservative reading of such texts sees this text in terms of direct promise-fulfillment or a form of typology (Craig Blomberg, “Matthew,” *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2007], 40). Either of these approaches regards Malachi as setting forth a prophecy or pattern which Jesus asserts is fulfilled in John the Baptist. But Allen is quite forthright in stating, “The NT writers, with their retrospective vision, were able to find much more in OT texts than independent, exegetical study of those texts can discover. . . . [*Peshet*] involved the *direct reinterpretation of OT Scripture in the light of contemporary concerns* and with recourse to congenial textual variants and interpretations” (p. 173, italics added). All commentators certainly agree that Jesus and the NT authors used the OT text in a variety of ways. Contra Allen, however, the inspired NT interpretation of OT texts does not co-opt these texts to fit their contemporary setting (2 Pet 1:20–21).

A Theological Approach to the Old Testament attempts a monumental task for such a short book, namely, presenting major OT themes and their connections to the NT. It accomplishes its first and more modest goal of outlining major OT themes. But as for its second goal of tracing connections to the NT, the book provides only a basic roadmap and some abbreviated examples. Readers will find more help

in this regard in a book like G. K. Beale's *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012).

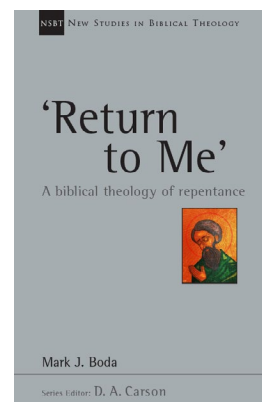
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Mark J. Boda. *'Return to Me' A Biblical Theology of Repentance*. New Studies in Biblical Theology 35. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015. 235 pp. £14.99/\$22.00.

The author, a professor of Old Testament at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario (Canada), takes the reader through the biblical texts concerned with repentance. Briefly defined, repentance refers “foremost to a turn or return to faithful relationship with God from a former state of estrangement” (p. 31). He initially introduces the primary Hebrew and Greek vocabulary for repentance, but notes sensibly that the subject matter is also present in texts where the terminology does not occur. One advantage of this starting point is that, in discussing various texts throughout the canon, he will often indicate some of the Hebrew and Greek vocabulary upon which the English translation is based and readers can gain some sense of the range and frequency of the biblical terminology. His presentation, however, is not a series of word studies. The majority of the chapters in the book deal with a segment of the canon, where relevant texts are identified and then briefly examined. Boda is an accomplished and experienced exegete of texts. Brief and discerning exegesis is the primary means in this volume of “taking a reader through” the text. Chapter 2, for example, concerns the Torah, with thematic and exegetical remarks on texts in Genesis through Deuteronomy. The rest of the Old Testament is subsequently examined in nine chapters. Texts and concepts from the New Testament are examined in two chapters, with a final chapter in the volume titled “Theological Implications of Repentance” (pp. 191–98).

Boda demonstrates that there are various facets to the matter of repentance in the Bible, including behavioral modification, ritual enactment, and inner dispositional change. No one text encompasses all the dimensions of what at its core is a supremely relational concept. He is at his best reflecting on individual texts, identifying nuance and particularity, while also placing them carefully in broader thematic patterns in the canonical witness. He points out, for example, that in the Torah, repentance is particularly associated with the threat of exile for covenant disobedience. In the Former Prophets, he underscores the importance of penitence, and in the Latter Prophets shows that penitence proves inadequate apart from divine initiative in overcoming human failure. In particular, his detailed treatments of God's work on Israel's collective “heart” in Jeremiah and Ezekiel repay careful attention (pp. 79–93).

One of the book's strong points is a summary statement with each chapter, keeping the reader focused on the larger interpretive enterprise while digesting exegetical detail. At the conclusion of his investigations of Old Testament texts, the author provides a summary chapter on repentance in Old Testament theology, using some thematic headings that reappear in a corresponding chapter on repentance in New Testament theology. This is yet another way in which he takes the reader through the biblical text. These summaries map out what he calls “redemptive-historical development” (p. 145) in the canon as well as reasons for seeing continuity of action and purpose in the two Testaments. The



New Testament, he claims, “resonates with the holistic penitential vision of the Old Testament” (p. 182) and in light of climactic redemptive events (i.e., cross and resurrection) assumes the necessity of repentance on the part of those rightly related to God. He also shows that both Testaments have occasions where God’s judgment “disables” human repentance as well as those where God “enables” human repentance (pp. 157–59, 188–89).

As the book’s title implies, the repentance under examination is that of human beings before God. God’s own “repentance” or “relenting” in relating to humans is also part of the biblical tradition (e.g. Jer 18:7–10; Jon 3:6–10). That is, God is subject of the same verbs (e.g., **שוב, נחם**) for a change in action or thought as are human beings. Boda acknowledges this aspect of the topic (p. 31), but chooses not to address it directly. His comments on pp. 26–27 *might* indicate his approach to the matter, and I, for one, would have appreciated more of his thoughts on it.

The author stands broadly in the Reformation tradition of western Christianity and his conclusions are consistent with it. His presentation is not, however, intended to sharpen sectarian debate, but to sharpen humility and trust in God. Consider in closing, for example, these two statements from his concluding chapter, both of which also acknowledge that repentance cannot be dealt with in a formulaic manner:

What is clear is that repentance lies at the core of the gospel message. Repentance is key at the outset of Christian experience with God, but it is also part of the enduring spiritual rhythm of life with the triune God. Repentance is a human act, but according to the biblical witness relies upon divine resources. There is mystery in how this works theologically and psychologically. (p. 192).

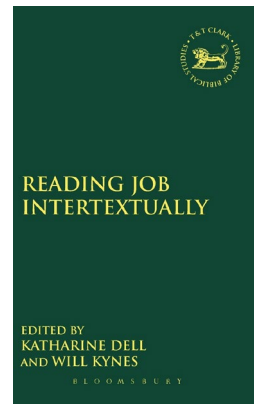
It is also helpful to remember the repentance of Job on behalf of the wisdom tradition that systematized sin, suffering and repentance and foolishly claims the sort of knowledge of good and evil only God possesses. We must know our place before our Creator, a posture of childlike humility in God’s kingdom (Mark 10:13–16) that acknowledges it does not have all the answers (p. 196).

Boda’s book will serve pastors and scholars well in showing that repentance is neither mechanical nor forced upon people in the Bible’s presentation; rather, it springs from a deeply personal encounter between sinful people and a holy God.

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Katharine Dell and Will Kynes, eds. *Reading Job Intertextually*. Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 574. New York: T&T Clark, 2013. xxiii + 344 pp. £80.00/\$150.00.

The book of Job's unique characteristics (e.g., its perplexing conclusion, relative lack of mooring to the biblical timeline, and absence of references to the covenant) can leave the impression that it is an island disconnected from the mainland of the canonical message. This collection of twenty-three essays analyzes Job's intertextual links to other biblical and non-biblical texts based on linguistic and thematic similarities. These intertextual links demonstrate Job's connections to the rest of the OT. While previous studies have investigated aspects of Joban intertextuality (e.g., Yohan Pyeon, *You Have Not Spoken What Is Right About Me: Intertextuality and the Book of Job*, StBL 45 [New York: Peter Lang, 2003]; Will Kynes, *My Psalm Has Turned Into Weeping: Job's Dialogue with the Psalms*, BZAW 437 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012]), this volume supplements such scholarship by broadening the scope to include investigations throughout all of Job, increasing the number of intertexts beyond the OT, and expanding the methods of intertextuality to include linguistic and thematic similarities. As the inaugural volume in a series exploring intertextuality and OT wisdom literature (a similar volume on Ecclesiastes was published in 2014), these essays capably advance Joban studies by bringing fresh attention to some of Job's connections with other biblical and non-biblical texts.



An editorial introduction provides three emphases permeating the collection: (1) highlighting the interpretive value of the intertextual connections rather than simply arguing for a relative date of composition; (2) exploring links inside and outside the OT; and (3) including contributions with different methodologies that treat intertextual links as author-intended (“diachronic”), reader-perceived (“synchronic”), or a middle way incorporating elements of both. After the introduction, John Barton’s opening essay presents an analysis of the relationship between biblical studies and intertextuality. He argues that biblical scholars, whether author- or reader-oriented, have transformed what was intended by Julia Kristeva (and others) as a fundamental *theory* signifying the interconnection of all texts into a *method* for how to read individual texts. While Barton’s essay probes the historical and theoretical foundations of biblical intertextuality broadly, the remaining essays serve as specific intertextual investigations and are divided evenly into four parts: (1) Job in Dialogue with the Pentateuch; (2) Job in Dialogue with the Prophets; (3) Job in Dialogue with the Writings; and (4) Job’s Dialogue beyond the Hebrew Bible. In these sections, each essay considers the way that the book of Job resonates verbally and/or thematically with another text, whether canonical (parts 1–3) or extra-canonical (part 4).

In order to provide some insight into the variety of the aims and methods within the collection, I will highlight one representative essay from each of the four main parts. From part one, Manfred Oeming proposes that Eliphaz (Job 15:7), Zophar (20:4), and Job (31:33) depend on the theological traditions of Genesis 1–3 to make comparisons between Job and Adam in efforts at condemnation (by Eliphaz and Zophar) or self-justification (by Job). Serving as an example from part two, James Nogalski uses a reader-oriented approach to analyze the uses of the word **שׁוּב** (“to return, repent”) in Job 8–10 and Joel 1–2. Nogalski argues that Bildad and Joel reflect the same theological presuppositions (i.e., that calamities imply guilt) which Job challenges. Bildad’s claims are unfounded, whereas historical and canonical evidence corroborates Joel’s position. In part three, Christian Frevel uses lexical links between Psalm 104 and the book of Job to suggest that various characters (i.e., Job, Elihu, and YHWH)

allude to the psalm's language and theology for their own rhetorical purposes. In the final section, Susannah Ticciati integrates historical theology and biblical studies in an essay that considers the way in which Augustine used Job in his disputes with the Pelagians. Ticciati proposes that Augustine's explicit references to Job's words twist his meaning, but that resonances between the theological worlds of Augustine and the book of Job reveal a measure of compatibility leading to a mutually informing understanding of both Augustine and Job.

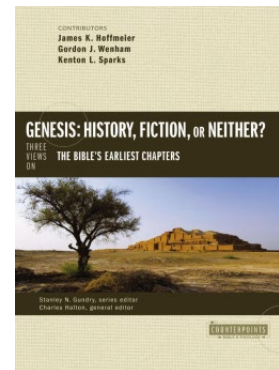
This volume deserves strong commendation. Taken cumulatively, the articles ably demonstrate the interconnections of Job's language and message with other biblical and non-biblical texts. At the same time, the design of the volume as a collection of isolated probes which examines Job's relationship to other texts contains some inherent limitations. One such limitation is the uneven treatment of the various Joban characters (e.g., Elihu's intertextual links are relatively unconsidered compared to Job and the three friends). Additionally, the differing methods of analysis and presuppositions regarding Job (e.g., its compositional history and theological message) mean that some essays are mutually exclusive; this complicates the synthesis of the essays into a holistic account of Joban intertextuality. Yet these limitations do not detract from the quality of the individual essays, nor from the significance of the whole, since the various methodologies allow for a more thorough examination of the topic by reflecting the current diversity in analysis of biblical intertextuality.

In sum, this volume accomplishes its central purpose of bringing much-needed attention to the intertextual links between Job and other texts, so that biblical scholars no longer need to begin by justifying their search for Job's verbal and thematic links with the rest of the canon. Rather, they can move on to scrutinizing the nature and extent of those links for their exegetical and theological significance. Accordingly, those interested either in detailed work on the book of Job or in biblical intertextuality (and especially both!) should benefit from reading this volume.

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Charles Halton, ed. *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither? Three Views on the Bible's Earliest Chapters*. Counterpoints: Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 173 pp. £10.99/\$16.99.

In the last decade the church has witnessed a resurgence of scholarly and pastoral wrestling with the genre and historicity of Genesis 1–11. In this addition to Zondervan's Counterpoints series, seasoned Old Testament scholars James K. Hoffmeier, Gordon J. Wenham, and Kenton L. Sparks debate these issues, with editor Charles Halton providing introductory and concluding comments. Hoffmeier teaches at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois (USA), and argues that Genesis 1–11 is real *history*. Wenham tutors at Trinity College, Bristol (UK), and argues that the Bible's earliest chapters are *neither* pure history nor fiction. Sparks is a professor at Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania (USA), and argues that Genesis 1–11 is *fiction*. Halton teaches theology at Houston Baptist University (USA) and appears to align with Sparks. While this volume will best help learned seminary students and pastors grapple with the issues, every Christian who savors salvation from God's wrath and who affirms the absolute necessity for the



historical, bodily resurrection of the last Adam (1 Cor 15:14, 17) should consider the factual importance of the Bible's earliest chapters, which narrate the first Adam's death-bringing role.

View 1: Genesis 1–11 as History. Known for his expertise in ancient Egyptian history and its intersection with the Bible, Hoffmeier helpfully argues that Genesis 1–11 is a mixture of accurate genealogy and family history that conveys theology (pp. 23–58). Hoffmeier's mastery of the extrabiblical material is evident throughout (see esp. pp. 41–55). He follows Wenham in translating the book's tenfold *toledot* formula "this is the family history of X," and he rightly notes how the repetition of the formula both unifies the book and calls us to read *all* the narratives, including those in Genesis 1–11, as "dealing with real events involving historical figures" (p. 32; cf. p. 58). Although Hoffmeier affirms the need to allow external data to force us to reevaluate our biblical interpretations, he rightly stresses the need to give highest authority to biblical revelation (pp. 140, 142). He properly draws attention to the doctrine of Christ's bodily resurrection as essential, though the world mocks it as foolish (p. 142; cf. Acts 17:32; 1 Cor 1:23), but he then unhelpfully joins Sparks in mocking a belief in a literal six-day creation and young earth, calling it "embarrassing" and "pre-scientific" (pp. 143–44).

Hoffmeier's discussion about the historicity of Genesis reminded me of Kenneth Kitchen's cataloging of the ancient world's five main narrative genres: (a) royal historical texts, (b) (auto)biographical texts, (c) historical legends, (d) purely fictional tales, and (e) tales of mythology (*On the Reliability of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 361–64). In my reading, Hoffmeier's language of "family history" points to biographical texts (b) as the best comparative genre for the book of Genesis as a whole, including the initial eleven chapters. While scholars often liken the extended ages in the linear genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 to those found in ancient king lists, the text does not portray the minority remnant of faithful as kings, so the royal annal (a) is not a good comparison. Like historical legend (c), Genesis 1–11 portrays characters from the distant past in third person through a transmitted text and includes some fantastic features (e.g., a talking serpent). However, the Bible's earliest chapters contain nowhere near the number of extraordinary elements common in legend, and they stand as biographies (b) of named family members in recognized geographical contexts (so too Hoffmeier, pp. 32–35). Accordingly, we should not tag Genesis 1–11 as fiction (d) or myth (e), for while Genesis 1–11 includes interaction with the divine realm, it deals principally with mankind on earth and addresses specific human characters within families in known locations.

While Hoffmeier does see the resemblance of "mythic" elements in Genesis 1–11 (e.g., depictions in the garden of Eden in ch. 3; the "sons of God" motif in ch. 6 [pp. 35, 37]), he stresses that ancient "myths" were "not fiction" but addressed the realm of the gods and "ultimate realities" (pp. 27–28). He also highlights how the Bible actually confronts its ancient Near Eastern context and demythologizes what was myth (pp. 41, 52). As John Currid has recently shown, Scripture teaches that what was "myth" or "fantasy" has become real and factual in Israel's experience—the God of the universe truly has entered into space and time to create and regenerate, to punish and pardon (*Against the Gods: The Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]).

View 2: Genesis 1–11 as Protohistory. Many are aware of Wenham's two-volume, masterful exegetical commentary on Genesis. Building off his work there, in this essay he argues that Genesis 1–11 is "protohistory" (pp. 73–97), by which he means that these chapters are neither impartial history nor imaginative fiction but address origins, illustrate important social and theological principles, and set paradigms for our later understanding of reality (pp. 85, 87; cf. pp. 82, 84). He compares disinterested history writing to a photograph of the past, protohistory to a portrait of the past, and fiction to a movie—by

which I think he means a Hollywood motion picture rather than a home video or historical documentary (p. 87). Wenham recognizes that no history writing is ever truly unbiased, and his analogy draws helpful attention to the fact that both true and fictive storytelling includes representation, selectivity, and authorial perspective and purpose (p. 154; cf. Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987], 24). For Wenham, Genesis provides an “expanded genealogy” that demonstrates “careful organization . . . with a didactic purpose” (pp. 76, 78); the events “may not be datable and fixable chronologically, but they were viewed as real events” (p. 85).

Both Hoffmeier and I agree with much of what Wenham articulates, but it is still difficult to know where Wenham stands on the historicity of Genesis, for, as Sparks observes (p. 102), Wenham never makes clear whether and to what extent he believes the biblical authors were correct in their perspectives, nor does he distinguish those elements that are both didactic and factual from those that are merely paradigmatic and literary but not accurate representations of actual history. Wenham emphasizes that the final-form message is what matters most in interpretation (pp. 61, 74, 95), but as Sparks correctly notes, Wenham fails to acknowledge “the profound implications of historicity, or lack thereof, for interpreting and appropriating Genesis theologically. . . . To the extent that we judge the text as accurate history, to that same extent we must accept all narrated within the text as theologically binding” (p. 103). Sadly, Sparks himself sees nothing in Genesis 1–11 as factually accurate, and therefore he sees no need to embrace the truth claims.

View 3: Genesis 1–11 as Fiction. Scholars appreciate Sparks for synthesizing ancient extrabiblical texts, but among conservative evangelicals, he is known for his open assault against the doctrine of biblical inerrancy. Sparks identifies Genesis 1–11 as “ancient historiography” (pp. 110–39), but he stresses that, while the biblical authors at times “sought (more or less) to narrate history,” this is “a different thing from getting that history right” (p. 72; cf. pp. 138–39). Indeed, speaking as if he were there, Sparks asserts that no ancient authors had “access to dependable historical sources for the earliest periods of human existence” (p. 66; cf. pp. 72, 107) and that “the early chapters of Genesis do not narrate closely what actually happened in natural and human history. . . . There was no Edenic garden, nor trees of life and knowledge, nor a serpent that spoke, nor a worldwide flood in which all living things, save those on a giant boat, were killed by God” (pp. 109, 111). He prefers to tag the various parts of Genesis 1–11 “myth, legend, and tale” (p. 109, cf. pp. 122, 130, 131), all of which are “fiction” and by nature exclude “accurate historical results (because created stories cannot map closely to historical events)” (p. 64n162).

Sparks says that the contemporary “scientific evidence (biological, geological, anthropological, linguistic) makes clear that, in the end, most of Gen 1–11 *cannot* be accurate history” (p. 72, italics original; cf. pp. 68–69, 104–05, 111, 115, 122, 134, 138–39). Intriguingly, however, Sparks is apparently not as sure about science’s results as he would lead us to believe, for he passingly states of the biblical authors that “we will look as confused in a thousand years as they do now” (p. 139). With science providing such an uncertain foundation, we should be cautious to follow Sparks in shifting our primary authority away from the unchanging word of God.

Both Sparks and Halton claim that identifying the actual genre of Genesis 1–11 will have profound implications for the text’s historicity (pp. 15–21, 101, 103). This affirmed, it is important to note that we judge a text’s factuality or fictionality not by literary form but by an author’s informing principles—authorial clues, authoritative testimony, and the text’s historical correspondence, keeping ever in mind

the nature of the source (so too both Wenham and Hoffmeier, pp. 62, 148; cf. Jens Bruun Kofoed, *Text and History: Historiography and the Study of the Biblical Text* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005], 206).

While Sparks at one point asserts the distinctiveness of the biblical materials within their ancient context (p. 117), his essay focuses almost solely on the similarities (p. 102) and concludes that the biblical authors “exploited” and “mimicked” the pre-enlightened religious ideas of their ancient neighbors (pp. 117, 125–26, 129). In response, Hoffmeier argues strongly against direct borrowing and shows that a closer look at the Bible’s differences suggests that the Bible’s tendency was not to appropriate but to dispute and repudiate pagan myths, ideas, identities, and customs (p. 41, 52–54, 147–49; cf. Currid, *Against the Gods*).

A Plea for Interpretive Consistency and Faithfulness. Based on Luke’s marked intent to represent history rightly, Sparks insists that the Gospel account of Jesus’s bodily resurrection provides a historically accurate description of what happened (p. 114). Nevertheless, even though he believes that the biblical authors of Genesis 1–11 often accepted their accounts as real history, he thinks that 21st century science proves that they got their facts wrong (pp. 72, 138–39). Both Sparks and Halton compare the Bible’s earliest chapters to Jesus’s parables and not historical narrative (pp. 114; 156n1). However, if we affirm Luke’s account of Jesus’s bodily resurrection, must we not also affirm his Gospel’s other stated historical (and not parabolic) assertions that Jesus’s genealogy actually goes back to a historic “Adam, the son of God” (Luke 3:38), and that the complacency of Jesus’s generation was like the historical unreadiness of Noah’s generation for judgment (Luke 17:26–27)? Hermeneutical consistency does not allow one to affirm the bodily resurrection of Christ and yet to deny other statements in the Old and New Testaments that the biblical authors intended as historical fact.

In response, Halton asserts that “the Bible like every other text, is not self-interpreting” and is filled with “imprecise and inherently ambiguous” words (p. 158). He says that we should not expect that any but the most elite academics can competently establish the genre of the Bible’s earliest chapters (p. 160), and he urges that we must constantly revisit and reevaluate our biblical interpretation in light of new insights and contexts “if the Christian faith is to retain any form of intellectual coherence and attractiveness” (p. 159). While I affirm that we must be willing to reevaluate our biblical interpretations in light of new data, the unchanging word of God must remain our highest authority. Otherwise, in order to gain the affirmation of the world, we will begin to follow “disgraceful, underhanded ways” and “to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word” instead of openly speaking the truth for an audience of one (2 Cor 4:2), even when our human listeners deem us foolish. Furthermore, if Genesis 1–11 is so unclear, how can we assert that the Gospels are more clear and that, with Paul, “Christ has been raised from the dead” (1 Cor 15:20)?

Contra Halton (and Sparks), the Bible is not like “every other text”; it is the Spirit-inspired word of God (2 Pet 1:21), which alone can be declared “pure” (Ps 12:6), “true” (Ps 119:142), “right” (Ps 119:72), “enduring” (Ps 119:160), and “breathed out by God” (2 Tim 3:16). With this, while some things in the word are difficult to understand, it is the “ignorant and unstable” who twist the Scriptures to their own destruction (2 Pet 3:16). God’s word is sufficiently clear and knowable (Ps 119:105, 130; 2 Cor 1:13; 2 Tim 2:7), though not all at once, not without effort, not without ordinary means, not without the reader’s willingness to obey, not without the help of the Holy Spirit, not without human misunderstanding, and never completely (Wayne Grudem, “The Perspicuity of Scripture,” *Them* 34 [2009]: 288–309). Proper

epistemological humility is *not* asserting that we cannot know truth but affirming that the truth is not our own but God's and that this truth has captured us and commends itself for others' assent.

Because God was the Bible's single, overarching author, we can approach Scripture as a whole, believing that later parts will cohere with and rightly interpret earlier parts, while potentially expanding the biblical authors' meaning, implications, or applications. We can trust that in matters of faith and practice, Scripture is infallible, and that in matters of fact (history, geography, science, or the like), Scripture is inerrant. We must respect the author's intentions and the literary conventions under which he wrote. We must allow for partial reporting, paraphrasing, and summarizing and must not require the Bible to give definitive or exhaustive information on every topic. We must allow for phenomenological language, wherein the author describes a phenomenon as he observes it or experienced it. And we must allow for the reporting of a speech without the endorsement of that speech's truthfulness. These things stated, the biblical narratives present themselves as accurate accounts of what happened in space and time, so we should approach them this way.

While Sparks counts himself an "evangelical" and considers the Bible to be "the word of God" (pp. 111, 116), his portrayal of Scripture's inner inconsistencies and inaccuracies (pp. 108, 116) sweeps away any true sense of biblical authority. For him, authorial intent is not a clear measure for assessing fact from fiction, so he places his highest authority on modern science, which itself is ever in flux. I applaud his desire to affirm the bodily resurrection of Christ, but his own methodology seems to make this faith claim inconsistent. His reading of Genesis 1–11 as fiction lessens the trustworthiness of Jesus and his apostles' words and shrinks the cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 11, for "Abel, Enoch, and Noah never existed!" (as noted by Hoffmeier, p. 149).

A Plea for Unity around Scripture's Jesus. Meir Sternberg once noted that when interpreters view the Bible's historical narratives as fiction, they change YHWH from "the lord of history into a creature of imagination, with the most disastrous results" (*The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 32). I see dangers for the church in Sparks's and Halton's views.

Halton appears to affirm Sparks's approach, and he concludes the book by calling believers to "take care to not let these issues become impediments to Christian unity" (p. 159). He asserts that Paul's appeal in Romans 15:5–6 for Christians to live "in harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus," points not to *doctrinal* unity but to "a way of living with one another . . . that grows out of a certain bondedness whereby deference is made to others" (p. 161). He recognizes the need to "share in common a few bedrock ideas (such as, who is Jesus?)" (p. 162), but he urges that doctrine should not divide.

Certainly there are some doctrines of which faithful Christians can disagree, but there are others that all must embrace to truly be Christian. Among these latter doctrines is the good news that through Jesus—the divine, crucified, and resurrected Messiah—God reigns over all and saves and satisfies believing sinners (1 Cor 15:3; cf. Matt 23:23). Yet our very understanding of this Jesus grows out of the Bible's portrait, and the more we deny the historical grounding of this representation, the more in danger we are of replacing the church's foundation with human imagination, leaving the world without a historical sovereign, savior, and satisfier.

We must ask, Is the Jesus we affirm the one who said not simply the ideas but the very letters and words of Scripture matter and point to him (Matt 5:18)? Is he the Jesus who was the word made flesh, who was "in the beginning with God" and through whom "all things were made" (John 1:2–3)? Is he the Jesus whose human lineage stretches back to Adam (Luke 3:38) and who affirmed the historic reality

both of God's creating male and female in the beginning as a paradigm for marriage (Matt 19:4) and of the global rebellion in the days of Noah (Luke 17:26–27)? Is he the Jesus who declared that Scripture "cannot be broken" (John 10:35) and whom Paul emphasized answers the sin problem produced by a historical Adam (Rom 5:12–19; 2 Cor 15:22, 45)? If our unity does not center on this Jesus, then we are in peril of losing the historic grounding of our faith.

In Romans 16:17–18, Paul stressed that unity must be around the foundational truths and not separate from them. "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naïve." Elsewhere he called for a unity "in the same mind and the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10; cf. 11:19). There is no true Christian unity apart from common surrender to the historic Jesus of Scripture. Yet this Jesus is the one who affirmed the historicity of the people and events of Genesis 1–11, who died a substitutionary death to overcome the wrath and sin problem introduced by the historic Adam, and who himself was genealogically connected to the first man, Adam, the son of God.

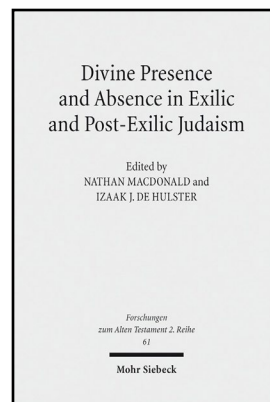
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Nathan MacDonald and Izaak J. De Hulster, eds. *Divine Presence and Absence in Exilic and Post-Exilic Judaism*. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2/61. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2013. xvi + 323 pp. £57.00/\$120.00.

This volume is a collection of twelve studies presented at a 2011 colloquium held at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (Germany). The essays by Johannes Zachhuber, Claus Ambos, Michael Emmendorffer are in German, and the remaining essays are in English. The studies explore Israelite theologies of divine presence and absence oriented by, and in response to, the fall of Jerusalem and the ensuing exile of Judah. This historical context forced the scribal-priestly elite of Judah to articulate how Yahweh was still present among his people in the wake of the loss of the Temple and their homeland.

The first two essays focus on hermeneutical questions, particularly with respect to the limitations of language for expressing how God may be or not be anywhere and everywhere in any temporal or spatial sense. Trevor Hart approaches these questions within a Trinitarian Christian framework. He deftly raises the important interpretive considerations to the reader for parsing divine presence and absence in our experience: God's relation to time, space, and creation. Zachhuber surveys important philosophical and theological works of the 19th and 20th centuries on the way toward deconstructing the notion that transcendence and immanence are in binary opposition.

The next two essays take the reader into the wider ancient Near Eastern context of conceptions of divine presence. The chapter by Ambos deals with how the destruction of sacred sites meant the cessation of a deity's cult (i.e., divine absence). He focuses on Mesopotamian material where kings claim credit for restoring abandoned or destroyed cult sites. Gods whose cultic presence requires human



industry (i.e., making idols) would naturally require human help in once again being present among a people or at a cult site. The study is relevant to post-exilic Judah in that a destroyed Jerusalem required an explanation as to how Yahweh of Israel was still present in the absence of cultic practices. Similarly, the study by Angelika Berlejung focuses on the use of amulets in the Canaan of the first millennium BC. Her discussion brings to mind correspondences between sentiments expressed by imagery and inscriptions found on amulets with modern religious practices (e.g., displaying pictures of Jesus or Bible verses, wearing crosses). Just as believers today utilize such items to be reminded of divine presence, so antiquity has produced abundant evidence for the same beliefs and concerns.

The remaining eight essays focus on the Hebrew Bible. The writers presuppose the dominant critical perspective that the book of Deuteronomy was in no part the product of Mosaic authorship, but was instead entirely composed by an anonymous author or authors after the monarchy split, at the same time the historical books of Joshua through 2 Kings were produced. These biblical books are collectively referred to as the “Deuteronomistic History” (DtrH) while their writer(s) and editor(s) take the general label of the “Deuteronomist” (Dtr).

In his contribution, Nathan MacDonald asserts that the spirit of Yahweh has undeservingly taken a back seat in discussions of divine presence compared to the emphasis on the *shem* (“name”) theology of the Deuteronomist and the *kabod* (“glory”) theology of the Priestly material. It’s unclear to this reviewer what MacDonald means by characterizing the *shem* and *kabod* theologies as not being associated with “persons” (p. 96) since the divine Name and the Glory are each anthropomorphized in Exod 23:20–23 and 34:1–9 (cf. Exod 33:21–22), respectively. Nevertheless, he persuasively argues that the spirit of Yahweh accomplishes the same goals as these theologies for articulating the divine presence in the Persian period. Next, Stephen Cook disputes and rebuts the common notion, dating to Gerhard von Rad, that the name (*shem*) theology of this material is a means of *removing* the divine presence from Israel. Cook shows that the name theology involves anthropomorphism and thus constitutes an effort to make the presence of Yahweh tangible to Israel.

The next two essays are oriented to the OT prophetic books. William Tooman focuses on the redaction history of Ezekiel with the goal of postulating how the book’s final redactors strategically employed references to the spirit to convey the simultaneous restoration of God’s covenant and presence for Israel’s future. The essay samples the powerful theological messaging behind editorial strategies of the biblical books. Jill Middlemas’s contribution deals with religious iconography in Israel and the prophets. Since this material is late in Israel’s history (i.e., after the split of the monarchy), the prophetic diatribes against idols and any representation of Yahweh meant an alteration in how Israelites (whether Yahwists or not) conceived of divine presence and absence. For the biblical prophets, iconography drove Yahweh away (divine absence) rather than making him present.

A focus on the Psalter follows. Joel Burnett looks to West Semitic inscriptions for deciphering the language of divine presence in the Elohist Psalter (Pss 42–83). Burnett finds comparable elements in the inscriptions and Elohist psalms (e.g., appeals to the deity to overturn a national reproach and a return of the divine presence). Emmendorffer follows similar themes, though his focus is psalmists’ complaints about God’s distance from his people in the wake of national disaster. The item of interest here is that these psalms do not presume Yahweh had withdrawn from his people. Rather, he was present as national judge.

The final two essays have Ezra-Nehemiah in view. Bob Becking draws attention to ancient Near Eastern texts that correlate cultic vessels with divine presence. This observation is noteworthy in light

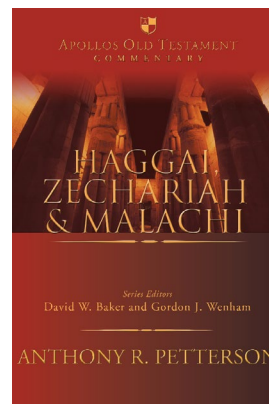
of the return of holy vessels to Judah described in the returns from exile—did the Jews returning to Jerusalem identify Yahweh with these vessels? Becking opts for a “symbolic presence” perspective (pp. 276–78) in view of Judah’s committed aniconism, particularly in the wake of exile. The final essay by Lisbeth Fried asks an obvious question—did the returning Jews think the divine presence inhabited the rebuilt Temple? She answers negatively for two reasons: (1) Yahweh’s people had adopted the Greek belief that the gods lived in the heavens; and (2) the Torah was perceived as the physical manifestation of the divine presence. Earlier biblical literature has Yahweh in the heavens, so the former is hardly an innovation (e.g., Gen. 19:24; Psa 2:4; 8:1). Fried’s close examination of the ritual acts in Ezra-Nehemiah that link the Torah with the Temple makes the second option more persuasive.

This reviewer has no hesitation in recommending this collection of essays to those interested in the biblical theology of divine presence and absence. Though the collection presumes the critical consensus about DtrH and Dtr, the literary artistry and theological message of the text as we have it are in no way compromised. When contextualized in the wider ancient Near Eastern world and the providential unfolding of history, as this book does, these textual features are in fact more pronounced.

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Anthony R. Petterson, *Haggai, Zechariah & Malachi*. Apollos Old Testament Commentary 25. Nottingham, UK: Apollos, 2015. 411 pp. £29.99/\$45.00.

The commentary on the books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi by Anthony R. Petterson, who teaches Old Testament and Hebrew at Morling College in Australia, is a recent installment in the Apollos Old Testament Commentary series (AOTC). The target audience for the series includes pastors, scholars, teachers, and all serious students of the Bible. The commentaries are also designed to be accessible to the non-expert. This goal of providing rigorous biblical scholarship to all serious students of the Bible is commendable, blending academic excellence with practical application for preaching in the Christian church. The publisher is to be praised for devoting 400+ pages to the three books, as such extensive treatment of the post-exilic prophets in a single volume is not often the case.



The author’s stated aim is to provide a valuable resource for preaching and teaching the post-exilic prophets, since their message remains pertinent (p. 13). The format of the commentary is organized accordingly and includes these section headings: Translation, Notes on the Text, Form and Structure, Comment, and Explanation. In addition, the commentary provides a General Introduction to the books of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, along with an Introduction to each book that offers a brief overview of setting, author and date, genre and structure, outline, text, and key themes. The informative introductory materials aptly set the text of each book in its historical and cultural context.

The series emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural setting of the Bible for grasping the meaning of the human writers of Scripture. Petterson’s treatment of the historical and cultural context of the post-exilic prophets is concise and current. Conspicuous by its absence in the notes and

bibliography, however, are references to commentaries on historical and cultural backgrounds to the OT (e.g., John H. Walton, ed., *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, 5 vols. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009]) and similar resources. Acknowledgement of such reference works could enrich the study of the cultural setting of the post-exilic prophets for some readers, as well as provide maps and images of realia from the biblical world since the commentary includes neither.

The commentary identifies the sub-genre of prophetic speech for each pericope of the postexilic prophets according to form-critical categories (e.g., Hag 2:20–23; p. 83). Yet the heavily formulaic nature of the prophetic speech in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi is underdeveloped. This feature of the literature is important both to establishing the divine authority of the message of each prophet and demonstrating the continuity of their message with the pre-exilic prophetic tradition. This is especially true of the repetition of the messenger formula (“so said the LORD [of Hosts]”) and the divine-council motif implied by the formula. Here is a missed opportunity to explore the divine and human nature of the Bible which the AOTC series seeks to accent.

The authors of the AOTC series offer their own translations of the given OT book under discussion. Since translation is an interpretive enterprise in its own right, the reader benefits from the perspective and nuance the author of the commentary brings to the biblical text. Overall this is the case for Petterson’s translation and the helpful but not overly technical notes on the text. However, a more comprehensive statement by the author regarding the translation theory employed would be welcome, especially for the “non-expert” the AOTC series seeks to target. The formal-equivalence methodology applied in the author’s translation, including adherence to the structure of Hebrew syntax, makes for stilted reading in places (e.g., Zech 5:3, 7–8; 9:8–9) and at times the translation lacks clarity (e.g., Hag 2:15–16; Zech 2:7). The bracketing to indicate ellipses and the excessive use of hyphens are additional impediments to readability.

The reviewer assumes that women are among the “serious students of the Bible” that the AOTC series targets. Petterson does give some voice to women’s issues in the commentary, a necessary move in light of some passages in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi that some interpreters have seen as misogynistic (e.g., Zech 5). Even so, one would like to see further affirmation of women beyond the *imago Dei* (p. 172) and their status in the marriage relationship (p. 352). For example, what were the implications of the rebuilding and dedication of the Second Temple for women and worship, the spiritual formation of women, and their personal spirituality (e.g., C. C. Kroeger and M. J. Evans, eds., *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002], p. 502)? Likewise, how were women affected by the call of Zechariah (7:9–10; 8:16–17) and Malachi (3:5) for the practice of social justice toward the weak (e.g., widows) in the post-exilic covenant community?

As noted in the comments section of the book, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi have much to say about the “nations” (e.g., Zech 1:18–21; pp. 124–25). Yet, the commentary gives little voice to the global Christian church and offers little by way of specific message for the Majority-World Christian. The Hebrews were refugees entering Babylonia at the time of the exile. Their descendants returned as migrants to post-exilic Judah, still under Persian rule. What do these books contribute to a biblical theology of migration? To what extent is the “day of the LORD” presented in Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi as a type of “postcolonial” theology?

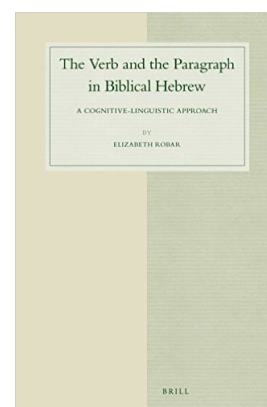
Overall, the commentary on Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi achieves the goals set for the AOTC series. The volume is a most serviceable contribution to the study of these prophetic books. The author thoughtfully engages contemporary scholarship, and the commentary combines sound exposition of

the biblical text with relevant application informed by a well-balanced, evangelical biblical theology. Haggai's audience heard and obeyed the word of the LORD (Hag 1:12). The reader of this commentary will be inspired and encouraged to respond to God's message in like manner.

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Elizabeth Robar. *The Verb and the Paragraph in Biblical Hebrew: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach*. Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 78. Boston: Brill, 2015. xii + 220 pp. £125.93/\$142.00.

This monograph by Elizabeth Robar (who is Junior Research Fellow in Semitic Languages at Tyndale House in Cambridge, UK) is based in part on her 2013 University of Cambridge dissertation with the same title. The main goal of the work is to use concepts from cognitive linguistics and grammaticalization to explain how verb forms, including paragogics and energics, help to signal the flow of thought within and between paragraphs in the Hebrew Bible (pp. 146–47, 188). Chapter one lays the theoretical foundation by explaining concepts from cognitive linguistics, beginning with the principle that human minds constantly seek to organize input into a coherent whole, generating absent details as needed. The remainder of the book applies this theory to the Hebrew Bible, focusing on verb forms and paragraphs. Chapter two discusses the semantics and functions of *yiqtol*, *wayyiqtol*, *wəqatal*, and *wəyiqtol*. Chapter three does the same for *wəqatal*, paragogics, energetic suffixes, and the lengthened *yiqtol*. Chapter four summarizes the conclusions, uses them to show the structure of 1 Samuel 1:1–7, and suggests an implication for the history of Semitic verbs.



The monograph's conclusions include the following:

- Although the discourse function of a given Hebrew verb form may correlate fairly well with foreground vs. background, mainline vs. offline, and text type, those correlations are imperfect because they are not the verbs' real functions (pp. 63–72, 77, 148–51).
- *Wayyiqtol* and *wəyiqtol* can both be short or long, just as *yiqtol* can. The length is what matters, not the spelling of the conjunction (p. 92).
- Long *yiqtol* is marked for imperfective aspect, although in the future or non-indicative, it is spreading to other semantics and functions (p. 93). An energetic pronominal suffix indicates that a verb is long *yiqtol* (pp. 167–68).
- Short *yiqtol* and short *wayyiqtol* are unmarked for aspect and mood, so they are not specifically preterite (pp. 80–86). To complement the long *yiqtol*, these short forms are primarily used for perfective aspect in an indicative, non-future context (pp. 93–94).
- (Short) *wayyiqtol* does not mark temporal succession or foregrounding (p. 77). Instead it is a consecutive-verb form that continues the aspect, mood, and time of the previous coordinate clause (p. 96–102). It cannot start a subordinate unit, but instead indicates that the organizational structure of the paragraph continues (pp. 102–11). Even when an explicit subject is used with *wayyiqtol* to indicate a topic shift, the discontinuity is minor because *wayyiqtol* indicates the continuity of the narrative (pp. 111–12).

- *Wəqatal* usually indicates purpose or result (pp. 128–29). It can also be used as a consecutive verb, particularly within an indicative speech (pp. 128–31, 138–39).
- (Long) *wəyiqtol* normally continues the tense, aspect, and mood of the preceding coordinate verb if it has the same subject. If it has a different subject, then it often indicates purpose or result (pp. 131–41).
- *Yiqtol*, *wayyiqtol*, *wəqatal*, *wəyiqtol*, and *qatal* may be used together, with each change of form indicating a change of hierarchy level in the discourse, rather than a change of semantics (p. 147, 190–92).
- An isolated *wəqatal* surrounded by *wayyiqtol* may mark the theme of the larger discourse (pp. 131, 152–59).
- Paragogic *nun* and paragogic *he* can indicate motion toward or involvement of the speaker or a named recipient, a volitional meaning, a change of topic, or the theme of the larger discourse (pp. 160–81).
- The meanings of the long *yiqtol* and the paragogics are part of the same cross-linguistic grammaticalization path, so they may all be the result of the grammaticalization of the same lexical item (pp. 187–88, 193–94).

Many readers will find the concise introduction to cognitive linguistics in the first chapter to be quite helpful. For example, when page 19, footnote 1 moved me to explain major disjunctive cantillation marks to my students as a signal to stop and form a chunk of meaning (instead of describing them as punctuation marks, as I did previously), I heard an audible “ohh!” from my students as the lights went on.

The remaining chapters potentially present major breakthroughs in solving long-standing problems of the semantics and origin of various verb forms, paragogics, and energetics, as well as how they work together to indicate the flow of thought at levels above the individual clause. Two caveats, however, are in order. The first is that the monograph presents only part of a larger system of discourse grammar and verbal semantics; discourse markers (pp. 73–74) and verb forms such as the *qatal* (p. 131n47) need to be analyzed and included. Second, much more work needs to be done to evaluate whether the author’s conclusions are indeed correct. The plethora of theories about Hebrew verbs in current scholarship, each supported with their own examples, demonstrates that a limited number of examples is insufficient to establish a theory. To settle the issues discussed in this monograph (e.g., *wəqatal* does not normally initiate verbal semantics other than purpose or result), what is ultimately needed is an exhaustive (and exhausting!) study of the entire Bible, evaluating each occurrence to see if it has the meaning that Robar proposes. For example, in preparing recently for Hebrew class, I noticed that the *wəqatal* in Ruth 3:9 seems to initiate imperatival semantics, apparently contrary to the claims on pages 123 and 130–31.

This monograph’s proposal is promising, and those interested in close reading of the Hebrew Bible are encouraged to learn it and use it to analyze the Hebrew text as Robar does throughout her monograph, while also evaluating, confirming, and modifying the proposal and enjoying the light that it sheds on the Hebrew Bible.

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Jay Sklar. *Leviticus*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 3. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014. 336 pp. £11.99/\$18.00.

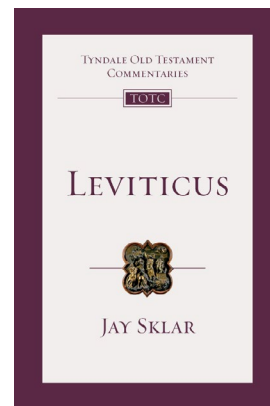
The replacement of the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries has seen some excellent new volumes already (e.g., Tremper Longman III on Psalms), and Jay Sklar's entry on Leviticus is no exception in taking the place of R. K. Harrison's 1980 commentary on this book. Typical of this new Tyndale series is the analysis of the passage under three headings, 'Context', 'Comment' and 'Meaning.' This follows an excellent 'Introduction' of 85 pages which covers the following: context and title, authorship and date, Hebrew text of Leviticus, theology of Leviticus, special issues in Leviticus, and Leviticus and the NT: the 'how much more' of Jesus.

Suitably for the series, Sklar does not go into technical issues of Hebrew, and his summary of scholarly matters is judicious and brief throughout. Footnotes are kept to a minimum. Dotted through the commentary are helpful tables, which do not always include headings but flow from the text of the commentary to make things clearer. The bibliography comes early in the book, but there are no indices as is typical of this series. The commentary is unapologetically evangelical in orientation, and apart from the appropriate sections of the Introduction, the connections and application for Christians are mostly covered in the 'Meaning' sections of the commentary, though always and rightly after discussing the meaning in its original context for ancient Israel. The Hebrew where referred to is transliterated, so the commentary is easily accessible for a layperson. The commentary divides the book into eight sections, with chapter 27 treated with chapters 25–26, rather than separately as most critical scholars do.

Leviticus has a reputation for being dry and dull, but this commentary is far from that. Right from the preface, Sklar anticipates that Leviticus directs us to some of the most pressing questions of our day: Who are we? Why are we here? What is our life about? Interest provoked, the commentary does not disappoint. Sklar writes lucidly and his commentary is eminently readable. His language is not too technical and he keeps a lay reader in mind always. Sklar repeatedly reminds us that obedience to the law is to be Israel's response to a gracious God who has made promises to Abraham and rescued Israel from Egyptian slavery. He also sets the law in the wider biblical story as a gift of God to his people, and one can almost feel Sklar rejoicing with the Psalmist at the goodness of God's law. So as he comments on the meaning and purpose of various laws, Sklar helps the reader see that the law is a good and gracious gift, righteous and attractive.

Sklar frequently uses the analogy of God being our King, with the tabernacle as his palace. Thus the laws of sacrifice and holiness are set in the context of approaching the King. The moral laws also bear witness to imitating this King's character to the world. Such use of this theme of divine kingship, while not overt in Leviticus itself, relates Leviticus well to the Bible's overarching story and also keeps us reminded of the bigger picture behind ritual.

It could be argued that many evangelical readers of Leviticus from low-church traditions come to the book with an aversion to ritual. Sklar draws us in to read Leviticus sympathetically, as when he helpfully explains ritual using contemporary analogies, such as weddings (p. 70) and in explaining that ritual impurity does not mean sin. Other modern examples from farming and sports (e.g., p. 202) are very vivid in conveying the importance of ritual in an attractive way.



While showing a mastery of scholarly discussions, Sklar never gets bogged down in such debates, with crisp and clear summaries of various positions and then stating his own viewpoint, or at times where undecided, leaving options open (e.g. mandatory death sentences, p. 68; meaning behind impure and pure foods, p. 168). As a more prominent example, in recent years there has been much discussion on the theology of sacrifice, with varying views on the purpose of sacrifice and the meaning of the Hebrew verb *kipper*. Sklar succinctly summarises the views and in his conclusion accepts *both* cleansing and atoning notions for this verb, since sin both makes people impure and enslaves them (pp. 50–53).

Another contentious issue in reading Leviticus has been the place of the OT law for Christians. Sklar categorises the laws of the OT into four groups: those repeated in NT, those not repeated because of cultural reasons, those not repeated because they are set aside in Jesus, and those not repeated because they were especially related to a theocratic Israelite nation. For each, he states that the values behind the laws still apply for Christians. I wonder, though, are there some laws that are not repeated in the NT simply because they do not need to be? Sklar relegates this fifth category to a footnote (p. 61) with the warning of this becoming a catch-all category, but I would resist any strategy that downplays the prominence of such laws. Would laws of homosexuality fall into that category? Or the parapet on the roof of a house (admittedly from Deuteronomy)? I would argue that there remain laws of the OT that still apply in practice, yet are not repeated in NT. Having said that, Sklar is brief but clear in drawing the reader's attention to the principles behind the laws, and in guiding their application today. For example, tattoos no longer having pagan associations can be acceptable for Christians today (p. 250).

It is fascinating to hear the resonances of Leviticus for Majority-World Christians as I read this commentary from Asia, where I live and serve. When explaining the efficacy of animal sacrifice in the Bible, I found Sklar uses the same illustration as I do, namely, writing a cheque ('check' in USA!). However, this illustration doesn't work in Myanmar and other developing Asian countries where there are no cheques. On the issue of burning fat in sacrifices, Sklar comments that in ancient Israel, 'fat was considered the very best portion' (p103). Unlike the Western aversion to fat, in Asia it is still the case that fat portions are valued, and it was precisely my Asian experience that alerted me to the value ascribed to fat in Leviticus. Another issue my 'Asian' eyes noticed was on eating blood. I had never considered this issue when I lived in Australia, but in much of Asia it is relevant and pertinent. So I was a little disappointed that Sklar only mentions Acts 15 in a footnote and says that its prohibition in Acts 15 for Gentiles is because of the risk of offending Jewish Christians, a view which does not make sense of the prohibition of fornication and idolatry in the same verses, as Richard Bauckham argues ("James and the Jerusalem Church," in *The Book of Acts in its Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham, BAFCS 4 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 415–80).

Overall, this is an outstanding commentary that will serve pastors and preachers well for at least another generation. It opens up the world of ancient Israel's laws and ritual in a clear and understandable way, rejoicing in the grace of the law of the Lord that is more to be desired than gold, a law which leads us to the majesty and glory of Jesus.

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Bruce K. Waltke, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore. *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014. xv + 312 pp. £18.99/\$28.00.

The Psalms as Christian Lament is co-written by three scholars, each contributing a different section to the commentary. Bruce Waltke, professor emeritus of biblical studies at Regent College in Vancouver (Canada) and distinguished professor emeritus at Knox Theological Seminary (Fort Lauderdale, USA), covers the exegetical sections on nine lament psalms. James Houston, founding principal of Regent College and professor emeritus of spiritual theology, contributes the historical sections. Erika Moore, professor of Old Testament at Trinity School of Ministry in Ambridge, Pennsylvania (USA), writes the exegetical section for Psalm 39, offers valuable editing, and composes the glossary and indices.

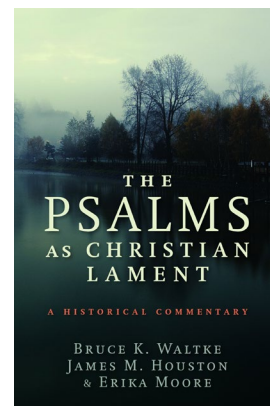
The book begins with a prologue and an introduction to the lament psalms. The rest of the book has ten chapters, each treating a lament psalm. The authors do not treat all the lament psalms, which, according to Hermann Gunkel's famous classification of the Psalms, make up almost a third of the Psalter; neither do they aim to offer a complete theology of lament. Rather, in this volume, they focus on Psalms 5, 7, 39, 44 and six of the seven penitential psalms (i.e., Pss 6, 32, 38, 102, 130, 143). The seventh penitential psalm, Psalm 51, is covered in their first volume (*The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 446–83).

Each chapter has four sections. In part one, Houston focuses on selected commentators from church history, summarizing the historical interpreter's life before relaying their interpretation of the particular psalm. The length of these sections varies from chapter to chapter, depending on that psalm's prominence in history. For example, Houston only treats Jerome's interpretation for Psalm 5, but for Psalm 7 he reviews the interpretations of John Chrysostom, Charlemagne (c. 742–812), Alcuin (735–804), and Alfred the Great (c. 849–899).

In part two, Waltke gives a translation of each psalm with plenty of footnotes explaining key syntactical, grammatical, textual, and translational issues. He translates the Hebrew יהוה as "I AM," a translation no mainstream English Bible follows. Also unlike most other English Bibles and Psalms commentators (e.g., Hans-Joachim Kraus, John Goldingay, Peter Craigie, and Gerald Wilson), Waltke often views as postscripts of the preceding psalm part of what most understand to be superscripts. For example, on Psalm 5 he regards the phrase, "For the director of music. For flutes." (Ps 5:1a) as a postscript for Psalm 4 (p. 23) but views "A Psalm of David" (Ps 5:1b) as the superscript to Psalm 5. As a result, his analysis of Psalm 5 does not treat Ps 5:1a.

In part three, Waltke gives an exegetical examination of each psalm. Waltke shows his appreciation of the organization of the Psalter by examining each psalm in its immediate literary context. He analyzes the structure of each psalm, gives a synopsis of its message, followed by exegetical comments, often making biblical-theological connections in the process. For example, alongside his exegesis he makes the following biblical-theological link about the house of the Lord: "Within the developing canon, *to the house* was interpreted from David's tent sanctuary to Solomon's temple and finally to the church triumphant, secure in the bosom of the resurrected Christ" (p. 36, italics original).

In part four, Waltke and Moore summarize the results of the exegetical section and draw out Christo-centric implications, especially of the Davidic psalms. The authors trace insightful typological



links between David and Christ. For instance, when he concludes the discussion of Psalm 6, a psalm that highlights God's merciful response to David's fervent plea, Waltke depicts David as both a type and antitype of Christ. He makes the following observation (pp. 69–70):

Both David and the Lord Jesus Christ suffered under God's wrath; both humbly accepted God's discipline; both were in anguish at the prospect of death and separation from God; both prayed earnestly to be delivered; both committed themselves to God alone; both tasted the grave; both reckoned by the malicious and malignant enemies as under a curse; both were heard by God when they prayed; both rose victorious from the sphere of death; and in so doing routed their enemies; both praised God for their salvation, discomfiting the damned and comforting the faithful. But the Antitype is so much greater than the type: David suffered justly for his son, our Lord suffered justly for our sins, not for his own, and because he himself was without sin satisfied God's wrath against sin and removed sin and its wages from all who trust him. David was slipping away into the grave, but our Lord was buried in the grave and descended into Hades. David was delivered from a premature death but eventually died a normal death in his old age; Christ rose from the dead and lives forever. This is the story the church gives to the terrified sick and dying: We tell our "old, old story," or we literally have nothing to tell. Until our Lord's return all the elect must clinically die, but David's psalm will always assure them that the God of life, and not death, will have the last word in their narrative. And if the type gives us that assurance, how much more will the Antitype?

This kind of Christo-centric typology characterizes all the chapters of this volume.

As rich as this work is in its various insights, it would have been richer, in my estimation, if the authors had crafted the exegetical section in light of the church-history section. The lack of attempt to integrate the historical and exegetical sections made the commentary somewhat disjointed. It would also have been helpful if the exegetical sections had evaluated the history of interpretation, but this task is left to the reader. Nevertheless, this book helpfully portrays lament as normative in early Christian devotion, and advocates the recovery of lament in the church today (p. 7). I recommend this volume to anyone who is seeking to recover the place of lament in the Christian life.

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— NEW TESTAMENT —

G. K. Beale, Daniel J. Brendsel, and William A. Ross. *An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek: Analysis of Prepositions, Adverbs, Particles, Relative Pronouns, and Conjunctions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 96 pp. \$15.99.

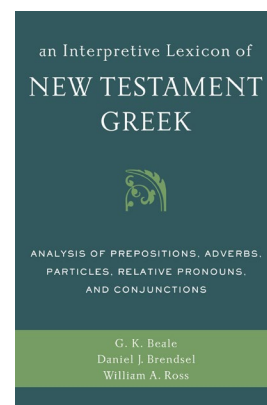
An Interpretive Lexicon of New Testament Greek is a very concise handbook that lists the meaning and some of the interpretive options for those little words that often have a significant impact on the meaning of a passage. It just seems to be a universal trait of languages that the smaller a word is, the more it is used, the wider its range of meaning can be, and, as a result, the more headaches it can cause for students. Consider the Greek word ἐν. The entry in BDAG (pp. 326–30) is over 5000 words long; it has twelve major divisions to its definition, with an additional twenty subdivisions. So a tool that allows one to find the relevant information on a preposition like this would be more than welcome.

If we return to the previous example, the entry for ἐν in the *Interpretive Lexicon* is about 250 words long (pp. 43–44). The first information given is the page numbers for the entry in BDAG (3rd English ed., 2000), followed by the page numbers (in italics) for BAGD (2nd English ed., 1979). After this the authors provide a synopsis of six possible meanings for this preposition. Finally, the entry concludes with brief summaries (each of which is a short paragraph in length) of the discussions of this preposition in Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) and Murray Harris, *Prepositions and Theology in the Greek New Testament: An Essential Reference Resource for Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012). Because only three reference works are cross-referenced limits the usefulness of this work some what. While someone could use this short lexicon to find a rudimentary definition for these words the authors highly encourage those who use it “to cross-reference these valuable resources as well” (p. 13).

However, as the title indicates, the goal of this book is not merely to provide lexical information; the book is also intended to be interpretive in nature. There are two exegetical approaches that form the interpretive framework from which this lexicon is developed. The first is discourse analysis. In this sense, Beale, Brendsel, and Ross hope to enable the reader to better discern how these words create relationships between clauses in the Greek text and thus gain a better understanding of what the authors of the New Testament were trying to communicate (pp. 6–7).

The second approach is derived from Daniel Fuller’s method of “arc-ing” the Greek text, as developed by John Piper and Tom Schreiner. In particular, when one is drawing an arc connecting two clauses the authors want to specify what type of relationship the connecting word is creating (pp. 7–12). For example, the entry for ἐν states that it can form L (locative), W-Ed (way-end), Gn-SP (generic-specific), Ft-In (fact-interpretation), M-Ed (means-ends) types of relationships, to name a few (pp. 43–44).

While the jacket cover states that this book will help the reader “quickly and easily” determine the translation and interpretive possibilities for a particular word it will take some time for most readers to become accustomed to how this book is organized and how to access its information. If you are familiar

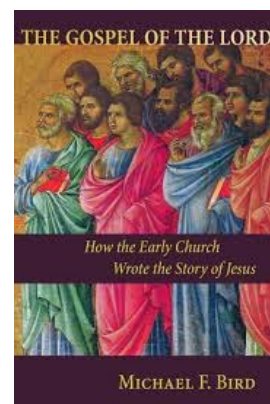


with discourse analysis and an arcing type approach to exegesis you may find this concise lexicon a useful tool in your work in the Greek text of the New Testament.

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Michael F. Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014. xiiv + 394 pp. £19.99/\$30.00.

In this well researched and well organized volume, Michael Bird examines how the Gospels emerged and why they took their particular shape and character. In his introduction, “From Jesus to the Gospels,” Bird raises four key questions: For what purpose were Jesus’s words recalled in the early church and what was the point of preserving them? How was the Jesus tradition transmitted? What are the sources, genre and purposes behind the Gospels? And why do we have four Gospels (instead of just one, or instead of many more)? These questions become the framework for the volume. Two lengthy excurses follow in this chapter: the first on the meaning of the word “gospel” in the ancient world and the second on how the proclaimer became the proclaimed—that is, the continuity between Jesus’s preaching *about the kingdom of God* and the early church’s proclamation *about Jesus himself* as savior and lord.



In chapter 2, “The Purpose and Preservation of the Jesus tradition,” Bird raises two main questions: why did Jesus’s followers pass on the tradition about him and how did they preserve these traditions? He explores various reasons for the church’s preservation of the Jesus tradition: the whole story of Jesus, not just his death and resurrection, provided the content and basis for their faith; the teaching of Jesus was viewed as relevant to the contemporary needs of the early church; the Jesus tradition provided the foundation for the early church’s self-understanding, especially in its conflict with the larger Jewish community; and Jesus’s role as “movement founder” resulted in the deliberate conservation and perpetuation of his teaching.

Concerning the second question, the preservation of the tradition, Bird points to multiple factors that suggest the followers of Jesus reliably preserved the traditions about him. These include their deep interest in him as a historical person; rhetorical and pedagogical devices that rendered Jesus’s teaching highly memorable; the evidence of an Aramaic substratum for much of Jesus’s teaching; the likelihood that both oral and written sources existed from the beginning; the importance of eyewitnesses as authenticators of Jesus tradition; and the reality of the Jesus tradition as a community possession. The chapter ends with an interesting excursus on the unease of many evangelical students with historical critical methods and a defense of what Bird calls “believing criticism”—treating Scripture as the inspired Word of God but acknowledging the context and processes through which it came to be.

Chapter 3 examines “The Formation of the Jesus Tradition.” Bird looks at a variety of models of oral tradition, from the form-critics who posited a highly creative early church community and a radically fluid tradition, to the rigid Scandinavian school of H. Riesenfeld and B. Gerhardsson, which posited a near-verbatim memorization of the gospel tradition. Bird opts for a centrist approach, drawing insights

from the “informed control oral tradition” of Kenneth Bailey and especially the more recent social memory theories of James D. G. Dunn and others. Bird writes, “Aided by eyewitnesses, teachers, a discernible process of handing-on and receiving traditions, and a rich mix of oral mnemonics and textual *aide-mémoire* [*sic*], the early church remembered Jesus, recounting him as a Judean sage as much as a divine Savior” (p. 113). A lengthy excursus on “The failure of form criticism” ends the chapter.

Chapter 4, “The Literary Genetics of the Gospels: The Synoptic Problem and the Johannine Question,” deals with the Synoptic Problem and the relationship between John and the Synoptics. After a judicious presentation of various views—Augustinian, Griesbach, Ur-Gospel, common oral traditions, Two-(Four) Source theory, Farrer—and a detailed discussion of the evidence, Bird concludes in favor of Markan priority and a literary (not simply oral or fragmentary) Q. He allows, however, that Luke likely used Matthew at a latent stage. This would account for the minor agreements between Matthew and Luke and the anomaly of the Q-Mark overlaps.

On the relationship between John and the Synoptics, Bird briefly surveys nine different views. These range from John’s intention to supplement, complement, or displace the Synoptics, to direct literary dependence, to common oral traditions, common written sources, interlocking traditions, synoptic-like sources behind John, and (of course) complete independence. Bird’s nuanced conclusion is that we envision “the spasmodic interpenetration of Synoptic and Johannine tradition across each other in pre-literary stages, recognize the independent nature of many of John’s sources, and imagine also John’s exposure to the Synoptic tradition through either a prior reading or from observing an oral performance of a Synoptic text, probably Mark and perhaps also Luke” (p. 212).

Chapter 5, “The Genre and Goal of the Gospels: What Is a Gospel and Why Write One?” deals with the genre and purpose of the Gospels (the traditional domain of redaction and narrative analysis). The question of genre takes up most of the space (50 pages). After a detailed discussion of various proposals, Bird concludes that the Gospels are “biographical kerygma.” Though they have much in common with Greco-Roman biographies, they are unique in narrating the purpose of God in salvation history. As such, the Gospels “are purposed for a mixture of apologetics, instruction, social legitimation, worship, and evangelism” (p. 280). An excursus to this chapter examines a variety of non-canonical gospels and their relationship to the canonical four. Helpful charts summarize the names, sources, dates and provenance, and description of various apocryphal gospels: Jewish-Christian, Nag Hammadi, pseudo-apostolic, death and resurrection, infancy, and dialogues with the risen Jesus.

Bird’s final chapter, “The Fourfold Gospel of Jesus Christ: Why Four Gospels?” discusses the origins of the fourfold Gospel collection, evaluates the theological rationale for the fourfold Gospel, and seeks to explicate its significance for the wider biblical canon. There were certainly both heretical (e.g. Marcion) and orthodox (e.g. Tatian) rivals to the fourfold Gospel. Yet, contrary to the claim by some that Irenaeus almost single-handedly squashed others and elevated the four Gospels to canonical status, Bird cites early and widespread recognition of the existence and priority of the four. While Irenaeus has been criticized for claiming their authority based on illegitimate analogies (like the four winds and four corners of the earth), Bird notes that he also pointed to their apostolic connections, their “true and reliable” testimony to Jesus, and their consistency and coherence with the Law and the Prophets. He writes, “The bishop of Lyons was simply tapping into the vein of the proto-orthodox church when he set forth a theological justification for the apostolic gospel in its four witnesses.” In the tradition of Irenaeus and Origen, Bird concludes, “I would be prepared to argue that it makes much sense to place the fourfold Gospel at the head of the canon” (pp. 329–30).

This is an excellent book, a perfect complement for seminary level courses in the Gospels or New Testament introduction. While avoiding technical jargon and esoteric debate, Bird takes the student well beyond basic introductory issues. His mastery of the literature is impressive and his conclusions are balanced, judicious and often innovative. Though I did not agree with every conclusion (e.g., I think it unlikely Luke used Matthew), I always found his discussions helpful and engaging.

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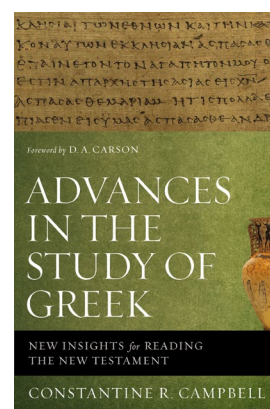
Constantine R. Campbell. *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 253 pp. £18.99/\$34.99.

Constantine Campbell's *Advances in the Studies of Greek* provides for biblical scholars a unique, helpful, and even essential introduction to the field of New Testament exegetical philology.

Campbell opens his volume with an apologetic for the book: rather than a Greek primer, the book attempts to provide a “cutting edge” presentation (p. 21) of the state of Greek studies, bringing both student and scholar into the current state of scholarship.

The book sets out to accompany the readers into the history of Greek studies (chapter 1) and broader linguistics (chapter 2); these chapters create the context for the evaluation of semantics and lexicography (chapter 3), where Campbell engages in an excellent discussion of John Lee's work. The examination of voice (chapter 4) introduces the reader to the well-accepted notion in broader Greek studies that Greek should be viewed as an active/medio-passive voice system without recourse to “deponency,” a Latin-based idea that thankfully has begun to dissipate. Chapter 5 addresses tense, aspect, and *Aktionsart*. While Campbell mentions a number of scholars, the primary discussion is framed in terms of the work of McKay, Porter, Fanning, and the author himself. Chapter 6 raises the underexplored topic of idiolect and register. Chapters 7–8 present summaries of various schools of discourse analysis; the extended summaries of Levinsohn and Runge in chapter 8 are of special note, though the evaluations of Levinsohn at times reveal a lack of engagement with Levinsohn's wider body of work. Chapter 9 engages with the growing debate on Greek pronunciation, Campbell arguing for the use of neo-hellenic pronunciation over and against the widespread use of the historically inaccurate Erasmian pronunciation. Finally, chapter 10 examines theories for improving Greek pedagogy; here, the approach of Randall Butth is of special note.

In evaluating this volume, it is important to us that we take Campbell at his word and read this work on its own terms. Campbell states in his preface that this book finds its origin in class notes from his time at Moore Theological College (p. 18). Later on, he also states that the current book form is designed as “an introduction to issues of interest in the current world of New Testament Greek scholarship” (p. 20). This is an essential point. This book is not intended as a comprehensive survey of all Greek linguistics for New Testament students. For the most part, it appears to be effectively a survey of those topics that have been prominent in Campbell's own research and studies. These are the areas where the book



is the strongest. The chapters on lexicography, voice, pronunciation, and discourse analysis provide clear, accessible, and compelling summaries of the current state those areas of New Testament Greek scholarship.

Similarly, chapter 5 on tense, aspect, and *Aktionsart* provides a strong summary, though here the content is at times colored by Campbell's more idiosyncratic views about the Greek verb (most notably the perfect tense/aspect forms). Campbell's discussion of grounding on pp. 124–130 is an excellent summary and an insightful critique of Porter's views. Our primary concern in this chapter is its narrow focus, focusing on conversations about aspect and tense that began in the early 1990s between McKay, Porter, and Fanning, now supplemented by Campbell's own contributions. However, there is a substantial amount of literature on the Greek verb beyond this small set of New Testament scholars cited by Campbell. Campbell's bibliography would be improved by reference to the broader scholarly literature, most notably work by D. N. S. Bhat, Joan Bybee, and Osten Dahl in cross-linguistic study, as well as others specifically in Greek study, for example David Armstrong, Egbert Baker, Maria Napoli, Albert Rijksbaron, C. M. J. Sicking, and Peter Stork. Limiting the "cutting edge" advances to the recent ETS/SBL "Perfect Storm" conference sessions between Porter, Fanning, and Campbell, and its resulting publication, is not a very large step forward into the current state of Greek scholarship, nor a terribly sharp edge. Despite this issue, chapter 5, together with chapters 3–4 and 6–10, offer strong presentations of many important discussions and should be read by all New Testament Greek students and interested scholars. Thus, overall, the book achieves in marvelous fashion the goals it set out to accomplish for its intended audience.

While those seven chapters represent reliable summaries of the state of the field, the opening two chapters, which move beyond New Testament and exegetical work and into the field of general linguistics, are less successful. Specifically, the history of linguistics and the linguistic theories Campbell outlines therein cannot be relied upon. In what follows, we provide a truncated summary of some of the more problematic viewpoints of Campbell's historical and linguistic summary. This is not to detract from the overall helpfulness of the book, but rather as a corrective, aimed at a relatively limited section of the volume, for the purposes of orienting students who would use this volume as an orientation to the state of discussion.

In chapter 1, Campbell establishes his clear preference for synchronic study over and against diachronic and cross-linguistic comparative studies (cf. p. 35 and elsewhere), and Saussure is a key figure in his discussion. However, Campbell ignores that even Saussure himself, using the comparative method, made some of the most important contributions to diachronic study of European languages and their history. Moreover, many important linguistic advances in Greek over the 20th century have come from historical linguistics. Campbell's emphasis on synchronic study leaves his readers with the impression that the productive research of various historical linguists like Wackernagel, Clackson, Szemerényi, and Antila is irrelevant.

Further, Campbell's summary of Saussure's other two "dichotomies," (*langue/parole* and *signifié/signifiant*) is demonstrably problematic in relation to his statement, "Saussure marks the dawn of modern linguistics in at least two respects: first, by establishing a clear break with previous language methodologies, and second, by establishing the principles that are now foundational to all subsequent linguistic schools" (p. 37). While this plays to Campbell's own preferences, these principles are certainly not foundational to all subsequent linguistic schools, nor was the break with the past very clear. As Matthews's *Grammatical Theory in the United States from Bloomfield to Chomsky* shows, American

structuralism's founder, Bloomfield, rejected Saussure's emphasis on the "sign," and his general opinion of Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale* was that it merely systematized ideas that had already been in discussion for some time. It should be noted that, despite Campbell's preference for synchronic study, the current trends in the field of linguistics in recent decades are all moving away from the synchronic-diachronic dichotomy and from the arbitrariness of Saussure's "sign." For many the move is already complete. A good alternate historical survey is available in Geeraerts, *Theories of Lexical Semantics*, which, while limited to the history and development of semantic theory, presents in a coherent manner the general trends and ideas across the larger field of linguistics.

Campbell's descriptive problems in chapter 1 continue with Noam Chomsky. For example, Campbell's statement on surface vs. deep structure (p. 40) is fundamentally flawed and should be revised. For Chomsky, deep structure is not "the underlying semantic principles" but rather an underlying formal syntax. Semantics, for Chomsky, is the interpretive result of the combination of grammar and a lexicon after a sentence is produced (so *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* [Boston: MIT, 1969], 128). Campbell seems to have attributed to Chomsky the definition of deep structure as argued by one of Chomsky's opponents, Charles Fillmore in the so-called "Linguistic Wars." Fillmore (e.g. his article, "The Case for Case," in *Universals in Linguistic Theory*, ed. E. Bach and R. Harms [New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston]) and those with him eventually developed their own ideas into what is *cognitive linguistics* today, a set of principles and frameworks that are growing more and more dominant in the field at large. Campbell concedes that his survey of linguistics is "curtailed" and focuses on the linguists and schools that "have most shaped the advances in the study of Greek" (p. 30n3). To his credit, Campbell mentions some important recent work on Ancient Greek from a cognitive linguistic perspective, including Allan on the middle voice. However, the lack of any formal discussion on cognitive linguistics is disappointing, since cognitive linguistics is so intrinsically tied to functional linguistics. In sum, therefore, the reader would be better served by a more careful (if not necessarily comprehensive) introduction to these foundational modern discussions.

Similar problems continue in chapter two with Campbell's summary of linguistic theories. The chart of the branches of linguistics (p. 58) he provides is unhelpful and will only confuse students who might consider digging deeper. For example: descriptive linguistics is not limited to the study of specific languages, applied linguistics is not linguistics applied to specific functions, and the distinction between "micro" and "macro" linguistics (coined in the 1940s) is no longer used. Lastly, Campbell's choice to limit his discussion of functionalism to only Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) reveals an engagement with a small set of linguistic literature that is narrow in scope and frequently out of date. Since SFL is the one realm of linguistics that has been summarized for New Testament studies multiple times already, it would have been more helpful for Campbell to introduce to his audience other aspects of functional linguistics, such as language typology, grammaticalization theory, or perhaps basic functional linguistic principles like the iconic relationship between meaning and form. A contemporary text such as Arnoff and Rees-Miller's *Blackwell Handbook of Linguistics* would be a good place to start for such foundational concepts.

Now, at this point, the intended audience for this book might be wondering whether these details are particularly important to Campbell's overall purpose. It is certainly an open question as to how much linguistics a student of New Testament Greek needs—especially when it comes to history and theory. Nevertheless, our preceding discussion, if fair in its evaluation, would imply that this book cannot provide an accurate account of the development and current state of linguistics. Students and

scholars relying on Campbell's survey as an up-to-date linguistic summary will find a discussion that is either several decades out of date or factually inaccurate. Such a survey is in danger of causing more confusion than clarity for students seeking to access the linguistic field.

Let us now return to Campbell's work as a whole. When this book is good, it is extremely good. Chapters 3 through 10 present an invaluable contribution to students. The description of Levinsohn's work alone is worth the purchase price. Campbell is a gifted and thoughtful New Testament scholar and biblical theologian, and he is to be congratulated and applauded for offering another contribution that bridges the gap between biblical studies and linguistics. Preceding caveats of chapters 1 and 2 notwithstanding, the rest of the volume fills a significant and much needed presentation of the state of the art in New Testament and Koine Greek linguistics.

We encourage scholars and pastors to utilize this volume for its insights into recent work in the study of New Testament Greek exegetical and philological research. If the readership should critically engage with the discussions on voice, aspect, discourse analysis, and pronunciation, our field will be greatly advanced. Our hope is that Campbell's efforts will both encourage biblical scholars to deepen their engagement with Greek studies, and stimulate current and up-and-coming scholars to contribute to advances in Greek linguistics.

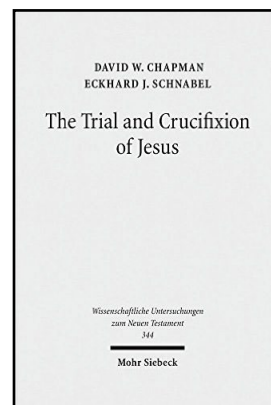
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David W. Chapman and Eckhard J. Schnabel. *The Trial and Crucifixion of Jesus: Texts and Commentary*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 344. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015. xxiv + 867 pp. £87.87/\$135.00.

For those interested in examining the historical plausibility of the gospel accounts of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, few resources could be more useful than this compendious reference work. Here in one volume David Chapman and Eckhard Schnabel have gathered an impressively comprehensive collection of hundreds of primary source materials bearing upon numerous facets of the final hours of Jesus's life, saving the curious student of the gospels untold hours of foraging and reference hunting. PhD candidates rejoice!

The authors adhere to a consistent format throughout the book: each primary source text is presented in its original language, followed by an accompanying English translation and a brief commentary upon the text by the authors. The commentary helpfully orients the reader to the text at hand, addressing the relevance of the material for the study of the trial or crucifixion of Jesus. Chapman and Schnabel discuss such matters as the likely provenance of the material, the interpretation of the text, and competing scholarly perspectives on the text. Occasionally the authors



also mention related historical considerations pertaining to the issues raised by the text. If the material is drawn from a larger work, the authors attempt to summarize the literary context of the excerpted passage. Throughout the volume, the authors also offer periodic summaries and assessments at the end of larger sections and sub-groupings of texts. These summaries successfully synthesize the contributions of the various materials and give the volume a sense of progression.

The volume is arranged topically and divided into three parts. In parts one and two, Schnabel sets forth texts and commentary which bear upon the Jewish trial before the Sanhedrin and the Roman trial before Pontius Pilate, respectively. Included in part one are texts that provide information regarding Annas and Caiaphas, the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin, capital cases in Jewish law, the interrogation of witnesses in Jewish legal proceedings, the charge of blasphemy within a 1st century Jewish context, the charges of being a seducer or a sorcerer, the abuse of prisoners, and the transfer of court cases. In part two are texts relating to Pontius Pilate, the jurisdiction of Roman prefects, the *crimen maiestatis* in Roman law, reports of trial proceedings, languages used in provincial court proceedings, amnesty and the appeal of the people for prisoners, abuse of convicted criminals, requisitioning of provincials by Roman authorities, carrying the crossbeam, and the titulus specifying a criminal's crime. Hence, parts one and two of the book offer a sweeping range of materials that bear upon the circumstances depicted in the gospel passion narratives leading up to the crucifixion scene.

In part three of the book, Chapman supplies texts and commentary which bear upon the crucifixion itself. Readers familiar with Chapman's earlier work, *Ancient Jewish and Christian Perceptions of Crucifixion*, will find part three of the present volume somewhat redundant, in so far as Chapman's previous work also provides a fairly extensive exploration of primary source material pertaining to the crucifixion. Still, the broad scope of the present work helps to differentiate the two volumes, and the different purpose of the new volume also results in a different presentation of the overlapping material between the two.

Chapman's contribution begins with a helpful discussion of the terminology and ambiguities of crucifixion and human bodily suspension in antiquity. Following this introductory section, Chapman offers texts related to bodily suspension in the Ancient Near East, the topic of barbarians and crucifixion within Graeco-Roman sources, suspension and crucifixion in classical and Hellenistic Greece, Jewish suspension and crucifixion, victims of crucifixion in the Roman period, crucifixion in Roman Judea-Palestine, methods and practices of bodily suspension in the Roman period, the application of the language of crucifixion to stories and myths that pre-date the practice (a phenomenon called "actualization" by Chapman), and perceptions of crucifixion in Graeco-Roman literature. Additionally, part three of the book contains a few sketches to help visualize what is depicted in the texts. Chapman's section of the book is especially thorough. If a given text has been discussed in scholarship pertaining to the practice of crucifixion in antiquity, one can be confident that the text can be found in this section of the volume.

Schnabel and Chapman have produced an excellent resource for the study of the condemnation and death of Jesus. The volume is meticulously documented, surprisingly navigable, and impressively wide-ranging in its scope. I can imagine several uses for this book. First, anyone interested in examining the historical reliability of the gospel passion narratives will not find a more thorough and objective presentation of the available data than what is offered here by Schnabel and Chapman. Second, exegetes will find that the materials in this book will help to situate New Testament texts within their proper historical context. This is especially the case for the gospel accounts of Jesus's trials, where Schnabel

provides quite a bit of data that ought to influence how we understand the dynamics of Jesus's examination and condemnation. Third, the book provides a good entry point for students interested in becoming more acquainted with the wealth of primary source material that exists for the world of the New Testament. Here are over 450 primary source excerpts, drawn from Ancient Near Eastern, Graeco-Roman, and Jewish sources, arranged topically, and presented in a straightforward way for the reader. The succinct commentaries make the material accessible and also serve as a pedagogical tool, modeling habits of good historical investigation. Finally, fourth, at well over 800 pages, the book can easily double as a paperweight, a doorstop, or a weapon to induce blunt force trauma.

I hesitate to criticize a book this long for being too short, but one way in which the book could have been made more useful for exegetes of the gospels would have been to include the relevant primary source texts for some of the events in the passion narratives which are not handled in this book, such as Jesus's exchange with Herod Antipas, the weeping of the daughters of Jerusalem, Jesus's promise of paradise to the penitent criminal, the tearing of the temple veil, the cosmic anomalies which occur around the moment of Jesus's death, the declaration of the centurion, or the burial of Jesus after the crucifixion. There are important non-biblical texts that provide relevant data for understanding and assessing the historical plausibility of each of these aspects of the passion narratives. The choice not to include such texts is certainly understandable, as this would have greatly broadened the scope of the book and diluted the volume's focus. Still, exegetes of the gospels would benefit greatly from a resource which does for the above passages what the present volume has done for others. Perhaps a companion volume is in order!

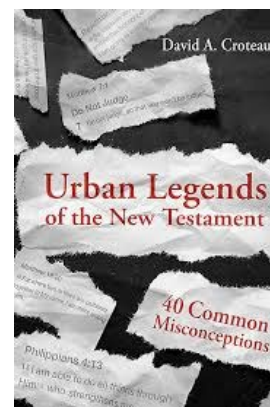
The primary readership of this volume will undoubtedly be scholars, if for no other reason than the prohibitive price. However, this book also has a certain utility for students and pastors, and those who can find the volume at a theological library will be rewarded with a resource that will surely enrich their study of the trial and crucifixion of Jesus.

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David A. Croteau. *Urban Legends of the New Testament: 40 Common Misconceptions*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015. 255 pp. £9.90/\$14.99.

In this work, *Urban Legends of the New Testament*, David Croteau seeks to address commonly espoused misunderstandings of the New Testament. The author examines forty exegetical myths commonly repeated in pulpits, books, and popular Bible studies. The author defines an "urban legend" as "a commonly circulated myth, repeated throughout the culture as common knowledge, but which isn't true" (p. xiii). In addressing commonly repeated errors in New Testament studies Croteau seeks to "focus on the correct interpretation of each passage and not on who has taught a legendary interpretation" (p. xiv).

The book contains forty concise chapters that generally range from four to six pages in length. In each chapter the author outlines the basic legend, as it is commonly presented in mainstream Christian circles, followed by his



explanation as to why the respective interpretation should be rejected. Having critiqued the shortcomings of each “legend” Croteau then provides his own brief understanding of the verse in question before providing some general applications as well as a bibliography for further study.

The book itself is highly readable. The short chapters along with the diversity of topics traversed keep the reader from getting bogged down. The tone of the work, along with the subjects covered, would indicate that the work is probably directed to a lay level audience that has some familiarity with the Scriptures. While there is engagement with technical works the language of the book is accessible to most. Helpfully, throughout the book there is a series of QR codes that one can scan and be taken to a short video clip that summarizes the basic issues of the chapter.

Urban Legends is a fresh and creative book. The author’s consistent structure of presenting the legend, critiquing it, and then providing an alternative understanding is clear and engaging. Croteau is evenhanded in his assessment and even in disputable interpretative conversation maintains a good degree of charity and scholarly humility. Many common misconceptions such as “Do not judge others,” “Agape is superior love to Phileo,” and “Jesus died when he was thirty-three,” though dismissed by most in the scholarly community, still manage to find legs at a popular level. By addressing such well-known errors the author provides more than just a corrective on the individual verse or issue, the author also models for the reader critically reflective hermeneutics.

The strength of the book is perhaps also its biggest weakness. As the author is addressing *common* legends of New Testament interpretation the target audience seems to be the common Christian in church rather than those leading in the pastorate or the academy. Of course there is nothing wrong with this, and indeed there is tremendous value in writing for this audience. For the seasoned Christian or pastor, however, many of the myths would already be known and understood as legends. Few serious students of the Scripture believe that “Jesus was a Carpenter” working in wood, “The Gospel is dynamite” in Acts 1:8, or “Good works are optional for the Christian.” While many of the legends in the books still find popularity many of those listed have died off and are no longer finding any airtime.

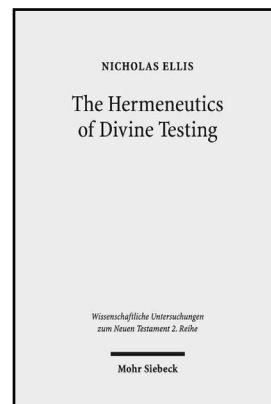
A few of the chapters could be clearer. In chapter 16 on the legend of “Go’ is not a command in the Great Commission” (pp. 91–95), for example, the author seeks to explain in simple terms the grammatical reasons why the participle in dispute should be taken with an imperatival force. The author hints, and I think correctly, that the participle should be understood as one of attendant circumstance. Without using jargon he does his best to argue this by looking at both grammar and contextual factors. Despite the author’s efforts to explain genuine grammatical complexity, however, one wonders whether the lay reader would sufficiently grasp the issue being discussed let alone have the skill to engage with it at a critical level. In this instance Croteau’s discussion seems to move away from a popular level to those in more technical spheres. Such lack of clarity, however, is the exception in the book.

Urban Legends of the New Testament is an easy and engaging read. Croteau has provided a helpful resource that not only corrects commonly perpetuated exegetical myths, but also provides a humble reminder that the student of Scripture must be diligent, judicious, and careful in handling the word of truth.

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Nicholas Ellis. *The Hermeneutics of Divine Testing: Cosmic Trials and Biblical Interpretation in the Epistle of James and Other Jewish Literature*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/396. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015. 275 pp. £77.46/\$119.00.

Nicholas Ellis's study on the problem of probation in the epistle of James is a welcome addition to the suddenly growing literature on James. His book, a "lightly revised version" of his Oxford doctoral dissertation (vii), is an articulate, well-argued, well-researched, detailed study into the difficulty that James poses for his reader with the declaration that God is *apeirastos*, which raises the seeming contradiction with Hebrew Scriptures where God does indeed test his people, from Abraham onward. Surveying a wide variety of Second Temple and later Jewish literature, Ellis draws forth a variety of paradigms within which James might have operated, and uses them to unpack the argument within the text. From this he is able to develop a clearer picture of the hermeneutics that the author of the epistle of James used in his own handling of key narratives.



The book begins by raising the particular issue of how to translate *peirasmos* in chapter one, revealing that most scholars use an ad hoc transition between verses 2–12 (“trials”) and 13 onward (“temptation”) without a secure justification for this decision. Add to this the difficulty of determining how James intends us to understand God as *apeirastos* (he “tests/tempts no one” or “ought not be tested/tempted”), one quickly comes to understand the reason for this study. Ellis then briefly acknowledges the various difficulties in this kind of study, both in locating the epistle of James and in discerning the appropriate parallel literature from which to draw, as well as presenting the current research on James and Jewish cosmologies.

At this point the main bulk of the thesis begins, with a focus on divine probation in Jewish literature. Ellis examines five different main texts (or groups of texts) in an attempt to discern the source of tests/temptations in human experience as well as how the texts deal with the perfection of God in relation to human failure. Is God to blame, or is making that claim putting God to the test? Examining samples from Jubilees (“rewritten Bible”), Sirach (“wisdom”), Philo (“Hellenistic philosophy”), the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* (a “cosmic drama”), and finally the Rabbinic Tradition (the “*yetzer*” and “demonic anthropology”), along with an abbreviated study on *4 Ezra* and the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, Ellis shows himself to work adeptly across a wide range of literature to arrive at very different answers. The range of texts is broad, if slightly puzzling, but answers to his earlier challenge that scholars not prematurely settle for one comparative “type.” The paradigms he arrives at are quite varied, from heavenly courtrooms with demonic opposition—a picture based on the introduction to Job but applied to Abraham (cf. p. 70)—to internalized desires at war with our own will. (He identifies versions of this latter paradigm in both Philo and Sirach, the former taking a Platonist attitude to the question of whether the created order is intrinsically good, the latter assuming a non-Platonist answer to that question.) He then takes these varied paradigms and reads James, particularly James 1:8, 1:13–14, and 4:5–8, to seek to discern where the anthropology of James may fit. Finding the anthropology of cautions against desires and double-mindedness and warnings of demons and demonic wisdom to sit most comfortably alongside the rewritten Bible paradigm of a cosmic courtroom (pp. 178–79), he then tests this hermeneutic against the creation, Abraham, and Job narratives alluded to in the epistle of James. Here the fruit of his work can best be seen as he reveals a useful reading of James that pays close attention to the elusive elements in the text without filling in too many gaps *ex nihilo*. In the end, his

conclusion ties together all the pieces, returning to the question of God as *apeirastos* in relation to a reconstructed “Jobraham” narrative found in the rewritten Bible tradition (p. 238).

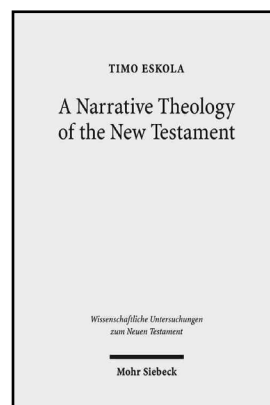
This book makes for an enjoyable read, tramping through vast swaths of literature and fine debate with finesse and clarity. The revelation of the blending of the stories of Job and Abraham in the literature creates a fine intertextual background from which to develop a nuanced hermeneutic for James. Some question could be raised regarding the choice of each of the literatures (particularly the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, a brow-raising choice, particularly given the absence of the Wisdom of Solomon and the relegation of the *Testaments* to an excursus; and why are no precedents given either?). One might also question the wisdom of attempting to put together Philo’s cosmology in a single chapter. However, Ellis repeatedly offers the caveat of the impossibility of surveying *all* the potentially relevant literature or compiling exhaustive cosmologies and anthropologies of every author, thus forcing the reader to concede the questions. The other difficulty for me with accepting his Jobraham thesis is the absence of any discussion of how Rahab fits in James’s hermeneutic (since he pairs Abraham with *her*, not Job, to reveal a tested faith).

Overall, I am very glad to have gotten the chance to read this book promptly upon its arrival in the field. Ellis raises challenging questions of hermeneutical assumptions regarding the epistle of James, and he then provides a winsome hermeneutical key. While the book assumes knowledge of Hebrew and Greek (and some German), it is still accessible to the average educated reader. For those who wish to study more deeply how God can relate to his creation in terms of tests but not be accountable for human failure, this work provides a generous set of options in literary backgrounds and a careful—and fruitful—reading of the text of James.

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Timo Eskola. *A Narrative Theology of the New Testament: Exploring the Metanarrative of Exile and Restoration*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 350. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015. xviii + 477 pp. £136.04/\$209.00.

With his most recent work Timo Eskola, New Testament scholar at the Theological Institute of Finland and Privatdozent at the University of Helsinki, investigates how the metanarrative of Israel’s exile and restoration provides a consistent theological context within which to understand the New Testament writings more deeply. Although the fruitful studies of restoration eschatology by E. P. Sanders and N. T. Wright are foundational to his proposal, he also adjusts and amends their viewpoints along the way. Restoration eschatology’s essential tenet is that, despite the return from captivity *via* Cyrus’s edict, Israel had not yet experienced the prophesied restoration; that is, even for Jews living in Judea, Israel yet remained in spiritual exile. Fundamental to Israel’s hope of restoration, furthermore, was the arrival of the Son of David who would end the curse of exile and build the eschatological temple (the destruction of the first temple being the core symbol of the exile). This point then provides the basis for Jesus’s self-understanding and mission, and becomes the narrative backdrop for how the New Testament unfolds



its Christology. Stated differently, the long-awaited restoration of Israel becomes the literary context for understanding the significance and accomplishment of Jesus. Eskola's aim, then, is to build upon restoration scholarship in order to test its explanatory power for the New Testament as a whole. By focusing on the metanarrative of exile and restoration as the major integrating principle, he endeavors to synthesize the theology of the New Testament.

A Narrative Theology of the New Testament opens with a chapter given to introductory matters, followed by four substantial chapters and a summary conclusion. In addition to a bibliography section, three indices are provided for ancient sources, authors, and subjects.

Chapter one outlines the purpose and method of narrative theology, discussing the relationship between history and narrative, and the role of semiotics and signification processes. Here Eskola also provides a brief summary of scholarship on restoration eschatology, along with more recent developments, including that of temple criticism.

"Jesus' Message" (chapter two) covers a wide array of topics: exile and restoration, Son of David as builder of the eschatological temple, the time of tribulation that marks the end of the exile, God's royal jubilee, priestly purity, the Lord's Supper as a priestly meal, and the suffering Messiah—each with four to six sub-topics. The opening section surveys the impact of the historical exile upon the formation of Jewish and Christian theology, and develops the concept of spiritual exile as an ongoing condition of the people. The other sections investigate major events and teachings in the life of Jesus in relation to this theology; for example, how by his triumphant entry Jesus had performed a prophetic act which, given the eschatology of Zechariah (8:3; 9:9), served as a symbol for the restoration of Jerusalem. Jesus's teaching on righteousness and his demand for perfect commitment to God's covenant, to take another example, are positioned within the restoration expectations that God would renew Israel unto holy obedience, enabling his people to live out their *Shema* confession.

In the third chapter ("The Teaching of Early Christianity"), Eskola studies the influence of restoration eschatology on the emergence of early post-Easter theology, examining the earliest stratum of hymns, confessional statements, and kerygmatic formulas which scholars have detected in the New Testament. Under three major headings ("Interpreting the events of Easter," "Six Christological narratives," and "Early Christology and Jewish synagogal liturgy"), the NT's teaching concerning the resurrection and ascension of Jesus is explored, utilizing subtexts like Psalm 110, as well as the context of Second Temple Judaism. Exemplary of the latter, he explores *merkabah* mysticism's influence on the early church's understanding of Jesus's enthronement, as well as how restoration expectations had been fostered through the *Amidah* prayer.

Chapter four ("Paul the Theologian") attempts to demonstrate the usefulness of the restoration paradigm for explaining and even shedding new light on Paul's thinking. Pauline topics such as Davidic messianism, the Holy Spirit, adoption as God's children, and Torah obedience, are found to fit well within the context of restoration eschatology. Eskola here critiques covenantal nomism in a helpful manner, promoting the "old" perspective on justification (pp. 328–41). By an intriguing connection between Jesus's opposition toward the temple and Paul's criticism toward "works of the law" (*erga nomou*), Eskola argues for a closer affinity between Paul's theology and Jesus's teaching—a potential boon for Pauline studies.

In the final chapter ("Jewish Christianity") before his conclusion, Eskola examines Hebrews, James, the letters of Peter, and the Johannine corpus in light of restoration eschatology. While his treatment of James, using the eschatological jubilee as a backdrop, was not entirely convincing, his exploration of

Revelation under the themes of release for the tribes of Israel, the enthronement of David, and the re-establishing of the garden-temple, rounded out his study in a particularly persuasive manner. Rightly, he melds the restoration from Israel's exile with that of humanity's from Eden. The conclusion then highlights the fruits of Eskola's project, such as allowing the new perspective on Jesus to correct some of the inconsistencies of the new perspective on Paul.

In terms of drawbacks, this volume would have benefited from a stronger editorial hand; typos and grammatical infelicities abound. More substantively, some of his connections between the historical context of Second Temple Judaism and New Testament theology lack sufficient demonstration—a case in point would be the purported influence of *merkabah* mysticism on the early church's understanding of Christ's enthronement. Moreover, Eskola's sound historical work would have been complimented by further exegetical work, especially on the prophetic material. For instance, an introductory section delineating the elements of the prophesied new exodus/restoration in more detail would have complemented his discussion on prevalent expectations in Second Temple Judaism and served his biblical theological aims well. His section on "Patterns of restoration" (pp. 23–30) comes nearest this desire, but lacks various elements (such as the reunification of the northern and southern kingdoms) that have been developed by others. This would also have been the place to rehearse the major motifs of the historical exodus out of Egypt (i.e., Passover), inasmuch as they feed into expectations for the second exodus. Lacking this synthesis, it is understandable why the book's treatment of John's gospel (pp. 399–408) neglects completely the Passover imagery of Jesus's crucifixion, not to mention the parallel between Jesus's first sign and that of the original exodus—which would have bolstered Eskola's thesis.

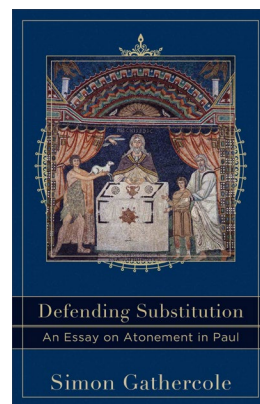
These remarks aside, Timo Eskola is to be thanked for this work of magnitude, which others will no doubt profit from and build upon—we commend it to scholars, pastors, and theological students. Not only was *A Narrative Theology of the New Testament* a delight to read, but the author's basic thesis has been demonstrated: New Testament theology is fundamentally the theology of exile and restoration.

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Simon J. Gathercole. *Defending Substitution: An Essay on Atonement in Paul*. Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015. 128 pp. £11.99/\$19.99.

Even the casual reader of Paul cannot help but appreciate the centrality of the death of Christ to the apostle's theology. But what exactly does it mean to Paul that "Christ died for our sins . . ." (1 Cor 15:3)? In *Defending Substitution*, Simon Gathercole defends the proposition, controversial within New Testament scholarship, that Paul understands Jesus to have died as substitute for the sins of his people.

Gathercole begins by providing definition and parameters for his study. He defines substitution as "Christ's death in our place, instead of us" (pp. 15, 17). Gathercole observes that substitution may but need not entail such concepts as penalty, propitiation, and satisfaction (pp. 18–23). Gathercole's interests lie strictly in substitution in Paul's writings. Gathercole furthermore distinguishes



substitution from the similar category of representation. Representation entails that the agent and beneficiaries are “part of the [same] body”; substitution, that the agent “tak[es] the place of and thereby oust[s]” the beneficiaries (p. 20). That Jesus’s death is substitutionary means that he “did something, underwent something, so that we did not and would not have to do so” (p. 15).

Observing that many New Testament scholars understand Paul to teach that Christ’s death was representative but not substitutionary, Gathercole surveys some of the leading exegetical objections voiced against substitution in Paul: Tübingen’s understandings of representation, Morna Hooker’s theory of “interchange,” and J. L. Martyn’s model of apocalyptic deliverance. For all their diversity, Gathercole concludes, each objection fails to account for the fact that Paul understands Jesus’s death to address individual transgressions, not merely sin in the aggregate, and that Paul understands sin not only in terms of its power but also in terms of guilt.

Gathercole proceeds to defend substitution from two passages in Paul, 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 and Romans 5:6–8. In 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, Paul specifies what is central to the gospel that he and the other apostles preach. Part of that core is the proposition that “Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.” Gathercole argues that the “Scriptures” that Paul has in mind here must include Isaiah 53, the account of the Suffering Servant. When we recognize this background, then we must acknowledge the place of substitution in 1 Corinthians 15:3. The Servant “suffers *alone*” for persons “who are responsible for this suffering and yet are miraculously saved by it” (p. 68). His death, furthermore, is not only “*caused* by the sinful behavior of his persecutors but also regarded as a punishment *in place of* the people for their benefit” (p. 69). Christ, Paul declares, is this Servant who died a substitutionary death.

In Romans 5:6–8, Paul draws a comparison between Christ’s death and “other heroic deaths” (p. 86). Which deaths might Paul have had in mind? Gathercole argues that within Greco-Roman literature and philosophy there was a venerable tradition of the noble, vicarious death. In particular, the substitutionary death of Alcestis for her husband, Admetus, was “perhaps the most well-established example of substitutionary death for pagans” in the first century (p. 96). This example may well be in the background of Romans 5:7. For all the differences between the death of Jesus and the death of Alcestis, their *tertium comparationis* is telling: the death of a substitute in which “the sacrificial death of the one aims at rescuing the other from death” (p. 104).

Gathercole concludes by observing that defining the meaning of Jesus’s death is not a zero-sum enterprise. That Paul understood Jesus’s death to be substitutionary in no way necessarily militates against it being also representative or liberating (p. 111). What must be granted, however, is that, for Paul, Jesus’s death is never less than substitutionary.

Defending Substitution is a measured, fresh, and persuasive statement of the case that Paul understood Jesus’s death to be substitutionary. In addressing two critical passages in Paul, Gathercole highlights dimensions of those passages that are sometimes overlooked in this discussion—the Isaianic background to 1 Corinthians 15:3 and the Greco-Roman background to Romans 5:6–8. While Paul should be understood in these texts to speak of Jesus’s death in substitutionary terms independently of these background considerations (cf. p. 72), Gathercole’s findings offer welcome corroboration of an often-embattled biblical teaching.

At points, greater clarity would have strengthened the argument. Gathercole states, for example, that “Jesus’ death is for Paul a *theological* consequence of sins rather than a straightforwardly historical one” (p. 72, emphasis original). Gathercole here means to say that Jesus’s death “cannot be explained merely in terms of historical causation.” Rather, “the divinely ordained consequence of sins is always

death” (pp. 72–73). Gathercole’s point is well-taken, but the wording of his proposed distinction (“historical,” “theological”) could permit a distancing of the divine purpose from the events of history that Paul would not have acknowledged. Furthermore, while Gathercole distinguishes substitution and representation, he rightly acknowledges the difficulty of maintaining a distinction, given the inherent overlap and similarities between the two ideas (p. 20n14). He subsequently offers some suggestions how the two might be integrated, but stops short of a concrete proposal (pp. 111–12). Further reflection on the relationship between substitution and representation would have enhanced Gathercole’s case.

One of the most salutary features of *Defending Substitution* is its unwillingness to be forced into false dichotomies. Is Christ’s death substitutionary or representative? Substitutionary or liberating? In declining to accept such terms of debate, and in probing the depths of Paul’s teaching on substitution, Gathercole succeeds in helping us to grasp the magnitude and depth of Christ’s death for our sins.

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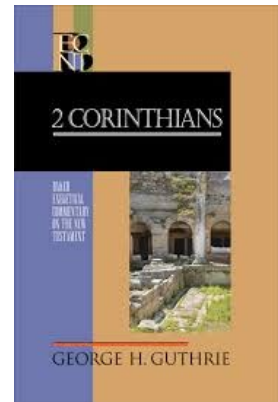
George Guthrie. *2 Corinthians*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. 736 pp. £29.99/\$49.99.

Throughout the history of church, the book of 2 Corinthians has often lived in the shadow of its older sibling 1 Corinthians. While not intentionally neglected, 2 Corinthians has not received nearly as much attention as it deserves. Fortunately, however, times are changing and over the last few decades there has been a renewed interest in the lesser-known epistle to the Corinthians. Following previous commentaries on 2 Corinthians, including those by Furnish, Harris, and Barnett, George Guthrie’s new commentary adds another significant contribution to our understanding of the epistle. Further conversations about the book are needed as “all that could be said has not been said” (p. xii).

This commentary, like others in the Baker Exegetical series, seeks to marry exegesis and theology with clarity and coherence. After dealing with the normal introductory issues surrounding authorship, and audience, Guthrie humbly navigates the contentious issue of the book’s unity and provides sensible reflections on the book’s overall purpose. He concludes,

In short, the message of 2 Corinthians is that Paul commends his ministry to the Corinthians as one of integrity. Appointed by God, under the lordship of Christ, and suffering in his proclamation of the gospel, Paul calls the Corinthians to repent from unhealthy relationships and embrace his authentic leadership. Their appropriate response will be seen, on the one hand, by again taking up the collection for Jerusalem, and on the other hand, by resolutely rejecting the ministry of the false teachers. (p. 50)

The commentary provides an excellent mix of technical nuance and big-picture clarity. Each pericope begins with a helpful half-page summary that enables the reader to see the whole forest before looking at the individual trees. In a similar fashion each section concludes with a brief paragraph that identifies the main exegetical ideas of the passage along with their contribution to the large theological ideas of the book. In the main body of the commentary Guthrie provides thorough and often highly



sophisticated insights into the text. Without losing the reader, the author provides careful explanation of each individual unit within the book and provides judgments that are both accessible and astute. There are numerous diagrams, charts, and tables throughout the commentary that elucidate the uses of words, grammar, and the development of themes. The crisp layout along with helpful footnoting and headings make this a highly usable resource.

One of the outstanding features of this commentary is Guthrie's sensitivity to the cultural backdrop and imagery of 2 Corinthians. In his analysis of 2 Cor 2:14–16, for example, Guthrie masterfully explores the background of the Roman triumphal procession and how that metaphor shapes the understanding of authentic Christian ministry under God. His observations give evidence of thorough research and provide access for the reader to better understand both the world of the Corinthians and the significance of it to understanding the text. Although there may be times when some readers might feel overwhelmed by the detail, one feels that the mix between technicality and readability is about right in this volume.

George Guthrie has provided a benchmark commentary on 2 Corinthians. His work demonstrates excellent scholarship that is marked by humility as well as pastoral warmth and wisdom. Throughout this commentary Guthrie's interpretive decisions are both judicious and persuasive. Even if one were to reach different exegetical conclusions than the author, there can certainly be no charge that Guthrie's interpretation lacks critical judgment or thoroughness. *2 Corinthians* is fresh, engaging, and thoroughly accessible to pastor and scholar alike and should be an automatic inclusion into the library of anyone hoping to mine the wealth of this wonderful epistle.

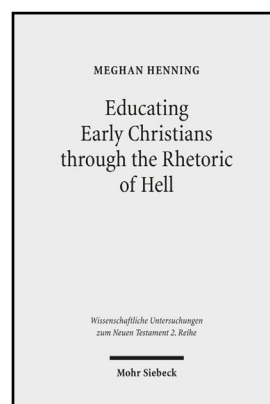
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Meghan Henning. *Educating Early Christians through the Rhetoric of Hell: "Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth" as Paideia in Matthew and the Early Church*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/382. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. xiii + 294 pp. £78.11/\$120.00.

Educating Early Christians through the Rhetoric of Hell by Meghan Henning (Assistant Professor of Christian Origins, University of Dayton, Ohio) is a well-researched, well-written work, which argues that Matthew and the early church utilized the biblical conception of "hell" and its vivid afterlife imagery as *paideia* or "Greco-Roman education" (p. 44). This work is a revision of Henning's Ph.D. dissertation (2013) at Emory University supervised by Carl R. Holladay and Adela Yarbro Collins (pp. vii–viii).

Henning conspicuously places her goal, thesis, and methodology in the opening pages of her work. Henning's goal is "to determine how the concept of hell functioned within early Christianity" (p. 10). Henning's thesis explains the early Christians' pedagogical use of "hell" as a rhetorical conduit for ethical conformity to the mores of the nascent Christian communities:

We will demonstrate that whether or not "hell" contains the kernel of the Christian message, it was viewed by ancient Christians as a useful vehicle for communicating the message. As a vehicle for educating early Christians, a better understanding of the



rhetoric of eternal punishment can provide invaluable data about the attempts of early Christians to establish, fortify, and expand their fledgling communities (p. 3; cf. pp. 140–45).

In terms of method, Henning works with the primary sources in a straightforward, (mostly) chronological manner, tracing the progressive development of the concept of hell from the Hebrew Bible to Christian apocalypses and church fathers. The author focuses particularly on the “rhetorical orientation and cultural milieu” of these sources (p. 11).

Structurally, Henning’s work consists of a preface, eight chapters, seven appendices (which are essentially lexical and thematic analyses that serve as reference charts or to fill lacunae from the preceding chapters), an impressive twenty-one page bibliography, and useful indices for ancient sources, modern authors, and subjects. Chapter one serves as Henning’s prolegomenon to “the history of hellish rhetoric” (p. 1). Chapters two through five trace the chronological development of “hellish rhetoric” through the Hebrew Bible, Greek and Latin literature, Jewish apocalyptic literature, and the NT. Chapter six investigates the “pedagogical role of eschatological judgment, eternal punishment, and the afterlife in Matthew” (p. 138). Finally, chapters seven through eight explore the “pedagogical function of hell in the early Christian apocalypses and the early church,” and conclude with “the landscape of hell and the cultivation of early Christianity” (pp. 174, 224).

There is much to commend in Henning’s work: it is well-structured, concise, and deals chiefly with the primary sources. Overall, Henning’s thesis is compelling in that the kerygma of “hell” in the early church (as today) served as an eschatological warning of impending judgment to those not obeying or conforming to biblical teachings. Henning’s investigation is helpful in that it shows the powerful effects of the ancient authors’ use of *ekphrasis* (descriptive language appealing to the readers’ imagination) and *enargeia* (“vividness”) in the church’s preaching about hell (p. 156). By using vivid eschatological imagery that would have been familiar (or at least somewhat familiar) to his audience, Matthew effectively utilizes the rhetorical devices of *ekphrasis* and *enargeia* to create “an emotionally moving picture of eschatological judgment,” and to reinforce specific “ethical” and “cultural boundaries” of the nascent Matthean community (pp. 162–63, 168–69). Henning cites Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* 3:12) in support of her thesis: “For punishments and threats are for this end, that fearing the penalty we may abstain from sinning” (p. 224). However, for Clement to note the pedagogical praxis of the early church in its preaching of eternal punishment is altogether different from saying that hell does not exist as a literal place of eternal punishment—as Henning alludes to throughout her work (e.g., Henning’s comments on pp. 231–32).

As good as Henning’s work is it is not without faults such as typographical errors (e.g., “imported bluntly into own [*sic*] world,” p. 232). Despite her subtitle, Henning spends relatively little time exploring the afterlife imagery in Matthew, and this work is devoid of any detailed exegetical/syntactical analysis of biblical texts. Thus, it seems that the focus of Henning’s writing shifted throughout this project. However, the primary flaw of this work (albeit, not the focus of Henning’s thesis) is that Henning sees a bifurcation between the world(s) of the “ancient authors” and the twenty-first century that seemingly necessitates the striking of “the words ‘damn’ and ‘hell’ from our vocabulary” (p. 232). Baldly stated, if Henning’s eschatological presuppositions are correct, then there is no real, eternal punishment for humanity’s sin, and, therefore, Jesus’s atoning, substitutionary sacrifice on the cross was superfluous. So too, the deaths of countless Christian martyrs throughout history.

In sum, *Educating Early Christians through the Rhetoric of Hell* reveals the complexity in contemporary approaches to eschatology and the parables of Jesus. Although Henning's eschatological presuppositions are problematic (at least to this reviewer), she does argue her thesis well. Ultimately, this work is a must-have for serious students of the afterlife imagery of the Bible, Second Temple Literature, and later Christian writings.

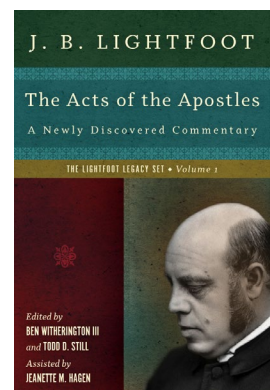
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J. B. Lightfoot. *The Acts of the Apostles: A Newly Discovered Commentary*. Edited by Ben Witherington III and Todd D. Still. The Lightfoot Legacy Set. Volume 1. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014. 397 pp. £28.99/\$40.00.

Who doesn't enjoy a great account of the discovery of long-lost-treasure? Well, this newly discovered (incomplete) commentary on Acts by J. B. Lightfoot (1828–89) is one that will be treasured by many. Lightfoot was Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University (one of the famous Cambridge Triumvirate along with F. J. A. Hort and B. F. Westcott) and, from 1879 until his death in 1889, Bishop of Durham. Although he was a prolific writer, it was his commentaries on the Pauline letters of Galatians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon, as well as his five-volume study of the Apostolic Fathers, that made the most lasting contribution to Lightfoot's reputation as one of the greatest scholars of the New Testament and early church history. His detailed historical and grammatical exegetical works carefully explain the meaning of the text, defend the authenticity and reliability of the New Testament, and model how to respond to grandiose reconstructions of early Christian history (e.g., his refutation of F. C. Baur and the "Tübingen school"). So, it is a delight to hear that we will be treated to three volumes of previously unpublished notes of Lightfoot's on Acts (volume one), John's Gospel (volume two, to be released in December 2015), and 2 Corinthians and 1 Peter (volume three, scheduled for release in 2016).

In this volume Ben Witherington and Todd Still have deciphered and combined two sets of Lightfoot's handwritten lecture notes on Acts 1–21 into one readable commentary. As valuable as this is, the volume includes much more. In addition to Witherington's introductory account of his exciting discovery of these manuscripts in the Durham Cathedral Library (complete with some photographs of the cupboards and Lightfoot's notes) and his orientation to Lightfoot as a biblical commentator, the volume includes the following by Lightfoot:

1. a general introduction to interpreting the New Testament (where he argues that the divine inspiration of Scripture does not override the particular characteristics of the human authors, as seen, for instance, in James's and Paul's complementary rather than contradictory view of the law, pp. 43–44);
2. an introduction to Acts (where he analyzes the manuscripts and lectionaries and explains the rules of textual criticism, showing respect for J. A. Bengel [it is worth remembering here that Lightfoot was one of those involved in the first revision of the KJV], defends the



- authenticity and reliability of the narrative of Acts, and argues for the Lukan authorship of Acts);
3. then, after the commentary, a 46-page article on Acts from the second British edition of Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible* that was omitted in subsequent editions and thus has been long out of print (the article argues more extensively than his commentary from internal and external evidence for the reliability and Lukan authorship of Acts);
 4. a 10-page article on how "recent discoveries" (i.e., inscriptions) confirm the historical accuracy of Acts (e.g., for the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, as the governor of Cyprus);
 5. a previously published lecture on Paul's travels after Acts (where he combines early external tradition with evidence from the Pastoral Epistles into a very readable account of Paul's movements between his release from prison at the end of Acts and his later imprisonment, and death, in Rome after writing 2 Timothy);
 6. finally, an anonymous obituary that summarizes Lightfoot's life and work.

The commentary itself is a combination of brief explanatory comments on words and phrases of the Greek text (including brief comments on various manuscript readings), cross references to other New Testament writers as well as to the Old Testament, illustrative references to ancient writers, and brief interaction with other commentators (e.g., Baumgarten, Bengel, Meyer) and grammarians (Winer). In addition, throughout the commentary there are at least 12 excurses on topics as diverse as: a reconciliation of the apparently differing accounts of Judas's demise; a discussion of the tongues of Acts as the same as the tongues of 1 Corinthians (a temporary gift of speaking in human foreign languages); an analysis of the promises to Peter as contradicting the claims of the Roman Catholic church; an unlikely argument that Simon Magus (of Acts 8) became the father of Gnosticism; and a defense of the Pauline character of the speech at Miletus. I especially enjoyed his argument that Acts is meant to be read as a continuation of Luke's Gospel as "the narrative of the working of Jesus in the church" and that in Acts "our Lord himself is represented as the chief agent" (p. 71)!

Readers should be aware, however, that in addition to untranslated Greek words at the beginning of each comment on a verse-by-verse basis, there are also occasional German and Latin quotes that are also left untranslated (occasionally all that is provided is a Greek phrase followed by a German or Latin quotation from a commentator such as Meyer or Bengel; cf. pp. 96–98). Furthermore, sometimes the explanatory comments are just too brief to be helpful (e.g., at 1:4 we have the following: "συναλιζόμενος. An interesting word."). These very brief explanatory comments, however, do not detract from the overall value of this volume. At this point it also needs to be remembered that these were originally his own handwritten notes for his classroom material. Overall, Lightfoot's notes are succinct, but clear.

This volume of Lightfoot's notes will guide you patiently and reverently through much of the text of Acts. You will be encouraged to pause to notice the details of the text and occasionally look over the broad landscape to see how the details of the text relate to the broader picture of the New Testament account of the work of the Lord Jesus in building his church.

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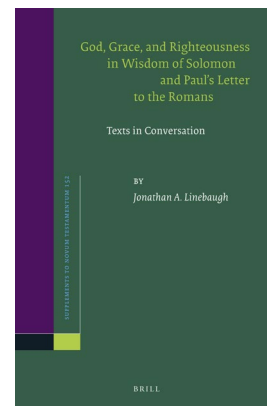
Jonathan A. Linebaugh. *God, Grace, and Righteousness in Wisdom of Solomon and Paul*. Supplements to Novum Testamentum 152. Leiden: Brill, 2013. 268 pp. £111.00/\$141.00.

In *God, Grace, and Righteousness*, Jonathan A. Linebaugh seeks to discover how a Jew soaked in scripture and schooled in philosophy would react to Paul's gospel. Therefore, Linebaugh facilitates a contextual conversation between the author of *Wisdom* and Paul regarding their essential theological structures—especially with respect to (1) the relation of Jews and non-Jews, (2) the meaning and theological ordering of divine justice and grace, and (3) the hermeneutical logic that shapes a rereading of Israel's scripture (p. 2–20).

To this end, Linebaugh explores *Wisdom's* eschatology and its celebration of Sophia, whose operation of the cosmic order shapes the sage's "comprehensive reading of history and reality." He finds that *Wisdom* argues from and for "a consistent theological vision shaped by the rational exercise of divine justice and the predictable patterns of moral order" (p. 28). This theological vision finds a paradigmatic expression in the Exodus event. As seen in Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the God of both illimitable love and immutable justice saves the righteous by rescuing them from the influence of ungodly nations, who inevitably meet their appropriate destruction (p. 60). As part of his universal love, God shows mercy to the ungodly nations, but in light of his justice, this mercy is by no means salvific. Conversely, because of her righteousness, God always saves Israel (p. 79). Whenever the Pentateuch appears to contradict this principle, *Wisdom* manipulates the material to maintain his vision (p. 69). Therefore, for *Wisdom*, the justification of ungodly Gentiles would be "an oxymoronic absurdity" that destabilizes the very moral structure of the world God's wisdom secures (p. 85).

Linebaugh goes on to compare the authors' polemics against idolatry and immorality, their understandings of divine justice and grace, and their rereadings of Israel's scriptures. He argues that, in Romans 1–2, Paul draws from *Wisdom* 13–14 to reinforce the opposite rhetorical function. Over against *Wisdom's* pursuit to underline the distinction between Gentile and Jew, Paul uses the tradition "to establish the essential unity of humanity: *homo peccator*" (p. 96). Whereas Paul declares there is no distinction between Gentile and Jew, *Wisdom* considers the distinction clear: Jews worship God, and Gentiles worship idols (p. 105). While both authors are theologians of righteousness and grace, *Wisdom* locates these terms in the Exodus event and Paul does so in relationship to Christ. Consequently, the sage considers the execution of God's son as exemplifying the injustice of the gentiles (*Wisdom* 2), but Paul declares that Christ's crucifixion demonstrates the righteousness of God. In other words, Paul sees divine justice as established in an instance that *Wisdom* would consider a double injustice: the murder of the righteous person and the justification of the wicked (p. 124–25).

Although both authors share the same canon, they operate with different hermeneutics. For instance, regarding *Wisdom* 10–19 and Romans 9–11, the fault-line that divides them is an Exodus-shaped hermeneutic over against a Christ-shaped one. Despite the wide continuity within these chapters, the resonances reveal just how much difference Paul's hermeneutic makes (p. 181). For example, in contrast to *Wisdom's* understanding of divine mercy, Paul sees it not as the restoration of the righteous but the rebirth of the unrighteous (p. 187). *Wisdom*, who understands God's election and judgment as predictable and rational, would surely balk at Paul's reduction of the difference between the objects of mercy and wrath to the inscrutable will of God. Over against the sage, Paul declares that divine election



is ultimately inexplicable in human terms: God saves and hardens whomever he so desires. Moreover, according to Paul, God's grace upon Israel has never been contingent upon their worth. Therefore, in contrast to *Wisdom's* construal of righteous Israel awaiting redemption on the day of the Lord, Paul depicts Israel as a disobedient people who nevertheless remain within God's salvific plan (p. 206).

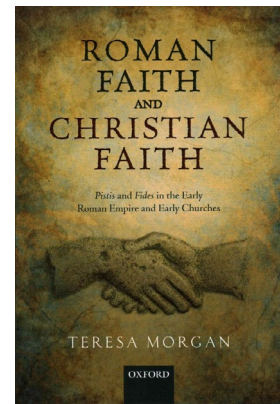
God, Grace, and Righteousness is masterfully done. Its insights are significant. Linebaugh not only summarizes the previous comparisons from other scholars (e.g., Cheon, McGlynn, Barclay, and Watson) but also further elucidates how Romans and *Wisdom* stand vis-à-vis each other—especially in relationship to how they read Israel's scripture and understand salvation history. Linebaugh's work should become the first stop for anyone interested in the relationship between *Wisdom* and Romans and will perhaps even be the final word on the matter for many of them. I have only two slight critiques. First, it would have been helpful for Linebaugh to spell out more clearly when he departs from the works of Watson, Barclay, and so on, as well as how exactly he adds to them. Finally, in light of his research, where does Linebaugh suggest scholars go next with respect to the comparison of *Wisdom* and Romans?

In conclusion, Linebaugh's research illuminates all the more how some Jews would *not* be shocked by Paul's stress on God's righteousness and mercy but by Paul's radical redefinition of these terms: "God justly justifies the unjust!" I am thankful for Linebaugh's contribution and am confident I will return to it often: both for my own understanding of Paul's gospel as well as for help in explaining to my students what is so incredible about God's righteousness and so amazing about his grace.

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Teresa Morgan. *Roman Faith and Christian Faith: Pistis and Fides in the Early Roman Empire and Early Churches*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. xi + 626 pp. £95.00/\$155.00.

Morgan's study attempts to answer a simple question: "why is faith so important to Christians?" (p. 1). The remarkable prevalence of faith language occurring frequently throughout a number of NT writings indicates that faith was central from the very beginnings of the early Christian movement—so much so, in fact, that Morgan suggests the likelihood that it may be rooted in memories of Jesus's proclamation and call to individuals. Rather than starting from the premise that early Christian faith is uniquely set apart from other understandings of faith, Morgan argues that one should first seek to understand how Christian faith is similar to and different from the workings of faith in the early Roman empire. Only after the interpreter has done this will s/he be able to see fully how the early Christians have creatively developed new meanings and understandings of faith. While her study is a treasure trove of rich information and significant insights related to faith in the Roman period, her primary contention is that faith is "first and foremost, neither a body of beliefs nor a function of the heart or mind, but *a relationship which creates community*" (p. 14, italics mine). Many of the questions that guide her study focus on the way in which faith forms relationships and communities, the threats to faith, and the foundation of faith (see pp. 34–35).



Morgan first works to situate faith language within its socio-cultural context by examining its use in Greco-Roman domestic (ch. 2), state (ch. 3), and religious discourses (ch. 4), as well as in the Septuagint (ch. 5). Morgan notes how faith-language is used to discuss a variety of relationships and is especially prominent and valued in the domestic sphere between patrons-clients, masters-slaves, and lovers. Faith is also enacted between soldiers and their army commanders, is a necessary virtue of the emperors, takes place between the Roman senate and Rome's citizens, and is frequently invoked in Roman juridical contexts. Morgan demonstrates that many of the authors used faith language alongside of cognitive/thinking language, and this shows how faith language often contains notions of trust, trustworthiness, *and* (propositional) belief. People often enact faith because they suppose (i.e., "think") the object of their faith is trustworthy. And often faith is invoked in moments when there is a crisis or some kind of danger that threatens relationships. If faith is in doubt, then oaths, appeals to cults of Fides, and legal trusts may be used to strengthen trust between two parties and thereby insuring good faith. The frequent use of faith language in interpersonal contexts means that one cannot so easily disentangle faith, then, as propositional content (belief) from the risk of trusting others. Morgan emphasizes that the incredible range of activities within which faith is invoked indicate its importance "for the creation, articulation, and functioning of any group or institution" (p. 117). The importance of faith for society and community explains why such virtues as faith and righteousness are emphasized in Roman literary depictions of a so-called golden age. The gods are also repeatedly spoken of as showing faith toward their human worshippers. Jupiter and cults of Fides are looked to as the guardians of oaths and treaties. The trustworthiness of the gods is also often held up as creating the virtue of faith in those who worship the gods. Divine faith and human faith are foundational for society and for the establishment of relationships, for "to deny the gods is to dismantle our understanding not only of the divine but of human nature and society" (p. 173). Within the Septuagint faith language is used to describe the creation and development of relationships, and this is seen paradigmatically in the story of Abraham where Abraham's faith "does not evolve without the negotiation of doubt" (p. 181). Faith language is also used, however, to refer to God's continued commitment to humanity as seen, for example, in his promise to show faith to the promises made to David (Ps 89; Isa 55).

In chs. 6–10 Morgan turns to the NT compositions and shows how the early Christians draw upon established meanings of faith language and creatively develop it into a new concept and practice. She notes that the frequency of faith language in the early Pauline texts is unmatched by the Greco-Roman sources: "The central importance of *pistis* to Christians will mean that they develop understandings of its nature and operation, especially between the divine and humanity, which are far more complex than those of surrounding cultures" (p. 223). Morgan argues that Paul develops a divine-human economy of faith such that God is faithful to his people and, through the trustworthiness of his apostles, works to create faith in God's people (e.g., 1 Thess 1:4, 7–8; 2:4). This economy of divine-human faith is developed further in Romans and Galatians where Christ takes on a more central role. Morgan argues that the *pistis Christou* passages have a "Janus-faced quality," as they express both Christ's character of faith toward God and humans *and* set him forth as the one who creates faith in his people. "It is precisely the fact that Christ is both faithful to God and worthy of God's trust, trustworthy by human beings and trusted by them, that enables him to take those who *pisteuein* into righteousness" (p. 274). Thus, Paul uses faith language to articulate "the tripartite relationship between God, Christ, and humanity, putting Christ in the centre of a nexus of faithfulness, trustworthiness, and trust which runs in all direction between God and Christ, Christ and humanity, and humanity and God" (p. 281). The intensity with which Paul uses faith language to describe this three-way relationship is unparalleled. Both Romans and Galatians

are also distinctive for their emphasis on faith as establishing a new relationship between humans and God/Christ. Morgan further notes the innovation of actually describing the early Christians with such language as “those who belong to the household of trust” (Gal 6:10) or “the faithful.” Also surprising is the fact that the early Christians all but eliminate the more prosaic uses of faith to describe intra-human relations; rather, faith is almost entirely reworked as something that only characterizes the divine-human relationship.

Morgan’s examination of the Synoptic Gospels further confirms her argument that faith-language is primarily as “a relationship and a praxis, rather than primarily as a state of the heart and mind with an object” (p. 348). Faith language is used within Mark’s Gospel to “express the complexity of Jesus’s identity and status, and the complexity of the divine-human relationship when Jesus is involved” (p. 349). For example, when Mark notes that Jesus could do no miracles in Nazareth because of the lack of faith (6:5–6), this draws attention to the absence of a relationship between Jesus and the people which prevents the mediation of God’s power between Jesus and the people. Christ’s unique identity as associated with God and yet human means that faith language often captures the “complexity and . . . the mystery of his identity” (p. 393). Within the Acts of the Apostles it is remarkable that the author never uses faith language to describe the relationship between members among the community; rather, Acts is all about how the word of God, the message of the resurrected Christ, creates faith in the Lord Jesus. John’s Gospel is similar in that its use of faith language (always the verb) is used exclusively to refer to the human response of trust in Christ as the Son of God. Once again, relational trust is interconnected with propositional beliefs about Jesus’s identity.

Given the frequency with which theologians have emphasized the uniqueness of faith as consisting in its interiority, Morgan examines the extent to which faith is understood as an emotion. She shows that faith is often spoken of as intertwined with other emotions, but that later Christian theologians have emphasized its interiority in a way that does not match its use in the first-century. The major contribution of the early Christians to our understanding of faith, rather, lies in the overwhelming use of faith to structure the divine-human relationship and the structure of Christian communities. Morgan’s study demonstrates persuasively that the NT’s use of faith “proved to be so rich, and so adaptable to developing understandings of the relationship between God, Christ, and humanity, together with understandings of human life and activity within that relationship, that *pistis* is everywhere involved with the early evolution of those understandings” (p. 503).

I suspect that this book will become a classic within NT studies as it is the only full-length treatment of the early Christian use of faith as seen within its first-century domestic, political, and religious context (at least so far as I know). The majority of recent studies on faith have been dominated by the question of how to translate and understand Paul’s contentious *pistis Christou* phrases, but Morgan’s study will cause biblical interpreters to reexamine their assumptions about the meaning of faith-language. Morgan’s study contains an incredible wealth of primary source documentation of the uses of faith language *and* simultaneously presents a strong thesis regarding the use of faith language to structure *relationships* (especially the divine-human relationship for the NT texts). This lengthy review has not been able to do justice to the potential insights the biblical exegete may derive by situating the NT use of faith language within its first-century context. Given that Morgan turns her eye to *all of the NT compositions*, the reader may find herself longing for fuller examination of the particular passages and how faith language

may relate, for example, to justice/righteousness language, but Morgan has provided a great service by infusing NT studies with a robust and creative treatment of one of its most central themes.

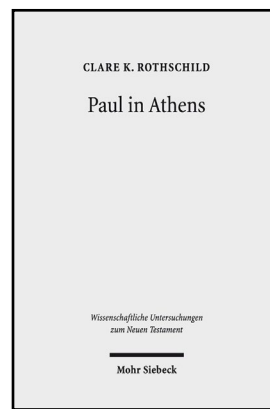
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Clare K. Rothschild. *Paul in Athens: The Popular Religious Context of Acts 17*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 341. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. 215 + xix pp. £87.87/\$135.00.

Critical commentators on Acts frequently note the *possibility* that in Paul's Areopagus address (Acts 17:22–31) Paul may be quoting the 6th century BCE Cretan seer Epimenides when he says: “in him we live and move and have our being” (17:28a). Some also note the relevance of Epimenides who purified Athens when he set up altars for an unknown god on the Areopagus as context for Paul's claim to have observed an altar set up for an unknown god (17:23). In *Paul in Athens* Rothschild claims, however, that Luke not only has Paul cite Epimenides but “fashions his portrait of Paul in Acts on a variety of popular traditions about him” (p. 133). Interpreters of Acts 17 have been too distracted with the presence of the Hellenistic philosophers (17:18a), particularly the Stoics and Stoicism, to see that “the most logical explanation of the apparently ad hoc components of Paul's visit to Athens . . . is the nexus of traditions crystallized around the figure of Epimenides in the second century C.E.” (p. 4). Luke draws on popular religious *topoi* related to Epimenides in order to facilitate Luke's agenda of “cult transfer—an aim spanning the entire narrative of Luke-Acts, although focused in Luke's portrait of Paul” (p. 6).

In ch. 2 Rothschild seeks to establish through an examination of the early reception history of Acts 17:28a that Paul is citing Epimenides. At best, I think Rothschild shows that this is a possibility but it is far from certain. Rothschild suggests, however, that its plausibility is bolstered when one recognizes the similarities between Paul and Epimenides: “For Luke, *both* Paul and Epimenides are strangers from afar summoned to Athens to fix a mistake; *both* announce that the tomb of their god is a lie; and, *both* transfer eastern cult traditions to Greece through Asia” (p. 24). Chapter 3 presents Rothschild's presentation of the Greek text and translation with copious notations justifying her translational decisions. One can see something of her particular agenda as any potential for hostility or criticism in Paul's speech is toned down. Paul is “stirred” (not “provoked”) when he looks at the city “chock-full of monuments” (instead of “idols”). The men of Athens are addressed as “extremely devout in every respect” (not “superstitious”). Paul calls everyone to “acknowledge” (not “repent”).

Chapter 4 provides a valuable discussion of the Epimenides and the traditions attached to him (i.e., the *Epimenidea*). Rothschild draws upon Plato, Aristotle, Diogenes Laertius, and 2nd century anecdotes to paint a picture of the seer as a legislator, religious guide, miracle worker, and purifier of Athens. Chapters 5 and 6 are the heart of Rothschild's argument, and here she reads the Areopagus speech (17:22–31) and draws upon the *Epimenidea* to support some of her observations. Rothschild suggests that Paul chooses the unknown altar as the major object in the speech in order to find common ground with his audience. Given that this unknown altar and inscription “would have recalled Epimenides” Paul “could have expected ‘Areopagites’ to welcome a reappearance of their old friend” (p. 53). Given that



Epimenides purified Athens from the plague, their reception of Paul is highly positive and favorable. Rothschild claims about Paul's persona are bold as she reflects on the likelihood that Paul quotes Epimenides in Acts 17:28: "If Paul can appear as a reincarnation of Christ in Galatia, the Lukan Paul can appear as a reincarnation of Epimenides in Athens—particularly if one of the aims is to break Greek resistance to bodily resurrection" (p. 73). Moreover, Rothschild does not see Paul as criticizing the Athenians for idolatry in 17:22–31: "On the contrary, he [the Lukan Paul] interprets one such 'idol' as representative of and dedicates to the god he wishes to reveal and extol" (p. 75). The Athenians would not have been surprised, Rothschild suggests, to hear Paul speak of resurrection since "resurrection is precisely that proof they would have anticipated, since it was the hallmark trait of the prophet (i.e., Epimenides) issuing the warning" (p. 76). Rothschild is speaking here of the tradition that Epimenides fell asleep for 57 years in a cave. To sum up: "In his Areopagitica, the Lukan Paul anticipates objections to his gospel (e.g., polytheism, idolatry) by accentuating similarities rather than differences with Greek piety" (p. 80). In ch. 7 Rothschild seeks to support her case by showing correspondences between or points of contact between Acts and *Epimenidea*. I confess that I find most of the similarities to either be quite general or strained. Whether Paul's three days of blindness parallels Epimenides having fallen asleep for 57 years and justifies a common point of contact of "divine incubation" I will leave to the reader to judge. I am perhaps most suspicious, however, of seeing any significant parallels between "resurrection" and Epimenides's awakening after his long sleep. In Rothschild's final chapter she argues that the spread of the gospel in Acts conforms to traditions of cult transfer narratives and claims that Acts 17 conforms to this theme in order to "set forth a smooth succession of the leadership of nascent Christianity" (p. 120).

Rothschild has proved herself to be one of the most creative and learned North American scholars carrying on the legacy of the study of early Christianity from a history of religion standpoint. There is much to learn from her in this study about Epimenides and, more broadly, about the incredible potentiality this speech in Acts has to resonate with numerous ancient religious and philosophical traditions. All interpreters of Acts should give careful listen, particularly, to the particularly resonances between Acts 17:23 and 28a and *Epimenidea*. Similarly, although her interaction with scholarship on cult transfer narratives seems too indebted to her University of Chicago background (see John Weaver's important work *Plots of Epiphany: Prison Escapes in the Acts of the Apostles*, BZNW 131 [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004]), I do not doubt the legitimacy of invoking this ancient practice for explaining both opposition and success of the early Christian movement in Acts.

There are, however, a number of problems with *Paul in Athens*. Rothschild has, in my opinion, drastically underestimated Paul's critique of the Athenians for their ignorance and idolatry. I was disappointed to see no interaction, for example, on this point with C. Kavin Rowe, *World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Similarly, the downplaying (or denial) of clear resonances with Socrates in 17:16–21 diminishes the strength or plausibility of her interpretation of the narrative frame. Rothschild is trying to move away from the dominance of philosophical categories for interpreting the speech, but given that the speech has resonated with so many philosophical critiques of superstition Rothschild probably needs to justify her translation of the disputed term as "extremely devout" instead of "superstitious." While too many throw around the language of parallelomania as an excuse for avoiding the religious context of the early Christian writings, I also felt too many unconvincing parallels were drawn between Acts 17 and traditions related to Epimenides, a few of which I have already mentioned above. Thus, while Rothschild has helpfully called renewed attention to the relationship between Epimenides and Acts 17:23 and 28a

and has provided a learned volume filled with interesting insights I find myself not convinced of the larger argument that Luke depicts Paul as Epimenides.

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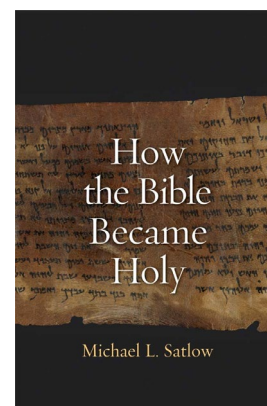
Michael L. Satlow. *How the Bible Became Holy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. 350 pp. £12.99/\$25.00.

In recent years, the subject of the biblical canon has generated a tremendous amount of scholarly interest. Discussions about the biblical text have led to questions about which books (really) belong, and those questions have led to more questions about how those books have become authoritative. The latest foray into this field, *How the Bible Became Holy*, comes from Michael L. Satlow, professor of religious studies and Judaic studies at Brown University.

Satlow's volume is designed to challenge what he considers to be the standard paradigm in studies of the canon, namely that "by the Hellenistic period (fourth to fifth centuries BC), almost all Jews knew of most books of the Old Testament . . . and thought them sacred" (p. 2). In contrast, Satlow argues that the biblical canon—both OT and NT—was a late bloomer at best. It did not take shape until the third century AD or later. Even Jesus himself "had a very limited knowledge of Scripture" (p. 6). But, even more important than the date of the canon, Satlow argues that these books were not typically regarded as authoritative by the Jews or the Christians that used them (at least in the normative sense). The essence of Satlow's argument, therefore, is that the Bible as we know it today—in terms of both its scope and authority—is not what the Bible originally was like. We (Jews and Christians) have made the Bible different than it was intended to be. And this explains the title of his book, *How the Bible Became Holy*.

Satlow has offered a bold and provocative thesis, and it's certainly one that will generate much discussion. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that the broad parameters of Satlow's counter-narrative about the Bible's origins are not new. A number of critical scholars have sought to portray the canon as a late idea, foisted upon a collection of books written for another purpose (e.g., see David Dungan's *Constantine's Bible: Politics and the Making of the New Testament* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006]). Indeed, as Brevard Childs observed many years ago, this approach to canon is fairly typical in higher-critical circles: "It's assumed by many that the formation of the canon is a late, ecclesiastical activity, external to the biblical literature itself, which was subsequently imposed on the writings" (*The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1985], 21).

What is (somewhat) new, however, is the manner in which Satlow approaches this issue. First, he deals with both Old Testament and New Testament canons in a single volume—a monumental amount of material to cover, to be sure. Most treatments of canon tend to focus on one of the testaments. Second, Satlow's position is even more aggressive than many other critical scholars, arguing not only that the Pentateuch (or an early version of it) was not "published" until the fifth century BC but that it bore very little authority for the next five hundred years. Third, Satlow tells the story of the canon at almost a



narrative level, outlining the broad history of Israel and the beginnings of the church, without engaging in the level of detailed discussion of the historical sources one comes to expect from other studies of the canon (e.g., compare to Timothy H. Lim's recent study, *The Formation of the Jewish Canon* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013]).

I suspect this third feature of the volume is largely dictated by the first. Given that the scope of the volume covers both testaments, such detail is just not a possibility. While there is nothing inherently inappropriate about this approach (one is free to address the canon in this fashion), it does create some challenges. In particular, this approach forces Satlow to make his case more through declaration rather than through demonstration. For instance, in chapter one Satlow is so involved in the re-telling Israel's pre-exilic story (922–722 BC) that he offers little historical documentation regarding the status of Israel's religious texts. At one point he declares, "Israel was the place that first gave birth to some of the earliest stories and texts found in the Bible, but these texts had little authority" (p. 15). The problem, of course, is that he hasn't *shown* that these texts had little authority, he has just stated it. He does offer a hypothesis about the origin of these texts, namely that they were merely "stories and legends that helped its [Israel's] people to see themselves as part of a single people" (p. 15). And he then uses the rest of the chapter to argue that these texts were designed to promulgate a "myth of a common past" (p. 21). But, even if Satlow is correct that these texts were just created to give Israel an identity (and that is a point of serious contention amongst scholars), that does not prove that they bore no authority for the average Israelite that heard/read them.

In later chapters, Satlow continues his narrative-style survey of the development of the canon. He argues that Deuteronomy was merely a "utopian scribal fantasy" (p. 44) that was never intended to be taken seriously. Thus, Josiah's later discovery of the scroll in the temple, and subsequent covenant ceremony, was an unprecedented "attempt to move religious authority to a written scroll" (p. 44). While Satlow is no doubt providing the standard higher-critical reconstruction here, there is (again) little demonstration of his claims. Rather, he is simply repeating the common critical viewpoint. While some readers might be satisfied with such an approach, others may have wished for more discussion of the evidence.

The status of Scripture received a later boost, argues Satlow, in the first century when the Sadducees pushed for scriptural authority over and against the Pharisees who still preferred oral/unwritten tradition. It was the Sadducees, therefore, with their aristocratic power and influence, that shifted Israel towards an interest in religious texts. Since Jesus came from Galilee, largely influenced by the Pharisees, then Satlow concludes that Scripture only "played a marginal role in his [Jesus's] religious life" (p. 208). Sure, argues Satlow, we see Jesus "citing a few verses of Scripture," but he never "framed his own life" around the Scriptures (p. 208).

At this point, Satlow's argument begins to feel seriously strained. Linking the origins of biblical authority to the Sadducees (not to mention the Sadducees link to Qumran) is pure speculation, especially given how little we know about them as a historical group. Also, his attempt to downplay the role of Scripture in the life of Jesus seems a bit disingenuous. While one might acknowledge the status of biblical texts in the pre-exilic period is less clear, there are a substantial number of texts that indicate that Jesus not only knew the Scriptures (e.g., Matt 4:4–10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:31; Mark 7:6; 9:13; Luke 22:37; John 6:32; 6:45; 8:17), but did explicitly frame his life around Scriptures (e.g., Matt. 21:42; 26:53–54; Mark 12:10; Luke 4:21; 24:44; John 5:39; 7:42). In light of these passages, Satlow's statement that Jesus "did not particularly link his own life to Scripture" (p. 225) seems particularly stunning. In

addition, more discussion needed to be given to Jesus's express statements about the power and truth of Scripture (Mark 12:36; Matt 5:18; John 10:35; 17:17). On top of all of this, Jesus freely and regularly used the Scriptures in his debates with others, with no indication whatsoever that the Scriptures may not have been known by his audience or that their authority was a recent invention. One might also observe that all the books that Jesus quotes as Scripture happen to be found in our current OT canon, and he never quotes a book as Scripture that is not in our current OT canon—a fact that seems quite remarkable if the state of the canon was as unestablished as Satlow maintains.

Of course, Satlow responds to such evidence by arguing that these Gospel accounts cannot be trusted when they record the words of Jesus. Indeed, at one point, he claims that Mark “put Scripture in Jesus’s mouth” thus “transforming Jesus into a citer of Scripture” (p. 227). At another point, he argues that Luke put words into Jesus’s mouth about how his life fulfilled the Scriptures (p. 231). But, again, these sorts of things cannot simply be claimed. They must be demonstrated. And Satlow leaves out any sustained argument to prove that Mark and Luke are guilty as charged. In addition, it should be acknowledged that the evidence that Jesus framed his life around the Scriptures cuts across *multiple* gospel sources, all three Synoptics plus John. Thus, it is difficult to dismiss all of these verses as merely the later fabrications of the gospel authors.

As for the development of the New Testament canon, Satlow provides a brief overview of some of the major players in the second century, including Justin Martyr, Tatian, and Irenaeus (pp. 241–56). Although there is substantial evidence that these individuals held a high view of New Testament writings, one gets the impression that Satlow is trying to minimize this evidence at every turn. For example, when it comes to Justin Martyr, he argues that the Gospels “play a relatively minor role for him” and “didn’t play much of a role in the lives of most ordinary Christians” (p. 250). But, then Satlow just glosses over the major text that shows otherwise, namely Justin’s description of how the Gospels are read in early Christian worship services as Scripture on par with the Old Testament writings (*1 Apol.* 67.3). Surely this suggests that the Gospels not only possessed a high authority, but that they *did* play an important role in the life of ordinary Christians.

In order to downplay further the authority of New Testament writings during this time period, Satlow then argues that early Christian scribal cultural was problematic. He makes three claims: (a) Christian manuscripts were “utilitarian” and lack evidence of being written by professional scribes; (b) manuscripts were not written for public recitation; and (c) physical features of manuscripts had no (or very little) importance (pp. 255–256). However, each of these claims is in serious doubt. Graham Stanton has observed, along with many others, that the scribal hand of many early NT manuscripts is quite professional, suggesting the scribes were more well-trained than many suppose. Stanton reaches the opposite conclusion of Satlow when he states, “The oft-repeated claim that the gospels were considered at first to be utilitarian handbooks needs to be modified” (*Jesus and Gospel* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press], 206). The argument that the Gospels were not written for public recitation has been taken up by a number of scholars, including Scott Charlesworth who (again) reaches the opposite conclusion of Satlow, arguing that the line spacing and reader’s aids in many gospel manuscripts suggest they were intended for public reading (“Public and Private: Second- and Third-Century Gospel Manuscripts,” in *Jewish and Christian Scripture as Artifact and Canon*, ed. C. A. Evans and H. D. Zacharias [London: T&T Clark, 2009], 148–175). And as for the physical features of New Testament manuscripts, Satlow is correct that they did not exhibit the elite, high-culture artistic features of some literary texts in the Greco-Roman world. But, that doesn’t mean their visual/physical characteristics

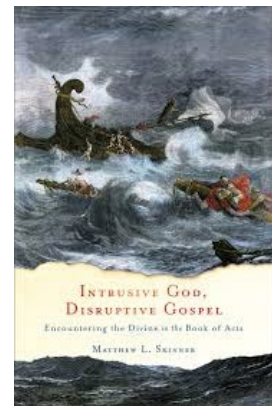
played no role. Larry Hurtado has shown that early Christians valued more than the text, but also the visual and material appearance of their manuscripts, particularly as exemplified by the use of the codex, *nomina sacra*, and the staurogram (*The Earliest Christian Artifacts: Manuscripts and Origins* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006]).

In conclusion, Satlow has written an interesting, provocative and wide-ranging volume on the origins of the Old and New Testaments that provides much helpful information on the history of biblical texts. However, Satlow's aggressive (and sometime speculative) reconstruction often presses the evidence beyond what it can bear. In addition, one gets the impression that Satlow is intent on minimizing the role of Scripture in both Israel and the early church, even when the evidence could be naturally read in the other direction. The broad, narrative style of the book allows him to lay out the standard higher-critical view of biblical origins, but does not provide the sort of documentation of his claims that might persuade those who don't already share his starting point. Regardless, those in the field of biblical studies, especially those interested in the origins of the canon, will want to read and interact with this volume.

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Matthew L. Skinner. *Intrusive God, Disruptive Gospel: Encountering the Divine in the Book of Acts*. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015. xix + 206 pp. £11.22/\$16.99.

Matthew Skinner has written extensively and intelligently on Acts, and so this new book is to be warmly welcomed. Prof. Skinner is Professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota and, in addition to his fine scholarly work on Acts (*Locating Paul: Places of Custody As Narrative Settings in Acts 21–28* [Leiden: Brill, 2003]; *The Trial Narratives: Conflict, Power, and Identity in the New Testament* [Louisville: WJK, 2010]; and numerous articles), he has contributed extensively to the seminary's excellent resource <http://www.enterthebible.org>, as well as writing for other accessible websites which equip and stimulate those who teach and preach. I mention this because this book is a further fruit of Prof. Skinner's research put into accessible form for those who may not have technical training in biblical studies, but want to dig deeper into the Bible.



In *Intrusive God, Disruptive Gospel*, Prof. Skinner sets out to read the majority of Acts in twenty-five short chapters of 5–8 pages. He divides the book into six major sections and provides a brief “Road Map” introducing each section: the sections are Acts 1–2; 3–7; 8–12; 13–15; 16–19; 21–28. He is selective in the passages he discusses, although he does not explain his principles for selection. Interestingly, Acts 20—perhaps the most informative section on Paul as pastor to his churches—does not feature in his selected passages for discussion, so we don't learn whether Skinner would locate it with 16–19 or with 21–28 or as a ‘stand alone’ section. Throughout his writing is lucid, readable and clear, and sections flow naturally from one to another.

His particular focus is to ask what the experiences of people in the book of Acts say about “who God is and how God has acted and continues to act through the spread of the good news about Jesus Christ” (p. ix). He is not so concerned with the history behind Acts as the message of the book about who God is and the ways in which God moves and acts. He somewhat hedges his bets on the historicity of the book in his brief comments on this: he sketches the main scholarly views on this, and says he is aiming to write in a way which will be useful to “a broad variety of readers—those who see no legendary elements in Acts, those who do, and those who do not worry about such matters” (p. 2). He doesn’t stop in the ancient setting, but goes on to ask about how our own experiences of God can change us in the light of his reading of Acts.

His introduction begins with the riot in Ephesus (Acts 19) and highlights the disruption which the gospel message brings to places and people. He claims that the disruptive nature of the gospel stems from the way God interferes and intervenes in the lives of people and communities. He notes the potential problems believing this creates for us: in what ways can we speak and think of God acting today, without portraying God as a “cosmic puppeteer” (p. xv)? He presents the challenge that our view of God may be too small, and invites us into a reading of Acts which will cause us to ask deep questions in this area.

Prof. Skinner treats the *whole book* of Acts as conveying Luke’s theological vision, rather than the older view which saw the speeches as containing the theological content of the book. The action portrays the ways God engages with people and they with God. This approach is a great strength, and is worked out by constantly asking what the text shows about who God is and how God engages with people, individually and in groups large and small.

The discussion of individual passages is always helpful, informative and theologically astute, and full of well-turned and memorable phrases. In place after place I found my head nodding in agreement, not least when Prof. Skinner showed me the text from angles I had not considered previously. He does not dodge difficulties in relating the experience of the believing communities in Acts to our experience today, whether concerning healing, prophecy, the death of Ananias and Sapphira, or other remarkable events. He helps us feel the challenge of the material in Acts on wealth and poverty in today’s western materialistic context. Throughout, he has a clear eye on today’s world and church.

I was conscious, as one who works extensively on Acts myself, in place after place where significant scholarly work and debate underlies Prof. Skinner’s writing (it is acknowledged a little in the “For Further Reading” section at the end). He is judicious and careful in his use of scholarship, and those who have eyes to see will recognise this quickly. Readers may agree or disagree with the exegetical decisions he takes (I found myself agreeing far more than disagreeing), but they will always be informed, educated, and stimulated.

This book will be eminently helpful to a church Bible study group working through Acts. It will also inform and help preachers or teachers engaging with Acts, and students who want to see ways in which the book’s themes and issues relate to Christian life and experience today. I commend it very warmly.

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Lauri Thurén. *Parables Unplugged: Reading the Lukan Parables in Their Rhetorical Context*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. viii + 422 pp. £24.95/\$39.00.

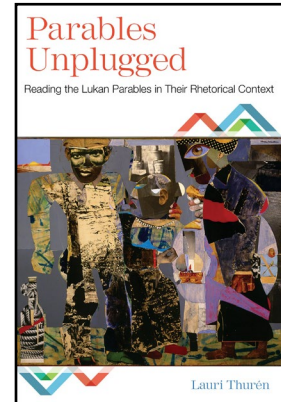
Few works are bold enough to challenge the consensus of centuries of scholarship within a given field. *Parables Unplugged* by Lauri Thurén (Professor of Biblical Studies, University of Eastern Finland in Joensuu) is such a work. Thurén is a rhetorical-critical scholar whose past works have primarily focused on the Catholic and Pauline Epistles and include *The Rhetorical Strategy of 1 Peter* (Abo, Finland: Abo Academy Press, 1990), *Argument and Theology in 1 Peter: The Origins of Christian Paraenesis*, LNTS 114 (London: T&T Clark, 1995), and *Derhetorizing Paul: A Dynamic Perspective on Pauline Theology and the Law*, WUNT 124 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000).

Thurén argues in this novel work that Lukan parables should be read “unplugged,” apart from any presupposed theological or exegetical grid, as they serve a singular rhetorical function of persuasion (pp. 13–15). Thurén conspicuously places his thesis, methodology, and purpose for writing in the opening pages of his work. Thurén states his thesis as follows:

[D]etaching the parables from all other perspectives [hence “parables unplugged”] opens new possibilities for understanding their meaning and specific persuasive function, and that Jesus seldom teaches his audience anything new by his parables. Instead, they mainly enhance the recipients’ adherence to already known facts, attitudes, or modes of behavior. This, in turn, is supposed to be applied to a new context. In some cases the result of this process may be a novel theological insight.... I shall argue that releasing the parables from unnecessary theological and historical burdens permits us a better view of their actual theological message. (pp. 4, 50)

In terms of method, Thurén is highly influenced by the parables work of Ruben Zimmerman, the rhetorical-critical work of Stephen Toulmin, and Adolf Jülicher’s hypothesis of a singular point (*scopus*) in every parable (pp. 13–17, 38–40, 84, 110, 187–89; 250–52). Thurén states: “I will present one of the best-known and most flexible methods, that of Stephen Toulmin . . . to clarify the precise persuasive function of each parable in Luke” (p. 13). Such a method “enables us to define more precisely the meaning and purpose of the specific parables, or at least many of them, provided that essential information about the situation [exigence] and the recipients is at hand” (p. 14). Thurén first provides “an overview of previous research, focusing on central problem areas.” Then, using Toulmin’s model, Thurén defines “the message and function of the parable in its embedding framework story by focusing on the text-internal interaction between the key characters in both narratives. Lastly, in chapters 6 and 7, he provides a “comprehensive ‘unplugged’ analysis of all the Lukan parables of Jesus . . . to test how the method applies to several types of parables” (p. 49). Thurén writes “to reveal interesting technical, rhetorical, and theological features of the Lukan way of telling parables” (p. 50).

Structurally, Thurén’s work consists of three main parts: Part I includes a substantive introduction (fifty pages), which serves as a prolegomenon for his rhetorical/narratological methodology; Part II is a “deep analysis” (p. 181) of four of Luke’s “key parables” (10:25–37; 15:1–32; 16:1–9; 20:9–19); and lastly, Part III includes a statistical analysis of all fifty-seven Lukan parables (as defined by Thurén), a brief investigation of the singular rhetorical “punch line” (*scopus*) of each of the remaining fifty-three



parables not covered in Part II, as well as a chapter on “re-plugging” the parables in which Thurén classifies and analyzes “the messages supported by each particular parable” (p. 345).

There is much to commend in Thurén’s work. First, Thurén is an excellent thinker and lucid writer. He presents and argues his case in a well-researched, straightforward manner, and helpfully summarizes his main points at the end of each section. Second, Thurén’s writing is bold as he courageously swims against the stream of the consensus in parables scholarship and is unafraid to blaze new trails as his research leads. Third, and perhaps its greatest contribution (at least to this reviewer) to parables scholarship, is the statistical analysis of Lukan parables in Part II. This section alone is worth the price of this book.

As good as Thurén’s work is it is not without faults. A major fault is the sheer number of superfluous typographical and formatting errors, which detract from the quality of Thurén’s argumentation. Numerous misspellings in the body of the text and bibliography (e.g., pp. 182, 386) coupled with various formatting errors (e.g., numerous footnotes are on wrong pages, and all hyperlinks to Thurén’s supplementary worksheets are broken) plague an otherwise excellent work. Another flaw is that Thurén tends to contradict himself throughout his work. A prime example of this is his erroneous, stereotypical description of parables as “simple stories” (p. vii). Any parables scholar worthy of the moniker knows complex pericopes such as Luke 16:1–9 and Luke 16:19–31 are anything but “simple stories.” Thurén later admits this throughout his work, thus contradicting his previous statements (see pp. vii, 107, 234–36).

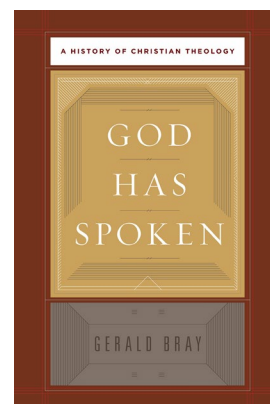
In sum, *Parables Unplugged* is a work that must be reckoned with in future parables scholarship. While this reviewer does not agree with many of Thurén’s conclusions, Thurén has argued his case well, and this work demands a hearing from any serious student of the Lukan parables.

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— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Gerald Bray. *God Has Spoken: A History of Christian Theology*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. 1260 pp. £36.25/\$55.00.

In this follow-up volume to *God is Love: A Biblical and Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), Gerald Bray charts out the development of Christian theology, beginning with its Israelite inheritance and ending in the contemporary period. The purpose is precisely that, a history of Christian *theology* and not a history of the Christian *church*. Quite obviously the two histories relate to one another by necessity, for Christian theology is a discourse worked out within and by the church. Materially though, the two histories may be presented in quite different manners, one leaning more toward an intellectual (as is the case here) than social analysis (as is the case with, for example, Robert Louis Wilken’s *The First Thousand Years: A Global History of Christianity* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013]).



The framework Bray adopts for his analysis is explicitly Trinitarian. Given our present theological milieu, he writes it “seems logical and appropriate to adopt a Trinitarian framework as the basis for explaining historical theology in the current context” (p. 17). The manner by which Bray fills in this framework takes its cue from theological dilemmas as they arose naturally and logically in time. This mode of analysis is neither *merely* topical nor *merely* chronological; rather, it is logically Trinitarian, unfolding as a development of the person and work of the Father, then the Son, then the Holy Spirit. However, Bray does retroactively appeal to earlier time periods in later chapters for cogency. For example, chapter 15 on the Holy Spirit begins chronologically in the early church even though materially (in Bray’s book) it follows the development of “covenant theology” in the 16th and 17th centuries (ch. 14). Such rationale, for Bray, follows from the fact that “covenant theology” logically falls as a development of the work of Christ (pp. 585–603). This is also why the inspiration of Scripture is treated in chapter 18 as a sub-section of the work of the Holy Spirit (Part VII), even though Bray’s analysis never ventures chronologically past Augustine in that chapter.

Admittedly, this review will not be a précis of each “Trinitarian” section of Bray’s lengthy volume; such a brief synopsis would only cheapen the flavor of his project as a whole. Yet, after working carefully through such a thought-out volume, a few critical remarks and, many more, positive affirmations are in order. First and critically, the volume’s sheer scope leaves certain areas within the history of theology underdeveloped. For instance, Bray’s passing treatment of Pentecostalism in the 20th century (pp. 980–82) has the implicit effect of denying the most widespread movement of Christianity in the contemporary period a place at the theological table. But, to be fair, the lack of rigorously theological material from its leaders and the movement’s newness globally (relatively speaking) makes it much harder to diagnose. Furthermore, based on the large number of persons treated in the volume, especially those outside of Bray’s areas of specialization (early church and the English Reformation), some readers may find his analysis of particular persons and their theological writings underwhelming, even misguided. By way of example, his exposition of Karl Rahner (pp. 1188–92) leaves much to be desired, particularly in Bray’s conclusion that Rahner “depersonalized” the Trinity—a rather un-nuanced reading of Rahner’s *Mysterium Salutis*, I would argue.

Despite the few difficulties mentioned above, the overall volume is a superb history of Christian theology. Its Trinitarian framework helpfully (and rightly) allows the student of theology to understand *how* and *why* Christian theology developed in the manner that it did. For example, instead of depicting the history of the atonement in one, neat section, Bray’s approach enables the reader to grasp the larger questions behind atonement theology that needed to be answered before technical theological quandaries associated with the death of Christ could come to the fore. In this way, different theological positions on the atonement (such as Gregory of Nyssa’s minority position [pp. 441–42]) become intelligible as the reader relives the questions that made such positions, even if ultimately rejected, possible in the first place. This also allows the reader to personally perceive and articulate underlying theological presuppositions instead of mindlessly repeating “textbook theology.” Such repetition is easily forgotten and pedagogically impotent.

Another strength of Bray’s monograph is his engagement with Eastern Orthodoxy, which is, by and large, excluded from Western, especially Protestant and evangelical, treatments of the history of theology. Given Bray’s linguistic fluidity, his inclusion and exposition of this side of the Christian tradition comes as a most welcome addition. Furthermore, his technical ability with language yields a lucid treatment of otherwise lexically confusing Trinitarian and Christological debates in the 4th and

5th centuries, as well as sympathetic treatments of traditional “heretics.” For instance, Bray’s conclusion regarding Nestorius’s theological position on the union of divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ and his subsequent condemnation are most proper: “He was condemned, not because of his intentions (which were good) but because his solution to the problem was inadequate” (p. 347).

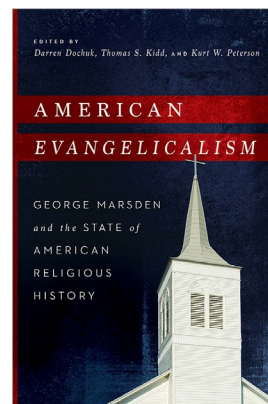
Overall, I heartily recommend this work as a resource for pastors, professors, divinity students, and the general reader. The prose is accessible and the technical vocabulary explained. For the divinity student, this volume would serve well as a complement to primary source study. For the pastor or professor, I see Bray’s volume as the single best resource for teaching through the history of Christian theology, whatever denominational allegiance one may have. Given my remarks about accessibility, I believe this to be especially true within the context of the local church. For anyone looking to lead parishioners through the history of Christian theology, they would be served well to utilize this work, despite any reservation they may have over length. The journey is long (over 1200 pages!) but the reward is great.

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Darren Dochuk, Thomas S. Kidd, and Kurt W. Peterson, eds. *American Evangelicalism: George Marsden and the State of American Religious History*. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014. xi + 518 pp. £59.95/\$66.00.

Religion is all the rage among professional historians, as a subject of academic inquiry if not personal devotion. According to a recent study conducted by the American Historical Association, religion is now the number one field studied by historians in the USA. Since at least the Watergate era, much of this historical attention has fixed upon various forms of theologically and morally conservative Christianity, especially Protestant evangelicalism and fundamentalism. One name looms especially large in this field: George Marsden, longtime historian at Calvin College, Duke University, and most recently the University of Notre Dame.

Marsden is an evangelical scholar whose body of work is widely regarded by the broader academy. He has published influential, often path-breaking books on topics such as 19th-century Presbyterian intellectual history, the origins of 20th-century interwar fundamentalism, the history of Fuller Theological Seminary as a microcosm of postwar evangelicalism, the decline of Christian sensibilities in American university life from the 1600s to the late-20th century, and a critical biography of 18th-century pastor-theologian Jonathan Edwards. The latter book won the prestigious Bancroft Prize, among other honors. In addition to his distinguished publishing record, Marsden has formally mentored almost thirty PhD students, played a significant role in professional historical societies, and directly influenced countless other religious historians. In *American Evangelicalism: George Marsden and the State of American Religious History*, Marsden’s former students and colleagues honor him with a collection of essays that assesses his most influential books and suggests numerous potential avenues for further research.



The book begins with a warm foreword by Nathan Hatch, Mark Noll, Harry Stout, and Grant Wacker; along with Marsden, these (slightly) younger historians have been the leading voices among evangelical historians since the early 1980s. But Marsden looms largest. In the introduction, editors Darren Dochuk, Thomas Kidd, and Kurt Peterson, all former Marsden students, argue, “No one has done more to shape and mainstream the history of evangelicalism than Marsden” (p. 8). The purpose of *American Evangelicalism* is to “use [Marsden’s] writings as a launch for wider discussion about past and future trajectories in the history of evangelicalism and American religion, the challenges and opportunities facing the next wave of religious historians, and the unchanging virtues of good historical writing” (p. 9). The remaining sections of the book each play off of one of Marsden’s major works by including a “state of the field” essay, a “scholarship profile” essay, and one or more “new directions” essays. The result is more than a *festschrift*; it is a primer on the historical study of American evangelicalism.

The state of the field essays do a fine job of contextualizing Marsden’s books within wider discussions among historians that those books often shaped. Doug Sweeney’s essay on Marsden’s contribution to Jonathan Edwards studies and Barry Hankins’s essay on Marsden’s pacesetter work in the history of fundamentalism stand out as especially insightful, while John Schmalzbauer’s essay on Marsden’s understanding of religion in higher education is more critical of Marsden’s failure to engage parallel research from the social sciences that would have added more nuance to his narrative.

The scholarship profile chapters have the benefit of being reflective review essays that are able to assess how Marsden’s work has stood the test of time. Sometimes Marsden’s work represented something of a capstone. Kidd shows how *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) skillfully synthesized fifty years of scholarly interest in Edwards among both historians and theologians. More often, Marsden was on the front end of scholarly discussions he helped to shape. William Svelmoe and Darren Dochuk demonstrate how this was especially the case with Marsden’s *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) and *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987). Simply put, historians cannot write about twentieth-century conservative Protestantism without significantly engaging Marsden’s definitions and interpretations.

The new directions essays represent the bulk of the book’s scholarship. Sometimes these essays are helpful distillations of monographs published by former Marsden students. This is the case with Jay Case’s chapter on what he calls the African American Great Awakening following the Civil War, John Turner’s essay on Campus Crusade for Christ, and David Swartz’s discussion of the evangelical political left. Hopefully, readers will be encouraged to dive into the excellent books these chapters are based upon. Kathryn Long’s chapter on the interest in evangelical missionaries in postwar popular culture is not based upon a monograph, but rather several noteworthy articles Long published on the subject.

Some of the “new directions” essays themselves make noteworthy scholarly contributions. Timothy Gloege’s essay on Reuben Torrey’s theological journey offers a substantial revision to the received interpretation of the famous fundamentalist. Gloege’s own monograph on the Moody Bible Institute has been published in the months since *American Evangelicalism* hit the shelves and is generating considerable discussion among historians. Rick Ostrander’s essay shows how the numeric center of gravity for evangelical higher education has shifted southward in recent years, away from schools such as Calvin, Wheaton, and Gordon, though the southern schools often have looked to the northern schools for direction on how to integrate faith and learning. Meanwhile, Baptist-related schools such as Union University and especially Baylor University have attempted to catch up with and, in the case of Baylor, even surpass the better-known northern schools in terms of scholarship and academic prestige. Michael

Hamilton's chapter on continuities and discontinuities between D. L. Moody's "interdenominational evangelicalism" and fundamentalism offers a significant challenge to current understandings of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy—one packing a lot of explanatory power.

American evangelicalism closes with an essay by Mark Noll that provides an insider account of how evangelical historians have become mainstays within the broader historical academy. Noll is uniquely positioned to write this chapter; arguably, he has been the most vocal proponent of evangelicals taking the life of the mind more seriously. Of course, Marsden's work and influence have been crucial to the mainstreaming of evangelical history (Though the same could be said of Noll, who ranks a close second behind Marsden in terms of influence). Evangelical graduate students will find this chapter especially helpful as they consider their own place in this story.

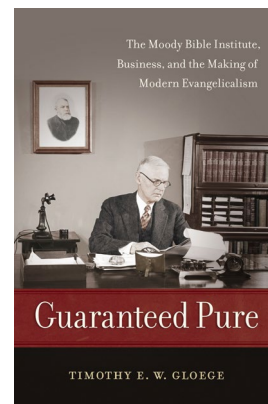
American Evangelicalism is a model for how to turn a Festschrift into a book that demands to be read by more than those with a warm affection for the honoree. The combination of review essays, historiographical insights, and fresh scholarship make this book required reading for historians of American religion and a foundational work for graduate students. My one criticism is that the subtitle promises more than it delivers. Of the Marsden books engaged in this book, only *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) represents a wider discussion of American religious history. *American Evangelicalism* is really a book about the state of conservative Protestant history, which is a worthwhile topic in and of itself. In fact, as the field of American religious history is increasingly influenced by pluralism and multiculturalism—positive trends, on the whole—one hopes *American Evangelicalism* will convince emerging historians (including non-evangelicals) of the ongoing value of studying topics such as fundamentalism, evangelicalism, spiritual awakening, and denominational controversies. Highly recommended.

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Timothy E. W. Gloege. *Guaranteed Pure: The Moody Bible Institute, Business, and the Making of Modern Evangelicalism*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015. xv + 307 pp. £31.95/\$34.95.

In this engaging and provocative study, Timothy Gloege seeks to show how two generations of evangelicals at the Moody Bible Institute (hereafter MBI) used new business ideas and techniques to create a modern form of "old-time religion," smoothing the rise of consumer capitalism and transforming the dynamics of Protestantism in America.

In the first half of his book, Gloege examines post-Civil War evangelicalism under the influence of D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey. Responding to labor unrest in Chicago, Moody (the shoe-salesman-turned-revivalist) strategized with local business leaders to build an army of "Christian workers" who could convert the middle class and restore social stability. In his efforts to create "Christian workers"—the evangelical version of the idealized industrial worker in the Gilded Age—Moody forged new links between economic identity and religious identity.



But when the masses from the working class were not converted and social order was not restored, Moody's project was in crisis. His conception of the Christian life—a personal relationship with God, guided by a plain reading of Scripture, leading to practical and quantifiable results—was bringing more disorder than order. Instead of joining the respectable middle class, Moody's working-class converts were becoming Populists (critiquing capitalism and professionalization) or Pentecostal (speaking in tongues and rejecting medicine). Even Torrey, Moody's most famous evangelistic associate at MBI, had been led by his "plain reading" of the Bible and his "evangelical realism" to embrace faith healing, a decision that tragically cost his daughter her life when he delayed the administration of medicine while she was ill, bringing about controversy and scandal. The death of Moody—one week before the dawn of the twentieth century—can be seen as the death of respectable evangelical's hermeneutical innocence. No longer could a plain reading of Scripture be embraced without fear of radically disruptive results.

In the second half of the book, Gloege traces the attempt of MBI to stabilize evangelicalism without depending upon churchly guardrails. This entailed the creation of a modern form of "old-time religion," much of it owing to MBI board chairman Henry Parsons Crowell (who shifted the operating metaphor from Christian *worker* to Christian *consumer*) and dispensational Bible teacher James M. Gray (who popularized an esoteric alternative to Moody's plain-reading of Scripture).

Just as Crowell's Quaker Oats business had increased its market share by eliminating wholesalers—who traditionally funneled goods between retailers and consumers—Crowell positioned MBI to reach the end consumer of religion, the respectable middle class, while bypassing the institutional church and her denominations. To do this he used the tools of a consumer culture he had perfected at Quaker Oats: trademark, packaging, and promotion. Quaker Oats won the market through the visage of a smiling Quaker vouching for a "pure" product packaged in a safe and sealed container; so now the moniker of Dwight L. Moody guaranteed the purity of the product MBI was offering to savvy consumers who faced unprecedented choice in the religious market.

In order to carry the day, however, a historical tradition had to be invented that would function as a new standard of orthodoxy—a set of essentials or fundamentals capable of uniting a transdenominational coalition of respectable conservative evangelicals. This was achieved through the publication of *The Fundamentals* (1910–1915), funded by oil businessman and Biola founder Lyman Stewart and produced under the functional control of MBI.

In the final chapter of the book (before an epilogue that applies the book's findings to contemporary evangelicalism), Gloege narrates the growing separation between MBI and the World Christian Fundamentals Association. Although they were largely on the same page theologically, key stylistic and political differences emerged between MBI and the militant fundamentalists. The demise of combative fundamentalism among the respectable middle-class was ultimately to the benefit of MBI, whose ministry continues to thrive today, even if it no longer dominates the conservative evangelical market.

Space does not permit a full enumeration of all the virtues in Gloege's work. Written in lucid prose and told within a compelling narrative arc, this book is a treasure-trove of information for students of late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century fundamentalism and evangelicalism. His original archival work, along with his bringing together disparate fields not often in conversation, challenges the conventional wisdom that fundamentalism was a reaction to modernism, showing instead that the assumptions of modern capitalism helped to shape a new manifestation of Protestant evangelicalism. Gloege's revisionist work genuinely advances our understanding of this religious movement, and going

forward his work will need to be consulted by all scholars of Protestantism in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era.

My own questions about Gloege's work are largely bound up with his methodology, which seeks to interrogate the unexamined assumptions of his subjects. This outsider critique, which refuses to privilege (or at least to be content with) self-definition and self-perception, often proves illuminating. But there are times when one can ask whether the paradigm is overwhelming the evidence. Two examples will have to suffice. One walks away from Gloege's book with the clear idea that evangelicals like Torrey read the Bible as a "contract," even though he cites no examples of this actual terminology and seems to conflate the concept of contract (a business concept) and covenant (a biblical concept). It's not always clear when Gloege is inferring and when he is reporting. One would likely also conclude from this work that fundamentalists bypassed denominations altogether on account of their individualistic-consumerist paradigm, but then would be hard-pressed to explain why northern evangelical Protestants frequently compromised in order to operate *within* their denominations. (See J. Michael Utzinger, *Yet Saints Their Watch Are Keeping: Fundamentalists, Modernist, and the Development of Evangelical Ecclesiology, 1887–1937* [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006]). At the end of the day, readers from a more "evangelical orientation" will surely profit from the provocative conclusions of a scholar who seems to assume a more "churchly orientation," even as they might be more willing, at certain points, to empathize with the key players and discern a wider swath of motives and more nuance in this complicated story.

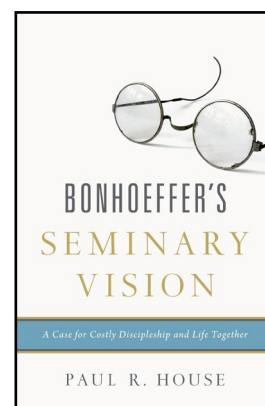
These methodological questions aside, Gloege has produced a fascinating work. He represents a growing generation of well-informed scholars who are challenging the prevailing assumptions about the history of evangelicalism in America. His work serves as a reminder that all religions—even those that claim to be "old-time religion"—are shaped by a cultural milieu, often unknowingly, and their assumptions must be studied and interrogated afresh.

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Paul R. House. *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. 207 pp. £11.86/\$17.99.

Paul House is a professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Beeson Divinity School where he has also served as academic dean. He has previously served at Taylor University and Wheaton College and as a local church pastor. His new study of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's approach to seminary training serves to articulate his own concern for the appropriate spiritual development and ministry skills formation of future pastors. *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision* demonstrates House's admiration for Bonhoeffer as well as his familiarity with the relevant primary and secondary sources.

House asserts that Bonhoeffer's most important writings, namely *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937) and *Life Together* (1939), should be considered in light of the fact that he wrote them while serving as the director of the Confessing



Church's seminary or "church-monastic" school (p. 41). Likewise, a study of that particular aspect of Bonhoeffer's life, not highlighted in other biographies, should be taken up in light of those important writings. House concludes, from this approach, that the best explanation for Bonhoeffer's fateful return to Germany from the U.S. was his love for the seminary work (p. 113). In a letter to Karl Barth in 1936 Bonhoeffer wrote that he found "great joy" in the task of teaching and mentoring students in the seminary where "the academic and practical work are combined splendidly" (p. 114). Between 1935 and 1940 Bonhoeffer directed the training of ten groups of students in various successive locations as changing circumstances necessitated new venues for the work (p. 45).

The book's first two chapters, both relatively brief, well frame the rest of the book by succinctly introducing House's thesis and method, the historical context, and pertinent biographical information (i.e. "Bonhoeffer's path to seminary ministry"). The next three chapters are theological. Chapter three primarily culls *The Cost of Discipleship* for Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology proper. Chapter four focuses on Bonhoeffer's ideas in *Life Together* regarding Christian community as both a gift and challenge, among other things noting the specific daily practices of Bonhoeffer's seminarians in two sections, "the day together" (pp. 114–23) and "the day alone" (pp. 123–29). Chapter five incorporates a broader range of Bonhoeffer's writings, including his unfinished *Meditations on Psalm 119*. This penultimate chapter portrays the seminary as a place to learn Christian faithfulness and perseverance in the midst of persecution and other temptations to compromise such as the prospects of wealth and celebrity. These three theological chapters are ordered chronologically as House considers each document in its respective historical context.

Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision reads at times like a personal manifesto, moving back and forth from an academic study of Bonhoeffer to a professional critique of current modes and trends in biblical higher education. House concludes chapters three through five with "observations for incarnational seminaries today" (pp. 88–100; pp. 136–42; and pp. 178–81). The book's sixth and final chapter is titled, "Life Together Today: Some Possibilities for Incarnational Seminaries" (pp. 183–97). House posits that Bonhoeffer's "incarnational" model of training budding ministers is worthy of emulation because it is grounded in the *theological principle* of God's presence with his people as well as the Bible's "face to face" intergenerational educational pattern as *precedent* (p. 15). In fact, House says the "incarnational principle" is at the heart of both the gospel and reality (pp. 195–96). Seminaries should reflect the church's identity as the body of Christ.

Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology provides much of the theological underpinnings for House's seminary vision in the book. Bonhoeffer considered the essence of the church to be *community* (p. 33). A Christian community should be a "visible righteous community" whose good works draw attention to Jesus (pp. 67–68). The church exists wherever the Word is preached, the sacraments are duly administered, and ministry gifts of the people operate in daily life. Jesus is present in the church via the Word, sacraments, and fellow believers (p. 79). In fact, the church is the "real presence" of Christ and continues the incarnation (p. 83).

According to Bonhoeffer, "church" must begin with the brotherhood of the clergy (p. 58). Jesus knit together the hearts of the apostles for their fight against temptation(s) and their perseverance in ministry. Therefore, seminaries should be places where future pastors experience the same. Students should learn the kind of encouraging cooperation in ministry and community that a "collective" pastorate entails (p. 76). In addition, a seminary's mode should reflect the fact that students and their teachers will share eternity together (p. 181).

The Confessing Church's program for training future pastors was only six months long. It included theological analysis, spiritual formation, and the practice of ministry while residing together in close quarters. Bonhoeffer himself lectured on ecclesiology, biblical studies, catechesis, preaching, and pastoral care (p. 49). The program was designed for students who had completed the university requirements for ordination and were already able to engage the Bible rigorously in its original languages. The program was designed to build upon previous academic training while also correcting the errors and deficiencies of that curriculum which assumed higher critical scholarship. Bonhoeffer wrote in 1934 that he "no longer believe[d] in the university" since that mode of training future ministers neglected "pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount, and worship . . . taken seriously" (p. 41).

Bonhoeffer believed what qualified men to be pastors was the daily habit of Bible reading, meditation, and holy living (p. 44–45). They should have absorbed the Bible deeply and broadly, knowing it as well as the Reformers did (p. 120), practicing both biblical exegesis and biblical devotion (p. 116). They should have a "thorough acquaintance" with the confessional writings of the Reformed and Lutheran churches (p. 44–45). They should know that their calling demands their all (i.e. their "commitment" or costly discipleship). Each of them should have spent time as an apprentice with a fellow pastor and mentor who provided the apprentice opportunities to preach, prayed with him, and guided his work so that he grew in pastoral skill (p. 45).

Bonhoeffer also believed compassion for God's people is prerequisite for the ministry. A pastor must be someone who follows Christ and serves others in Christian community (pp. 74–75). Bonhoeffer wrote in *Life Together*, "The community of faith does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and of one another. It does not lack the former, but the latter" (p. 133). House is similarly concerned that seminaries produce committed "Bible-formed" shepherds rather "visionary leaders" who act more like chief executive officers or community activists (pp. 112 and 139): "It is hard to find biblical passages that call for 'leadership' in anything approximating what that term implies in American life" (p. 139).

There were four general acts of serving others required of students in the Confessing seminaries (pp. 129–34): listening to others, humble tasks of "active helpfulness," bearing with one another's quirks and failures "as a reflection of the cross," and speaking God's Word to others. In addition, students were to confess their sins to one another, especially before monthly services of the Lord's Supper (pp. 134–36). Daily (Monday-Saturday) one-hour-long chapel services were designed to build the *esprit de corps*. They consisted of corporate prayer usually led by Bonhoeffer, the public reading of extended passages of the Bible, and the singing and praying of psalms, with a sermon on Saturday. The seminary experience should produce men able to reform a congregation around all of these relational and liturgical practices (p. 122).

House is wary of models of seminary education that maximize scale at the expense of the incarnational principle and a "life on life" mode of education, or what he also calls "embodied pastoral formation." He maintains that seminary programs and practices should be formed from theological convictions about the church and ministry rather than the need to generate more revenue (pp. 92–94) or the desire to expand an institution's influence (p. 137). He calls the practice of enrolling and graduating more students than will ever make it to full time ministry, creating a stockpiled surplus of degree holders and maintaining cash flow for the seminary, a practice "very American" though not theologically informed (pp. 92, 139).

House is most critical of “disembodied” online programs. He responds to the argument that the epistles are biblical precedent for distance education by noting that most of these letters were occasional and supplemental to ministries in person, most were addressed to congregations, and the writers usually knew the recipients well (pp. 185–86). He also observes that biblical writers, like many isolated Christians still today, longed for face-to-face fellowship with other believers (p. 106). After all, God sent prophets and witnesses, not a recorded message; Christ has a relational body on earth, not a mere voice in a machine (p. 99).

The experience of the Confessing Church and its seminaries is becoming more relevant for Christians in the United States (we might consider House’s treatise a proposal for “the Bonhoeffer Option”). Bonhoeffer knew that in Nazi-led Germany seminaries must prepare students to be able to preach *and model* “costly grace” (p. 62). In addition, seminaries must train future pastors to posture themselves toward unbelievers as agents of grace who are in fellowship with the Christ who can save the latter rather than perceive the unbelieving stranger as merely a threatening enemy (p. 71).

House makes a case for why seminaries should apply to themselves biblical principles for and about “the body of Christ” though he “state[s] unequivocally” that seminaries are not a church (p. 186). Readers will not find in *Seminary Vision* an argument for why local congregations might be the ideal primary agents for training future elders. House does note, though, the existence of “church-based internship programs” and their similarity with Bonhoeffer’s model. My church-based institution (Bethlehem College & Seminary) only accepts full time M.Div. students who are committed to being a community with their cohort mates, who are “willing to get out of their pajamas to go to class” (p. 91), and who think theology and pastoral work are “life-and-death matters” (p. 46). Professors aim to be “committed teachers” and mentors who pursue time with student-apprentices in the home, in ministry situations, and in recreation (pp. 51–52; 95–97). House suggests that more of these local, practical, personal, theologically driven, and mentor-oriented programs will emerge and flourish in the next generation, especially if seminaries continue to become more “impersonal” and online education fails like he thinks it will (pp. 193–94).

One might object to House’s proposal for the normativity of incarnational seminaries by asserting that a student can experience healthy fellowship in a Christian milieu other than his or her seminary. But House, like Bonhoeffer before him, is concerned about the obligations of those who would train pastors and the best practices for cultivating the kind of pastors the Bible envisions. *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision* is a fine and stimulating contribution to the growing body of literature about Bonhoeffer and to the contemporary effort by Evangelicals to glean lessons and encouragement from his thinking and experience. Seminary professors, administrators, and other stakeholders who want to be guided by theological principles will be well served by House’s labor of love. It is a sober yet refreshing read.

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Peter J. Morden. *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller (1754–1815)*. Studies in Evangelical History and Thought. Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2015. 206 pp. £24.99/\$39.99.

Peter Morden has distinguished himself as a premier scholar in Andrew Fuller studies. As Vice-Principal of Spurgeon’s College in London, Morden has done extensive research among eighteenth and nineteenth century English Baptists. *The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller* in the words of the biographer “aims to uncover something of the personal, private Andrew Fuller so that a clearer picture of the real man can be seen” (p. 9).

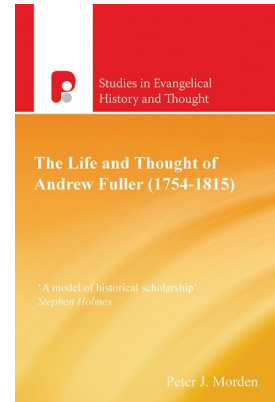
Life and Thought should be read as a complementary edition to Morden’s first work: *Offering Christ to the World: Andrew Fuller (1754–1815) and the Revival of Eighteenth Century Particular Baptist Life* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2004). Morden’s contribution in *Life and Thought* can be summarized in the following: Andrew Fuller “emerges as a far more complex person than has sometimes been supposed and yet there was significant integration between the public figure and the private man. Fuller was a flawed character, but he was also a man of integrity who thought and felt deeply about his faith and agonized over major decisions and issues” (p. 9).

Life and Thought is arranged in a thematic rather than strictly chronological structure. The author introduces the work with an explanation of method, research, and aim, contending that he has sought to be as objective as possible. Concurring with the historian Thomas J. Haskell, Morden affirms that “objectivity is not neutrality.” But as George Marsden has noted, “a historian frigid towards his theme can hardly ever write good history” (p. 9).

In *Offering Christ to the World*, Morden concluded that John Calvin’s writings were unimportant to Fuller. A newly discovered 1777/78 manuscript revealed direct quotations from the *Institutes* and led Morden to reconsider this position. Morden’s revised conclusion is that Fuller read the Genevan Reformer’s *magnum opus* as he penned the *Gospel Worthy* (p. 55). Morden gives a balanced perspective of Fuller, noting the pattern of self-deprecation in his diaries reflected a Puritan practice of rigorous self-examination rather than an actual state of affairs. Echoing Bruce Hindmarsh’s conclusions drawn from John Newton’s life, the confessional and sometimes “self recriminatory” tone of the diary was used as a means of “disciplined self-examination” (p. 105). This insight leads the reader to view Fuller’s diary through the appropriate lens, thereby discerning a more accurate picture of his life.

While the intense suffering Fuller endured through illness and family bereavements has been duly noted, Morden reveals a dimension of Andrew Fuller’s life that has yet been given extensive scholarly attention. He concludes that Fuller struggled with bouts of depression that deeply affected the trajectory of his writing and ministry. Morden cites evidence which included “terrible dreams, bouts of insomnia, dramatic mood swings, frequent tears and despair,” all symptoms of mental illness (p. 105). Prior to 1784 Fuller wrote regularly of doubting his own salvation. One entry in 1780 records, “I think of late, I cannot in prayer consider myself as a Christian, but as a Christian casting myself at Christ’s feet for mercy” (p. 104). Morden perceives a positive shift in Fuller’s disposition that coincided with his work as secretary of the *Baptist Missionary Society*. After 1784 there is no evidence Fuller questioned his eternal security.

Morden gives careful attention to the family life of Fuller, although the reader would have desired greater insight into his marriages. Possibly for a lack of material, little is said of Fuller’s correspondence



with his wives. Morden does note that Fuller's 2nd marriage was strong and loving, despite being marked by tragedy (p. 157). The author gives a fair assessment of Fuller's domestic life, claiming "devoted father" is an appropriate appellation while "exemplary" cannot withstand scrutiny where evidence is fragmentary and incomplete (p. 103). Fuller wrote of intense agony resulting from his children's deaths, particularly his six-year-old daughter. He expressed deep interest in the spiritual state of his family. Fuller's extensive ministry duties, however, lead the reader to conclude more should have been done in the home.

Fuller lived and ministered concurrently with the evangelical revivals. Morden gives evidence of the impact of these revivals on English evangelicalism. Fuller's closest friends were converted through the preaching of George Whitefield. It would have been helpful, however, to know his personal assessments of the revivals. What did Fuller conclude about the Wesleys and Methodism? One would prefer to know what aspects of the revivals Fuller judged as genuine and which ones spurious, particularly in light of prevailing Particular Baptist sentiment.

As for Fuller's legacy, Morden gives primacy to missions. He gives an anecdote from Spurgeon's College documenting an African American student that studied at the college in the 1870's and had read Fuller's work in America. After completing his studies, Thomas L. Johnson served with the *Baptist Missionary Society* in Cameroon. This account, in Morden's words showed, "Fuller's influence was not just confined to the western world; his significance as a pioneer of modern cross-cultural mission was, and remains, global" (p. 206).

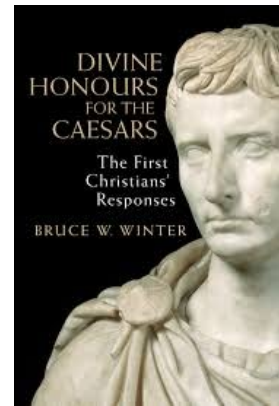
The Life and Thought of Andrew Fuller is a worthwhile addition to the ongoing historiography of Fuller studies. Morden's portrait of Fuller is arguably the most comprehensive and balanced book of its length available, making this book an important read for pastors and students desiring knowledge of the eminent pastor theologian would fare well to grab this read.

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Bruce Winter. *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians' Responses*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. 348 pp. £23.07/\$35.00.

In *Divine Honours for the Caesars: The First Christians' Responses*, Bruce Winter, the former warden of Tyndale House in Cambridge, has offered a comprehensive work of historical scholarship. As a student of early Christianity myself, with a special interest in the reasons for ancient persecution, I found the book interesting and useful.

Yet I think most readers will need to be in my professional field to come to a similar conclusion. It won't be an easy read for the average pastor or layperson. Anyone seeking an engaging style or briskly flowing prose will find instead a dense scholarly tome. This book will serve best as a well-researched resource for scholars and other experts investigating biblical backgrounds. Many specialists will be glad to have this handbook on their shelves, though it might rarely find its way into the pastor's study or church library.



Readers familiar with contemporary trends in NT studies (particularly Pauline scholarship) will immediately perceive that Winter's book takes the so-called "anti-imperial" approach to Scripture. This movement, associated with N. T. Wright and Richard Horsley among others, suggests that many Greek words used by Paul, such as *kurios* ("lord"), are in fact loaded terms rooted in Julio-Claudian emperor worship.

The implication here is that many NT writers were subtly refuting an aggressive propaganda machine that required Greco-Roman people to participate in the imperial cult. The significance of this, in turn, is that the message of the cross, seen especially in Pauline soteriology, was primarily focused on political emancipation from the domineering regime of Rome. Many of today's anti-imperial scholars quickly turn to the contemporary applications of such a perspective, resulting in theologies that critique the perceived dominance of political/industrial/capitalist powers in the modern world. Often this methodological approach intersects with Marxist and postcolonial readings of Scripture, as well as with Liberation Theology.

Winter's new book clearly stands in this scholarly tradition, though it makes its case without any apparent concern for contemporary politics. Instead, Winter's main stimulus seems to be his appreciation for the rich texture Roman history can offer as background to NT studies. In other words, Winter has a scholar's interest in classical antiquity, not a modern political axe to grind.

Though the overall argument of *Divine Honors for the Caesars* is easy to understand, it's a painstakingly detailed rehearsal of evidence, not a crisp historical narrative. After an introduction orienting the reader to the central thesis and highlighting the most relevant bibliography, Part I offers abundant evidence for the ubiquity of the imperial cult in the Roman East, particularly Asia Minor and the Aegean. Chapter 2 describes the many popular festivals that made the imperial cult such an enjoyable and therefore pervasive part of everyday life. Chapter 3 argues that prayers and petitions to the emperors put them in the role of providing benefits to provincials, resulting in a mutually favorable patronage relationship between ruler and ruled. In Chapter 4 we learn that while the Caesars often declined the offer of temples in their honor as inappropriate for mere humans, they weren't shy about adopting exalted titles that signaled their divine status. Chapter 5 demonstrates that Herod the Great adopted the imperial cultic system in Judea. The Jews soon adapted to this new requirement by offering temple sacrifices on Caesar's behalf, though not directly to him; yet the Jewish uprising in AD 66 led to a repudiation of this compromise.

In Part II, Winter assesses the relevance of the "all-pervasive and inescapable" imperial cult for ancient church life. The earliest Christians embarked on several strategies as they attempted to cope with a widespread cultic system that demanded a loyalty they were reluctant to give in light of their commitment to King Jesus. Winter examines various historical situations such as:

- Paul's Areopagus speech in Acts 17;
- the religious requirements and social pressures in first-century Achaia, Galatia, and Thessalonica;
- the dire persecutions faced by the recipients of the Epistle to the Hebrews;
- a new Asian initiative identifiable in Revelation and in pagan sources that required Christians to make a choice between highly visible ritual honors for the Caesars or maintenance of an undefiled faith—a decision that would have resulted in severe penalties for non-compliance, including economic sanctions or even execution.

In each scenario, Winter makes a compelling case that the first Christians faced a hostile and highly coercive state-sponsored cultus. Yet because Winter argues primarily from Greco-Roman background material, some readers may wish for a sustained exegesis of the biblical text to more fully establish the book's thesis.

Recent trends in the scholarship on early Christian martyrdom have tended to downplay the extent (or even the existence) of ancient persecution (see for example Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013). Moss and others have argued that the earliest pre-Decian martyr stories are unreliable and datable to a later era than the ostensible time of their composition. Though a "myth" exists that Christians were persecuted, the argument goes, they were only occasionally prosecuted for standard crimes under Roman law. Whatever violence was done to the earliest followers of Jesus has left a barely discernible mark on the historical record.

Though Winter doesn't confront this thesis directly, his work serves as a strong rebuttal to the theory of mythical persecution. He shows that even if the traditional second-century martyr stories were taken off the table as late forgeries, a dominant imperial ideology—widely disseminated, intolerant of resistance, and willing to deal in violence—stood opposed to Christianity at every turn. To the extent Winter highlights anti-imperialism as a relevant New Testament context, he challenges the scholarship of those who say we can't discern much about early Christian persecution prior to the age of Diocletian. On the contrary, Winter claims, Rome was a dangerous adversary right from the beginning.

Divine Honors for the Caesars is an important book for the scholarly community. Exegetes reluctant to see political dimensions to a purely spiritual NT theology will not be able to proceed without engaging Winter's meticulous argument that Roman imperial ideology dominated the biblical world. Likewise, historians who believe imperial persecution was not an important factor in ancient Christian experience will need to grapple with the evidence in Winter's monograph of brutal struggles occurring early and often between Jerusalem and Rome.

Although most of today's pastors will not feel compelled to enter into the nuances of these academic debates, scholars of early Christianity will no longer be able to continue their professional conversations without footnoting this pivotal new work.

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— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND BIOETHICS —

Gregg R. Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology & Practice: An Evangelical Assessment*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. 493 pp. £18.99/\$28.00.

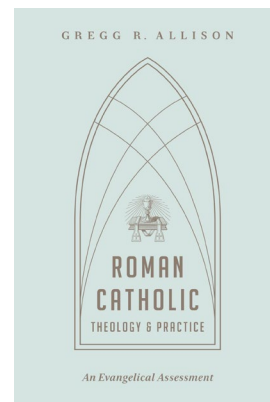
Protestants have a long history of subjecting Roman Catholic theology and practice to a written critique. Calvin, Chemnitz, Vermigli, Zanchi, Turretin, Usher, Newman (prior to his conversion), Bavinck, Boettner, Berkouwer, and Van Til are just a few notable examples. The volume under review continues this legacy of rigorous, trenchantly biblical engagement from a Reformed perspective. It differs, however, in that it is current, irenic in spirit, and driven by a particular methodology, that is, by a consideration of how the various strands of Catholic doctrine relate to its overall fabric.

Gregg Allison begins by reflecting on his experience as a young man preparing to engage Catholics in evangelism at the University of Notre Dame (p. 22). Such background sets the stage for what follows by introducing the author as an evangelical with two basic concerns: understanding Catholicism as it is taught by the Catholic Church, and responding to Catholic claims in an authentically evangelical manner, that is, with the gospel of Jesus Christ at the leading edge.

Precisely because this is an “evangelical assessment,” Allison begins with consideration of the Catholic and Protestant approaches to Scripture in his opening section (pp. 31–32). It is at this initial point where he also spells out his understanding of Catholic theology “as a coherent, all-encompassing system with two major features: the nature-grace interdependence, that is, a strong continuity between nature and grace; and the Christ-Church interconnection, that is, an ecclesiology . . . that views the Catholic Church as the ongoing incarnation of Jesus Christ” (p. 31). These two features comprise the methodological lens through which Roman Catholic theology and practice are evaluated throughout the book.

Recognizing the importance of definition, Allison explains, “As for evangelical theology, one must understand first of all that evangelicalism is not a church or denomination but a massive broad-tent movement that encompasses thousands of churches and ministries from many different theological persuasions” (pp. 32–33). He proceeds to explicate what he regards as the typical expression of evangelical theology in terms of “a vision of life with God and human flourishing” (p. 33). However, he is not content to simply define the gospel; he proclaims it with the pathos of a preacher (p. 35).

Allison credits the outline of his systematic approach to the Italian scholar, Leonardo De Chirico, whose doctoral thesis, *Evangelical Theological Perspectives on Post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), lays the groundwork (p. 43). From this foundation several principles of Catholic theology are highlighted: its ability to assimilate new ideas in an increasing complexity without altering its basic unified identity, its “and-and” approach, rather than an “either-or” (e.g., *solī Deo Gloria*, glory to God *and* special honor attributed to Mary as the *theotokos*), and the incarnational impulse that integrates concepts with visible, material, and organizational structures. This would have also been a good place to also mention the notion of doctrine’s development—so central to post-Vatican II Catholicism—as popularized by John Henry Newman.



After explaining how Catholic theology functions as a coherent, all-encompassing system, Allison begins to exposit the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (p. 71). Before doing so, however, he explains the historical background of the *Catechism* from the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). The various drafts through which it passed, its publication in English in 1994, and its overall scope and sequence are summarized in these pages (pp. 71–72). In the exposition that follows, Allison is sensitive to the proportion of space that he dedicates to various doctrinal subjects, taking his cues from the *Catechism* itself (p. 267).

The section on “Scripture and Its Interpretation,” a central focus of Allison’s research, is pure gold (pp. 95–108). Once again, he is quite comfortable identifying the significant agreement that Catholics and Protestants share on this subject: e.g., the importance, divine inspiration, and truthfulness of Scripture. At the same time, he sheds light on differences such as the canon of Scripture, perspicuity, and methods of interpretation.

Allison’s analysis goes further than simply the Catholic *Catechism*. He also considers trends in the Catholic Church, such as its charismatic renewal movement (p. 158). Furthermore, he draws from sources outside of the *Catechism*, such as Vatican II documents (unfortunately, references to these do not appear in the index), encyclicals, conciliar statements, documents from important events such as the World Day of Prayer for Peace (p. 165n32), *motu proprio* (papal edicts), canon law, Church Fathers, lectionaries, and a host of secondary sources.

In addition to shedding historical theological light on Catholic teaching (pp. 194–96), including its relationship to sixteenth century Protestant thought (p. 170), Allison’s reflection is also pastoral in nature. Speaking of Catholics attempting to emulate the lives of their saints, he writes: “these saints cannot offer grace and mercy to them, only an unattainably high standard that functions as a law that brings greater condemnation as it is not reached” (p. 174). Underscoring the need for Christian faith to maintain a missional impulse, he writes, “Withdrawal from the world . . . is no more an option for Christians than it was for Jesus himself” (p. 201).

When treating a subject, Allison often steps backward to provide insight into its wider and fuller context, such as when he explains the etymology and biblical orientation of the word “baptism” (p. 260). Readers will also appreciate the various illustrations sprinkled throughout the book, drawings and explanations that elucidate complex concepts. For example, in explaining the catholicity of the Church, he writes:

The *Catechism* raises an important question: “Who belongs to the Catholic Church?” To envision its response, think of concentric circles with the Catholic faithful in the center, others who believe in Christ—Orthodox Christians, Protestant Christians, evangelical Christians—in the circles farther out, and all the rest of humanity, “called by God’s grace to salvation,” in the more remote circles. (p. 163)

Such statements are consistently followed by an evangelical critique. In this case, Allison notes, “Evangelical theology decries this notion of the Church’s universality as embracing inclusivism . . . (p. 177). In his section on Catholic inclusivism, one wishes that Allison would have explained the Catholic doctrine of “invincible ignorance” and compared it to Karl Rahner’s notion of “Anonymous Christianity.”

Allison’s nuanced approach in navigating areas of controversy between Catholics and evangelical Protestants endows his treatment with an explanatory force. For instance, after presenting the evangelical position on Petrine supremacy in Matthew 16, he writes, “This interpretation should not be taken to be minimizing Peter’s salvation-historical privilege among the apostles” (p. 182n82). Likewise, Allison

dispels common misconceptions, such as the notion that the Roman Catholic Church is without a doctrine of the priesthood of believers (p. 187).

For readers who desire to better understand the Mass, Allison explains why the Catholic liturgy takes the particular form that it does—the various movements of the Liturgy of the Word followed by the Liturgy of the Eucharist (p. 247). He considers the tangible elements in which the liturgy consists: “the altar, the tabernacle, the sacred chrism (*myron*, or oil), the chair (*cathedra*), the lectern (*ambo*), the baptistery, the holy water font, the confessional, and the threshold” (p. 256). Moreover, he overviews the legally recognized rites, explaining how they fit into the Catholic picture, including Byzantine, Alexandrian (Coptic), Syriac, Armenian, Maronite, and Chaldean (p. 250).

There are a few areas where readers may find themselves disagreeing with Allison’s presentation. For instance, in a visual image on page 47 he distinguishes (in his words) the “primary elements” of Catholic theology in terms of “nature” and “grace” (which are portrayed as parallel) from the “secondary element,” that is, “sin” (which is depicted below the previous elements). I expect Catholics will protest this portrayal, since Catholic theology is quite clear that grace is higher than nature. Then, a couple of pages later, Allison asserts, “According to evangelical theology, grace has *nothing* to work with in nature because creation has been devastatingly tainted by sin” (p. 49, emphasis added). This, it seems to me, sounds like a Barthian view, but not exactly an evangelical understanding of how divine grace redeems humanity.

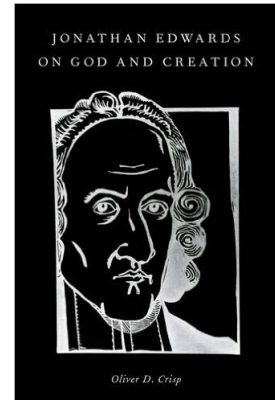
The final chapter of Allison’s book, “Evangelical Ministry with Catholics,” is full of practical, ministry-oriented suggestions (pp. 453–58). Growing out of the “many commonalities that are shared between Catholics and evangelicals,” and also the many differences that have been critiqued, particularly the nature-grace interdependence and the Christ-Church interconnection, Allison encourages readers to engage Catholic friends in respectful conversation (p. 453). One wishes that this section (of only 6 pages) were longer.

Readers will want to ask themselves at the conclusion of this book whether Allison has succeeded in portraying Catholic theology and practice as an all-encompassing system. Frankly, while I have been in agreement with Allison’s presuppositions for a long time, I was unsure whether they would serve as an effective heuristic lens without having to die the death of a thousand qualifications. In my humble opinion, Allison not only succeeds, he does so in a way that is genuinely helpful to anyone desiring to understand and relate constructively to the Catholic Church.

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Oliver D. Crisp. *Jonathan Edwards on God and Creation*. New York: Oxford, 2012. 260 pp. £41.99/\$73.00.

As his title suggests, Oliver Crisp's book deal with "two central concepts" in the thought of Jonathan Edwards: "the divine nature and the created order" and the relationship between them. In what amounts to an overview of the foundation and structure of Edward's theological vision, Crisp's monograph explores Edwards's view of metaphysics, divine freedom, divine simplicity and excellency, the Trinity, the God-world relation, and the final state. In the process, Crisp locates his own reading of Edwards in relation to other key Edwards scholars, most notably Sang Lee, Stephen Holmes, and Amy Plantinga-Pauw. Methodologically, Crisp attempts to give appropriate weight to the various genres of Edwards's writings, privileging published treatises and sermons over private notebooks and outlines. This is a welcome move, since some scholars give inordinate weight to Edwards's more obscure musings and speculations, as opposed to the writings that he commended to the public.



The book proceeds by focusing on various metaphysical and theological foci that are central to understanding God and creation. As a result, some of these subjects are treated more than once, as they are brought into relation to new topics in what amounts to a spiraling effect. Crisp begins in Chapter 1 by engaging with Sang Lee's dispositional ontology, arguing that while Lee's reading has many merits, Edwards does not completely abandon an essentialist metaphysics that utilizes substances and properties. Instead, Edwards modifies an essentialist metaphysics, combining it with an idealism and occasionalism (on which see below). In Chapter 2, Crisp argues that Edwards is closer to the Reformed tradition from which he emerged when it comes to his theology proper, particularly in relation to the pure act understanding of the divine nature. Moreover, Crisp, invoking and modifying Lee, argues that Edwards held that God has an essential disposition to create. This raises the question of whether God *must* create and how a positive answer to that question relates to divine freedom. Chapter 3 explores these questions in detail, arguing that Edwards held both that God must create *and* that this does not impinge upon his freedom, since divine freedom, like the creaturely version, is compatibilistic. In other words, for Edwards, not even God has libertarian freedom, since liberty of indifference is an incoherent concept in itself. Thus, creation can be both necessary and freely willed by God. The necessity of creation seems to pose a challenge to divine aseity, a criticism made against Edwards by scholars such as James Beilby and Michael McClymond. Crisp takes up this question in Chapter 4, arguing from *The End For Which God Created the World* that Edwards has the resources to withstand the attack, even if some puzzles and questions remain. The fifth chapter is devoted to Edwards's peculiar notion of divine excellency, in which Edwards argues that "one alone . . . cannot be excellent . . . for there can be no such thing as consent" (quoted on p. 84). Excellency requires plurality, which seems to pose a challenge to the classical notion of divine simplicity. Engaging with McClymond and Pauw and drawing up Muller's work on the Reformed Scholastics, Crisp argues that Edwards held to an apophatic account of simplicity, which, though idiosyncratic in relation to individuating the persons of the Trinity, stands well within the Reformed tradition. Chapter 6 focuses on Edwards's doctrine of the Trinity, especially his attempt to reduce the attributes of God to persons. Crisp finds Edwards's arguments at this point irredeemable and incomplete, though it is unclear to the reviewer that Crisp has sufficiently and clearly understood them. Chapter 7 returns to Edwards's occasionalism and links it to his pantheism, the notion that the world exists, in some sense, "in God." Offering a charitable reading of Edwards on this

point, Crisp finds Edwards's panentheism to be consistent with classical theism, and that any residual problems in Edwards's view apply in equal measure to others in the Augustinian Neoplatonic tradition. The final chapter focuses on the consummation of all things. For Edwards, Crisp argues, heaven is an ever-increasing, asymptotic union of God with his elect creatures. Moreover, Crisp responds to objections from Holmes and Plantinga-Pauw with respect to Edwards's doctrine of hell, noting that his views on the subject are consistent and rooted in his understanding of the Bible, however out of step they may be with modern notions of divine love. The result is that Crisp offers a careful, well-reasoned, illuminating, and at times provocative analysis of Edwards's thought.

For all of Crisp's benefits, however, there are a handful of areas where he falls short. For example, he doesn't always heed his own methodological cautions. In his chapter on the Trinity, he reiterates the circumstantial nature of Edwards's writing on the subject, noting that Edwards's thinking "was never in the final form he wished it to be," and that he "never published a sustained treatment of the doctrine" (p. 118). However, later in that same chapter, he chastises Edwards for making a "peculiar oversight" and obvious "mistake" (in relation to how to individuate the persons of the Trinity). But, what would one expect, if Edwards's writings were *ad hoc* and not in their final form?

Additional methodological criticisms revolve around Crisp's mode of comparing Edwards to other thinkers. At times, such as in his treatment of Edwards and the pure act tradition, Crisp ably and helpfully locates Edwards in relation to his own theological influences, notably Turretin, van Mastricht, and Ames. At other times, Crisp runs far afield, evaluating Edwards in light of modern theological notions of divine simplicity (p. 114), or anachronistically linking his views to metaphysical philosophies such as Humean bundle theory (pp. 18–21), which may or may not have any direct bearing on Edwards. Moreover, Crisp's penchant for breaking Edwards's views up into propositions for the sake of philosophical analysis is a two-edged sword (see chs. 2, 5, 6, 7). On the one hand, at times it does bring clarity to the subject at hand. On the other hand, it sometimes untethers Crisp's analysis from the text and Edwards's own language and framing, resulting in reductionisms and mischaracterizations of Edwards's thought. The most significant example of this is Crisp's persistent claim that Edwards held that God must necessarily create. To demonstrate this claim, Crisp repeatedly appeals to passages in *The End For Which God Created the World* in which Edwards says that there is "a disposition in God, as an original property of his nature, to an emanation of his own infinite fullness." Crisp uses this passage (and others like it) to claim that for Edwards, "God is essentially disposed to create some world" (p. 50), and that "the divine nature is configured such that God must create a world, because the act of creation is a 'propensity of nature,' a 'necessary consequence of' God's 'delighting in the glory of his own nature'" (p. 146). But notice that the word "create" does not appear in the passage; instead, Edwards consistently uses the word "emanation" to talk about this original property. What's more, in *End*, Edwards is at pains to distinguish emanation from creation, since it is this original disposition to an emanation that *moves* God to create the world. Now, Crisp may respond that this is a distinction without a difference, given Edwards's commitment to divine compatibilism. But the point is that Edwards does clearly make this distinction, and therefore regards it as significant at some level. Therefore, to collapse the distinction (and to do so perhaps unknowingly?) is a defect in one's analysis.

The other major area of criticism lies in Crisp's treatment of Edwards's occasionalism. Crisp argues that for Edwards, "the world is an infinite series of numerically distinct entities created *ex nihilo*, moment by moment, and arranged in the divine mind *seriatim*, so as to produce the effect of continuous activity over time" (p. 36). The world is like a motion picture made up of still frames that God stitches together

and projects in his mind (p. 160). In itself, this seems like a fair summary of Edwards's view. However, Crisp goes on to argue that this entails the denial of secondary causality and makes persistence through time illusory. In fact, Crisp repeatedly stresses throughout the book that, for Edwards, creatures "strictly speaking, do not persist through time" (p. 86). Persistence and change over time are only a matter of appearances (p. 150). What's more, Crisp finds this incredibly problematic in his discussion of hell, since "the damned are not the agents that cause the acts by which they are condemned and do not cause the acts they perform in hell; God does" (p. 186). At this point, Crisp has gone substantially beyond Edwards's view to draw conclusions that Edwards would clearly not accept because they don't accurately reflect his claims. Crisp's error comes from failing to take seriously Edwards's argument in the key passage supporting occasionalism from *Original Sin*, a passage that Crisp repeatedly quotes.

It appears, if we consider matters strictly, there is no such thing as any identity or oneness in created objects, existing at different times, but what depends on *God's sovereign constitution*. . . . [I]t appears, that a *divine constitution* is the thing which *makes truth*, in affairs of this nature. (quoted on p. 150, Crisp's italics)

Crisp takes this to mean that Edwards denies that creatures persist through time, that there is no "identity" between the Joe Rigney who ate breakfast this morning and the Joe Rigney writing this review. But Edwards says precisely the opposite. Rephrasing the quotation, Edwards claims that the *only* identity in created objects is that which depends on God's sovereign constitution *because* God's constitution is what makes truth in these matters. Edwards doesn't deny persistence; he accounts for persistence through total divine dependence understood in an occasionalist manner. Put another way, Edwards is not offering an occasionalist account of *apparent* persistence; he's offering an occasionalist account of *actual* persistence. The persistence is real precisely because, as Edwards says, God makes this the "truth" of the matter. It's only by privileging a non-occasionalist metaphysics that Crisp is able to characterize Edwards's thought in the way that he does.

Despite these shortcomings, Crisp's book offers a comprehensive and careful treatment of his subject. Even when he errs, Crisp clarifies issues by helping us to see the fundamental interpretive issues facing Edwards scholars. Because of this, Crisp's book is an essential read for anyone doing serious study of Edwards's theology.

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Herman J. Selderhuis, ed. *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*. Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition. Leiden: Brill, 2013. ix + 689 pp. £203.00/\$277.00.

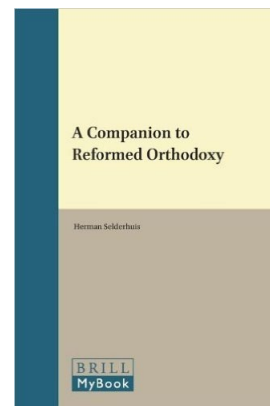
Here's another hefty *Companion* from Brill's reference series on the medieval and early modern Christian life, thought, and practice. This series joins other similar series from Oxford, Cambridge, Blackwell, and Routledge, which are popular with students, but usually purchased by college libraries.

Professor Selderhuis has edited the book with a light touch. Usually the authors to *Companions* provide a survey of current research and thinking on the topic, person, or period. This is central to the genre, and what students rummage for. But entries to this volume vary significantly in scope, length, and quality. Some contributors provide the sort of survey readers expect, others offer a representation of their topic for a modern readership who don't fancy themselves as Reformed scholastics, others offer new research, others propose new areas of research, and still others summarize their own research area. So, for example, Carl Trueman on Reformed Orthodoxy (RO) in Britain gives his readers an account of some of the main events, people and publications from the onset of the Reformation to post-Restoration Dissent, the materials for research. On the other hand, Christian Moser on RO in Switzerland provides us with a slice of the state of research. Some contributions are twenty-odd pages, some forty or fifty pages. There are eighteen chapters. Brill has the policy of not calling them chapters, and not numbering them, but the editor has gathered them into three Parts: 'Relations,' 'Places' and 'Topics'.

In Professor Selderhuis's short Introduction, he reflects on the difficulty of defining 'Reformed Orthodoxy'. In the first instance 'Reformed' refers to a familiar list of Reformers which is broader than 'Calvinistic', and it may include those against whom Reformed confessions and theological tomes were written, and they may have thought of themselves as 'Reformed'. Selderhuis says, "'Reformed" therefore stands for each and every movement, standpoint or theologian that considers itself Reformed' (p. 2). So if a theologian to be studied thinks himself Reformed then he is Reformed. And what if he doesn't think himself Reformed, may he nevertheless be? Presumably so, for the one doing the research may think that he is. And 'Orthodoxy' is used neutrally, a term with neither negative or positive connotations (p. 2). In this area I think there is no alternative but to stipulate and then to be ostensive, showing more determination than does Professor Selderhuis.

However, whatever their provenance, the assembled papers are full of interest. It is not possible to review each of the eighteen contributions here, so I have picked a third of them to describe and comment on. The equally worthy remainder are listed at the end.

(1) Aza Goudriaan teaches church history at the VU Amsterdam and is the author of *Reformed Orthodoxy and Philosophy, 1625–1750* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), for which this piece in the *Companion* should whet appetites. Here he discusses the relations between philosophy and theology in RO, looking to the responses of the movement to philosophical developments. The figures treated are largely Dutch, or those who worked in Holland. The chief of these movements is of course Aristotelianism. In addition Goudriaan has things to say on Ramism, Cartesianism, the philosophies of Hobbes, Ludwijk Meijer, and Spinoza. He sees philosophical reflection as an adaptation of the general knowledge of God, which the RO were educated in and inherited from late medievalism. This Aristotelianism operated as a conservative force in Dutch universities, since it became embedded in the teaching not only of



philosophy and theology, but of law and of medicine as well. It was adapted for theological purposes, and used eclectically (e.g., for use in elucidation of creation, or the immortality of the soul, or the human person). Goudriaan says that it was ‘strongly adapted’ in such ways (p. 35). It seems to me that such a force came through much more strongly in Holland than in England, where it seems to have been less developed in fact and with less pronounced literary vehicles.

(2) Irena Backus of the Institute d’histoire de la Réformation, Geneva, discusses the relationship between RO and the patristic tradition. RO was interested in the synthesising of the Reformed faith to aid the education of ministerial candidates, using aristotelian and Ramist tools. What, in this process, of the relation between Reformed theology and the patristic tradition? Her paper endeavours to begin to answer that question, noting ‘some of the specific features of the reception of patristic tradition’ (p. 91) by early RO theologians. She offers a learned account of the state of research, which has identified summaries of patristic thought for RO consumption by authors such as Jean Daillé and André Rivet. The purpose of such writing was partly to warn the Reformed against aberrant catholicity, while at the same time introducing reliable patristic guides. Backus is not shy in critiquing the RO, a welcome note modulating the generally laudatory tone of the *Companion*. On the relation between systematic theology and the patristic tradition she notes the work of E. P. Meijering on Turretin, Polanus and Wollebius. The Reformed had to draw a fine line by dissenting from the Roman teaching on *consensus patrum* while at the same time employing them as witnesses to the Trinity and to the person of Christ. She opines that by Turretin’s time there was a weaving between some of the dogmatic deliverances of the fathers and RO theology beyond these obvious themes (e.g., on the sense or senses in which the atonement was necessary). Backus also investigates parallels between Beza on Jerome and Daneau’s work on Augustine’s *Enchiridion*, but she curiously overlooks Calvin’s use of the Fathers—not only Augustine of course, but of Bernard of Clairvaux, Hilary of Poitiers, and the like.

(3) Antonie Vos, Professor of Historical Theology, Evangelical Theology Faculty, Leuven, writes on RO in the Netherlands, providing the reader with a fairly celebratory whistle stop tour of Dutch university towns and their universities in this Golden Age. This is followed by a section on systematic theology in the Netherlands of this time. The key to RO distinctiveness and the root of its glory lies in part in the distinction between necessity and contingency in God, owed to Duns Scotus and realized in the Reformed community in Holland in the seventeenth century, ‘classic Reformed theology, in the Golden Age of the northern Netherlands . . . this land flowing of excellent theology’ (p. 158).

According to Vos, there is a fundamental ontological difference between Calvin and the Calvinists. But it is hard to make this out. Such theology as he ascribes to the Dutch Calvinists can be found earlier in Geneva with or without the help of Duns Scotus (p. 158). Vos’s contribution to the study of RO is noteworthy, but not representative of the wider field.

(4) Sebastian Rehnman, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Stavanger, has provided a fifty-page paper on the doctrine of God. It is the best in the *Companion* for its accuracy, care, and freshness (I declare a modest interest: I had the privilege of reading a draft). It is a considerable achievement. The RO elucidate the concept of God in terms of the scholastic notions of act and potency: God is pure act, he is omnipotent and so on. Rehnman transposes such expressions into non-scholastic prose. He seeks to convey understanding of RO by a synoptic approach to the various parts of the RO understanding while at the same time closely following the contours of their thought and noting the primary sources at each step, usually in footnotes. His synopsis has three stages: God’s existence, his perfections, and his tri-personhood. Each of these stages presupposes the earlier one. Talk of God may seem in peril

for the RO with their stress on negative theology, for God is incomprehensible. Yet we can talk of God since God has talked of himself in Holy Scripture in a way that is accommodated to our capacity. He is preeminently the cause of all that exists besides himself, and he is our Creator. So the Creator-creature distinction is fundamental. And the doctrine of God is the result of disciplined thought on this accommodation.

Rehnman takes the reader through this sequence in some detail, offering generous citations especially from Francis Turretin and (in respect of the divine persons) the Independent divines John Owen and Thomas Ridgley. This choice is a bit curious, in that Ridgley was skeptical of the Nicene formula of the eternal begottenness of the Son and the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son (*filioque*). Not for rationalist reasons, but because of what he regarded as its lack of solid scriptural grounding. Such scepticism was a minority view among the orthodox but taken up by several Reformed theologians in RO and subsequently. Rehnman does not touch on this fact.

The second phase is concerned with the nature of God's attributes or perfections, drawn from his revelation which bears evidence of God's nature, though not comprehensively so. First in this, what are called God's incommunicable attributes, his metaphysical 'structure' and the theologian works forward via the disciplines of causality, negation and eminence. And then deals with the communicable properties.

The third phase is God's Trinitarian personhood. The persons have attributes which are communicable but they differ from each other by each possessing distinct incommunicable properties. He avoids the idea of the godhead as being a common nature, but it is hard to make out the difference. For the external actions of the three persons (about which Rehnman says little here) are indivisible, and so are actions of the one God. As he puts it, the persons are distinguished by a case of God begetting, another by being God begotten, and the third by God eternally proceeding (p. 397). The God begotten is the Son, and the God proceeding is from Father and the Son and is the Spirit. None of this looks abstract, as Rehnman maintains. In any case, for the RO is not God pure act? All this is very difficult, very mysterious, as Rehnman freely reckons (p. 398). We are always teetering on the brink of incomprehensibility, despite the author's admirable skill in teaching us to think and speak consistently, and by his excellent reworking of the RO on this matter.

(5) Maarten Wisse and Hugo Meijer of the VU University, Amsterdam, write on pneumatology. This ambitious essay stresses the full personhood of the Spirit, whose work is not confined to a restricted number of topics. They hold that pneumatology in RO is rarely undertaken currently (p. 466) then discuss the position Augustine, Peter Lombard and Aquinas, and arising from this identify two areas of pneumatology that deserve specific attention, the relationship of the Spirit to love and the role of the Holy Spirit in Christology. They discuss Calvin, the relation between the Spirit and the authentication of Scripture, and other new *loci* introduced in his work, and suggest that the work of the Holy Spirit in creation is 'passed over in silence' (p. 481). They continue their survey by considering the Helvetic and Westminster Confessions and they discuss John Owen (and Thomas Goodwin and Wollebius) in reference to the Holy Spirit, in connection with the doctrine of Scripture, the Trinity, Creation, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology and Sacramentology. They find most interest in Christology. In my judgment, the authors are a little unfair to Calvin's work on the Spirit in creation, if one includes what is created, as well as the act of creating (cf. *Inst.* II.2.15).

(6) While most of the entries in Part III are on dogmatic *loci* (though nothing on the person of Christ, which given its significance in debates and wrangles about the Supper, is surprising), Luca

Baschera redresses the imbalance somewhat by considering 'Ethics in Reformed Orthodoxy'. She notes how under-researched this area is (to which may be added political theology, the two kingdoms etc., though note Professor Witte's contribution to the *Companion*), but leads the reader through the various *genres* of ethical writings. It should be remembered that Aristotelian practical reason already features in areas of dogmatics, in discussions of the nature of divine and human action, and so on.

What Baschera refers to as 'ethics-related literature' represents diverse genres. These include the presentation of ethics within a dogmatic framework; not only in the treatment of the *locus de lege*, but in the work of those like Polanus and Ames who regard ethics as the practical outworking of dogmatics, in what might be called the *Pilgrim's Progress* strain in RO. Baschera notes that there is also the difference between those whose first concern in ethics is with the promotion of civic virtue, and those who understand it as an aspect of spirituality, and hence with motivation and intention.

This difference may be evident in the tradition of Puritanism. For there is a striking mis-match between what seems to be the almost exclusively deontic approach to ethics in the Westminster catechisms and Westminster theology stressing the third 'use' of the law. This is in contrast with next to nothing on the moral virtues in the treatment of the Moral Law. Maybe this reflects the Divines' responsibility for preparing documents for a projected Presbyterian/Independent state Church of England, and with the close working between the church and the magistrate that was envisaged as a part of this. There was also the then-current fear of the rise of antinomianism. Interestingly there is less emphasis on deontology in the Confession. By contrast there is a rather meager attention paid to the law as such, much more on the virtues, in such a seminal Puritan document as William Ames's *Medulla*. Baschera shows that there is a tradition of writing manuals of ethics, beginning with Lambert Daneau, and including Antonius Walaeus and, in later RO, Johann Heidegger. Finally, there are works on Reformed casuistry. Baschera thinks that such works were particularly developed in England. Of such the best known is perhaps Richard Baxter's *Christian Directory*. So, here is the prospect of opening up research on the ethical side of RO.

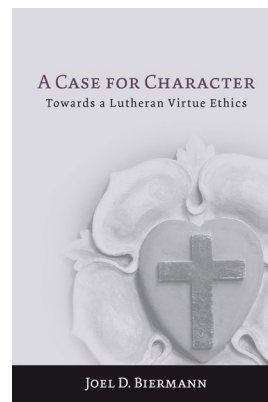
All in all, despite being something of a catch-all, the *Companion* will, I hope, be consulted and dipped into, and thereby act as a stimulus to new areas of work in the field, if Reformed Orthodoxy is a field.

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London, UK

— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Joel D. Biermann. *A Case for Character: Towards a Lutheran Virtue Ethics*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. vii + 204 pages. £19.99/\$29.00.

In *A Case for Character*, Joel Biermann offers an extremely readable, deeply scholarly, well-researched, and theologically constructive volume concerning the topic of virtue ethics and Lutheran theology. The book seeks to address the pastoral issue of antinomianism in the praxis of many churches, due to a variety of factors that stem from the theological weight given to the doctrine of justification by faith alone and from various paradigms of Lutheran theological ethics. In addition, Biermann seeks to respond to the critiques of theological ethicists such as Stanley Hauerwas that find within Lutheran theology itself propositions which he claims not only do not emphasize the development of character and virtue, but which he believes are also incapable of even incorporating virtue into Lutheran theology.



The book's argument is simple to follow and is packed with primary source quotes from all the necessary contributors to the study of both virtue ethics and Lutheran theology. In Chapter 1 ("Virtue Ethics and the Challenge of Hauerwas"), the arguments of major, non-Lutheran thinkers in the field of virtue ethics (Hauerwas, MacIntyre, etc.) are presented and summarized. Chapter 2 ("Contemporary Lutheran Voices") introduces the reader to the work and perspectives of the primary contemporary Lutheran ethical/theological thinkers contributing to the discussion today including David Yeago, Robert Benne, Reinhard Hütter, Gilbert Meilaender, and Biermann himself. For those who are not a part, or are only mildly aware, of the work of contemporary Lutheran theologians, this chapter constitutes a superb introduction.

The emphasis switches to the primary sources of the Lutheran Reformers themselves (Luther and Melancthon) in Chapter 3 ("The Lutheran Confessions"), providing a great overview of the particularly magisterial Lutheran understanding of the place of Aristotelian virtue theory and the distinction between righteousness *coram deo* (before God) and *coram mundo* (before the world) in the thought of the Reformers. This chapter provides an abundance of primary source material from Luther and Melancthon of which most readers will not be familiar. Biermann successfully demonstrates that Luther had some pretty harsh things to say about Aristotle (on p. 79, Biermann cites Luther's 1520 writing "To the Christian Nobility" in which he refers to Aristotle as "a damned, conceited, rascally heathen"). Nevertheless, the Reformer (and more especially, Melancthon) can be shown in other texts to hold Aristotle in very high regard (see e.g. pp. 79–85). Building on this historical revelation, Biermann does an excellent job throughout the book in demonstrating how the idea of good works and virtue are not antithetical, and indeed, can be and should be included in the Christian life.

Then chapters 4 ("The Search for a Paradigm"), 5 ("A Creedal Framework"), and 6 ("An Ethic for the Church") together constitute a new movement in the book in which Biermann offers a detailed response and proposal. This portion of the book integrates a faithful incorporation of the Lutheran Confessional documents, the thought of contemporary Lutheran theologians, and the complexities of the contemporary problem of antinomianism in the Church.

Biermann's research and writing are commendable, but for me as a non-Lutheran the book suffers from several key weaknesses inherent in Lutheran dogmatic theology itself. This, however, can hardly be imputed to Biermann as a fault associated with his own project, which succeeds in arguing for a Lutheran ethic of character that is faithful to the Bible and to the Lutheran Confessions. Biermann argues for an ethical paradigm which recognizes "three righteousnesses," namely: (1) a righteousness obtainable *coram mundo* which is based on God's will as evidenced through nature; (2) a righteousness that makes the believer "righteous" *coram deo* which is imputed to the believer by grace alone through faith alone; and (3) a righteousness that is lived out in response to the believers justification and which involves transformative good works *coram mundo*.

The idea of three kinds of righteousness may seem strange and idiosyncratic to the non-Lutheran.. The use of different theological terms to describe these "righteousnesses" might help to make the muddy theological waters a bit more clear. For example, it would make more sense to me to refer to Biermann's "conforming righteousness" simply as "holiness" rather than as one of the three types of righteousness, one of which justifies and thus is the formal cause of the application of the gospel, and the others of which do not justify and thus merely precede and/or proceed from the gospel. Lastly, those in other evangelical traditions outside of Lutheranism may take issue with the rather truncated view of the gospel as basically referring to the forgiveness of sins and justification by faith alone (see e.g., pp. 2, 6, 14, 26, 50–52, 71, 85, 167).

Yet, in the end, theological differences aside, all streams of orthodox Christianity would find common cause and resonance with the findings and formulations of Biermann's book when he concludes "Faithful churches cultivate character" (p. 199). The book vindicates the Lutheran Reformers from the charge of antinomianism so commonly leveled by critics of Luther (often issued without a deep knowledge of Luther's writings), and thereby rescues the Lutheran Confessions from the charge of containing within themselves a theology devoid of concern for moral formation. There should be no more jumping straight from Hauerwas to a critique of Luther without going through Biermann first. To do so would be to willfully neglect the real potential of Lutheranism for faithful Reformation theology and powerful moral transformation.

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J. R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt. *Eldership and the Mission of God: Equipping Teams for Faithful Church Leadership*. Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity Press, 2015. 216 pp. £12.99/\$17.00.

I was reading *The Hunger Games* all over again: the creative concept, the captivating opening chapters, the forward-thinking perspective, unfettered to the categories of the past—and then, all too soon, the sneaking suspicion that something in the narrative was amiss. Was this storyline just too good to resolve well? I began to cringe at the thought that this might end in disappointment, that our heroes might not be grounded enough to avoid that one fretful, but significant indiscretion just as the story was ending. I wish my worries had been needless.

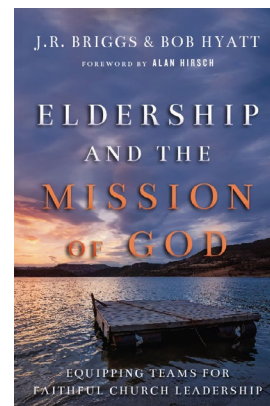
I had found so much to celebrate along the way. Evangelicals, perhaps especially Reformed types like myself, could use a balanced and biblical exploration of what eldership will be in the increasingly post-Christian days ahead. *Eldership and the Mission of God* has no wrist-binding nostalgia for the pastors of another age, no sentimental notions about the practices of the old Puritan shepherds. God bless Puritan theology, but the methods, of necessity, were fit for a bygone era. But Briggs and Hyatt are ready to ask the uncomfortable questions about what it means to be pastor-elders in the twenty-first century, when posting service times on a display board outside the church is no longer enough to inspire the masses to come steaming in. What will it look like to be elders who think like missionaries?

I was pleasantly surprised to find the wonderful, clear embrace of plurality in the eldership (throughout, and especially in chapter 8) and church discipline (chapter 10), and even a subtle and measured anti-church growth subtheme. In places, the book almost read like something from 9Marks, even if the specific roots in the biblical texts were thin in spots, and lacking in others (which contributed to my sneaking suspicion). It had the ring of wisdom to advocate team consensus over mere majority decisions, and to emphasize how vital is the health of the elders as a team. Do the elders trust each other? Are they welcoming? Are they forthright and self-disclosing? Caring? Gentle? On mission? What the elders are as a team, the church soon will be as a body.

In particular, the authors make good on the focus of the title and the notion of elders being agents of mission amid their communities. The church will not be on mission if her elders are not. The flock will not do the hard work to press out of the Christian bubble and into the world, into significant relationships with the lost, if her shepherds are not. And elder teams are essential in modeling the unity, harmony, and camaraderie the church should have.

Even with my growing suspicions that something wasn't right under the hood, I was caught off guard in chapter 8 by the nonchalant mention of "one of our former elders, Sarah" (p. 124). Sarah? That didn't sound like a one-woman man. Feminine pronouns confirmed it. But they did say "former elder." Let's wait and see where this goes.

I really wanted to like this book. I was eager for a resource that would take a chastened but prophetic perspective on eldership in light of the post-Christian mission in the West. I'm eager for a resource on "missional eldership" for the eldership course I teach to seminarians, as well as to use in the life of our local church, where we're training men for the office.



But the ironies were telling of a greater confusion to come. I found it odd that Briggs and Hyatt would argue so extensively (and helpfully) for the community's role in decision-making while treating church membership as an unimportant reality. And the greatest irony was to come.

Chapter 9 began to expose the weakness. Something seemed askew in the talk about listening for the voice of the Spirit, a hitch in the Word-Spirit dynamic. I noted that at least the authors could use more care in addressing "what God is saying to you." Is God speaking through his word, or does "listening to the Spirit" happen in one's own head, without the Scriptures open. Talk of "listening to the Spirit" can serve as an easy cover for sanctifying one's own thoughts without owning up to it.

At least this much was clear: Briggs and Hyatt were emphasizing "the Spirit" to the detriment of the Word. Then the curtain came all the way back in chapter 11. This chapter is unlike anything else in the book. The authors turn to the question of women elders, and Hyatt tells the story of planting a complementarian church that seemed to have trouble reaching its community with all-male elders, and so made a midcourse correction to egalitarianism.

For several months, the elders read up on the topic, and convenient for the mission, found the egalitarian perspective freshly persuasive. When it comes time to quote a scholar, it's William Webb and his *Slaves, Women, and Homosexuals* (p. 170). Then the authors proceed to rehash the speculative egalitarian arguments from the 1970s—Phoebe, Junia, Priscilla, and all—that have been so ably answered by those who take the Bible's teaching on gender seriously.

It is sad thing that, motivated by how those we're wanting to reach will receive us, they take away a vital part of the counter-culture people need. This is an issue about which our society is terribly confused. Churches that abandon God's pattern do their people a massive disservice—as well as society. God's pattern in creation will prevail, and a day is coming when the society will finally own up to the confusion, and look to the church for help in healing. What a tragedy it will be for churches that have buckled under society's pressure and have nothing to offer in this important area of human life and relationships.

It is a terrible misunderstanding of eldership (and a contradiction of what the authors say earlier in the book) to imply that a woman must hold the office of elder to be doing meaningful ministry (p. 172). That is patently not the case. All Christians do ministry. The elders are to equip the saints for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11–12). Women (and all who are not elders!) are in no way "excluded from leading people closer to the heart of God" (p. 172). This is province of every believer. To imply anything else is to evidence an unfortunate gaff in one's ecclesiology.

The authors point again and again to women being qualified and competent. But this is not an issue of competency, but obedience. As a man, I'm happy to admit that women are often the more competent gender. But God has made it more than clear that the elders are to be qualified *men*. In churches where this is treated as privilege, women rightly will bristle. But where elders are manifestly self-sacrificial, relentlessly taking loving initiative and giving of their own time and energy for the benefit of others, it will produce a world of difference. It may still repel some, but many others will be won to what they were designed for.

Evangelicals could use a good book on missional eldership. Unfortunately, this is not it.

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Kevin DeYoung. *What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. 160 pp. £7.99/\$12.99.

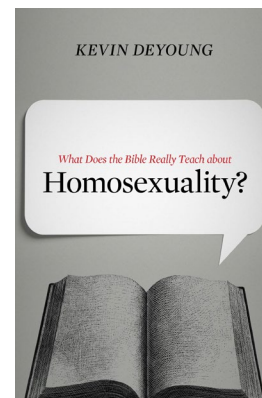
My grandmother is theologically conservative, but she's stayed in a denomination that has drifted. She wants to know. The barista at Starbucks who found out I'm a pastor wants to know. The young family who visited our church and talked to me in the foyer afterward wants to know. They all want to know what the Bible *really* teaches about homosexuality. Kevin DeYoung has written the book to answer their questions.

DeYoung is the senior pastor at University Reformed Church in East Lansing, MI and the author of several books, including *Just Do Something*, *The Hole in Our Holiness*, *Taking God at His Word*. In all of these books, DeYoung presents rich, complex doctrines—whether the will of God, sanctification, Scripture, or now sexuality—to a popular audience, and he does so in ways that are clear and compelling without being simplistic. In this current book, DeYoung affirms the traditional Christian understanding of sexuality and engages the most common objections to this view. The book is structured in two central parts, with an introduction at the start, and a conclusion and several appendices at the end.

In the introduction, DeYoung notes that questions related to homosexuality abound. “How can I minister to my friend now that he’s told me he’s attracted to men? Should I attend a same-sex wedding?” (p. 16). But his book is only about one question, at least directly. It’s the one question that Christians must answer before all of the others: According to the Bible, is homosexual practice a sin that needs to be forgiven and forsaken, or is it, under the right circumstances, a blessing that we should celebrate and solemnize? Readers familiar with DeYoung, or Crossway, won’t be surprised at his answer. He writes, “I believe same-sex sexual intimacy is a sin.” And then he adds, “Why I believe this is the subject of the rest of the book” (p. 17).

Part 1 consists of a chapter on each of the most relevant passages, namely, Genesis 1–2; Genesis 19; Leviticus 18, 20; Romans 1; and a combined chapter on 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1. The focus here tends to be proactive and positive, that is, showing why Christians believe “that God created sex as a good gift reserved for the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman” (p. 19). At the same time, discerning readers will notice some of the more nuanced objections to the traditional view in the background, or sometimes even in the foreground, often in the form of rhetorical questions.

Part 2 responds to what DeYoung considers the seven most common objections to the traditional view: (1) the infrequency of explicit biblical material on homosexuality, especially from Jesus; (2) when the Bible does address homosexuality, it’s addressing something different than what we know today, namely, committed, consensual same-sex relationships, and is rather addressing only what they knew of same-sex activity, namely, something abusive or cultic (e.g., prostitution, pederasty, or master-slave relationships); (3) the myopic focus on this issue to the neglect of gluttony and divorce, sins spoken of far more frequently in Scripture; (4) the church should be a place for the broken, and therefore should be affirming of the LGBT community; (5) just as the church has been wrong on other things, especially slavery, so now traditionalists are on the wrong side of history by not celebrating homosexual practice; (6) it’s simply not fair—we dare not ask people to deny something so fundamental to their identity, especially if God gave these desires; and finally, (7) as is so clear in the Bible, “God is love,” therefore, he



must be affirming of committed same-sex intimacy. In this ordering of objections, there is a slight but observable move from the more sophisticated and scriptural to the more popular.

The conclusion underscores what is at stake if we depart from the biblical understanding, and it wraps up with our need—our universal need—for Jesus and the gospel. The three appendices are brief but helpful extensions of how the implications of the book relate to same-sex marriage, same-sex attraction, and the local church. There is also a short annotated bibliography.

Readers should note that the book requires more of them than Sam Allberry's book (*Is God Anti-Gay? And Other Questions about Homosexuality, the Bible and Same-Sex Attraction* [London: The Good Book Company, 2013]), but less than the standard, technical work by Robert A. J. Gagnon (*The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* [Nashville: Abingdon, 2001]). It's well written, as is Wesley Hill's book (*Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010]), though more didactic and missing Hill's narrative arc. The book does, I believe, sufficiently answer the objections that revisionists raise, whether in academic works such as *A Time to Embrace: Same-Sex Relationships in Religion, Law, and Politics* by William Stacey Johnson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), or more popular books, such as *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* by Matthew Vines (New York: Convergent, 2014). All the while, in our sound bite culture, DeYoung resists the sloganeering so prevalent—on both sides.

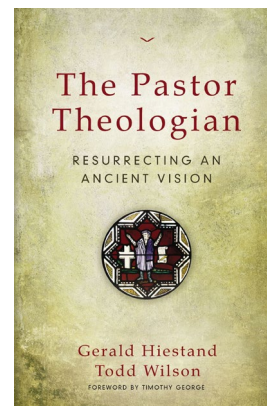
"Debates about gender and sexuality are not going away," DeYoung writes (p. 125), and likely we'll only be talking about this more in the coming years. In the process, well-meaning people will get confused. These are the ones DeYoung writes for—not primarily for the already convinced or the contentious, but the confused (pp. 17–19)—that is, those like my Grandma, or the barista, or the new family at church. And he's written for pastors like me that need help as we help others. While the book could cover a few more topics or be more detailed on others, I don't know of a better book to help us answer *the* question that must be answered before all of the others: What does the Bible really teach about homosexuality?

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Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson. *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 187 pp. £11.99/\$18.99.

Nearly a dozen pastors were assembled. At the invitation of Gerald Hiestand and Todd Wilson, we met to discuss challenges facing “pastor theologians.” In the course of conversation, some confusion arose. What should come first, pastor or theologian? A participant proposed an illustration, “It’s like the hypostatic union—two natures conjoined in one person.” Another suggested inserting a hyphen: “We need pastor-theologians.” In all of its blessed ambiguity, the vision was cast and we went home inspired. Where it would lead, only God knew. The year was 2008.

Seven years later, we no longer look through a dim glass. Hiestand and Wilson have managed to develop The Center for Pastor Theologians (CPT), a fellowship of nearly fifty shepherds dedicated to renewing the church and theology through written production of biblical and theological scholarship. The CPT pulls together a diverse body of evangelical pastors from a variety of denominations that meet annually, the fruit of which is showcased in their journal, *The Bulletin of Ecclesial Theology*. And now there is the book, *The Pastor Theologian: Resurrecting an Ancient Vision*. Here is a glimpse of what it offers.



What is a pastor theologian? According to Hiestand and Wilson, the identity of a “pastor theologian” can be understood in three ways: as a local theologian, a popular theologian, and an ecclesial theologian. The *local theologian* constructs theology for the laity of his local congregation. The *popular theologian* provides theological leadership to Christian laity beyond his own congregation. And the *ecclesial theologian* constructs theology for Christian theologians and pastors (p. 80). The key here is audience. While the local and popular theologians direct their theological scholarship toward Christian laity, the ecclesial theologian directs his theological scholarship toward other theologians and pastors.

According to Hiestand and Wilson, all pastors are called to be local theologians; some pastors have the calling and platform to be popular theologians; and a few have the calling, gifting, and training to be ecclesial theologians. According to Hiestand and Wilson, all three types of pastor theologians are vital to the health of the church. But they are mostly concerned to resurrect the ecclesial theologian. Why? Because the ecclesial theologian, though once a flourishing vocation, has gone all but extinct in recent times.

We no longer expect a pastor to be a *bona fide*, contributing member of the theological community. Sure, he may have spent a few years on the academic mountaintop, listening to the voice of the scholarly gods, before descending to his own congregation with a few choice oracles from heaven. But the heady atmosphere isn’t his natural habitat; he’s called to the more pedestrian concerns like budgets and buildings, small groups and series, leadership meetings and pastoral visitations (pp. 11–12).

Why then have most pastors ceased to generate theology? Hiestand and Wilson point to democratizing impulses such as the American Revolution and Second Great Awakening, which leveled pastor theologians as with a fire hose. They also credit the legacy of the Western Enlightenment, which tethered rigorous theological reflection to the university system. Such movements have effectively driven a wedge between pastors and theology. The effect, according to our authors, was the “great divorce” (42–52), “theological anemia of the church” (53–64), and “ecclesial anemia of theology” (65–78). The details of this narrative are explored in a variety of vivid examples.

Against this dispiriting backdrop, Hiestand and Wilson step forward like modern-day John the Baptists. Clad in camel hair and with wild honey on their lips, they desire to help pastors end their identity crisis and become learned prophets. They begin by providing a textured account of pastor theologians from the Apostolic Fathers to the Enlightenment. It is a compelling case for the robust and storied place that pastor theologian has occupied in the history of God's people.

Having offered historical perspective, Hiestand and Wilson flesh out what it means for the pastor theologian to serve as an ecclesial theologian, that is, one who is "of and for the church" (p. 88). Chapter 7 highlights eight characteristics of a pastor theologian's work, cast mainly in comparison to the work of academic theologians:

1. The ecclesial theologian inhabits the ecclesial social location.
2. The ecclesial theologian foregrounds ecclesial questions.
3. The ecclesial theologian aims for clarity over subtlety.
4. The ecclesial theologian theologizes with a preaching voice.
5. The ecclesial theologian is a student of the church.
6. The ecclesial theologian works across the guilds.
7. The ecclesial theologian works in partnership with the academic theologian.
8. The ecclesial theologian traffics in retrospection.

In the penultimate chapter, our authors get down to brass tacks, offering ten practical steps for realizing the vocation of an ecclesial theologian in the local church context. They explore such issues as time management, reading habits, staffing, study and writing leave, and the type of PhD one should obtain. The personal case studies that appear throughout this section further clarify the picture, illustrating the tangible patterns by which one embodies the role.

In the concluding chapter Hiestand and Wilson offer a final admonition to three distinct constituencies: professors, pastors, and students. Their point is clear: "The church stands in great need of pastors who are capable of functioning as robust theologians, for the sake of the church and its theology" (p. 128). And like an Apostolic Exhortation from Rome, they conclude with intercessory prayer, asking God to inspire a great host of pastor theologians, "since we truly believe that the vision of this book will only come to pass through the divine miracle of resurrection!" (p. 123).

Those who love data will eat up the appendix, which includes a historical survey of how pastoral theologians have been represented in the church among clerical, non-clerical, and monastic theologians from A.D. 90 to 1750. Finally, a full index testifies to the breadth of their study.

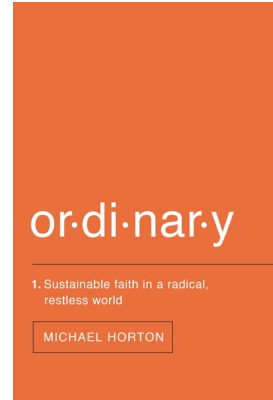
What are the liabilities of this book? Not many. It is a pleasurable read, remarkably so given its substantive and complex subject matter. It is, however, surprising that the book fails to provide a salient definition for the term "pastor theologian." Perhaps this is by design, since our authors' vision is so multilayered. One might have also appreciated a greater amount of reflection on how this model has found expression among Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic pastors, since this is where these traditions often excel. But these are minor criticisms. It is a terrific book that deserves a place on every pastor's shelf.

Only time will tell if contemporary shepherds answer the call. For the world's sake, I hope we do.

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Michael Horton. *Ordinary: Sustainable Faith in a Radical, Restless World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 221 pp. £9.99/\$16.99.

Author Michael Horton states that the contemporary Western Christian has a particular fallen condition that is not in alignment with the gospel; namely, “an impatience and disdain for the ordinary” (p. 18). Horton believes the Christian subculture is so generally passionate about superlatives that the unintended effect is “a growing restlessness with this restlessness” (p. 14). Constant calls to a “radical,” life-changing choice “to trail-blaze new paths to greatness” are tiring out listeners (p. 12). The author quotes Tish Harrison Warren as an example of a Christian who wondered if an ordinary life was even possible: “What I need courage for is the ordinary, the daily everydayness of life.... Giving away clothes and seeking out edgy Christian communities requires less of me than being kind to my husband on an average Wednesday morning or calling my mother back when I don’t feel like it” (p. 15).



This book encourages ordinary pastors that “super-apostles,” heroes, and gospel celebrities are not needed, nor even helpful. Rather, what is needed, is the courage to live out one’s calling as a member in a local church that practices the right use of the ordinary means of grace with continuity for a long time towards maturity.

How refreshing it is that the author admits his own fear of the ordinary in another day of life! Horton confesses that “ordinary callings to ordinary people all around us is much more difficult than chasing my own dreams that I have envisioned for the grand story of my life” (p. 15). The pressure to dazzle with successful efforts from bridal magazine-like weddings to “groundbreaking” academic research is not something that is only felt by others; Horton refreshingly admits that he himself feels the pull to an extraordinary life. “In fact,” he admits, “I find myself drawn to these same adrenaline rushes and enticing getaways” (p. 54).

Part one, “radical and restless,” addresses and qualifies the problem. “We have drifted from the true focus of God’s activity in this world. It is not to be found in the extraordinary, but in the ordinary, the everyday” (p. 18). The author is not giving an excuse to be comfortable (p. 19), nor advocating mediocrity (ch. 2). Rather, he calls for selfish ambition’s death in our hearts (ch. 5).

Part two, “ordinary and content,” puts forth his solution. “The thesis in this book,” he states, “is that we must turn from the frantic search for ‘something more’ to ‘something more sustainable.’ We need to stop adding something more of ourselves to the gospel. . . . We need to be content with his ordinary means of grace, that, over time, yield a harvest of plenty for everyone to enjoy” (p. 126). Contentment is found in the gospel; namely, living an ordinary calling determined by our identity in Christ. Horton put it well: “The real difference is whether our choosing is ultimate, whether our choices determine our identity (which God chose for us) determines our choices” (p. 149).

The more recent and tragic sins in the dangerous and toxic contexts of well-known pastors in mega churches ought to make this book a timely remedy for many readers. It shouldn’t surprise readers to discover Horton is consistent with his earlier writings in two ways. First, he promotes “loving service” over the “unrealistic call to cultural transformation” (pp. 155–61). Two, he views revival as “an extraordinary blessing on God’s ordinary means of grace” over against staging and managing evangelistic ingenuity with predictable results similar to Charles G. Finney (pp. 74–81).

With any good book, the readers are left with questions: How can we use the word *radical* rightly, as John Stott did in *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010)? How might we pray and seek God for an extraordinary blessing on the ordinary means of grace with holy longings without being ungrateful for God's ordinary ways in providence? How can we avoid justification by "ordinary ministry righteousness" and love pastors with extraordinary gifts and church resources? Is there room for more discussion and debate to enhance an appreciation for the cultural transformation approach that also affirms loving service?

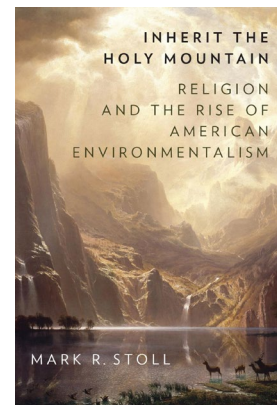
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Mark R. Stoll. *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. 406 pp. £25.99/\$39.95.

Since the 1960s there has been a significant ongoing debate over the relationship between Christianity and the environment. Some argue Christianity promotes degradation of nature while others see biblical faith as an encouragement to love God's creation. Mark Stoll's recent book, *Inherit the Holy Mountain: Religion and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, tends to support the argument that Christianity has the theological foundation to encourage beneficent treatment of the created order. His thesis is that there is a close relationship between the religious heritage of many activists and environmentalism in the United States.

The book is divided into eight chapters bookended by an introduction and conclusion. In Chapter 1, Stoll argues that Calvinism provides the theological foundation for environmentalism. Nature is valuable because God created it and it points toward his goodness. This led the Puritans to practice an ethic of conservation as an act of worship toward God. This theme is developed further in the next two chapters. In the second chapter, Stoll highlights the impact the Calvinist theology of creation led to the conservation movement. The Puritans planned their land distribution and usage to improve it, set aside space to provide opportunity for future generations, and gain economic benefit without wanton destruction. There was a sense that creation had utility, but it was to be respected and used wisely. The roots of the later conservation movement can be traced to these ideals. In Chapter 3, Stoll further expands on this notion by exploring the moral influence of later colonial and post-colonial Calvinists on the eventual founding of the National Park system in the United States. Gifford Pinchot, the staunch conservationist whose position was contrasted to John Muir's wilderness preservationism, came from the Calvinistic tradition which led to his view of wise usage of natural environments. Throughout these chapters, Stoll carefully weaves together theological insights with a historical narrative.

Chapter 4 brings the history well into the Twentieth Century discussing the work of Ansel Adams in celebrating the beauty of American national parks. Adams and others were participants in what Stoll calls an "Emersonian Modernism" that sought for transcendental experience through the observation of landscape. Though not Christian, there was a distinct religious bent to this part of the American environmental movement. The fifth chapter details the work of progressive Presbyterians in conservation. Stoll appears to define progressive here as those interested in social action as much as



or more than theological conformity. His main claim in this chapter is that many Presbyterians were instrumental in the conservation movement in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries. Stoll demonstrates that their interest, like the earlier Puritans, was built upon their Calvinistic worldview. For example, until the middle of the Twentieth Century, most of the men serving as Secretary of the Interior were Presbyterian or Congregationalist. According to Stoll, their religious worldview enhanced their interest in creation care rather than diminishing it.

In the sixth chapter, Stoll shows how Southern Presbyterianism drifted into a pursuit of good stewardship of personal property instead of concern for collective action. The decline of Presbyterianism as a percentage of the population also led to the decline in its role in environmentalism. Yet, according to Stoll, there is much that the Calvinistic framework of Presbyterianism gave to the environmental movement. Chapter Seven gives an overview of the contributions of many non-Calvinists—Baptists, Transcendentalists, and Quakers—to environmentalism. Because of the very non-conformist roots of these religious movements, they tended to encourage independent action rather than seeking government policies to improve the environment. Still, they had from their religious foundations a firm interest in seeing creation treated well. In the eight chapter, Stoll outlines more recent contributions of African-Americans, Catholics, and Jews to contemporary environmentalism. These theologically diverse social and religious movements have taken greater interest in structural evil and sought changes in society instead of merely improving individual attitudes toward the environment.

Stoll covers a wide swath of American religious history and exposes the tender roots of modern environmentalism in theological movements that did not address the issue in contemporary categories. He does this with care and theological accuracy uncommon in environmental histories. The result is a masterful portrait of America's religious traditions that illuminates already existing themes instead of imposing them. Stoll's book is a treasure to the Christian theologian and the environmentalist. It helps explain some of the quasi-religious language of the environmental movement as it developed within a culturally Christian American context. The breadth of the history tends to enhance Stoll's endeavor more than a project focusing narrowly on a few handpicked figures might have; the reader is presented with witness of both the substance and trajectory of the major theological movements across American history.

The weakness of this volume, such as it is, rests in Stoll's treatment of conservative Evangelicals who have resisted aspects of the contemporary environmental movement. He traces the history of their skepticism, but fails to note that the resistance is tied into the ethical implications of some proposals from environmentalists, which sometimes include the advocacy for population control measures like abortion. In one specific example, Stoll argues for the novelty of recent Southern Baptist interest in environmentalism while failing to note the five previous resolutions passed by the Southern Baptist Convention that encourage faithful stewardship of the environment. These gaps, however, represent minor defects in an otherwise outstanding theological and historical treatment.

This book fills a need in the study of the relationship between Christianity and environmentalism. Stoll's approach is responsibly critical. His insights advance the conversation. As such, faithful Christians seeking to understand the historic ties between their faith and the green movement will find this text invaluable.

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Gary Tyra. *Pursuing Moral Faithfulness: Ethics and Christian Discipleship*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015. 304 pp. £21.99/\$30.00.

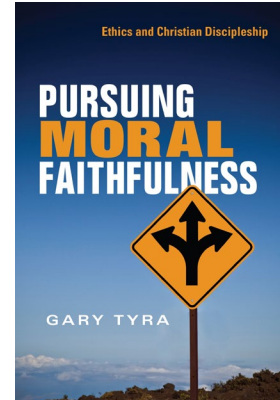
Gary Tyra is professor of biblical and practical theology at Vanguard University of Southern California. Tyra has nearly three decades of pastoral experience and is the author of six books mostly relating to themes within the fields of missions, discipleship, and moral theology. Tyra's service within both the academy and church, as well as his publishing record, establish him as being well qualified to pen a volume entitled *Pursuing Moral Faithfulness: Ethics and Christian Discipleship*.

In the introduction, Tyra is clear about his aim in writing. He writes this book "is not intended to function as a comprehensive introduction to ethics. . . . [Rather, it is] a primer on Christian ethics that focuses on one very serious matter in particular: too many Christians making ethical decisions the same way as their non- and post-Christian peers" (p. 29). In short, *Pursuing Moral Faithfulness* is a book on Christian ethical decision making. More specifically, this book is an explanation of Tyra's unique model of moral decision making. While it would be impossible to fully explain all of the nuances of Tyra's suggested paradigm in a brief review, his approach rests upon the moral guidelines of Scripture and the moral guidance of the Holy Spirit. These two resources combine in the mature believer to create what Tyra terms "moral faithfulness," which is proper Christian decision making.

Pursuing Moral Faithfulness consists of ten fairly balanced chapters that fall into two main sections. In the first section, comprised of chapters 1–4, Tyra reviews and critiques different ethical theories, ranging from utilitarianism to various forms of deontology. His purpose in these chapters seems to be to orient readers to the field of Christian ethics, as well as to highlight what he perceives to be the flaws with many of the available models of ethical decision making. In the second section of this book, comprised of chapters 5–10, Tyra gives an in-depth presentation of his own model and its constituent parts. This second section is the portion of the book that will interest most readers.

There is much to commend about *Pursuing Moral Faithfulness*. In fact, Tyra's analysis and description of the poor decision-making skills and practices of many Christians is reason enough to purchase and read this book. Additionally, it should be noted that Tyra has taken great care to write a very readable volume. His prose is winsome and lucid, with the academic and esoteric material suppressed into content footnotes for those who want to investigate his ideas further. Clearly, Tyra did not write this book for others within the academic ethics guild; rather, this text is aimed at students and motivated laypeople in the church. Along these same lines, it is refreshing to see Tyra's recognition that discipleship and Christian ethics are complementary (if not synonymous) concepts. Indeed, Christian ethics cannot be practiced apart from character formation. These ideas will resonate with most readers.

Certainly there are minor deficiencies in *Pursuing Moral Faithfulness* about which one may quibble—the occasional typo and the microscopic font in the book's indices come to mind. But as to major drawbacks, there is just one matter to raise. This issue, which may not be a problem for some, relates to Tyra's understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Tyra writes, "It's possible, through the Scriptures and the Spirit, to 'hear' the heart of God. . . . Christ's followers should expect to interact with the Holy Spirit in ways that are real and phenomenal" (pp. 22–23). The issue here is that whereas evangelicals have traditionally held to the idea of the Spirit's illumination of Scripture, in



light of the doctrine of *sola Scriptura* most evangelicals have not endorsed the idea of normative, extra-biblical revelation. However, Tyra is clear that he is referring to the Spirit speaking through “Scripture, the community of faith *and* his still small voice speaking directly to the conscience” (p. 25). Tyra refers to this charismatic idea as “pneumatological realism,” and it is a key part of model of moral faithfulness. Readers with a more traditional understanding of the ministry of the Holy Spirit will find this idea problematic.

The above critique notwithstanding, overall *Pursuing Moral Faithfulness* is a useful book. While some may disagree with aspects of Tyra’s theological leanings, time spent reading this book is time well spent. While this volume would not be ideal for use in a basic ethics class—as Tyra himself alludes to—it would be useful in a specialized course on moral decision making, in a small group setting, or for personal edification.

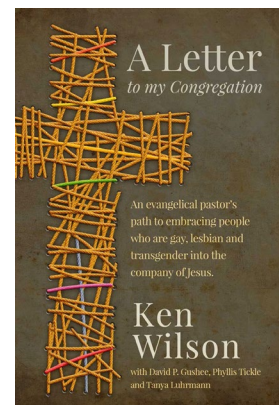
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Ken Wilson. *A Letter to My Congregation: An Evangelical’s Pastor’s Path to Embracing People Who are Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender into the Company of Jesus*. Canton, MI: Read the Spirit Books, 2014. 186 pp. £10.95/\$16.95.

Into the growing field of evangelical literature finding biblical support for same-sex relationships comes *A Letter to My Congregation* by Ken Wilson, founding pastor of Vineyard Church of Ann Arbor. Wilson differs from recent affirming authors such as Matthew Vines and Justin Lee in that, though he sees the Bible supporting same sex relationships, he writes to provide a “third way” forward for Christians between the prevailing binary options of “open and affirming and love the sinner, hate the sin” (p. 8).

Chapters 1 and 2 begin tracing Wilson’s internal unease with the traditional approach to sexuality that he saw to be the “cause of unnecessary harm” (p. 17) to LGBTQ people. These two chapters serve to outline the discernment process Wilson went through as he began to sense the need for a new way, a “third way” forward. Here Wilson notes his dissatisfaction with the available binary options, his consideration of the issue of divorce and remarriage as it relates to the LGBTQ question, the difficulty of seeing LGBTQ people excluded from table fellowship, and his personal experience with people of same-sex attraction.

Chapter 3 evaluates the prohibitive texts concerning same-sex activity. Wilson singles out five texts—Leviticus 18 and 20, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, and 1 Timothy 1—which he acknowledges all speak negatively about same-sex behavior, but his main question is “What are the texts referring to?” (p. 56). Wilson works briefly through each of the five texts and concludes that the type of behavior which the biblical authors are prohibiting is not the type of loving and faithful same sex relationships that we see around us today. Wilson asks, “Is the Bible addressing modern-day monogamous gay unions at all? If the answer to that question is unclear, how are we to apply the prohibitions to gay people who are willing to practice lifelong fidelity with a same-sex partner?” (p. 79).



Chapters 4 and 5 represent the heart of the book, where Wilson unpacks his “third way” approach for the inclusion of LGBTQ people into the community of faith. He uses Romans 14–15 as his biblical basis for his advocacy of a third way approach. The issue in Romans 14–15 is Paul’s concern that the “strong” and “weak” Christians accept each other as family, even as they disagree strongly over the eating of certain types of food. Wilson believes Romans 14–15 “suggests that Paul includes first order moral concerns in his disputable issues category” (p. 104). Wilson then strongly insists that embrace, inclusion and acceptance must mark the church and that disagreement over LGBTQ questions should not divide the church as it has.

Chapter 6 works through the LGBTQ issue in light of “biblical marriage.” Wilson notes (rightly in my view) how lax many churches now are about the serious issues of divorce and remarriage in the church among heterosexual couples. He then deals with the problems he sees in the traditional approach of advocating celibacy as the only option for those people with same-sex attraction and concludes with his answer to “Would you perform a gay wedding?” (spoiler alert: It’s a yes.)

In his concluding chapter, Wilson works through several “I am willing . . .” statements that relate to his understanding of the LGBTQ issue, including the following: “I am willing . . . to be misunderstood” (p. 182), “I am willing . . . to be fearless” (p. 183), and finally “I am willing . . . to continue” (p. 186).

What struck me in reading Ken Wilson’s warm and pastoral “Letter to My Congregation” is that it really is that—a letter to his church, a church that he clearly loves and longs to see be a place of welcome and acceptance for all people. Wilson writes as a pastor who has had a lot of experience with LGBTQ people, and this has clearly shaped both his exegesis and his discomfort with excluding LGBTQ people from the church. You cannot read his book without appreciating how deeply he has wrestled with his revisionist position.

While there are elements to commend in Wilson’s book I want to offer my disagreement with the “third way” that he articulates in the book. Wilson clearly believes that the Bible speaks to issues of sexuality, but that the biblical references to same-sex activity are nothing like the same-sex relationships that we see around us today and so this issue is a disputable matter which should not then be used to exclude anyone. I must respectfully dissent. For nearly two millennia this was not a disputable matter. For the vast majority of Christian people around the world today this is still not a disputable matter. Wilson imports the LGBTQ issue into the specific situation Paul is addressing of the weak and the strong, but this doesn’t hold theological water.

Wilson assumes the same-sex relationships the Bible condemns are exploitative and categorically different from the type of same-sex relationships in 21st century culture, but this an argument from silence. The biblical texts prohibiting same-sex activity cannot be read in a way to argue that they are only prohibiting certain types of same-sex activity. They are prohibiting all forms of sexual activity outside of an opposite-sex marital union.

The central question when considering the Bible and same-sex relationships is not, “Is this relationship loving and monogamous in its sexual expression?” but “Is this relationship biblically faithful in its sexual expression?” We must let the Bible shape our experiences and not let our experiences move us to revise biblical teaching.

To claim that the issue of same-sex activity is a disputable matter is not a humble position but an arrogant one. It is arrogant to claim that despite the near uniform teaching of the church for two millennia this issue should be seen as disputable matter where we should err on the side of acceptance and welcome. To make this a disputable matter on the level of divorce is not convincing since the Bible

does actually make exceptions which allow for divorce and there are many churches that do take divorce and remarriage very seriously.

I am not persuaded that a third way is possible on the issue of same-sex activity. The church must be a welcoming place for sinners and for all LGBTQ people, but being a place of welcome does not mean that we affirm all the choices of people within our churches, especially when we are convinced that these choices are running contrary to good commands of God.

I do not accept Wilson's own binary position of either full acceptance or full rejection of LGBTQ people within the church. To truly love someone in the way of Jesus means that we speak the truth to them because we believe this truth can set them free and heal them. To speak the truth to LGBTQ people is tell them that they are always welcome to attend our churches, that we will not use (or tolerate) any bigoted language towards them, but that all people are called to repent of their sins and to follow Jesus—the way of true human flourishing.

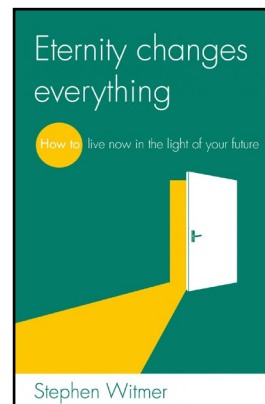
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Stephen Witmer. *Eternity Changes Everything: How to Live Now in the Light of Your Future*. London: The Good Book Company, 2014. 128 pp. £7.99/\$12.99.

Stephen Witmer's book is part of The Good Book Company's popular-level "How To" series, serving the everyday Christian whose desire is to live distinctively in the world. The book's aim is to set our eyes to the gospel's promised future so that our lives now might be transformed by the vision.

In the first part of the book, Witmer paints a wonderful picture of our eternal future, emphasizing the hope of a renewed heaven and earth rather than remaining in heaven forever ("There's somewhere better than heaven," p. 23). It is a delightfully earthy and attractive portrait that appeals to all our desires to enjoy the creation as we were intended to. Readers will be delivered from seeing the gospel as a golden ticket to a disembodied ethereal cloudland, and brought to anticipate millennia of friendship, global exploration, and celebration in God's good world. Yet mouth-watering descriptions of steaks and the prospect of lounging on sun-kissed beaches rightly give way to the central attraction: the living God dwelling with his people. "The central joy of the new creation is not God's gifts: it is God himself" (p. 26). This early section is theologically rich, but Witmer moves through biblical and doctrinal material with an impressively light touch, especially evident as he expounds material from Revelation.

The middle chapters are devoted to helping readers understand how they fit into the grand story of cosmic redemption. Those struggling with lack of assurance, the fear of death, or condemnation will be encouraged that their future is certain as they are shown how Jesus's gift of eternal life is the life of eternity. Witmer's exposition of the serpent on the pole and Jesus's reference to it in John 3 will draw any non-Christian reader into the heart of the gospel. This creatively presented section is a crucial step



in the author's argument and wisely anchors our future hope in our response of faith to Christ in the present.

In the latter part of the book, we are encouraged to consider our lives in the light of our hope. Witmer calls us to live with both restless longing and patient contentment, needing the world less but loving it more. The author's pastoral skill is clear as he carefully deals with the subjects of present suffering and unfulfilled desire, and never lapses into the kind of escapism that would flee the world for glory now. Instead, we are urged to apply the promise of our eternal reward to our workplace, family life, and future plans. Lively illustrations and perceptive applications enable the reader to ground doctrine in real life struggles and questions, such that any youth leader or student worker should feel confident in handing out copies to those they care for.

The subject of the kingdom of God is addressed, and the book rejects prosperity theology as strongly as it does Gnosticism. Similarly, while Witmer writes that the hope of the new creation ought to encourage readers to social action and creation care (and quotes N. T. Wright), we are not led to believe that the Church's efforts in these spheres are the means of the renewal of all things. Rather, the work of Christ in redemption is central and instrumental, and any Christian efforts at conservation and others kinds of service are clearly secondary and responsive. These are compared to the messy efforts of the author's young son helping his father paint furniture. "Somehow, God includes our modest efforts, done in his service, within his mighty transformation of the world" (p. 110).

Once or twice the book uses "heaven" to refer to the new creation, which threatens to contradict the thesis of the early chapters that the Christian's final destination is the new creation rather than paradise. While this might prove a slight confusion to some, it is not a serious problem.

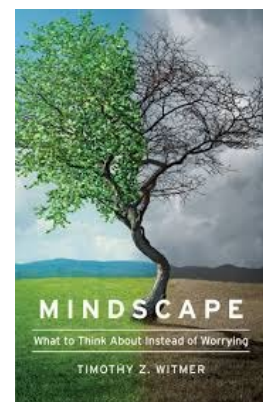
Stephen Witmer's book is a joy to read and will refresh many. While I suspect its main audience will be students and young people, it has much to offer any reader because it so effectively frames reality with the gospel. Readers will find their eyes lifted to Christ, and perspectives biblically adjusted, because the observation that we will still be enjoying Jesus in one million years changes everything now.

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Timothy Z. Witmer. *Mindscape: What to Think About Instead of Worrying*. Greensboro, NC: New Growth, 2014. 180 pp. £11.88/\$17.99.

Whether a scholar, student or pastor — you encounter worry and so do the people you teach or lead. Without proper treatment, worry is a weed that will take over the landscape of your mind. According to Timothy Witmer, Professor of Practical Theology at Westminster Theological Seminary, the landscape of your mind—your "mindscape"—should be made up of healthy vistas that defend against worry and anxiety.

In *Mindscape*, Witmer consults Philippians 4:8 to help us cultivate healthier vistas, transformative vistas, that weed out worry and produce fruitfulness for godly living and ministry. *Mindscape* introduces the infestation of worry (ch. 1), sets the context of Philippians 4:8 in prayer (ch. 2), and then looks in turn at



each key, transformative vista of this verse: true (ch. 3), noble (ch. 4), right (ch. 5), pure (ch. 6), lovely (ch. 7), admirable (ch. 8), excellent and praiseworthy (ch. 9)—concluding with the imperative to think upon these things (ch. 10). So, fundamentally, *Mindscape* is a reflective exposition of Philippians 4:8, especially fitting for biblical and pastoral counseling.

From the onset, Witmer’s approach provides a practical resource rather than an academic tome on cognitive behavior. He interacts accessibly with the Greek text of Philippians 4:8, conveying the verse’s diction, set within the context of Greek philosophy and ethics. As he does so, Witmer points to where Paul nuances Greek thought on these vistas and sometimes turns that thought upside down.

For instance, when discussing the word προσφιλής (“lovely”)—a common term in Greek philosophy used only once in the NT—he writes: “The Greek philosophers could not separate the beautiful from the good, the true, and the real, which they saw as all unified in the One. While Plato spoke of this he couldn’t put a name on the One—but the Bible does!” (p. 105).

Following this, Witmer sheds light on who this One is. “God’s beauty consists of the perfection of his attributes. . . . The One who is the perfection and source of beauty must be surrounded by that which is lovely as well” (pp. 106–7). Witmer’s knack for pointing to the person of God as the exemplar par excellence for true virtue recurs in each chapter in *Mindscape*.

Witmer confesses in the Acknowledgments that this content is adapted from a sermon series. Yet, this is done so deftly that one does not notice. Still, *Mindscape* profits from everything a nourishing Christ-centered sermon might offer. Witmer doesn’t decode terms to train you out of worry; he ushers you to the feet of a person, namely Jesus, who is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. Witmer refers to one’s union with Christ again and again, which facilitates the landscaping of your mind. Each chapter I found myself celebrating these connecting points to Christ and the gospel, seeing as Witmer sees, that only Christ can defeat my worry and the gospel extinguish my anxiety.

This is the beauty of Witmer’s contribution. Whereas many books offer a check that’s sure to bounce—“seven steps to defeat worry” or “a sure-fire method to end anxiety”—Witmer contends that we’re stuck with worry until we’re detached from this life, and our minds are not just set on eternity, but our persons find themselves in the setting of eternity. “Paul’s words are so urgent because these weeds and ruts are not removed once and done. . . . There are always going to be things to worry about; therefore, you always need to remind yourself of God’s faithfulness” (p. 164). Until that time, you cleave to Christ; you set your mind on anything and everything that encapsulates his person and beauty, whether it be creation, creature, or Creator. You function with an ongoing heart of repentance—turning away from the idol of worry and turning in faith to the God of wonder.

Witmer could have strengthened the content of *Mindscape* by providing more background on how Paul adapted this laundry list of terms in Philippians 4:8 from Greek philosophers and ethicists. Not too far into the book Witmer claims, “The words Paul uses would have been familiar to his readers. They are the vocabulary of the Greek philosophers and ethicists—ethical standards to which his readers should aspire” (p. 5). He goes on without validating this claim. Witmer does show and tell here and there throughout *Mindscape*, as exhibited above in this review, but a section in each chapter on how the Greeks understood each virtue might have gone a long way in understanding how Paul appropriates and improves upon these ideas. This exercise might have led to a more robust harvest for our mindscape.

Mindscape is a leisurely read that evokes reflection. The real life anecdotes of those who exemplify these virtues and of those who have learned to manage worry brings the content home. If worry eats you

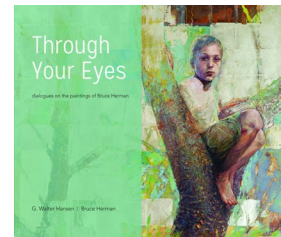
up or is consuming someone you know, I suggest taking a first step towards change by learning from the approach Timothy Witmer offers in *Mindscape*.

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— MISSION AND CULTURE —

G. Walter Hansen and Bruce Herman, *Through Your Eyes: Dialogues on the Paintings of Bruce Herman*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. 145 pp. £33.99/\$50.00.

Bruce Herman has for many years been working in that strange cultural space between the church and the contemporary art world—indeed he is one of the most prominent figures to have made his home there. His most recent book *Through Your Eyes*, collaboratively written with Walter Hansen, offers a welcome contribution for further study and reflection about the work being made in that space.



Through Your Eyes is an interesting contribution on at least two counts. First, it functions as a partial retrospective of Herman’s career, offering a handsome survey of the major threads of thought and practice that have run through his work for the past three decades. Dozens of images are reproduced here—all printed in full color at large scale—which are accompanied by several short essay meditations on a selection from ten series of paintings created since the late 1980s. Readers are able to see and consider long-range developments in Herman’s work, as he has mulled over particular themes and narratives and as he wrestled with the fraught meaningful bond between the materiality of painting and the pictorial worlds somehow possible within a painted surface.

Second, as the book’s subtitle indicates, the format for reflecting upon these works is a dialogical exchange between the artist and one his collectors, New Testament scholar G. Walter Hansen. In their introductory chapter the authors frame the book as an effort to “show how an artist and one of his interpreters engage in conversation from different starting points and different interpretive assumptions” (p. xx). While the essays themselves offer helpful and illuminating engagements with Herman’s paintings, the most interesting aspect of this format is the way that the artist and commentator continually displace and yield to each other as authoritative voices, as they “venture into the potentially embarrassing business of interpretation” together (p. xix). The displacements that occur are charitable rather than violent; indeed Herman sees the entire exchange as a gesture of reciprocated hospitality: “this is the most encouraging thing that could ever happen to an artist—to have a committed and sensitive interpreter of his work turn and open the whole thing up to others” (p. xx).

Interestingly, this collaborative venture into interpretation includes an articulate artist and an articulate patron of the arts, but it conspicuously excludes members of the professional interpretive guild of art critics and historians. This isn’t a problem for the book, but it signals that a different aim is in view here (and a different kind of conversation is being sought) than one of garnering validation from the professional art discourse. The dialogue that unfolds between Herman and Hansen is more personal, even devotional, than had this been a standard retrospective catalogue. And its chief values and virtues

derive from that fact: the conversation takes place within the context of long-term friendship (more than professional dialectic), and the paintings are engaged as sites for serious theological contemplation (more than through the gridwork of academic art history).

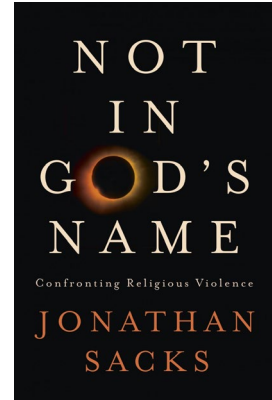
But that's not to imply that the conversation is narrow or insular. The literary references brought into play in the essays are diverse and rewarding, ranging from Julian of Norwich to Jacques Ellul, with significant discussions along the way given to Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and T. S. Eliot. The visual references in Herman's work are also wide-ranging: his theological imagination is steeped in the visual languages of late medieval and early renaissance altarpiece painting (traditions he understands well), which are made to contend with the resolute material flatness of modernist painting—a dynamic that produces much of the generative tension in Herman's work. The paintings present themselves as both windows and walls: holy scenes appear in surfaces that are dense and agitated, adorned with gold yet violated with scraping, scrubbing, and sanding. The figuration is often awkward and course, yet somehow delicate and sensitively rendered. The visual space oscillates between medieval gold leafing (traditionally the transcendent light of God), some version of Giotto's blue (the endless expanse of the created order), and the uneasy geometric divisions of Richard Diebenkorn (the flat rectangular surface).

The works (and essays) produced in these tensions are often poetic and theologically rich meditations on a world that is holy and distressed. *Elegy for Bonhoeffer* (2001), for example, is a haunting requiem for the great pastor-theologian who was hanged in a Nazi concentration camp in April 1945. In Herman's painting the dying Bonhoeffer is inverted, falling naked and head-downward (cf. Max Beckmann's *Falling Man*, 1950) past a heavy heap of Nazi architecture into a disheveled field of gold leaf—the light of God, the ground beneath all things. The martyr is absorbed into this ground, pulled by a heavier “weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:16–18). *Second Adam* (2007) is one of Herman's best paintings, offering a smart reconfiguration of traditional crucifixion altarpieces. Whereas Adam's skull traditionally appears at the base of Christ's cross, Herman presents a full-bodied *adam*, a “bent” man, disfigured by labor and wickedness (a striking allusion to the Augustinian/Lutheran notion of *incurvatus in se*). With these and many other works, *Through Your Eyes* offers fruitful opportunities for further contemplation of—and within—that space Herman has occupied.

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Jonathan Sacks. *Not In God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2015. 305 pp. £20.00/\$28.95.

In the aftermath of the Cold War many thought that convictions and certitudes—be they political, cultural, or religious—should be held loosely. This seemed confirmed by the steady-stream of violence featured in the news. However, many sense that foundation-free beliefs and moral relativism are ill equipped to defend against violence in the name of God—never mind formulating a binding universal argument that this violence *should not exist* (pp. 15, 256–57). Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, a leading Jewish voice in Britain and the United States, grounds his arguments from within deeply held beliefs and expresses them with urgency, conviction, and passion. With his worldview evident throughout, he works hard to present a multi-focal and charitable view of history, theology, sacred texts, and international relations. One could focus on areas of disagreement. For example, he tends to downplay differences between sacred texts and theology in an effort to reduce violence often based on them. However, this review intends to mainly summarise his arguments, recommending the book as a thought-provoking, challenging, and impassioned exposition of the indispensability of the Hebrew Bible for peace-making.



Part I, 'Bad Faith', examines the relationship between humanity, religion, and violence. With reference to causality, 'there is a connection between religion and violence, but it is oblique, not direct' (p. 23). He also challenges predominant myths about secularisation (pp. 16–19). In seeking to provide order, secularisation led to instability and deprived communities of meaning and the thicker morality otherwise available through religious ethics (p. 37). In contrast to earlier predictions, Sacks declares that the 'twenty-first century will be the start of an age of desecularisation' (p. 18).

Chapter 1 introduces two primary aims. First, to understand and undermine 'altruistic evil'—a term he coined to describe 'evil committed in a sacred cause, in the name of high ideals' (p. 9). 'There is nothing specifically religious about' it (p. 10). The carnage of the last century shows that religion-substitutes have made the problem of altruistic evil worse (pp. 13–14, 40–41). His second aim, which is foundational to the first, is to provide a theology of the 'Other' (p. 25). Chapter 2 focuses on the nature of humans—groupish individuals who are torn between altruism and survival (p. 27). He then tackles individual and group perception in conflict (ch. 3) and scapegoating (ch. 4). In contrast to many others, he believes monotheism and a deeper understanding of the book of Genesis in the Torah are fundamental to the solution (ch. 5).

Part II, 'Siblings', addresses familial conflict in Genesis (pp. 105–73). First, Sacks examines the pervasive theme of sibling rivalry in the texts and challenges a simplistic reading of these narratives. He insists that the 'counter-narrative' he draws out of the text 'is not an interpretation imposed by modern or postmodern sensibility' (p. 124). Using the examples of Ishmael and Isaac (ch. 6), Esau and Jacob (ch. 7), and Joseph and his brothers (ch. 8), Sacks argues that the 'choice' of one person did not mean the 'rejection' of the other (p. 142). He maintains that God stilled loved, cared for, and remained in relationship with those not chosen to carry on Abraham's covenant. These rivalries resulted from comparisons made between two siblings who were both loved by God (pp. 142–43). Further, he argues that the four narratives (Abel, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph) end with increasing levels of reconciliation (p. 156). Chapter 9 focuses on Rachel and Leah and how love can unite and divide (pp. 161–73). His

interpretation of the Genesis conflict passages is intriguing and merits serious attention. The central claim is that God's choice of a covenant-bearer does not imply the rejection of the other siblings. Malachi 1:2–3 and—for the Christian—Romans 9:13 present the biggest obstacle to this reading. Chapter 12 tackles the problem of 'Hard Texts' (pp. 207–19). Without explaining them away Sacks promotes the kind of reading whereby direct application is considered overly simplistic and unacceptable.

In Part III, 'The Open Heart', Sacks develops his theology of the 'Other' based on convictions drawn from the Hebrew Bible: Violence is a foundational concern of scripture (p. 190); no human is all bad or all good (p. 183); Abraham did not coerce outsiders (p. 203); the covenant community was, and will be, foreigners and strangers who can empathise with foreigners and strangers (pp. 177–88); 'A chosen nation is not a master race but its opposite: a servant community' (p. 199); 'God is active in the history of other nations' (p. 197); all humanity is made in the image of God (pp. 194–95); all humanity is in some sort of covenantal relationship with God (pp. 169, 200). Sacks's theology of the 'Other' mainly hangs on these last two points.

Chapter 13 discusses the relationship between religion, power, and violence. He advocates a liberal democracy that 'makes space for difference' (p. 230), and believes that Islam can also support toleration. Chapter 14 prioritises letting go of hatred because it keeps the victim enslaved. In the final chapter he exhorts the reader to choose 'the will to life' over the 'will to power' (p. 255). According to Sacks, the world needs Jews, Christians, and Muslims to recognise: (1) the radical implications that all humans are ethically bound in a mutual relationship of rights and obligations with God and each other due to the Noahic covenant; and (2) that all humans are made in the image of God. 'This is the best solution I know to the potential violence implicit in the fact that we derive our identities from groups' (p. 264).

At its core this book is a persuasive and impassioned exposition of the importance of the biblical book of Genesis for promoting peace. In a time when many argue that sacred beliefs should be jettisoned for the sake of harmony, Sacks helpfully defends the indispensability of the Hebrew Bible as a foundation for respecting the dignity of others.

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