Midwestern Journal of Theology

Published biannually by the Faculty of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Future Issues:

Fall 2005—Nehemiah

MIDWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

Volume 3   Spring 2005   No. 2

CONTENTS

Editorial

In our day the biblical doctrine that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation is under fierce attack. This belief that Jesus is not the only Savior is called pluralism. Such claims are a part of postmodern thinking.

This issue, devoted to the topic of "Christianity and Religious Pluralism," includes articles by exceptional contributors who engage and critique this thinking which is contrary to biblical teaching.

First, J. P. Moreland clarifies, distinguishes, and critiques four different forms of postmodernism in a helpful article titled, "Pluralism and Four Grades of Postmodern Involvement." Moreland is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, in La Mirada, California.

Second, Ronald Nash evaluates John Hick's thinking in "The Pluralism of John Hick." He finds that the philosophy of this leading religious pluralist is not an intellectually responsible place to find an alternative to the Christian faith. Nash is Professor of Philosophy at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Third, Win Corduan shows in "Congenial Pluralism: Why It Does Not Work" that two kinds of pluralism are advocated today, an aggressive kind and a congenial one. He concludes that neither option is legitimate. Corduan is Professor of Philosophy at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana.

Fourth, Steve Lemke critiques the philosophy of Richard Rorty in "Pluralism and Relativism in Richard Rorty's Liberal Utopia." He shows that Rorty's relativism is fundamentally flawed and not a sound foundation for religious pluralism. Lemke is Provost and Professor of Philosophy at New Orleans Theological Seminary in New Orleans, Louisiana.

Finally, Timothy Jones contributes to the construction of a developmental model of Christian formation that is biblical and evangelical in "James W. Fowler's Stages of Faith and Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* as Spiritual Transcendance: An Evangelical Rethinking of Fowler's Model of Faith Development."

We pray that these articles assist you to defend and proclaim the biblical teaching that Jesus is the only Savior. For indeed, "there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

To God's glory: enjoy!

Terry L. Wilder, Editor

Pluralism and Four Grades
of Postmodern Involvement

J. P. Moreland
Distinguished Professor of Philosophy
Talbot School of Theology, Biola University
La Mirada, CA 90639

Introduction

These are tolerant, pluralistic times, or so we are often told. They are also postmodern times, or so we are just as often told. Is there a conceptual relationship between pluralism and postmodernism? I think that one's answer to this question will depend on what one means by the two terms in question. Clearly, one can be a pluralist and not a postmodernist, but given a fairly widely accepted understanding of postmodernism, it is far from clear that the converse is true. And even if a specific form of postmodernism does not entail a relevant version of pluralism, it still may be the case that the former provides a plausibility structure for making the latter go down more easily. It would seem fruitful, then, to explore the relationship between different versions of postmodernism and pluralism to see what can be learned. This is what I propose to do in this article. From time to time, I shall also offer a critique of the version of postmodernism in focus.

In what follows, I shall distinguish four grades of postmodern involvement from most to less extreme. In order, those grades are *ontic*, *alethic*, *epistemic*, and *axiological/religious* (a.k.a. *non-empirical*) *postmodernism.* In speaking of "grades of postmodernism involvement" I am referring to what we might call "degrees of ingression." What I have in mind is this. The more deeply ingressed or strongly graded one's postmodernism is, the more pervasive is the impact of postmodern ideas throughout one's worldview. More specifically, with rare exceptions, ontic postmodernism entails the other three (if one is an ontic postmodernist, then if one is consistent, one will also be a postmodernist of the other sorts); alethic postmodernism entails epistemic and axiological/religious postmodernism; epistemic postmodernism entails axiological/religious postmodernism.[1]

---

[1] It is possible to deny the existence or relevance of truth and still affirm the objectivity of rationality if that objectivity is cashed out in an anti-realist way. So, for example, one could hold that, for some person S, belief P is more rational to hold than

Ontic Postmodernism

Ontic postmodernism denies the existence of a mind/theory/language independent world. For the ontic postmodernism, there is no such thing as an objective reality. On the face of it, this claim is pretty hard to take seriously. So before teasing out the implications of ontic postmodernism, we had better try to understand how someone could believe, or at least claim to believe, that there is no such thing as objective reality.

A fairly standard line of argument for this claim goes as follows: First, one refuses to talk about reality itself, and instead, talks about reality assertions, i.e. existence claims, reality talk.

Second, one observes that existence claims are made relative to a background theory or linguistic community. "There are electrons" is made in the context of a broader theory of atoms, protons, and so forth, such that the assertion itself is given meaning by the role it plays in atomic theory. For example, an electron is something with negative charge, that attracts protons, circles the nucleus, and so forth. "Jesus is the Son of God" is similarly an assertion made relative to the Christian story.

Third, rival theories, different narratives, alternative communities have incommensurable stories, accounts that have no common ground that is theory independent and on the basis of which those rivals could, in principle, be compared. Theories/narratives and their kin are imperialistic; they leave no prisoners. Everything whatsoever is theory independent. It follows from this that existence claims are simply assertions that play certain roles relative to different narratives. There are no metanarratives, stories that exhibit an objective reality that is just there, existing for everyone. Advocates of different conceptual schemes literally live in different worlds because there is no such thing as reality itself.

If one asks whether there is something that is REALLY real outside a community's narrative, then the ontic postmodernist will respond by saying that the questioner is using "REALLY" in an abandoned modernist way and the question should be disallowed as inappropriate, given the postmodern viewpoint. If one does not believe in a narrative independent reality, then the notions of objective truth, objective rationality (understood in a realist way; see below), and objective axiology will, like "Western Civ," have to go. There is a plurality of worlds, truths, rationalities, and values each constituted by and relative to

---

belief Q just in case holding P solves more intellectual problems than holding Q, where a solved problem is not taken as an indication of truth and where it is taken to be an objective fact of the matter as to whether P solves more problems than Q. It would take us to far a field to examine these matters further and, in any case, a realist view of rationality is more relevant to the dialectic in focus.

a different community and its narrative. It should be clear that this form of postmodernism entails a radical version of religious pluralism. Whether God exists and what God is like is literally reduced to linguistic practices relative to different communities. God exists relative to the Christian community because that community uses existence language to talk about God. God does not exist in the atheist community because that community uses existential denial-talk as a form of life.
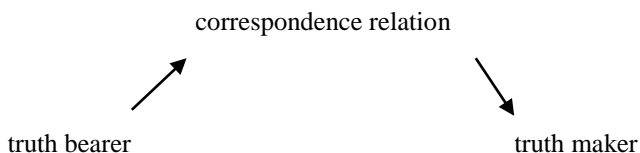
My main purpose is to clarify and not critique ontic postmodernism, but before we turn to the next grade of postmodern involvement, I should at least sketch out a line of response. First, it is self-evident that a language independent reality exists—we are in direct contact with it all the time; we bump up against it when our beliefs are false, we regularly experience acts of comparing our words, concepts, and theories with the real world and adjust the former thereby—and indeed, we have more justification for believing in reality than we do for accepting any of the arguments for ontic postmodernism. This justification places a severe burden of proof on the postmodernist that she/he systematically fails to meet. Second, any attempted support for ontic postmodernism will be either self-refuting or something that should be ignored. If the attempted support (e.g. "linguistic studies demonstrate that various communities carve up 'reality' differently, and thus, there is no such thing as objective reality") is taken to be grounded in reality, then it is self-refuting (the studies must be of real communities and their actual linguistic practices if they provide a "demonstration"). If the alleged support is not even claimed to be rooted in reality, then why should anyone listen to it? Is should be dismissed as neurotic rantings. If the postmodernist responds that my dismissal presupposes an outmoded modernist notion of REALITY, then I will just repeat the dilemma for this claim (either it is about reality and is self-refuting or else it is neurotic ranting).

Alethic Postmodernism

The second and weaker grade of postmodern involvement is alethic postmodernism, which denies the concept of truth, especially the correspondence theory of truth, but accepts the existence of a theory independent world "out there." Accordingly, our descriptions of that world are neither true nor approximately true. Moreover, we are trapped behind our language (theories, conceptual schemes, narratives) and cannot get to the thing-in-itself; so for all purposes, questions about the existence and nature of the "real world" are moot.

A bit more needs to be said about the correspondence theory of truth. In its simplest form, the correspondence theory says that a proposition is true just in case it corresponds to reality, when what it asserts to be the

case is the case. More generally, truth obtains when a truth bearer stands in an appropriate correspondence relation to a truth maker:

correspondence relation

truth bearer   truth maker

First, what is the truth bearer? The thing that is either true or false is not a sentence, but a proposition. A proposition is the content of a sentence. For example, "It is raining" and "Es regnet" are two different sentences that express the same proposition. A sentence is a linguistic object consisting in a sense perceptible string of markings formed according to a culturally arbitrary set of syntactical rules, a grammatically well-formed string of spoken or written scratchings/sounds. Sentences are true just in case they express a true proposition or content.

What about truth makers? What is it that makes a proposition true? The best answer is facts. A fact is some real state of affairs in the world, for example, grass is green, an electron has a negative charge, God is all-loving. Consider the proposition that *grass is green*. This proposition is true just in case a specific fact, *viz.* grass's being green, actually obtains in the real world. If Sally has the thought that grass is green, the specific state of affairs, (grass actually being green) "makes" the prepositional content of her thought true just in case the state of affairs actually is the way the proposition represents it to be. Grass's being green makes Sally's thought true even if Sally is blind and cannot tell whether or not it is true, and even if Sally does not believe the thought. Reality makes thoughts true or false. A thought is not made true by someone believing it or by someone being able to determine whether or not it is true. Put differently, evidence allows one to tell whether or not a thought is true, but the relevant fact is what makes it true.

Our study of truth bearers has already taken us into the topic of the correspondence relation. Correspondence is a two-placed relation between a proposition and a relevant fact. A two-placed relation, such as "larger than," is one that requires two things (say, a desk and a book) before it holds. Similarly, the truth relation of correspondence holds between two things—a relevant fact and a proposition—just in case the fact matches, conforms to, and corresponds with the proposition.

What reasons can be given for accepting the correspondence theory of truth? Two main arguments have been advanced for the correspondence theory, one descriptive and one dialectical. The descriptive argument focuses on a careful description and presentation of specific cases to see

what can be learned from them about truth. As an example, consider the case of Joe and Frank. While in his office, Joe receives a call from the university bookstore that a specific book he had ordered—Richard Swinburne's *The Evolution of the Soul*—has arrived and is waiting for him. At this point, a new mental state occurs in Joe's mind—the thought that Swinburne's *The Evolution of the Soul* is in the bookstore.

Now Joe, being aware of the content of the thought, becomes aware of two things closely related to it: the nature of the thought's intentional object (Swinburne's book being in the bookstore) and certain verification steps that would help him to determine the truth of the thought. For example, he knows that it would be irrelevant for verifying the thought to go swimming in the Pacific Ocean. Rather, he knows that he must take a series of steps that will bring him to a specific building and look in certain places for Swinburne's book in the university bookstore.

So Joe starts out for the bookstore, all the while being guided by the proposition: "Swinburne's *The Evolution of the Soul* is in the bookstore." Along the way, his friend Frank joins him, though Joe does not tell Frank where he is going or why. They arrive at the store and both see Swinburne's book there. At that moment, Joe and Frank simultaneously have a certain sensory experience of seeing Swinburne's book, *The Evolution of the Soul*. But Joe has a second experience not possessed by Frank. Joe experiences that his thought matches and corresponds with an actual state of affairs. He is able to compare his thought with its intentional object and "see," be directly aware, that the thought is true. In this case, Joe actually experiences the correspondence relation itself and truth itself becomes an object of his awareness.

The dialectical argument asserts that those who advance alternative theories of truth or who simply reject the correspondence theory actually presuppose it in their own assertions, especially when they present arguments for their views or defend them against defeaters. Sometimes this argument is stated in the form of a dilemma: Those who reject the correspondence theory either take their own utterances to be true in the correspondence sense or they do not. If the former, then those utterances are self-defeating. If the latter, there is no reason to accept them because one cannot take their utterances to be true.

Alethic postmodernists deny the existence of objective truth, construed along the lines of the correspondence theory, which they often equate with absolute truth. According to Brian McLaren, making absolute truth claims becomes problematic in the postmodern context. Says McLaren, "I think that most Christians grossly misunderstand the philosophical baggage associated with terms like *absolute* or *objective* (linked to foundationalism and the myth of neutrality). . . .Similarly,

arguments that pit absolutism versus relativism, and objectivism versus subjectivism, prove meaningless or absurd to postmodern people . . ."[2]

Unfortunately, this postmodernist rejection of objective or absolute truth rests on at least two confusions. The first postmodern confusion involves metaphysical vs. epistemic notions of absolute truth. In the metaphysical and correct sense, absolute truth is the same thing as objective truth. On this view, people discover truth, they do not create it, and a claim is made true or false in some way or another by reality itself, totally independently of whether the claim is accepted by anyone. Moreover, an absolute truth conforms to the three fundamental laws of logic, which are themselves absolute truths. According to objectivism, a commitment to the absolute truth of some proposition P entails no thesis about a knowing subject's epistemic situation regarding P.

By contrast with the metaphysical notion, postmodernists claim that a commitment to absolute truth is rooted in Cartesian anxiety and its need for absolute certainty, and accordingly claim that acceptance of the absolute truth of P entails acceptance of the conjunction of P's truth in the objective sense and the possibility of a (finite) knowing subject having Cartesian certainty with respect to P. Thus, one postmodernist recently opined that commitment to objective truth and the correspondence theory is merely ". . . an epistemic project [that] is funded by 'Cartesian anxiety,' a product of methodological doubt . . ."[3]

As I have already pointed out, this claim is entirely false philosophically. Advocates of a correspondence theory of objective truth take the view to be a realist metaphysical thesis and they steadfastly reject all attempts to epistemologize the view. Moreover, historically, it is incredible to assert that the great Western thinkers from Aristotle up to Descartes—correspondence advocates all—had any concern whatever about truth and Cartesian anxiety. The great correspondence advocate Aristotle was hardly in a Cartesian quandary when he wisely pointed out that in the search for truth, one ought not expect a greater degree of epistemic strength than is appropriate to the subject matter, a degree of strength that varies from topic to topic. The correspondence theory was not born when Descartes came out of his stove, and postmodernists lose credibility when they pretend otherwise. The claim that some proposition P is an objective or absolute truth is simply the claim that P corresponds to reality. Such a claim says absolutely nothing about the speaker's degree of certainty with respect to P.

---

[2] Brian McLaren, "Emergent Evangelism," *Christianity Today* (November 2004): 42-43.

[3] Philip Kennison, "There's No Such Thing As Objective Truth, and It's a Good Thing, Too," in *Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World*, ed. by Timothy Philips, Dennis Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 157.

The second confusion plaguing alethic postmodernists is one about the identity of the truth bearer. As we have already seen, the informed correspondence theorist will say that propositions are truth bearers. What is a proposition? Minimally, it is the content of declarative sentences/statements and thoughts/beliefs that is true or false. Beyond that philosophers are in disagreement, but most would agree that a proposition (1) is not located in space or time; (2) is not identical to the linguistic entities that may be used to express it; (3) is not sense perceptible; (4) is such that the same proposition may be in more than one mind at once; (5) need not be grasped by any (at least finite) person to exist and be what it is; (6) may itself be an object of thought when, for example, one is thinking about the content of one's own thought processes; (7) is in no sense a physical entity.

By contrast a sentence is a linguistic type or token consisting in a sense perceptible string of markings formed according to a culturally arbitrary set of syntactical rules. A statement is a sequence of sounds or body movements employed by a speaker to assert a sentence on a specific occasion. So understood, neither sentences nor statements are good candidates for the basic truth bearer.

It is pretty easy to show that having or using a sentence (or any other piece of language) is neither necessary nor sufficient for thinking or having propositional content. First, it is not necessary. Children think prior to their acquisition of language—how else could they thoughtfully learn language?—and indeed, we all think without language regularly. Moreover, the same propositional content may be expressed by a potentially infinite number of pieces of language, and thus that content is not identical to any linguistic entity. This alone does not show that language is not necessary for having propositional content. But when one attends to the content that is being held constant as arbitrary linguistic expressions are selected to express it, that content may easily be seen to satisfy the non-linguistic traits of a proposition listed above.

Second, it is not sufficient. If erosion carved an authorless linguistic scribble in a hillside, for example, "I'm eroding," then strictly speaking it would have no meaning or content, though it would be empirically equivalent to another token of this type that would express a proposition were it the result of authorial intention.

Postmodernists attack a straw man when they focus on the alleged inadequacies of linguistic objects to do the work required of them in a correspondence theory of truth. Speaking for himself and other postmodernists, Joseph Natoli claims that "No one representation, or narrative, can reliably represent the world because language/pictures/ sounds (signifiers) are not permanent labels attached to the things of the

world nor do the things of the world dwell inside such signifiers."[4] Unfortunately, even granting the fact that language (and certain sensations) is problematic if taken to represent things in the world (e.g. that the language/world hookup is arbitrary), it follows that human subjects cannot accurately represent the world only if we grant the further erroneous claim that representational entities are limited to language (and certain sensations). But this is precisely what the sophisticated correspondence theorist denies.

Again, Richard Rorty says, "To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is not truth, that sentences are elements of human language, and that human languages are human creations. Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there . . . . Only descriptions . . . can be true and false."[5] It should be obvious that Rorty attacks a straw man and that his argument goes through only if we grant that sentences are the fundamental truth bearers.

Epistemic Postmodernism

Epistemic postmodernists do not target reality or truth; rather, the object of their rejection is reason (allegedly construed along modernist lines) and "objective rationality." The notion of objective rationality they reject included two components: the ability of a knowing, believing subject to have (1) objective justification for his beliefs and (2) direct, cognitive access to the objects of knowledge in the external world. Let us analyze these components in this order.

Postmodernists reject the notion that rationality is objective on the grounds that no one approaches life in a totally objective way without bias. Thus, objectivity is impossible, and observations, beliefs, and entire narratives are theory-laden. There is no neutral standpoint from which to approach the world. Therefore, observations, beliefs and so forth are perspectival constructions that reflect the viewpoint implicit in one's own web of beliefs. For example, Stanley Grenz claims that postmodernism rejects the alleged modernist view of reason which ". . . entails a claim to dispassionate knowledge, a person's ability to view reality not as a conditioned participant but as an unconditioned observer—to peer at the world from a vantage point outside the flux of history."[6]

---

[4] Joseph P. Natoli, *Primer to Postmodernity* (Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 18.

[5] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4-5.

[6] Stanley Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 15.

Regarding knowledge, postmodernists believe that there is no point of view from which one can define knowledge itself without begging the question in favor of one's own view. "Knowledge" is a construction of one's social, linguistic structures, not a justified, truthful representation of reality by one's mental states. For example, knowledge amounts to what is deemed to be appropriate according to the professional certification practices of various professional associations. As such, knowledge is a construction that expresses the social, linguistic structures of those associations, nothing more, nothing less.

These postmodernist claims represent some very deep confusions about the notion of objectivity. As a first step towards clearing away this confusion, we need to draw a distinction between psychological and rational objectivity. It is clear from the quote above that Grenz' confused understanding of objectivity is at least partly rooted in his mistaken conflation of these two senses. Psychological objectivity is detachment, the absence of bias, a lack of commitment either way on a topic.

Do people ever have psychological objectivity? Yes, they do, typically, in areas in which they have no interest or about which they know little or nothing. Note carefully two things about psychological objectivity. For one thing, it is not necessarily a virtue. It is if one has not thought deeply about an issue and has no convictions regarding it. But as one develops thoughtful, intelligent convictions about a topic, it would be wrong to remain "unbiased," that is, uncommitted regarding it. Otherwise, what role would study and evidence play in the development of a one's approach to life? Should one remain "unbiased" that cancer is a disease, that rape is wrong, that the New Testament was written in the first century, that there is design in the universe, if one has discovered good reasons for each belief? No, one should not.

For another thing, while it is possible to be psychologically objective in some cases, most people are not psychologically objective regarding the vast majority of the things they believe. In these cases, it is crucial to observe that a lack of psychological objectivity does not matter, nor does it cut one off from knowing or seeing the world directly the way it is, or from presenting and arguing for one's convictions. Why? *Because a lack of psychological objectivity does not imply a lack of rational objectivity and it is the latter than matters most, not the former*.

To understand this, we need to get clear on the notion of rational objectivity. Rational objectivity is the state of having accurate epistemic access to the thing itself. This entails that if one has rational objectivity regarding some topic, then one can discern the difference between genuinely good and bad reasons/evidence for a belief about that topic and one can hold the belief for genuinely good reasons/evidence. The important thing here is that bias does not stand between a knowing

subject and an intentional object nor does it eliminate a person's ability to assess the reasons for something. Bias may make it more difficult, but not impossible. If bias made rational objectivity impossible, then no teacher—including the postmodernist herself—could responsibly teach any view the teacher believed on any subject! Nor could the teacher teach opposing viewpoints, because she would be biased against them!

Grenz exhibits the twin confusions, so common among postmodernists, of failing to assess properly the nature and value of psychological objectivity, and of failing to distinguish and properly assess the relationship between psychological and rational objectivity.

So much for objectivity. The second component of epistemic postmodernism is the denial of direct cognitive access to the objects of consciousness. Postmodernists adopt a highly contentious model of perception and intentionality, often without argument, and they seem to enjoin serious consideration of a *prima facie* more plausible model. The result is that postmodernists are far too pessimistic about the prospects of human epistemic success.

Postmodernists adopt a linguistic version of Rene Descartes' idea theory of perception (and intentionality generally). To understand the idea theory, and the postmodern adaptation of it, a good place to start is with a common sense, critical realist view of perception. According to critical realism, when a subject is looking at a red object such as an apple, the object itself is the direct object of the sensory state. What one sees directly is the apple itself. True, one must have a sensation of red to apprehend the apple, but on the critical realist view, the sensation of red is to be understood as a case of being-appeared-to-redly and analyzed as a *self-presenting property*. What is a self-presenting property? If some property F is a self-presenting one, then it is by means of F that a relevant external object is presented directly to a person, and F presents itself directly to the person as well. Thus, F presents its object mediately though directly, and itself immediately.

This is not as hard to understand as it first may appear. Sensations, such as being-appeared-to-redly, are an important class of self-presenting properties. If Jones is having a sensation of red while looking at an apple, then having the property of being-appeared-to-redly as part of his consciousness modifies his substantial self. When Jones has this sensation, it is a tool that presents the red apple mediately to him and the sensation also presents itself to Jones. What does it mean to say that the sensation presents the apple to him mediately? Simply this: it is in virtue of or by means of the sensation that Jones directly sees the apple itself.

Moreover, by having the sensation of red, Jones is directly aware both of the apple and his own awareness of the apple. For the critical realist, the sensation of red may indeed be a tool or means that Jones uses to

become aware of the apple, but he is thereby directly aware of the apple. His awareness of the apple is direct in that nothing stands between Jones and the apple, not even his sensation of the apple. That sensation presents the apple directly, though as a tool, Jones must have the sensation as a necessary condition for seeing the apple. On the critical realist view, a knowing subject is not trapped behind or within anything, including a viewpoint, a narrative, or a historical-linguistic perspective. To have an entity in the external world as an object of intentionality is to already be "out there"; there is no need to escape anything. One is not trapped behind one's eyeballs or anything else. It is a basic fallacy of logic to infer that one sees a point-of-viewed-object from the fact that one sees an object from a point of view.

Before leaving the critical realist view, it is important to say that the theory does not limit self-presenting properties to those associated with the five senses and, therefore, does not limit the objects of direct awareness to ordinary sensory objects. The critical realist will say that a knowing subject is capable of direct acquaintance with a host of non-sense-perceptible objects—one's own ego and its mental states, various abstract objects like the laws of mathematics or logic, and spirit beings, including God.

By contrast, for Descartes' idea theory, one's ideas, in this case, sensations, stand between the subject and the object of perception. Jones is directly aware of his own sensation of the apple and indirectly aware of the apple in the sense that it is what causes the sensation to happen. On the idea theory, a perceiving subject is trapped behind his own sensations and cannot get outside them to the external world in order to compare his sensations to their objects to see if those sensations are accurate.

Now, in a certain sense, postmodernists believe that people are trapped behind something in the attempt to get to the external world. However, for them the wall between people and reality is not composed of sensations as it was for Descartes; rather, it is constituted by one's community and its linguistic categories and practices. One's language serves as a sort of distorting and, indeed, creative filter. One cannot get outside one's language to see if one's talk about the world is the way the world is. Thus, Grenz advocates a new outlook, allegedly representing some sort of consensus in the human sciences, that expresses "a more profound understanding of epistemology. Recent thinking has helped us see that the process of knowing, and to some extent even the process of experiencing the world, can occur only within a conceptual framework, a framework mediated by the social community in which we participate."[7]

---

[7] Ibid., 73-74.

It has been noted repeatedly that such assertions are self-refuting. For if we are all trapped behind a framework such that simple, direct seeing is impossible, then no amount of recent thinking can help us see anything; all it could do would be to invite us to see something *as* such and such from within a conceptual framework. Given the self-refuting nature of such claims, and given the fact that we all experience regularly the activity of comparing our conceptions of an entity with the entity itself as a way of adjusting those conceptions, it is hard to see why anyone, especially a Christian, would adopt the postmodern view. In any case, I have seldom seen the realist perspective seriously considered by postmodern thinkers, and until it is, statements like Grenz' will be taken as mere mantras by many of us.

Axiological (religious, non-empirical) Postmodernism

It is possible, indeed, it is widely believed that the physical world and only the physical world studied by the hard sciences employing empirical means is real, that those sciences and only those sciences furnish truth or approximate truth regarding the domain of entities within their proper domain, and that objective rationality is achieved in and only in those sciences. Underwritten by some form of empiricism, this view eschews postmodernism as an approach to the hard sciences while employing it everywhere else. Technically, this grade of postmodern involvement should be called "non-empirical postmodernism," but I have adopted the somewhat less accurate label "axiological postmodernism" because of the main impact of this view in contemporary life. Axiological postmodernism treats religious, ethical, political and aesthetic claims in a postmodernist way.

Standing behind axiological postmodernism, at least in popular culture, is an implicit epistemology that we may call *Folk Empiricism*: *For any belief P, P is reasonable to believe and assert if and only if P can be and has been adequately tested with one's five senses*. Let's name this claim FE. The point of FE is to limit what we can reasonably believe and assert to what can be "appropriately" tested with the five senses, and the hard sciences are taken to be the ideal exemplars of this epistemic standpoint. When many people make claims consistent with axiological postmodernism, they are assuming something like FE whether they know it or not. So we need to ask, how do things stand with respect to FE? How should we assess it?

First, in a certain sense, FE is self-refuting. As we shall see shortly, FE is, in fact, false. But it is arguably the case that FE could have been true. It is not necessarily false like "2+3= 17." Rather, it is like "Cuba is a state in the United States." While false, under certain circumstances, this sentence would have been true. Similarly, arguably, FE could have

been true even though it is false. By contrast and strictly speaking, self-refuting statements, for example, "No sentence of English is longer than three words" are necessarily false—they could not be true.

It follows then, that, strictly speaking, FE itself is not self-refuting. But that should be of small comfort to people who assume FE. Why? Because all an advocate of FE can do is merely to shout FE and leave it at that. One cannot give any evidence that FE itself is a reasonable belief because this claim about FE's rationality *would* be self-refuting. It would amount to this assertion: It is reasonable to believe (and, thus, we all ought to believe) that "for any belief P, P is reasonable to believe and assert if and only if P can be and has been appropriately tested with one's five senses." Once one claims that FE is itself reasonable to accept, that claim is self-refuting because there is no sense experience to which one can appeal to justify belief in FE.

To clarify, suppose one claimed that there was an apple on the table. It is very clear what sensory experiences could verify or falsify that claim. But no such sensory experiences can be given to justify FE itself. Thus, FE cannot be recommended as something one should reasonably believe, and for those of us who want reasonable beliefs, that is enough for us to dismiss FE from further consideration. And if someone claims that FE is itself reasonable, his or her assertion is self-refuting.

Either adequate reasons can be given for FE or they cannot. If they cannot, then there are not adequate reasons to believe it. If there are, then FE is self-refuting and there are not adequate reasons to believe it. Either way, FE's adequacy as a viewpoint is in trouble. Not only are there no adequate reasons for believing FE, there *can* be no such reasons! So much for FE as an adequate, reasonable guide for life decisions!

But there is more. Not only can there be no adequate reasons for accepting FE, but FE fails to account for many of the things we actually know or believe on the basis of adequate reasons. Let me give some examples. For brevity, let us use seeing as a shorthand way of speaking about testing something with all five senses and not just sight.

First, truth (correspondence with reality) is not something one can see, so if we are limited to our five senses, no one could have a grasp of truth itself. If I believe that a particular book I ordered is at the bookstore waiting to be picked up, and if I go to the bookstore and see the book, I also know that my thought that the book was there is true. I can see the book, but I cannot see my thought that the book is there nor can I have a sense experience that the situation in the bookstore (my book being there) accurately corresponds with my thought. In a case where my wife tells me I am angry and I am not sure she is correct, I can introspect to decide the matter. If I take the thought "I am angry" and use it to search my inner feelings, then when I experience my own anger, I come to

know that my wife's claim is true. But I cannot see my thought ("I am angry"), I cannot see the emotional state of anger itself, and I cannot see the true correspondence between the thought and my feeling of anger. Truth itself is not sense perceptible.

Second, adequate notions of what knowledge is, what counts as a good explanation, and what makes a piece of evidence a good piece of evidence are not matters one can know or have a reasonable view about if one is limited to one's five senses. Take knowledge. Many have understood knowledge to be justified true belief. If I actually know that I had breakfast this morning, then (1) I believe I had breakfast, (2) it is actually true that I have breakfast, and (3) I must have adequate reasons (perhaps, from memory) that I had breakfast (I cannot just have a lucky guess about breakfast). Some people think that this definition of knowledge is close, but not entirely adequate to capture what knowledge itself is. Now, how in the world are we going to evaluate this definition of knowledge and ones offered by detractors? How are we going to come to know what knowledge itself is, if we are limited to what we can test with the five senses? Exactly to what sensation could a proponent or critic of this definition appeal to make his or her case? These questions make evident (and making something evident is not something we can recognize by our senses!) how absurd FE really is as a guide for knowledge.

We know a host of other things that are not justifiable by our five senses. We do not know our own states of consciousness (our thoughts, feelings, desires, beliefs, whether we chose to do something or did it passively out of habit) and we do not know our own selves by sensation. We do not even know which sensations in a room filled with people are ours as opposed to which belong to others by our five senses! We do not gain normative knowledge by our senses, knowledge of what we should/should not believe (rational normativity), what we should and should not do (moral normativity), or what is beautiful or ugly (aesthetic normativity). And we do have this sort of knowledge. I should rationally believe there are such things as birds or that 2+2=4; I should morally recognize that kindness and honesty are virtues and not vices; and I should aesthetically recognize that a sunset viewed from Maui over a turquoise ocean is beautiful.

Even some things studied in the hard sciences cannot be known by the five senses. For example, one cannot see, touch, feel, hear, or smell a magnetic field, but we know there are such things. One can see or feel the effects of such a field, say, the iron filings falling into a particular pattern, but one cannot see the field itself. We infer that there must be such a field to explain the effects.

At the end of the day, FE is an inadequate guide for living a rational life, no matter how many people believe it. To the degree that axiological postmodernism is justified by FE, then it must be rejected as well.

Conclusion

In this article I have sought to clarify and distinguish four different forms of postmodernism. I have ranked them in order of their strength, and along the way I have criticized different versions, though I admit that my remarks are brief and need further development. In so doing, I hope I have clarified the relationship between postmodernism and pluralism in their various forms.

The Pluralism of John Hick

Ronald Nash
Professor of Philosophy
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary
Louisville, KY 40280

Once upon a time Christians were identifiable by an unqualified commitment to Jesus Christ as the one and only Savior of the world. But the unity of Christians on this fundamental issue has disappeared. Today many people who claim to be Christians choose among three fundamentally different answers to the question, "Is Jesus the only Savior?" These answers can be stated succinctly: No! Yes, but . . . Yes, period!

The negative answer—the belief that Jesus is not the only Savior—is commonly called *pluralism.* People holding this view think that there are many paths to salvation and that Jesus is only one of them.

The unqualified affirmative answer (Yes, period!) is undoubtedly the one that most readers of this article identify with. This view is often called *exclusivism* because it teaches that there is one exclusive way whereby men and women can approach God and receive his salvation: Jesus Christ. Sometimes this position is called *restrictivism* because it teaches that salvation is restricted to people who come to have explicit faith in Jesus Christ.

The qualified affirmative answer (Yes, but . . .) is the favored view of a growing number of Christian college and seminary professors. But it is also held by many pastors, Christian workers, and denominational leaders who were introduced to the theory by their professors. This position is commonly called *inclusivism* because its adherents believe that the scope of God's salvation is significantly wider than that held by exclusivists. It is so wide or broad that it includes many people who have not explicitly believed in Jesus.

I have dealt with the whole range of issues related to this matter in my book, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*[1] In this article, I will examine the position known as pluralism. To save time, I have chosen to focus on the work of John Hick, the person who is probably the best known religious pluralist in the part of the world we loosely refer to as Christendom. A

---

[1] See Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994). This article is adapted from the latter title by permission of the publisher.

pluralist is a person who thinks humans may be saved through a number of different religious traditions and saviors.

The Pluralism of John Hick

John Hick explains his own pluralism this way: "There is not merely one way but a plurality of ways of salvation or liberation . . . taking place in different ways within the contexts of all the great religious traditions."[2]

The development of Hick's pluralism went through two stages. The earlier stage of Hick's thinking extended roughly from about 1970 to 1980. The changes that occurred after 1980 contain the theories for which he is best known. It is legitimate to ask why I spend time on his earlier positions which he has abandoned. The reason is this: it is important to see that Hick's current positions did not appear in a mature, fully developed form. It first took root and then grew sometimes fitfully, as Hick tried first one move and then another to make his evolving view of pluralism work. Tracing some of those early steps can be instructive. Far too many people act as though all that is required to prove pluralism is simply to assert it dogmatically. To claim that there is only one way to God, only one Savior, is so narrow-minded, so intolerant, so contrary to common sense, and so on. It is actually a humbling experience to discover how extremely difficult it is to establish religious pluralism as a plausible theory. John Hick's early attempts to do just this failed miserably and what demonstrated the disastrous nature of his early arguments came from criticisms he received from non-Christian scholars.

The second stage of Hick's pluralism marked a major break with elements of his earlier position. In fact, the reason that Hick developed his second stage (from 1980 to the present) was because his first attempt at pluralism was such an embarrassing defeat. Understanding the mistakes of the first stage will make it easier for us to reach a judgment about the value of stage two.

The First Stage of Hick's Pluralism

During the early 1970s John Hick regarded what he thought of as his new approach to world religions as so radical that he began to describe it as a Copernican Revolution in religion. As Hick saw things, Christian exclusivism (the belief that people can only be saved by knowing about Jesus and believing in Jesus) is analogous to the old, outdated Ptolemaic model of the solar system. Claudius Ptolemy, the astronomer and mathematician who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, from around A.D. 100 to 170, taught what is called the geocentric theory of the solar system and

---

[2] John Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 34.

pictured the sun and the planets as revolving around the earth. Ptolemy's view was challenged by the heliocentric, or sun-centered, theory proposed by the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543).

Hick's self-described Copernican alternative to Ptolemy's theory involved the removal of Christianity from any exalted or exclusive place at the center of the world's religions. Just as Copernicus replaced the earth-centered paradigm with a sun-centered model, so Hick proposed to replace the historic Christian view that Jesus Christ is the center of the religious universe with the claim that God is the center. This amounts to abandoning a Christocentric view of the world's religions with a theocentric model. The historic Christian position that there is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ must now be abandoned, according to Hick. His alternative sees all the world religions rotating around God, not Jesus.

Many students of astronomy are surprised to learn how well the old Ptolemaic model worked in explaining the apparent motion of the planets. One reason for its success resulted from the skill of Ptolemaic astronomers in designing what are called *epicycles*. An epicycle was an orbit on an orbit, such as the orbit of the moon around the earth, which in turn is orbiting around the sun. There were times when the Ptolemaic astronomers could only explain certain motions of heavenly bodies by postulating orbits on orbits on orbits. Such complexity in the Ptolemaic model of the solar system eventually became a major reason why many astronomers after Copernicus and Kepler abandoned the earlier paradigm.[3] Ever since, the epicycles of the old Ptolemaic theory have served as an example of arbitrary and contrived theorizing, not based on evidence, adopted solely to enhance the plausibility of the theory. According to Hick, the religious analogue of Ptolemy's model is any view that places Christianity at the center of the world's religions. Hick denigrates attempts to protect Christianity from the challenge of the world's religions by comparing the Christian's efforts to the epicycles of the Ptolemaic system. That is, the efforts of any who believe Jesus is the only Savior are contrived and arbitrary. Their efforts, Hick thinks, are not prompted by an honest attempt to conform theory to evidence, but are merely tinkering with one's model so as to continue delaying its inevitable demise.

Was This "Revolution" Necessary?

One reason why Hick thought his Copernican Revolution was necessary was his growing awareness in the early 1970s of saintly and holy people

---

[3] For more details, see Nash, *Is Jesus the only Savior?* 23-24.

in non-Christian religions.[4] But does encountering pious, devout, and even saintly non-Christians prove the truth of pluralism? During the first stage in the development of his pluralism, Hick also appealed to the notion of an all-loving God. He believed that the existence of an all-loving God required the rejection of any form of Christian exclusivism. The more Hick thought about it, the more convinced he became that a loving God would not exclude *anyone* from his salvation.

Ironically, Hick himself provided the major reason why this line of thinking had to be rejected. Hick recognized that pluralism could not succeed if any specific knowledge about God is possible. Suppose we knew, for example, that personal monotheism is true. We could then know that polytheism and pantheism are false. But if we know that pantheism is false, then, we can hardly continue to view pantheistic systems as paths to God that function on an equal footing with theism. And so we find Hick conceding that God as he, she or it really is, is unknowable.

But when Hick then appeals to the love of God as the ground of one of his convictions, he is clearly contradicting himself. A loving God is a supreme being with known properties. As soon as we can legitimately ascribe any properties to God, problems arise for the pluralist, specifically because *that* God with *those* atttributes (such as love) will conflict with the gods of other religious systems who do not possess those attributes or that set of properties.

Hick wants it both ways. On the one hand, he promoted a pluralistic, non-Christian approach to the world religions; on the other hand, all his talk about a loving, personal God sounds a lot like Christianity. If, as Hick insists, no one can have any knowledge about God, then no one can know that the Supreme Being is a loving God. But if we cannot know *this*, then we can hardly use information that we cannot know—that God is love—as the basis of an attack on exclusivism.

Hick also argued that religious beliefs are typically a result of geographic and cultural conditioning. Someone born in Dallas, Texas, is most likely going to be a Christian. Guess what that person would be if born in Sri Lanka, Mecca, Tokyo, Tehran or New Delhi? A just and loving God would hardly punish people for what is basically an accident of birth. But again we see how difficult it is for Hick to avoid this essentially self-defeating line of thinking. The argument falters unless he can free his appeal to geographic and cultural conditioning from references to divine love.

---

[4] See the early pages of John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (London: Macmillan, 1980).

Problems with Hick's First Stage

Hick's movement away from important aspects of his early pluralism was hardly an accident. He changed his position on some issues because it became clear he had to do so. An examination of Hick's reasons for changing his mind provides some interesting insights regarding both Hick and his pluralism.

We noticed how Hick's Copernican Revolution had removed Jesus from any central place in relation to the world's religions and replaced him with an all-loving God. Hick failed to appreciate that many non-Christians would regard his appeal to an all-loving God as an insult, or even worse from Hick's standpoint, as a new kind of exclusivism. Such non-Christians saw clearly how Hick was still operating under the influence of a "narrow" Judeo-Christian type of thinking. To be all-loving, the God operating at the center of Hick's system would have to be a *personal* God. But many religious systems express believe in a non-personal Supreme Principle; others neither affirm nor deny the existence of a personal God.

Hick ascribed not only personality to his God, but also biblical attributes such as love. This created a dilemma. If the "God" of his New theocentric approach to religion were personal, then Hick would appear guilty of excluding non-personalistic views of God (pantheism). But if, by contrast, he opted for a non-personal God at the center, then he would be excluding religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam that understand God as personal. Since one of Hick's objectives was tolerance as opposed to "closed-minded Christians," it would not help his cause if Hick appeared intolerant toward anyone.

All this was embarrassing for another reason. It suggests that Hick knew in advance what he wanted his conclusions to be and was simply cutting the cloth to fit the customer. Was not Hick simply churning out his own arbitrary, *ad hoc* epicycles? He who had set himself up as the radical revolutionary rejecting such evils as exclusivism, intolerance, and epicyclic imaginings appeared to be guilty of these very sins. Clearly he had to do something.

Hick's first search for a way out of his dilemma found him arguing that God was both personal and impersonal, as though this would make his system big enough to include theists, pantheists, and everyone else he wanted. But a little reflection shows how unsatisfactory that move was. The world contains some square objects and some round objects, but it does not and cannot contain objects that are round and square at the same time. Likewise, reality might contain a personal God or an impersonal god, but it is logically impossible for God to be both personal and impersonal at the same time.

Hick's Unknowable God

In the midst of all this, Hick was also denying that humans could know God.[5] At that time, in 1973, denying the knowability of God had assumed the status of an initiatory rite into the mysteries of neo-liberal theology.[6] So it is unclear whether Hick's adoption of theological agnosticism was anything more that a less-than-thoughtful surrender to the liberal *Zeitgeist.* Eventually, however, the unknowability of God would prove to be a key step in Hick's attempt to rescue his Copernican Revolution from all kinds of difficulties.

What Hick failed to see, however, is that his affirming God's unknowability only created new problems. Here is why. Hick tells us that God is unknowable. But in making this claim, Hick reveals at least two things that he knows about God. For one thing, he knows that there is a God. Second, to claim that God is unknowable is already to know something very significant about God. If God really were unknowable, then we should be unable to know that he is unknowable.

Hick faced another difficulty. His claims about the unknowability of God have impressed a number of authors that Hick has moved towards a view of God found in certain Asian religions. Theologian C. Forrester, for example, concludes that Hick's ideas would be most acceptable to followers of the Vedanta strain of Hinduism.[7] But if this were so, Hick's early theory would have had the ironic consequence of replacing Christian exclusivism with the view of a particular Hindu sect. Thus Hick would only have replaced one alleged Ptolemaic position with one of his own. He would have rejected one version of exclusivism with what amounted to a Hickian version of exclusivism.

It seems clear that Hick's first attempt at a Copernican Revolution was a philosophical and theological disaster. Instead of his early attempt at pluralism flowing logically from a set of plausible premises, the reverse seems to have been the case. Hick started with a conclusion (Jesus is not the only Savior) and then sought premises to support it. The opponent of a Ptolemaic-type exclusivism had ensnared himself in his own version of it. The self-described enemy of theological epicycles had invented his own.

---

[5] See Hick's *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 178.

[6] For examples, see Ronald Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), chs. 1-3.

[7] C. Forrester, "Professor Hick and the Universe of Faiths," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 29 (1976): 69.

The Second Stage of Hick's Pluralism

Stage one of Hick's evolving pluralism was his move from a Christ-centered approach to religion to a God-centered model. During the 1980s Hick moved from this theocentric theory to a salvation-centered model. A necessary step in understanding these changes in Hick's thinking is to notice several points that he borrowed from the influential German philosopher Immanuel Kant who died in 1804.

Kant distinguished between the way the world appears to us (the phenomenal world) and the way the world really is (the noumenal world).[8] The so-called phenomenal world is the world as it appears to human consciousness; these appearances necessarily reflect the organizing powers of the human mind. The world that appears to us is not necessarily the way the world really is; it is more correct to think of the phenomenal world as a product of the ways our mind forces us to conceive it. All this points to another world "behind" the world of appearance; this is, for Kant, the real world or, in his terminology, the *noumenal* world.

Basic to Hick's move to a second stage of pluralism is his distinction between the phenomenal God and the noumenal God. Hick believes the distinction is justified because of the many different and sometimes conflicting ways that the real God (the noumenal God) appears to people in the different religions of the world (the phenomenal God). All of the phenomenal concepts of God we encounter in the religions of the world are misleading and inadequate. What we should be seeking is God as it, he, or she is in itself.

Hick's New Theory of the Unknown God

In Hick's second stage, he drops the word "God" from his vocabulary. The old term, he decides, is simply too loaded with Christian connotations. "God" is replaced by such words as *Reality* or the *Real* or *Ultimate Reality*.[9] This major switch in Hick's position was clearly an attempt to escape the mistakes he made in the first stage of his pluralism, which often found him operating with elements of an older, more theistic, even Christian concept of God. Consistent pluralists should not do that sort of thing.

Hick does provide an interesting example to illustrate his distinction between the many phenomenal gods that advocates of the world religions claim to know and the unknowable noumenal Reality behind or beyond

---

[8] For a more complete account of Kant's theory, see Ronald Nash, *Life's Ultimate Questions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), ch.11.

[9] See John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 158.

the phenomenal. He appeals to an old story about five blind men walking through a jungle who come across an elephant in a clearing. After each of the blind men has touched the animal, one identifies the animal as a snake (the trunk), another as a fan (an ear), another as a rope (the tail), another as a pillar (a leg), and the last as a wall (the body).[10] Similarly, each of the world's religions describes a different facet of Ultimate Reality. Each religion possesses a partial truth but the whole of the Ultimately Real (Hick's so-called noumenal God) is unknown and unknowable. Even though Hick's God is unknowable, he contends that it is plausible to believe that something Real stands behind the various religious experiences of the world's religions and that the Real is essentially the same thing experienced in different, even conflicting, ways.[11]

Hick's earlier pluralism saw him wrestling with a God who was both personal and impersonal. Hick's distinction between the phenomenal and noumenal God helped him escape the contradiction in his position of the 1970s. He made the quite different claim that the Real or Ultimate could be authentically thought of and experienced as both personal and non-personal.[12]

Christians, Jews and Muslims perceive the Real as personal, whereas believers in some other religions experience the Ultimate as impersonal. None of these experiences give us the Real as it really is. Instead, each results from the Real affecting different people within the contexts of differing religious traditions. But of course the noumenal God is still unknowable. We cannot know whether it is one or many, personal or impersonal, good or evil, or purposive and purposeless. Given all this, we really cannot know whether the noumenal god might turn out to be the evil deities of Jim Jones or David Koresh, two religions that Hick eliminates from the list of plausible religions. Indeed, we cannot even eliminate the possibility that Hick's noumenal God might turn out to be Satan. Hick is really claiming that a large number of conflicting experiences, all of an unknown God whom we should not even call "God," are somehow supposed to bring us closer to a more accurate understanding of that which is essentially unknowable.

Hick insists that no predicates can be applied to the Real. This means that we cannot say that God is loving or all-knowing or all-powerful or holy or a spirit or a person. Is it not natural, then, to suppose that Hick's words for God have no significant content? Once we have unpacked the

---

[10] I sometimes tell students that we should be thankful there were only five blind men. What other parts of the elephant might have been discovered by additional blind men?

[11] Hick, *Disputed Questions*, 178.

[12] See John Hick, "The Theology of Pluralism," *Theology* 86 (1983): 337.

ramifications of Hick's radical theological skepticism, why should we not hold instead, as philosopher David Basinger says, "that there is no higher Reality beyond us and thus all religious claims are false . . . or why not adopt the exclusivistic contention that the religious claims of only one perspective are true?"[13] When you begin by stating that point *A* in your system is the recognition that humans cannot know anything about God, how can you rationally get from point *A* to point *B*—or anywhere, for that matter?

More Detail on Hick's View of Salvation

As we have seen, Hick first abandoned a Christocentric view of religion for one that was God-centered. When that failed, he turned to a salvation-centered view of religion. But once a person identifies salvation as the ultimate test of a genuine religion, everything begins to turn on how "salvation" is defined. Consider the options:

If salvation is the attainment of illumination, then Buddhism can save.

If salvation is union with a Universal self, then Hinduism can save.

If salvation is forgiveness and justification, then Christianity can save.

But if salvation is defined as overthrowing an oppressor class and establishing a classless society, when can't we say that communism can save as well? Did not those systems that practiced child-sacrifice or mutilation or cannibalism also offer what they thought was salvation? Did not Jim Jones offer his followers salvation, even if it came in the form of kool-aid laced with arsenic? Is not Hick's appeal to salvation/liberation/ultimate fulfillment so vague and general that he ends up offering a kind of religious supermarket with countless paths to salvation? Of course, Hick tries to avoid this kind of chaos by insisting that all legitimate forms of salvation exhibit one common trait, namely, a movement from a state of self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness. But how does Hick arrive at this particular concept of salvation? Hick's propensity to oversimplify becomes apparent once we remember that the world's religions not only understand the Ultimate differently (for some of these religions, there is no Ultimate), but also differ in their understanding of the basic human predicament and the means by which humans are delivered (saved) from this predicament. As much as he might like to try, Hick cannot escape the pivotal question of truth.

---

[13] David Basinger, "Hick's Religious Pluralism and 'Reformed Epistemology': A Middle Ground," *Faith and Philosophy* 5 (1988): 422.

Pluralism and the Question of Truth

Biblically faithful Christians believe that the proposition "Jesus Christ is God Incarnate" is true. Muslims believe that the proposition "Jesus Christ is not God Incarnate" is true. According to John Hick's pluralism, these two propositions should not be viewed as contradictory. Hick tries to justify this by denying that apparently conflicting truth-claims within the religions of the world really are truth-claims.

Hick believes that religious "truth" differs considerably from the kind of truth we encounter in everyday life. Instead of being a property of propositions, religious truth is *personal*; it is the kind of truth that transforms and changes a person's life. Pluralists like Hick consider it misleading to talk about the supposed truth of Christ's resurrection as though this were merely an event in the objective world of history.[14] Christ's supposed resurrection only becomes true insofar as it transforms individual people. Hence, no religion is true in the objective or propositional sense. But all religions are true subjectively! And of course, this personal, subjective view of religious truth ends up implying that the same religious claim (proposition) can be true for me and false for you. It also implies that a religious proposition that was false for me yesterday can *become* true tomorrow.

Hick transforms religious doctrines into myths or pictures that help direct humans toward the infinite, unknowable, divine reality.[15] Hick's reduction of religious beliefs and doctrines to myth is totally foreign to the way most religious believers understand their faiths.

What Should Non-Christians Think
of Hick's Theory of Religious Truth?

In almost everything he writes about pluralism, John Hick leaves the impression that the people he most hopes will accept his views are the stubborn Christian exclusivists of the world. He leaves little doubt that he regards this Christian recalcitrance as a product of ignorance, prejudice, intolerance, and no small amount of cultural conditioning—all defects that Hick himself presumes to be free of. It is important to recognize that many non-Christians have their own good reasons to reject Hick's work. This is certainly the case with Hick's handling of the issue of propositional truth in other religions.

It defies common sense to suppose that the people who utter all the competing claims we find in the major religions believe they doing anything other than truly describing the nature of reality. Not only are the

---

[14] See Ronald Nash, *Christian Faith and Historical Understanding* (Lima, Ohio: Academic Renewal Press, 2002). Chs. 3-4.

[15] See Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, 178-79.

things they say apparent truth-claims to our minds, the people who utter them understand them to be truth-claims. Basic to Hick's approach to the world religions is the conviction that regardless of what the followers of these religions think they are doing, pluralists know better. This is hardly convincing as a foundation for interreligious tolerance.

It simply will not do to downplay, ignore, or minimize the serious and very real differences among the world religions. The major religions conflict at the level of essential doctrine. The pluralist claim that doctrinal disputes are irrelevant because they have little or nothing to do with propositional truth flies in the face of the evidence. Most religions insist that correct believing is a necessary condition for salvation. This is certainly true in the case of Christianity (Acts 16:31 and John 3:16). Parallels to this can be found in non-Christian religions.[16] According to William Christian, attempts to play down the major disagreements among the world's religions by suggesting that they all teach pretty much the same thing "seem very implausible, and certainly much current talk in the aid of these views is loose and sentimental."[17]

It is hard to deny that the world's major religions contain some false teaching. Naturally, Muslim or Buddhist exclusivists will think the errors are to be found in systems other than their own. Moreover, the millions of non-Christians in the world will not be satisfied with the distortions that pluralists like Hick introduce into their beliefs.

Hick's View of Jesus Christ

Hick acknowledges that if the orthodox Christian understanding of Jesus Christ is correct, then pluralism must be false.[18] If Jesus really is God Incarnate, then he must be the only Savior. Hick must do everything possible to attack the historic Christian beliefs about the person and work of Christ. He must use every weapon at his disposal to deny such Christian doctrines as the deity of Christ, the Incarnation, and the Trinity. Astute readers of Hick's efforts in this matter will realize that he provides little or no argumentation for his positions. What Hick presents is for the most part pure speculation or mere dogmatism.

Hick's major moves to denigrate the divine personhood of Jesus and his work of salvation include the following. First, he simply asserts that the biblical picture of Jesus is only a myth. Second, he claims that Jesus never claimed to be God. Third, he offers an explanation for how, over a long period of time, the early Christians turned the human Jesus into

---

[16] See Netland, *Dissonant Voices,* 232.

[17] William A. Christian, *Oppositions of Religious Doctrines: A Study in the Logic of Dialogue Among Religions* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 5.

[18] See Hick's "Jesus and the World Religions," in *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick (London: SCM, 1977), 180.

God. Fourth, he then denies the uniqueness of Jesus and the Christian faith. Fifth, as part of this essentially unitarian position, he attacks the dependability of the New Testament. Hick's initial thunder and lightning about the Incarnation turns out to be no more than a series of dogmatic assertions grounded on badly outdated New Testament scholarship. Separated from any relevant arguments that might function as a ground for his claims, his assertions reveal much about Hick's present state of thinking but mount no serious challenge to the Christology of the historic church. For more detail on these and other matters concerning the deity of Christ, the reader should consult chapter five of my book, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*

The Issue of Alleged Intolerance

Pluralists and many of their allies often accuse exclusivism of being immoral. Christian exclusivists are said to be guilty of intolerance for holding that religious beliefs that are logically incompatible with what Christians believe must be false. Of course, pluralists seem to forget that the same kind of intolerance must then be attributed to Jewish, Muslim and Hindu exclusivists. In addition to alleged Christian intolerance, any number of other moral failings including elitism, arrogance, spiritual pride, imperialism, triumphalism, and arbitrariness can be found in the same neighborhood.[19]

While I have met a few exclusivists who exhibited moral failings like those mentioned, I have no reason to think that these attitudes were a direct consequence of their exclusivism. Many people are mean and nasty in expressing their ideas, including lots of non-exclusivists. That I do not believe all the things you believe hardly makes me guilty of intolerance. If disagreeing entails an explicit or implicit condemnation of certain beliefs, then by implication the dissenter displays the attitude and conviction that his or her beliefs are superior to mine. However, we should note, Hick himself dissents from the beliefs held by exclusivists. So the criticism cuts both ways. Hick falls prey to the same moral failings he attributes to exclusivists.

Some people hold that any difference of opinion implies rejection of the person. Paul Griffiths and Delmas Lewis suggest that pluralists seem "to believe that you can only be nice to people if you agree with them. This seems clearly false. It is both logically and practically possible for us, as Christians, to respect and revere worthy representatives of other traditions while still believing—on rational grounds—that some aspects

---

[19] See John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), viii.

of their world-view are simply mistaken."[20] Person A might like, respect, and trust person B even though B believes some clearly false propositions. So it is clear disagreeing with other people is not necessary immoral in some way.

It is helpful to distinguish between two kinds of tolerance. Moral tolerance is total acceptance of the other person as a human being who has a right to be treated with dignity and respect, even though he or she holds beliefs quite different from mine. The opposite of this is moral intolerance. All sorts of people may be guilty of moral intolerance; some may be exclusivists, but there is no necessary link between the two.

A different kind of tolerance appears when I am forbidden to judge or criticize the beliefs of anyone who disagrees with me. This second, unlabeled kind of tolerance insists that it is wrong, always and everywhere, to disagree with anyone who disagrees with me. Although some may choose to treat this position as a form of tolerance, thereby endowing it with an aura of saintliness, it is in fact a type of intellectual suicide. While Hick advances his cause by confusing these two kinds of tolerance and intolerance, he himself does not hesitate to disagree with anyone who disagrees with his pluralism. Yet it is the second type of intolerance—the kind that Hick himself practices—that is part and parcel of the moral attacks Hick and other pluralists make on exclusivists.

What about attempts to convert non-Christians to Christianity—is not that a display of intolerance? While evangelizing and proselytizing are sometimes carried out in an unworthy manner, I fail to see how any respectful attempt to persuade another person to change his or her beliefs can be an instance of intolerance.

Nor does exclusivism obligate Christians to believe that everything taught by a non-Christian religion must be false. Christian exclusivists can recognize truthful concepts in other religions as well as valuable psychological and moral insights. Exclusivism need not entail narrow-mindedness, arrogance, insensitivity, or self-righteousness. Upon closer examination, the moral attack on exclusivism appears shallow, unsound, hypocritical, and peevish and should be turned back upon the people who raise it. To assault people in such a personal way without justification is itself a moral failing.

Geographic and Cultural Conditioning

One of Hick's earliest grounds for rejecting exclusivism is its alleged indifference to what he regards as the role of geographic and cultural conditioning in determining religious beliefs. No one should be surprised

---

[20] Paul Griffiths and Delmas Lewis, "On Grading Religions, Seeing Truth, and Being Nice to People—a Reply to Professor Hick," *Religious Studies* 19 (1983): 77.

to find that people born in New Delhi, India, become Hindus any more than that someone born in Cisco, Texas, becomes a Baptist.

How this information is relevant to adjudging the truth or falsity of the Christian faith is unclear. Consider some of the dubious implications of Hick's position. Hick's view that truth is a function of geography and cultural conditioning, that is, where people happen to be born has some absurd consequences. This idea, carried to its logical implications, would make Nazism, cannibalism, infanticide, and witchcraft true because they could all be a result of geographic and cultural conditioning. Hick's position also implies that beliefs can be true and false at the same time, true for people conditioned in one way and false for others. Furthermore, it reminds us that the supposed truth of pluralism is also a function of geographic and cultural conditioning.

Roger Trigg notes, "Hick's argument, so far from encouraging us to give equal respect to all world religions, makes us wonder whether religion is any more valid than atheism,"[21] which also would be a function of geographic and cultural conditioning. Trigg finds it ironic that when Hick uses this appeal to encourage greater agreement between Christians and non-Christians, he "can only proceed by emptying the claims of either or both, of all real content."[22]

The biggest dilemma for Hick's contentions, however, is that he himself, born under cultural conditions that might be expected to produce a Christian, was converted to his present non-Christian, quasi-Eastern religious variety of pluralism.

Exclusivism, Pluralism, and the Love of "God"

We need to say something further about Hick's argument that Christian exclusivism is inconsistent with any adequate notion of divine love. Hick has specifically in mind the Christian doctrine of hell. Surely an all-loving God would save non-Christians.

It is difficult to see how this argument fits with Hick's commitment to religious skepticism. We have noted that Hick feels strongly that God is unknown and unknowable. God is so unknowable, in fact, that the divine being should not even be called "God" any more. To abandon this skepticism would create serious problems for Hick's whole system of thought. So if Hick, the religious skeptic par excellence, insists on raising this charge, he can only do so on pain of contradicting himself.

But perhaps Hick's argument is merely hypothetical. Perhaps he intends to say that because Christians insist that God is love, their belief

---

[21] Roger Trigg, "Religion and the Threat of Relativism," *Religious Studies* 19 (1983): 298.

[22] Ibid.

in divine love is incompatible with their horrible assertions of eternal judgment. Fair enough, but then we Christians must also point out that the Scriptures and Christian doctrine clearly teach that God has attributes other than love. He is also holy, an attribute that points to both the unqualified purity of his nature and also his holy hatred of sin. God's holy hatred of sin is analogous to the hatred a mother feels upon seeing a poisonous serpent about to strike a young child. Never once in his pluralist writings do I recall John Hick's mentioning the holiness of God. And the reason should be obvious: Universalists have no place in their theology for divine holiness.

The love of God that is such a matter of sentimental reverence for universalists is actually a holy love. It is a love that will not and cannot ignore human sin—hence the cross of Christ (John 3:16). Nor can God's attributes be treated adequately without reference to God's holy justice. The major question that concerns Paul in his letter to the Romans is, "How can God be just and be the justifier of sinful men and women?" In universalist and pluralist systems, this question has absolutely no standing. But it is a fundamental matter of Christian belief. A God who possesses the attributes of holy love and holy justice cannot pretend that sinners have not sinned. The punishment for sin is death. And so either sinners are punished for their own sins or else God takes their punishment upon himself. This truth is the heart of Christian belief.

Hick's Hidden Religious Agenda

John Hick still describes himself as a "Christian" in the loose, essentially content-less sense that the term holds for many people today. Yet I mean no ill will when I say that Hick is not a Christian in any historical, traditional, or biblical sense of the word. This is not being unkind; it is only being accurate.

But more attention needs to be given to the extremely vague contours of the religious system Hick is recommending. Some observers of Hick's recent work have noted how closely his basic ideas resemble certain Eastern ways of talking about Ultimate Reality. In my book about Hick, I highlight Hick's advocacy of Eastern religious thought with Hick's own comparison of Buddhist *sunyata* to the Real.[23] Because of Hick's shaky "Christianity," philosopher Doug Geivett feels that more attention should be given to the impact of Hick's pluralism on people who have doubts about their own religious heritage. As Geivett writes, "It would seem that many religious believers could only accept the pluralistic hypothesis at the cost of drastically reconceiving the nature of their own particular

---

[23] See Ronald Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior?*, ch. 2.

faith tradition. This, of course, is precisely what John Hick has done himself."[24]

One of my purposes has been to reveal the high price that must be paid by any evangelical Protestant or traditional Roman Catholic who may feel attracted to pluralism or who, at least, feels moved by some of its claims. Any Christians who would become pluralists must cease being Christians. They must also, for that matter, commit themselves to what amounts to a version of a non-Christian faith. But the same price must be paid by Jewish and Muslim believers who might feel attracted to pluralism. While pluralism's natural home is a small set of off-shoots of the larger Eastern religions, the majority of devotees will find that movement toward pluralism will require them also to reject major distortions of their faith.

Conclusion

John Hick has a prominent standing among those who teach and write about the major world religions. He also speaks as a self-professed "Christian" intellectual. This explains why many people's ideas about Christianity and the world religions are being filtered through the grid of Hick's theories. Hick's approach to Christianity and religion is presented to many college and seminary students as brilliant, compassionate, and tolerant. For this reason, Hick's ideas are having a far greater influence than they deserve. One hopes that Hick's views will be examined ever more carefully and that the unstable foundations of his theory will lead to a more realistic and justly negative evaluation of his claims. Pluralism is hardly an intellectually responsible place to find an alternative to the Christian faith.

---

[24] Doug Geivett, "John Hick's Approach to Religious Pluralism," *Proceedings of the Wheaton College Theology Conference* (1993), vol. 1, *The Challenge of Religious Pluralism: An Evangelical Analysis and Response,* 50.

Congenial Pluralism: Why It Does Not Work

Winfried Corduan
Professor of Philosophy and Religion
Taylor University
Upland, IN 46989

Introduction

In the dominant paradigm for understanding the relationship of religions to each other, there are three options:[1] exclusivism—the idea that one religion is true whereas all others are false, inclusivism—the doctrine that all religions are true because they are all ultimately all expressions of the one true religion, and pluralism—the belief that all religions are true in their own right. As we shall see below, this tripartite division is subject to critique in two directions: whether it actually corresponds to reality in its broad outline and whether it needs more refinement in its subdivisions in order to be fair. I would like to propose that pluralism really comes in two forms, the aggressive and the congenial. Congenial pluralism, as I will describe it, in important ways seeks to overcome the manifest problems of aggressive pluralism. Nevertheless, I intend to show that the congenial form, like the aggressive one, still suffers from serious defects.[2]

Aggressive Pluralism: Inclusivism Not So Thinly Disguised

Let me give a brief description of what I call "aggressive pluralism." In essence, this is a view that superficially claims that all religions have equal validity in their own right. However, there is a hitch to this apparently generous interpretation because religions have to earn the right to their validity. They have to abdicate the privilege of having their actual beliefs and practices taken at face value in favor of a higher order of interpretation by participation in which they actually derive their truth. In other words, they are true only insofar as they actually manifest a specific theoretical scheme that supposedly validates all religions. And,

---

[1] The innovation of these three categories is widely attributed to Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1982).

[2] This paper continues some of the thoughts in my book, *A Tapestry of Faiths: The Common Threads Between Christianity and World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002). What I am calling "congenial" pluralism in this paper, I called "bashful" in that book.

unsurprisingly, among leading advocates of this view this scheme has been some concept that has been devised by Western scholarship. The adherents of the religions themselves would presumably be totally shocked at the idea that this scheme is what they really believe; one could not plausibly imagine that they would want to embrace the scheme that some Western scholars have conspired to impose on them.

The two most celebrated defenders of this form of pluralism in the twentieth century may have been John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. Hick contends that all (post-axial age) religions have the objective of putting their adherents in contact with "the Real" and thus transform people from being self-centered to Reality-centered. Even though it would appear that different religions maintain mutually exclusive beliefs, in truth, we need to look past those conceptual and verbal differences in order to recognize that beyond all the concepts and words there lurks the Real. Evangelical Christians have rightly focused their criticisms of Hick on the fact that, despite his claim that all religions are true, he *ipso facto* rules out any religion that makes exclusive truth claims unless it first of all abandons those claims and accommodates itself to his scheme. But, perhaps even more importantly, a religion that professes a little more open-mindedness, say Vedantic Hinduism, would be just as much in trouble because according to Hick nobody actually believes what they think they believe. They all believe what Hick believes; they just don't know it.[3]

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, though getting at the matter from a slightly different vantage point, is just as imperialistic in his revision of other religions in order to absorb them into his supposedly pluralistic interpretation. Again there are profuse declarations of an all-embracing acceptance. The right hand of pluralistic fellowship is extended to everyone; no one should be compelled to submit to the truth dictates of any other religion. Smith avows, "No observer's statement about a group of persons is valid that cannot be appropriated by those persons."[4] What statement could express a pluralistic attitude better than such a slogan!

Nevertheless, this is all smoke and mirrors. Smith does not actually apply this statement to the outward forms and beliefs of a religion. He applies it only to the underlying "faith" that religious human beings supposedly manifest. When a Muslim declares that the Qur'an is the ultimate revelation from God, when a Hindu finds *darshan* in *puja* to Shiva, or when a Christian claims that he is saved by faith in Christ, none

---

[3] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Salvation," in Philip L. Quinn and Kevin Meeker, eds., *The Philosophical Challenges of Religious Diversity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54-66.

[4] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Toward a World Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981), 97.

of those confessions are literally true. In fact, Smith considers it a grievous fault to claim truth for your specific religion. The real meaning behind the particular historic or dogmatic expressions of a religion is that of a generic, existential "faith," stripped of all tangible reality. Thus, for Smith just as much as for Hick, a pluralistic acceptance of all religions in fact demands that the religions must first give up their individual expressions of truth and meaning and adopt a Western scholar's concept that they, themselves, would never recognize as being a part of their religion.

So we see that aggressive pluralism is really only a higher-order inclusivism. Just as what we have usually come to call an inclusivist position absorbs all other religions into one specific religion's beliefs,[5] so these so-called pluralistic positions actually do the same thing. They frog-march all religions into their single fortified camp and proceed to strip them of their all their specific claims.[6] Some pluralism.

A Bashful Congenial Pluralism—William Alston

What I am calling "congenial pluralism" actually seems to have more coherence at first glance. I am calling it congenial because, unlike its more aggressive cousin, it does not try to usurp other religions into one overarching scheme and seeks to make statements that can be accepted by members of all religions. Still, when we are done looking at two examples we will see that serious problems still persist.

One advocate of "congenial pluralism" is William P. Alston,[7] who presents us with a "bashful" pluralism insofar as it retreats behind an

---

[5] Perhaps the most celebrated version being Karl Rahner's idea of the "anonymous Christian." Karl Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*, 16 vols. (Einsiedeln: Denziger, 1965), 5:183-221.

[6] For example, Philip L. Quinn, "Towards Thinner Theologies: Hick and Alston on Religious Diversity" in Quinn and Meeker, *Philosophical Challenge*, 234. Quinn makes the following observation: "Of course this strategy will not yield interpretations of religion that would be acceptable to most current members of the great religious traditions. But those traditions have undergone development in the past, and no doubt they will continue to change in the future. Hence it is worth asking whether the belief systems of the great religious traditions ought to be altered to bring them into conformity with the truth of the matter as it is understood by some refined pluralistic hypothesis. Would it be rational for members of such a tradition to endeavor to changes its belief system in the direction of such conformity?" And again: "Hence I think it would be rational for a knowledgeable and reflective Christian to revise [Christian mystical practice] from within in ways that are designed to bring it into line with a Kantian understanding of Christian belief of the sort expressed by some refined pluralistic hypothesis and to try to get [Christian mystical practice] thus revised socially established." Ibid., 242.

[7] William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), 255-85; and "Religious Diversity and Perceptual Knowledge of God," in *Philosophical Challenge*, 193-207.

exclusivist position when pushed too far. His argument, in brief, runs like this: Both Christians, who are basing their beliefs on a mystical experience of God, and adherents of different religions, who are basing their beliefs on some other experience, are justified in holding those beliefs. Even though there is no way of adjudicating between the different belief systems since they are each coherent and productive, Christians are entitled to maintain the exclusive truth of their beliefs. However, as things stand, persons of another religion are also entitled to the truth of their beliefs since their system is coherent and productive as well.

This is a position that theoretically could earn plaudits from everyone. It respects the integrity of each religious adherent's experience; it allows the Christian to claim exclusive truth for his beliefs; and it grants the same courtesy to all other religious believers who wish to apply for it.[8] Thus, Alston, holding firmly to the truth of Christianity, will also make room for the hypothetical truth of other belief systems by the lights of his analysis.[9]

Unfortunately, the opposite is true, and Alston leaves us with a pluralism that leaves everyone dissatisfied. A pluralist or someone holding to another religion cannot be comfortable with the fact that Alston has just granted the Christian the right to consider his religion to be exclusively true. Unfortunately, the Christian cannot be comfortable either because Alston has just informed him that, even though he can consider his beliefs to be exclusively true, he may have to share that honor with some other religion as well. It would seem that the two concepts of exclusivism and pluralism are themselves mutually exclusive and cannot be accommodated to each other, not even on a hypothetical basis. Just as I cannot even hypothetically consider a square circle, I cannot hypothetically consider two religions being exclusively true.

A Generous Congenial Pluralism—S. Mark Heim

Much interest has been generated of late by the ingenious proposals put forth by S. Mark Heim. Heim has taken a number of ideas that have been floating around in the conversation on pluralism and has brought them together in an attempt to devise a truly pluralistic theory. His proposal comes under the heading of "congenial," not because it is not thoroughly

---

[8]Alston, "Religious Diversity," in *Philosophical Challenge*, 204.

[9]As numerous commentators have recognized, Alston is somewhat ambivalent on this point. Since he is a philosopher who has contributed widely to the greater acceptance of Christianity in the philosophical world and has not been ashamed to let his philosophy be recognizably Christian, I want to emphasize that Alston leaves us here with an unfilled epistemological hole and not an attempt to short-sheet Christian beliefs in the way in which Hick does. Nevertheless, the hole *is* significant.

and assertively pluralistic, but because Heim deliberately avoids making the kinds of dogmatic statements that characterize Hick's and Smith's positions.

In fact, Heim's own critique of Hick and Smith is thorough.[10] Because he wants to advocate a truly pluralistic position, he shows extensively how much the so-called leading advocates of pluralism have actually compromised their pluralistic avowals. He quotes with approval Raimundo Pannikar's contention that "a pluralistic system is a contradiction in terms."[11] Whenever someone tries to justify pluralism with an over-arching scheme of their devising, their pluralism is not so pluralistic any longer. Heim asserts,

> Pluralistic theologies require conversion of all faiths not to any form of Christianity, but to the cultural structures of plausibility against which modern Western Christianity has been defined. The fullness of religions truth . . . is in fact only available to those sufficiently drawn into the modernized international economic and political system to have access to the revelatory conditions of pluralism and their proper interpretation.[12]

Instead, Heim proposes that in order to have a true pluralism, it is necessary to accept the truth claims of all religions on their own terms. If I say that Hinduism is right in its belief that moksha brings about the release of a soul from samsara (reincarnation), but do so only because this belief lines up with some other belief foreign to Hinduism, then I am not really accepting the correctness of the Hindu belief at all. I am simply making the Hindu state my own beliefs in different terms. In a delightful bit of imagery, Heim likens such attempts to "a face photographed inside a boardwalk cutout."[13] In order to be authentically pluralistic I have to say that Hinduism is right in its belief that moksha brings about the release of a soul from samsara. Period. To quote Heim,

---

[10] S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 13-126. Heim has developed his thesis further in *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001). Similar approaches appear in Joseph DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1992) and Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001). Though he apparently is not aware of his writings, Dupuis in significant ways echoes the earlier work by Richard Viladesau, *Answering for Faith: Christ and the Human Search for Salvation* (New York: Paulist Press, 1987).

[11] Raimundo Pannikar, "The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges: Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness" in John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 110.

[12] Heim, *Salvations*, 103-04.

[13] Ibid., 110.

I suggest that Christians can consistently recognize that some traditions encompass religious ends which are real states of human transformation, distinct from that Christians seek. There are paths in varying religious traditions which if consistently followed prove effective in bringing adherents to alternative fulfillments. The crucial question among the faith is *not* "Which one saves?" but "What counts as salvation?"[14]

Similarly then, the genuinely pluralistic person must affirm that the Pure Land Buddhist will actually be admitted to the Western Paradise of Amida when he dies, the Theravada Buddhist will attain nirvana, and the Christian will go to heaven. These expressions are not just code words for one and the same reality, a code that the contemporary scholar with his superior training has finally learned to break. Hindus, Buddhists of differing schools, or Christians do not, unbeknownst to them, all partake of the same reality. There are different realities in which each of these people participates, and there is no *a priori* way of establishing that one of them is dominant to the others.

Heim is calling for a genuine "pluralism of ends." He claims that "the key to such a hypothesis is the willingness to consider more than one realizable religious aim."[15] Previous pluralisms, as we have shown, have essentially been not-so-thinly disguised forms of inclusivism, and at the heart of inclusivism is the notion that all religions, despite their clearly distinct and frequently mutually exclusive methods of attaining salvation, actually lead to the same goal. To quote some celebrity spokespersons for this cause, Mahatma Gandhi declared,

> Religions are different roads converging to the same point. What does it matter if we take different roads so long as we reach the same goal? Where is the cause for quarreling?[16]

And his contemporary replicant, the Dalai Lama, declares,

> I believe all religions pursue the same goals, that [sic] of cultivating human goodness and bringing happiness to all human beings. Though the means may appear different, the ends are the same.[17]

---

[14] Ibid., 160. (Italics his).

[15] Ibid., 130.

[16] M. K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1938), 36; quoted in Heim, *Salvations*, 130.

[17] Excerpt from Tenzen Gyatso, "Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech." URL: http://magna.com.au/~prfbrown/peace_dl.html. But note that in less public circumstances, the Dalai Lama has a very different message: "Liberation in which 'a mind that understands the sphere of reality annihilates all defilements in the sphere of reality' is a state that only Buddhists can accomplish. This kind of moksha or nirvana is only explained in the Buddhist scriptures, and is achieved only through Buddhist practices."

But Heim shows that this kind of pluralism is disingenuous because it does not truly allow for a religion to be appraised within its own context. Instead, he calls for not just a plurality of methods towards attaining salvation, but a plurality of salvations as well. An honest appraisal of other religions demonstrates that Christians and Hindus and Muslims and anyone else, do not mean the same thing when they talk about whatever corresponds to "salvation" in their systems. Rather than finding some artificial common denominator, we should recognize that each of these goals as well as the paths that are supposed to lead to them have integrity in their own right.

Philosophically, Heim bases his contention on a position devised by Nicholas Rescher, dubbed "orientational pluralism."[18] This concept combines two crucial insights: On the one hand, every person considers their beliefs as true or at least superior to those that differ from them. This would appear to be an undeniable fact, and we should not try to impute an inclusive view on people when they so obviously do not hold it. "I am right, and if you disagree with me, then you are wrong." What could be more basic to human belief structures? But on the other hand, as a philosopher, I recognize that my I may be living on the edge in terms of which beliefs I can actually justify with full confidence. Clearly, I have to reckon with my finitude and concede that another person may have just as valid a set of reasons for his beliefs as I have for mine. So, for the time being, I may have to concede that the other person is just as entitled to his beliefs as I am to mine. Nevertheless, (on a third hand, if you will), if I try to explain how it is that another person can hold to views that differ from mine, I will try to do so from the vantage point of my system. That is to say, I invoke my system to show why the other person is wrong. "In the end," Heim concedes, "we are all inclusivists."[19]

But it is what happens in the meantime that is of interest here. To put it simply, the Christian has no choice but to live in his own world. He must speak from his vantage point, in the light of which his beliefs are right and those of others are false. However, recognizing his epistemological limitations, the Christian also allows for the fact that some other believer, a Hindu, say, lives within his own world and that the Hindu must judge the Christian's beliefs by the lights of his Hinduism. Furthermore, there is no way to bridge the gap between the two without introducing artificial external categories. And thus, the Christian, without compromising reality as he knows it, will also

---

"The Bodhgaya Interviews" in Paul Griffiths, ed. *Christianity through Non-Christian Eyes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 160.

[18] Nicholas Rescher, *The Strife of Systems* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1985).

[19] Heim, *Salvations*, 138.

acknowledge the validity of reality as the Hindu knows it. Heim avers that,

> the hypothesis of multiple religious ends "relativizes" each faith path in a rather different way. It affirms that more than one may be truthful in their account of themselves, and that these truths are distinct. That is, it relativizes the religions precisely by actual relation to each other.[20]

This is a pluralism that, at least on the surface, makes sense. It truly allows the Hindu to be Hindu and the Christian to be Christian, and so on with any adherent of any religion. To be sure, we have to recognize an unavoidable tension in this approach insofar as the Christian must at the same time recognize the validity of others' beliefs while holding firmly to his own. But Heim considers this tension not a detriment but a virtue because it emphasizes the nature of faith. "The alternative perspective I am suggesting would acknowledge frankly the venturesome dimension of religious faiths."[21]

Finally Heim, now speaking from within his own system as a Christian, believes that his view is compatible with Christian theology because it grows out of the doctrine of the Trinity. He says,

> The possibility of a more thoroughgoing diversity in the future of humanity is in some measure authorized by the trinitarian vision of God and a notion of divine plenitude.[22]

Heim believes that a correct understanding of the Trinity will not only permit the pluralism he seeks to endorse, it will actually mandate it.

The Trinity, Heim tells us, exemplifies the epitome of "communion-in-personal-difference."[23] In fact, it is the difference that makes the communion possible, and this applies to the communion between the three persons of the Trinity as well as to the relationship between God and human beings.

> Because God's own nature is a communion-nature (Trinity) and human nature is a reflection of this (we are persons only in relation) the two can meet at a point of extraordinary similarity. In the divine-human communion that is salvation, the *difference* between humanity and God is not the primary obstacle to religious fulfillment, but a necessary

---

[20] Ibid., 146.
[21] Ibid., 125.
[22] Ibid., 163.
[23] Heim, *Depth*, 126.

prerequisite to the deepest relation with God, one that recapitulates God's own mode of relation.[24]

Thus, "in claiming communion with the triune God as their religious end, Christians make Trinity central to their understanding of religious diversity."[25] The Trinity teaches us that diversity is what makes communion possible.

Now, both for the sake of guarding against a purely abstract understanding of the Trinity and of embracing the reality that actually does make such a communion-in-identity possible, Heim emphasizes that he is referring to the Trinity as expounded in Christian theology. He insists that he is "speaking of the reality of God as presented in the doctrine of the Christian church, which presupposes the incarnation of the Word as crucial revelation and act of God."[26] For Heim, the incarnation is a further aspect of the trinitarian doctrine that supports his scheme. The Trinity is not just a belief, but it is a fact of being. It is not just expressed in words and thoughts, but in reality.

Consequently, the Trinity as manifest through the incarnation becomes the template from which we can understand the relationships between religions. "The Trinity is Christianity's 'pluralistic theology.'"[27] By looking at the fact that the very nature of God exemplifies diversity and that this God became incarnate in Christ, we realize that it is impossible for us to draw lines as to what "fits" into our understanding of God and salvation.

> The Trinity teaches us that Jesus Christ cannot be an exhaustive or exclusive source for knowledge of God nor the exhaustive and exclusive act of God to save us.[28]

And thus, Heim concludes that the Christian's foundational beliefs are not only not opposed to a genuine pluralism, they do not even need to be accommodated to a genuine pluralism, because by themselves they demand a genuine pluralism.

---

[24] Ibid., 126.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 130-31. Note his earlier dismissive comments on "cheap" (my word) trinitarian approaches. "By 'Trinity' I do not mean to refer to a generic and symbolic scheme of abstract threeness. With such a minimalist pattern, one can run merrily through the religions gathering 'trinities,' from the *Brahma-Shiva-Vishnu* triumvirate of Hinuism to the *trikay* or "three bodies' doctrine of Buddhism." Ibid., 130.

[27] Ibid., 133.

[28] Ibid., 134.

Responses

Heim's proposal is intelligent, sensitive, and—perhaps above all—rooted in some sound common sense. For anyone who has for years felt himself shouted down by Hick, Smith, and other aggressive pluralists, Heim infuses some much-needed fresh air into the discussion.[29] He attempts at one and the same time to allow each religious tradition all the integrity it asks for while clinging tightly to his own Christian convictions, as demonstrated in his Trinitarianism. Thus, I offer the following critical responses with the underlying assumption that Heim's conclusions represent the best effort to date at establishing a pluralistic theology.

1. As a steadfast exclusivist, I always ask myself when reading any writers advocating inclusivism or pluralism why we should even go in the direction of their views. Why not simply accept an exclusive view rather than go to the extreme lengths that many writers seem to pursue in order to promote their pluralistic schemes? Paradoxically, most of the time, despite the enormous amount of work that they have put into their systems, the answer to the question of why even establish such a system to begin with, tends to be extremely thin. As often as not, it is either *ad hominem*, impugning the integrity of those who are unwilling to get on their train,[30] or it simply comes down to an appeal to virtual self-evidence. Given the state of the religious world today, we just should abandon exclusivism for one of the other alternatives.[31] No further reason should be necessary.

---

[29] Perhaps needless to say, these comments are made in response to the discussion outside of the evangelical circle. I am responding positively to what a non-evangelical is saying. It seems to me that an evangelical position forecloses the possibilities that Heim proposes *a priori*.

[30] Such as, on a personal level, Clark H. Pinnock's accusation of Millard Erickson for seeming to "want to ensure that there is as little Good News as possible." Clark H. Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1992), 163. Or, on a wider level, John Hick believes that there is a "realization that Christian absolutism, in collaboration with acquisitive and violent human nature, has done much to poison the relationships between the Christian minority and the non-Christian majority of the world's population by sanctifying exploitation and oppression on a gigantic scale." "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," in Hick and Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 17.

[31] This seems to me to be the underlying assumption of Jacques Dupuis in *Toward a Christian Theology of Pluralism.* He says things like "The 1970's marked the beginning of a new quest, arising worldwide from the situation created by the ever-increasing interaction between people of different religious faiths" (Ibid., 3), and he argues again and again that we must respect the integrity of other religions and not write them off as false, but he never really provides a cogent answer of how a situation of plurality necessitates a pluralistic theology. He takes one particular writer to task for espousing exclusivism within Catholic theology by stating that he manifests a "hardened position" in which he "lacks the openness and sympathy toward the other religious traditions which alone make it possible to recognize in them the action of God and the presence of God's

When it comes to writers like Heim who are genuinely attempting to do justice to the plurality of the world of religions, this question becomes particularly fascinating. Heim, for one, recognizes that an individual believer will normally see his or her religion in exclusivist terms. He recognizes that "it would seem that religious traditions are simply, descriptively exclusivist."[32] That being the case, there ought to be powerfully compelling reasons to abandon an *a priori* exclusivism in favor of even as benign a pluralism as he is advocating.

Just to clarify this question a little more, I am not asking here whether his solution is plausible or biblical or whether there are good reasons to accept his solution over all others. The question is whether there even is a problem crying out for a solution. Why must we even look beyond the surface exclusivism of religious traditions to find a further scheme that violates this basic notion?

As it turns out, Heim's answer to this fundamental question is not any more helpful than any others. He does a solid job of showing that Hick, Smith, and others are not as pluralistic as they claim, and that his theory is definitely more pluralistic than theirs, but the question of why be pluralistic to begin with does not get much of an answer. It seems to come down primarily to the idea that exclusivism in its traditional form leads to strife and physical violence,[33] and that we need a truly pluralistic point of view to guide us in "the concern to remove Christian motives for oppression or persecution, the desire to foster nonviolence, mutual respect, and active cooperation among the faiths."[34] The harmful effects of exclusivism are assumed, and the need for greater pluralism essentially taken for granted. Heim gives himself credit that,

> the pluralistic hypothesis I have proposed rules out as much as Hick's does any dogmatic assertion on the part of one tradition that all others are simply wrong.[35]

In other words, the exclusion of exclusivism is presented as a virtue, not as the conclusion of an argument. Now, one should not necessarily chalk this up as a flaw in Heim's contribution; he deliberately directs himself

---

spirit" (Ibid., 13), but even though Dupuis correctly observes that this openness and sympathy is permitted by the official teaching of the church, he does not show that, therefore, one *must* take it. Perhaps Dupuis' most telling criticism is found in his statement: "Such an attitude betrays on the part of a Catholic theologian a striking affinity to a rigid 'evangelical' standpoint" (Ibid.). The writing referred to is H. van Straelen, *L'eglise et les religions non chrétiennes au seuil du XXIe siècle* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1994).

[32] Heim, *Salvations*, 5.
[33] Ibid., 88-89.
[34] Ibid., 126.
[35] Ibid., 156.

to an audience that already assumes the need for a pluralistic theology, and he does not owe me an accounting of why I should join him in his position. Nevertheless, if I do not share his starting point, I do not get much help towards becoming motivated to walk along the road he proposes.

2. The fact of the matter is that Heim, all of his protests notwithstanding, cannot allow the Christian (or any other) exclusivist to maintain his beliefs. I am not just making the indisputable observation here that a Christian exclusivist and Heim cannot both be right in their theologies. If I do not share his pluralism of ends, I am clearly not agreeing with him. But even more importantly, my point is that, even if Heim is right, the Christian still has to modify his beliefs in order to fit them into his scheme. He himself states that his proposal "requires a significant revision of traditional Christian outlooks."[36] Specifically, he sees himself as advancing Christian theology from its first stage of simply dividing the world into saved and lost, which was followed by a second stage of allowing for diversity among the saved (various inclusivist views), into a third stage that is exemplified by his pluralism. But then he is not really simply taking Christianity as it is given, he is asking Christianity to change in response to his proposal. The "pluralism of ends" requires that at least one "end," namely the Christian one, rethink itself.

3. Even though Heim rightly exposes the underlying philosophical scheme that the aggressive pluralists attempt to make mandatory, he himself brings a number of categories to the task, at least some of which are not beyond controversy. Specifically, in order to buy into Heim's proposal, one needs to subscribe to the following ideas:[37] (a) There is at least one metaphysical reality constituting a religious end. (b) The achievement of (a) religious end(s) is a human possibility. (c) Various different religious traditions have their own validity. (d) Truth claims arising out of different religious traditions can only be appraised relative to each other (viz. not absolutely). (e) Different religions provide different fulfillments. Obviously, these statements are encompassed by the very nature of Heim's proposal, but that does not change the fact that they are also extrinsic to the religions themselves. To take just one example, Heim casts his discussion in terms of religious traditions providing "fulfillment."[38] But we need to ask ourselves whether as a universal category it is accurate to describe the aims of all religions as fulfillment. Does Christianity, for example, provide "fulfillment"? If it is not an accurate category, then what Heim is doing is essentially no

---

[36] Ibid., 160.
[37] Ibid., 146-48.
[38] Ibid., 148.

different from Hick and Smith, viz. imposing an external philosophical concept on the religious manifold. To be sure, Heim does not make imperialistic claims as Hick or Smith do for what may qualify as a genuine religion, but he does ask his co-religionists to make these *a priori* concessions in order to qualify his pluralistic offer.

4. Heim himself acknowledges the fact that there is a glaring conceptual problem with his scheme, namely the logical exclusion of various religious beliefs towards each other. He asks,

> Does not my hypothesis involve too much affirmation, appearing to agree with systems whose accounts of the way things are cannot consistently be true?[39]

Thus, for example, if it is true that human beings have only one lifetime on the basis of which they will be judged, it cannot also be true that they have multiple lives into which they are reincarnated. Heim sees this problem and responds to it, but his answer reveals that, when you come right down to it, his proposal has really not solved anything at all. His response to the problem appears to move in two stages.

First of all, Heim asks us to distinguish between accepting the reality of various religious ends on the one hand, and the truth of the beliefs surrounding them on the other. Yes, after having roundly taken Hick and Smith to task for revising other religions in order to accommodate them to their schemes, specifically to judge what is and what is not of the essence for them, suddenly Heim makes a similar move.

> It is important to recognize that the hypothesis affirms the reality of different experiential states of religious fulfillment; it does not require that all of the elements a tradition associates with attainment of that state are also the case. . . . To regard the religious fulfillments as real does not entail accepting in their entirety both sides of these oppositions.[40]

But then what is left? How can a religious person conceivably make such a distinction? Their religion comes in a package; the beliefs and practices cannot be isolated from the attainment of the ends. Will Heim do it for them? If so, is Heim not now doing exactly what he saw as so problematic in Hick and Smith? He knows better, as he demonstrated throughout the book leading up to this point and again right afterwards. This passage leaves one baffled.

Second (and in an apparent paradox with the previous point), Heim counsels us to accept the reality of the conflicts and to see the issues as

---

[39] Ibid., 154.
[40] Ibid.

of ultimate significance within each tradition. Hick said that we should realize that there are differences, but that we should disregard them. Heim states,

> I argue on the contrary that one's commitments about these matters and others are integrally constitutive of the distinct religious fulfillment that is realized, if any are. Further, at least some of the factual differences implied in the diversity of these commitments have a crucial bearing on how the various religious ends relate to each other.[41]

So, now Heim insists that such issues are vital, that as a believer of a particular religion I cannot help but embrace one of the options, and that consequently in my relationship to other religions I need to take account of them in "how these fulfillments are ultimately ordered."[42] This assertion is entirely consistent with the part of Heim's proposal that says that each believer must view other religions from their own perspective, which means if not as exclusively true then at least as superior. But the problem that Heim skirts is that we are not talking about beliefs that can be "ordered," or arranged as "superior" and "inferior." We are looking at mutually exclusive beliefs, only one of which can be true. They cannot just be significant; they are constitutive, and as such they and their contradictories cannot both be true.

And so we come to the conclusion that, regretfully, Heim has not really provided a conceptually viable scheme for understanding religious pluralism. I do not at this point wish to address his trinitarian theology because on the one hand, the ambivalence of grounding a true pluralism in an essentially Christian theology is too obvious to need pointing out, and also because on the other hand, given Heim's scheme, for him to take recourse to a model within his own religion is entirely appropriate. It is the entire scheme that is ambiguous. Does it really help to point out that there are many legitimate religious fulfillments while at the same time recognizing that any given religious tradition must see itself as uniquely true and standing mute on the question of how it is that logically contradictory beliefs can be incorporated into such a framework? Other than the benefits presumably accrued under the heading of values, such as tolerance, acceptance, respect, or non-violence, which can presumably be earned in some other way, Heim's proposal does not actually take us any further than the previous discussion. His congenial—or at lest courteous and respectful—pluralism is no more helpful than the aggressive versions were.

---

[41] Ibid., 155.
[42] Ibid.

Heim has the right intuition when he realizes that religious traditions see themselves as exclusive and that it is impossible to jamb them together into one overarching scheme without doing violence to a religion's self-expression. He also observes correctly that religions do have different "ends" which cannot be translated into each other. And if the concern is that an exclusive belief system necessarily leads to violence and persecution, I believe it can be shown that no such correlation, let alone cause-and-effect relationship can be shown. Intolerance does not grow out of commitment to belief, but out of the fear of disbelief.

I have tried to show that there are two kinds of pluralism being advocated today, the aggressive kind defended by John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and the more congenial species promoted by William Alston and S. Mark Heim. Neither option, however, does justice to the reality of the world of religions.

Pluralism and Relativism
in Richard Rorty's Liberal Utopia

Steve W. Lemke
Provost and Professor of Philosophy
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
New Orleans, LA 70126

An Overview of Rorty's Liberal Utopia

Richard Rorty is one of the high priests of postmodernity in America. Once a leading analytic philosopher, Rorty abandoned the modernist quest for absolute truth and certainty, and cast in his lot in the company of those who affirmed a postmodernist world in which all truth is relative. Although Rorty does not evidence religious commitments, his relativist thought has provided a conceptual framework that is foundational for many contemporary religious pluralists and relativists.[1] Rorty articulates his perspective most thoroughly in his key work *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.[2] Rorty's central theses may be summarized in the following three affirmations:

1. Truth is relative; there are no objective truths or absolutes. There are no "metanarratives" or eternal truths. Postmodern thinkers assume that while there may be a real world out there, we can never know anything about it with certainty. They deny that truth is "out there" as something to be discovered, and claim that all truth is relative to the observer.

Richard Rorty is particularly concerned to deny or dismiss the truth of Christianity, asserting that we live in a "post-theological" age in which every "trace of divinity" is removed:

> [The postmodernist doctrine of historicism] has helped free us, gradually but steadily, from theology and metaphysics—from the temptation to look for an escape from time and chance. . . . [T]he novel, the movie,

---

[1] For example, William Doty agrees with Lynda Sexson that "we must fabricate, make up our sacred stories as we go along. . . . [W]e do make/create ourselves, . . . we are indeed goddesses and gods insofar as we repeatedly determine the Enframings toward which and through which everyday realities are experienced and reenvisioned" William G. Doty, *Picturing Cultural Values in Postmodern America* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 28.

[2] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

and the TV program have gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress.[3]

Utopian politics sets aside questions about both the will of God and the nature of man and dreams of creating a hitherto unknown form of society.[4]

[O]nce upon a time we felt a need to worship something which lay beyond a visible world . . . . [Now] we try to get to the point where we no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as a quasi divinity, where we treat *everything*—our language, our conscience, our community—as a product of time and chance.[5]

[The liberal utopia] would be one in which no trace of divinity remained, either in the form of a divinitized world or a divinitized self . . . . It would drop, or drastically reinterpret, not only the idea of holiness but those of "devotion to truth" and of "fulfillment of the deepest needs of the spirit." The process of de-divinization . . . would ideally culminate in our no longer being able to see any use for the notion that finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings might derive the meanings of their lives from anything except other finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings.[6]

Rorty is cognizant, however, that earlier thinkers such as Nietzsche and Derrida were self-referentially inconsistent in asserting that they knew there was no truth. This is the relativist predicament—to affirm absolutely that all things are relative is to affirm that at least this one principle is not relative but absolute.[7] Rorty's solution for the relativist dilemma is to claim that he is relatively sure (but not positive) that all truth claims are relative. So while he asserts that "[t]ruth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind," he nonetheless maintains that "[t]o say that we should drop the idea of truth out there waiting to be discovered is not to say that we have discovered that, out there, there is no truth."[8] For Rorty, describing something as true is nothing more than "an empty compliment," and thus "our purposes would be served best by ceasing to see truth as a deep matter, as a topic of philosophical interest . . . ."[9]

---

[3] Ibid., xiii, xvi. The postmodern doctrine of historicism (or radical contingency) is essentially that all our present decisions are determined by prior events.

[4] Ibid., 3.

[5] Ibid., 22.

[6] Ibid., 45.

[7] Ibid., 8, 46.

[8] Ibid., 5, 8.

[9] Ibid., 8.

Rorty is a moderate postmodernist in that he believes that the French deconstructionists went too far in denying referential language. If terms did not have an abiding sense of meaning, we would not "get" the double entendres and plays on words of postmodernists. Rorty even acknowledges that the radical postmodern use of language is parasitic in that "[a] language which was 'all metaphor' would be a language which had no use, hence not a language but just babble."[10] But Rorty shares the postmodernist presupposition that all language consciously or unconsciously furthers some political agenda, and thus all truth claims are not objective but are driven by self-interested motivations.

2. There is no essential human nature; humans are the contingent products of time and chance. According to Rorty, there is no underlying human nature. For the most part, we are determined by our genetic, social, economic, and psychological background. Rorty asserts that "[O]ur language and our culture are as much a contingency, as much a result of thousands of small mutations finding niches (and millions of others finding no niches), as are the orchids and the anthropoids."[11] Rorty recognizes that "[t]he very idea that the world or the self has an intrinsic nature—one which the physicist or the poet may have glimpsed—is a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation . . . ."[12] He joins those who deny "that there is such a thing as 'human nature' or the 'deepest level of the self,'" and views discussions about "the nature of man" as "an unprofitable topic."[13]

Rorty dares to extend this notion of radical contingency to biblical inspiration:

> . . . for all we know, or should care, Aristotle's metaphorical use of *ousia*, Saint Paul's metaphorical use of *agape*, and Newton's metaphorical use of *gravitas*, were the results of cosmic rays scrambling the fine structure of some crucial neurons in their respective brains. Or, more plausibly, they were the result of some odd episodes in infancy—some obsessional kinks left in these brains by idiosyncratic traumata.[14]

Obviously, postmodernists such as Rorty do not take adequate account of the fact that not all knowledge claims come from fallible, contingent humans—in Scripture we have truth revealed by an omniscient God.

---

[10] Ibid., 41.

[11] Ibid., 16. This quote manifests the doctrine of historicism referenced earlier in the paper.

[12] Ibid., 21.

[13] Ibid., viii, 8.

[14] Ibid., 17.

3. In the absence of absolute truth, moral absolutes, essential human nature, and Western logic, Rorty dreams of a liberal utopia with an ethic which maximizes freedom and human solidarity and minimizes pain.

If we are merely contingent products of time and chance, we can make no truly moral choices, and postmodernists cannot offer moral prescriptions. William Doty acknowledges that "one cannot preach 'Just say no!'" if all values are contingent and transcendental ideals or deities are no longer thought to exist somewhere to give them birth.[15] How can anyone be morally accountable when we are helpless pawns in the hands of chance circumstances? Rorty asserts that "the distinction between morality and prudence, and the term 'moral' itself, are no longer very useful."[16]

Rather than imposing moral absolutes on people, Rorty urges us to simply re-describe terms repeatedly until we somehow achieve a sense of social solidarity. These re-descriptions should be understood as pragmatic compromises, however, not as moral absolutes. A Rorty-like postmodernist asks not, "What is right?" but "Why do you talk that way?"[17] Endless discussion and persuasion take the place of deductive logic and the correspondence theory of truth.

The liberal utopia which Rorty envisions is a rather conflicting mixture of socialism with regard to national issues and libertarianism with regard to individual freedoms. Rorty endorses democracy, particularly because of his concern for those on the margins of society. But in fact his appeal is almost exclusively to the educated elite. While he speaks of using persuasion to achieve his political ends, his view of persuasion appears to be a one way street which does not allow for the possibility that he might be persuaded by conservative values. Rorty is among the postmodernists who appear to hold in contempt the mainstream, traditional values of "middle Americans."[18]

---

[15] Doty, 2.

[16] Rorty, 48.

[17] Ibid., 51.

[18] For example, William Doty, a faculty member in a university in the Deep South, voices this contempt for middle American beliefs and values: "Traditional religious conservatives will surely reject such an approach, arguing from hierarchical perspectives such as medieval Christendom that only a single deity worshiped within a single parochial form of religiosity deserves worshipful attention. . . . . [W]hile [we] operate in parts of the country where such perspectives still represent the majority viewpoint, [we] operate out of a much more open-ended, pluralistic, even occasionally polytheistic perspective" (Doty, 32). He delights in the fact that in professional academic meetings such as the American Academy of Religion, the views of religious studies professors would shock middle American religious beliefs: "The AAR's annual meetings . . . offer such a gamut of presentations as might astonish middle-American assumptions about what 'religion' entails. Recently I have noted papers on spiritual aspects of male masturbation, gnostic recognition of feminine power, womanist reconstructions of

Rather than truth or morality, Rorty wants to make freedom "the goal of thinking and of social progress."[19] Rorty wants to maximize freedom especially for ironist poets who incarnate the highest ideals of his liberal utopia, while he desires socialism in the public arena. Rorty argues that individuals should be given the maximum amount of freedom to pursue their own individual fantasies. The only limit he puts on such fantasizing is when it carries over into actual acts of cruelty.

An Evaluation of Rorty's Ethic

I have spent much of my adult life ministering as a pastor and hospital chaplain to people of diverse ethnic, religious, and economic backgrounds in the grip of pain, suffering, and unspeakable tragedy. At least the contingencies of my experience lead me to agree, then, with Richard Rorty when he asserts that we should see "traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation."[20] All humans are appropriate objects of moral concern. I affirm all other persons as fellow sufferers, and abhor discrimination which leads to pain for anyone. Rorty's description of the Christian rejection of ethical ethnocentrism expresses well my own beliefs:

> It is part of the Christian idea of moral perfection to treat everyone, even the guards at Auschwitz or in the Gulag, as a fellow sinner. For Christians, sanctity is not achieved as long as obligation is felt more strongly to one child of God than another; invidious contrasts are to be avoided on principle.[21]

Of course, this ideal of eliminating cruelty is often not realized in the real world.

But although we may agree about the ideal end of eliminating pain and humiliation (and, for that matter, who but a sadomasochist would not?), I want to raise six concerns with Rorty's account: (1) its inappropriate proposed means, (2) its lack of a clearly-defined motive, (3) its lack of conceptual clarity, (4) its internal inconsistency, (5) its anthropological confusion, and (6) the vagueness of its practical application.

African-American literature, and gay/lesbian spirituality . . . . At least in professional academic religious studies, the sky's the limit, and nothing remains taboo any longer" (Doty, 16).

[19] Rorty, xiii.

[20] Ibid., 192.

[21] Ibid., 191.

1. The Means to the End of Solidarity. The means Rorty suggests to achieve solidarity seem quite problematic. Rorty appears to want his cake and eat it too; for while he rejects religious and secular ethical universalism, he also urges us to "try to extend our sense of 'we' to people whom we have previously thought of as 'they'"—indeed, he describes this imperative as being "characteristic of liberals."[22] Rorty is both affirming and denying ethical universalism, rejecting the ideal of ethical universalism and yet urging us to live by it. This appears to be very confused, if not contradictory.

Perhaps we could rescue Rorty by asserting that the "we-group" method is but a pragmatic means to achieve the ideal of ethical universalism. Rorty is right, I believe, in recognizing that we do in fact often take more seriously the pain of our own in-group. An earthquake in our hometown rivets our attention, while an earthquake in another area of the world where we know no one may evoke only nominal interest from many of us. So Rorty may be descriptively correct when he asserts that we tend to build we-groups from the bottom up. We may indeed be more likely to feel solidarity when we say, "No American should live without hope," than we would if we said, "No human should live without hope."[23] But we should deplore this ethnocentrism rather than exalt it. Such a circuitous move seems to me to be a self-defeating methodology, like going from Chicago to China in order to get to Houston. Why not simply make Houston our goal, and set out toward it (rather than in the opposite direction)? That is, why not confront ethnocentrism and proclaim ethical universalism forthrightly? Will the means of ethical ethnocentrism lead to ethical universalism? Probably not. The best means toward our shared goal would seem to be a means consistent with our shared end.

2. The Motive for Avoiding Cruelty. We may share Rorty's concern that mere reason or duty (i.e. Kantian motives) are incomplete motives without a corresponding sense of solidarity or benevolence. Without love or compassion, our motive is not pure. But what motive does Rorty offer us to feel solidarity with those who suffer? I could not find a clearly stated motive. But Rorty explicitly rejects what would appear to be his most obvious ally and a powerful motive against cruelty, the Judeo-Christian ethic of love (and its secular corollary, Kantian ethical universalism)–that all persons have inherent value and that the pain of one of us hurts us all. Rorty acknowledges that from a Christian perspective, an ethnocentric ethic is "deplorable,"[24] but Rorty is not willing to call this imperative of ethical universalism a moral obligation

---

[22] Ibid., 192.

[23] Ibid., 190-91.

[24] Ibid., 191.

in any meaningful sense. Rorty cannot even agree with the humble proposal of Bernard Williams that moral obligation is not merely the invention of philosophers but the "outlook, or, incoherently, part of the outlook, of almost all of us."[25] Rorty suggests that moral obligation is an urge primarily felt only by sophisticated Westerners, and that even for us it is merely one obligation among others, with no automatic priority over our private lives.[26] Perhaps he fears to acknowledge this universal obligation because he rejects any essential human nature.

I assert that delimiting moral obligation to Western culture is the grossest form of elitism, reflecting a paternalistic attitude toward non-Western cultures (which in most cases are shocked by the immorality of Western culture). Further, making moral obligation as one obligation among others which can be easily dismissed in private life is simply to make it something it is not. Rejecting moral first principles, such as making the Ten Commandments into ten suggestions, is simply to confuse what they are. To treat a snarling tiger as you would your own pet cat would be a huge category mistake, and so is ignoring objective ethical imperatives.

At any rate, what rational or affective motive does Rorty have to offer to convince Sartre that hell is really not other people, or to convince Nietzsche that he should rethink his cruel will to power? Why arbitrarily dismiss the most obvious reason for human solidarity—that we all share an essential humanity? Rorty's assertion that there is no core essence of humanity or personhood, but we are only victims of the contingencies of our lives, leaves little room for an inherent value of persons. Why value that which has no inherent value? Without a strong compelling motive, there will be no solidarity.

3. Lack of Conceptual Clarity regarding Cruelty. If Rorty understands the principal imperative of solidarity to be the elimination of cruelty, which in turn is defined as the elimination of pain and humiliation, there would seem a conceptual problem about the precise definition of cruelty. From a strictly logical perspective, the only way to guarantee the elimination of pain and humiliation is suicide. Could Rorty be borrowing from the Four Noble Truths of Buddhism, in which to exist is to suffer, and the only way to avoid suffering is to go out of existence?

Presumably, Rorty is not recommending mass suicide. But just when would he advocate pain and humiliation? Might there be situations in which inflicting pain and humiliation is justifiable? Undergoing a surgery involves both pain and humiliation, but it has a good end. Benching the star football running back might humiliate him, but it might bring out his best effort in the next game. What about the sadomasochists

---

[25] Ibid., 192.
[26] Ibid., 193-94.

who have purported pleasure in the pain they seek in the torture chambers of San Francisco? And what of cases when pain and humiliation stand against each other, such that to avoid pain is to cause humiliation, and to avoid humiliation is to cause pain? Rorty may argue that his end is not the elimination of pain and humiliation, but of cruelty. If so, it would seem that at least he has a lot of work to do in defining just what cruelty is. One person's cruelty is another person's kindness, and sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind.

4. Internal Consistency regarding Human Nature. The concern about logical consistency arises from Rorty's persistent rejection of a human essence or a human nature. Despite Rorty's admission that the religious vision of all persons as children of God has "done an enormous amount of good,"[27] he is eager to jettison this misdirected benevolence. His principal reason for rejecting the contributions of Christianity and the Enlightenment is that they commit the great sin of clinging to beliefs about the existence of truth and an underlying human nature. Rorty goes so far as to claim to recognize no essential difference between a person, a dog, and a robot.[28] He seems quite ready to sacrifice arguably the greatest source of benevolence in human history on the altar of his ideology.

But does Rorty really believe his denial of any human nature or essence? If there truly is no difference in essence between persons, dogs, and robots, then to what might these terms refer? Such natureless, essenceless beings would seem to be too amorphous to recognize when we saw them. Obviously, there are clearly defined differences (at least in chemical makeup) between these three entities. If persons have no essence, how can we know with whom to have solidarity or on whom to show compassion? Or, for that matter, how can the *self* of each of us have solidarity with other selves if *selves* do not exist? Rorty creates an anthropological dilemma for himself similar to that of Buddhism in which we are urged to feel compassion for those who suffer, while at the same time denying in the doctrine of *anatta* that any such suffering being really exists.

Despite his denials, however, Rorty seems to have something essential clearly in mind when he references human life. He defines humanity as pain experiencers, so being sensate must be at the essence of personhood. He describes humans as capable of fantasy, so imagination

---

[27] Ibid., 195.

[28] Specifically, Rorty argues that his proposal "is incompatible with the idea that there is a 'natural' cut in the spectrum of similarities and differences which spans the difference between you and a dog, or you and one of Asimov's robots–a cut which marks the end of the rational beings and the beginning of the nonrational ones, the end of moral obligation and the beginning of benevolence." Ibid., 192.

must be an element of personhood. He speaks of preserving private freedom, so will or freedom must be included in the essence of personhood. He speaks of feelings of benevolence, so emotion and/or conscience must be essential to personhood. Although Rorty criticizes those who assert that rationality is essential to personhood, his writing utilizes reason and requires reason to be comprehended–so rationality must indeed be an essential characteristic of at least some persons. He asserts that reading novels will curb those who fantasize in private from acting out their fantasies; thus he apparently has an incredibly optimistic view of human nature. So Rorty seems to be talking about humans as sensate, imaginative, free, emotional, rational beings with an optimistic view of human nature not unlike that of Rousseau. How much more essence would anyone want? There appears to be a logical inconsistency in that his viewpoint presupposes the very reality he consistently denies.

5. Anthropological Confusion. Besides the anthropological confusion caused by Rorty's denial of an essential human nature, there appears to be an irresolvable conflict in his thought between viewing humans as contingent (with their choices radically determined by their genetic, economic, social, and psychological circumstances) and as radically free. How can we be both free and contingent? Rorty, like many liberals, is burdened with an overly optimistic view of human nature in which people will do right if they are properly educated or persuaded. Such an optimistic anthropology does not take adequate account of human sinfulness.

The philosophy of government which Rorty proposes for his liberal utopia also appears to present an irresolvable tension between maximizing personal freedom on the one hand and maximizing government control on the other. Can people be maximally free in a socialist society? This public-private tension is a fissure which runs through Rorty's system.

6. Impracticality of Application. Rorty's proposals are sketched in such a broad outline that it is difficult to imagine precisely how they would carry over into any given ethical issue. When we attempt such a pragmatic maneuver, we often get unsatisfactory results. One of Rorty's principal aims is to secure private fantasy without causing public cruelty. He recommends reading novels such as *Lolita* and *1984* to facilitate private fantasies without leading to public acts of cruelty. We could all hope that requiring sexual predators to read novels would stop them from acting out their fantasies, but we all know that it will likely not turn out that way. A woman who is the object of a man's private fantasies can sense this in his gaze, even if he does not consciously and overtly act out his fantasy. Is it reasonable to think that he can keep his fantasies to himself, or is it not more probable that his obsession will carry over into

practice? If a clinically diagnosed pedophile ex-convict who lived next door began befriending Rorty's young daughter, would he be content to give his neighbor a copy of *Lolita*, or would he attempt more stringent means? Obviously, Rorty has proposed an ethic that simply will not work in real life.

Just how pragmatically effective does Rorty's rather vague concept of solidarity play out in real ethical issues? It would be interesting to observe how Rorty would apply his principles on the bioethics committee of the urban hospital on which I serve. How would his principles apply in the case of a conscious quadriplegic who desires to have his life support system removed? Would he favor abortion and euthanasia because they reduce pain and humiliation? If Rorty is unclear about the difference in essence between persons, dogs, and robots, how could he possibly make such decisions? I believe that Rorty might profit from having to struggle with such real life bioethics issues. Such experiences might bring him down from his fantasies of a liberal utopia into the real world.

If Rorty's relativist thought is this unworkable and unrealistic with regard to ethics, it is not a sound foundation for religious pluralism. Relativism is the logical foundation of pluralism, and it is fundamentally flawed. With a cracking logical foundation, religious pluralism cannot stand the tests of time or truth.

James W. Fowler's Stages of Faith and Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* as Spiritual Transcendance: An Evangelical Rethinking of Fowler's Model of Faith Development

Timothy P. Jones
Senior Pastor
First Baptist Church of Rolling Hills
Tulsa, Oklahoma 74108

The task of the Christian theologian has been described as *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding"). Alongside—perhaps even prior to—the task described by Augustine and Anselm, a second task, less obvious but equally vital, also occurs.[1] This correlative pursuit may be summarized as *quaerens intellegere fidem* ("seeking to understand faith"). The task of *fides quaerens intellectum* is a prescriptive task that seeks to answer the question: "*What* should a Christian believe?" This task presupposes the presence of Christian faith and is primarily concerned with its proper content. The task that this research refers to as *quaerens intellegere fidem* is a descriptive task that seeks to answer the question: "*How* does a Christian believe?" This task concerns circumstances not only preceding but also succeeding Christian faith and is concerned with the structural-developmental features of Christian formation.

Despite the importance of the latter task, contemporary evangelicalism has granted scant attention to *quarens intellegere fidem*. A perusal of current evangelical interests reveals an abundance of studies articulating the content and external consequences of faith, coupled with a scarcity of studies that grapple with the structural-developmental processes by which faith develops.[2] Evangelical theological works may,

---

[1] It is acknowledged that a lengthy development in the church's understanding of "faith" occurred between Augustine of Hippo, Anselm of Canterbury, and modern structural-developmental models of faith. See e.g. A. Fitzgerald, *Augustine Through the Ages* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 347–48, and J. Healey, "Faith, O.T.," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* vol. 2 (ed. D. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 744. This development, however, stands beyond the scope of this study.

[2] See e.g. Sally Stuart, *Christian Writers' Market Guide* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Shaw, 2003). The most popular topics in the evangelical book market are

in their expositions of the *ordo salutis*, articulate carefully the process by which faith begins while virtually ignoring the specific structural processes by which faith develops.[3] As a result, the prevailing models for the structural-developmental study of faith have emerged not from evangelicalism but from mainline Protestant theology and the social sciences. In the opening decade of the twenty-first century, the social-scientific model proposed by James W. Fowler in the early 1980s remains a dominant paradigm for faith-development studies.

The overarching goal of this research is to contribute to the construction of a structural-developmental model of Christian formation that is biblical in its basis and evangelical in its orientation. The specific, twofold purpose of this study is (1) to determine the most appropriate theological category for the phenomenon to which James W. Fowler referred as "faith," and (2) building on this determination, to clarify the most appropriate function for Fowler's research in an evangelical model of faith-development.

Research Overview

Following a brief survey of the essence of Fowler's understanding of faith, this study will suggest that the theological concept that relates most closely to Fowler's "faith" is not faith but the phenomenon described by the nineteenth-century theologian Friedrich D. E. Schleiermacher as *das schlechthinnigen Abhängigkeitsgefuehl* ("the awareness of absolute dependence," hereafter referred to as the *Gefuehl*). After delineating six specific points of contact between Fowler's "faith" and Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl,* the study will conclude with a recommendation for the most appropriate function of Fowler's stages in evangelical theology, utilizing as a paradigm the function of the *sensus divinitatis* ("sense of divinity") in the theology of John Calvin.

"Faith" in Fowler's Model

The genesis of James W. Fowler's structural-developmental model may be traced to interviews that he conducted in the 1970s at a spiritual retreat center in North Carolina. During these interviews, Fowler observed the presence of a common psycho-spiritual developmental phenomenon—which he identified as "faith"—in subjects' retellings of their spiritual journeys.[4] Fowler described this phenomenon as follows:

"inspirational" and "spirituality." Topics such as "discipleship," "faith," and "Christian education" do not even appear in the top ten.

[3] See e.g. M. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 944–59; S. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville: Broadman, 1994), 594–600; C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton: Victor, 1986), 324–27.

[4] J. Fowler and S. Keen, *Life Maps* (Minneapolis: Winston, 1978), 16.

a disposition of the total self to the total environment in which a trust and loyalty are invested in a center or centers of value and power which give order and coherence to the force-field of life, which support and sustain (or qualify and relativize) our mundane and everyday commitments and trusts, combining to give orientation, courage, meaning, and hope to our lives, and, to unite us into communities of shared interpretation, loyalty, and trust.[5]

the person's or group's way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through forms of the cumulative tradition.[6]

During the late 1970s and the early 1980s, Fowler identified and empirically validated a succession of six distinct stages through which this phenomenon develops in individuals.

"Faith" and "Belief" in Fowler's Model

As he developed his model, James W. Fowler, relying heavily on the research of religious historian Wilfred Cantwell Smith, drew a sharp distinction between "faith" and "belief."[7] According to Smith and Fowler, the term "belief" describes the acceptance of certain facts as true. To have "faith" is, on the other hand, to regard another person with a certain ultimate loyalty and to set one's heart on a relationship with that person. Faith implies, from the perspectives of Smith and Fowler, a personal engagement that requires no propositional assent, a means of knowing that neither necessitates nor implies agreement to any specific knowledge.[8]

The Concept of Faith in the New Testament

At this point, the reality to which Fowler referred as "faith" stands in stark discontinuity with the understanding of faith found in the New Testament. Faith, as presented in the New Testament, comprises two distinct but inseparable aspects. One aspect involves subjective commitment to the person of Jesus Christ; this commitment necessarily engenders obedience to God's self-revelation, perseverance in God's will, and charity toward God's people (John 3:36; Rom. 5:1–5; 1 Cor. 13:2; 1 John 3:10). The other aspect involves objective confidence in the

---

[5] J. Fowler, *Trajectories in Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980), 137.

[6] J. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981), 9.

[7] Fowler, *Stages,* 9–13.

[8] See e.g. W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1963) 180–202; W. C. Smith, *Faith and Belief: The Difference Between Them* (rev. ed.; Princeton: Princeton University, 1998), 5–6, 12, 61, 77, 108, 118.

conditions, promises, and events that constitute divine revelation, especially the events surrounding God's consummate self-revelation in Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:9; Heb. 11:3, 6; 1 John 5:1).[9]

According to the authors of the NT, if either aspect of Christian faith is compromised, the result is something other than Christian faith. According to the NT, to make an orthodox confession of faith without exhibiting a transformed life is to have a faith that is "dead" (Jas. 2:18-26). To exhibit subjective commitment to Jesus Christ without affirming specific, orthodox convictions concerning Jesus Christ is to be a "deceiver" and "antichrist" (1 John 1:18–22; 2 John 1:7).

Fowler's Model of Faith in an Evangelical Context

Despite the discontinuity between the presentation of faith in the NT and Fowler's model of faith, a host of evangelical theorists have sought ways in which Fowler's theory may be amended to coincide with an evangelical perspective. Perry Downs' perspective is typical:

> Ultimately, evangelicals must offer an amended version of [Fowler's] stage descriptions and validate them empirically to make this theory more compatible with a distinctly biblical perspective. A more biblically derived version of the ultimate stages of faith would yield a theory more useful for our purposes, one that is exclusivistic in its orientation.[10]

What will be asserted here is that offering "an amended version" of Fowler's descriptions is not enough. Based not only on the present study but also on qualitative and quantitative research presented elsewhere, this researcher has concluded that the phenomenon described by Fowler as faith is *not* faith—at least not in the sense described in the NT.[11] With this in mind, what will be suggested here is that the theological category that most resembles Fowler's "faith" is not Christian faith but the *Gefuehl* of Friedrich Schleiermacher's theology.

---

[9] For a fuller exploration of these themes, see T. Jones, "The Necessity of Objective Assent in the Act of Christian Faith," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (forthcoming, 2005).

[10] P. Downs, "The Power of Fowler," in *Nurture That is Christian* (ed. J.C. Wilhoit and J.M. Dettoni; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 84.

[11] T. Jones, "An Analysis of the Relationship Between Fowlerian Stage Development and Self-Assessed Maturity in Christian Faithfulness Among Evangelical Christians" (Ed.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2003); T. Jones, "The Basis of James W. Fowler's Understanding of Faith in the Research of Wilfred Cantwell Smith," in *Religious Education* (forthcoming, 2004).

Fowler's "Faith" and Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl*:
A Comparative Analysis

Before articulating the common threads that tie together Fowler's "faith" and Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl,* a brief overview of Schleiermacher's theology will be helpful.

Overview of Schleiermacher's Theology

Often termed "the father of Protestant Liberalism," Schleiermacher elevated "intuition and awareness" (*Anschauung und Gefuehl*) from the position of an existential response of the individual to the position of theological paradigm.[12] In Schleiermacher's thought, the essence of faith may not be located in any reality external to the believing subject (such as, e.g. the Scriptures or the historical person of Jesus Christ). The "core of religion" is, rather, the subjectivized awareness (*Gefuehl*) of one's dependence on an overarching transcendent reality; this subjective awareness is present in varying levels of intensity in all people and ties together all religious experiences. The *Gefuehl* develops in three distinct stages.[13] The phenomenon is not distinctively Christian; it is a universal awareness of the infinite and eternal dimensions that undergird all of life. Through this awareness, persons gain "a sense and taste for the Infinite" and experience "the universal being of all things in and through the Infinite."

Points of Contact Between "Faith" and Gefuehl

Although their terminologies differed, Schleiermacher and Fowler devised strikingly similar visions of spiritual development. Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* and the reality to which Fowler has referred as faith are substantively identical in at least six key areas.

First, Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* and Fowler's "faith" represent a series of human responses to that which exhibits infinite or transcendent value. For Schleiermacher, the *Gefuehl* was the means by which persons experience and respond to that which holds infinite value.[14] Similarly, for

---

[12] F. Cross and E. Livingstone, eds. "Schleiermacher, Friedrich," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (3d ed; New York: Oxford University, 1997), 1463-64.

[13] F. Schleiermacher, *Die christliche Sitte nach den Grundsätzen der evangelischen Kirche im Zusammenhang dargestellt* (Berlin: Reimer, 1843), 5:1–3; 34:1 (hereafter, e.g. *Glaubenslehre* 5:1–3; 34:1). See also C. Christian, *Friedrich Schleiermacher* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979), 67, 83–84; F. Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* (trans. J. Oman; New York: Harper, 1958), 208–09, 276.

[14] M. Redeker, *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973) 42; Schleiermacher, *Speeches,* 79, 82, 93.

Fowler, faith represents "the person's or group's way of responding to transcendent value and power."[15]

Second, Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* and Fowler's "faith" are transcognitive phenomena—that is, they describe an experience of the transcendent realm that goes beyond cognitive assent. Both Schleiermacher and Fowler clearly separated the content of faith— "dogmatic propositions" (Schleiermacher) and "beliefs" (Fowler)—from the individual's experience of the transcendent realm. In both cases, the result is an understanding of the spiritual life that regards every expression of faith or religiosity as a relative apprehension of a single transcendent reality.[16]

Third, although neither Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* nor Fowler's "faith" requires specific knowledge, each one describes the way in which persons structure their knowledge to make sense out of their life-experiences. In other words, while neither Fowler's "faith" nor Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* determines the content of an individual's beliefs, these phenomena do comprise the structure within which those beliefs develop[17]—the structure by which, to utilize Schleiermacher's categories, an individual's internal knowledge (*Insichbleiben,* "abiding-in-self") develops into a pattern of external actions (*Aussichheraustreten,* "passing-beyond-self").[18] The result is a way of knowing that does not require specific knowledge.[19]

Fourth, Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* and Fowler's "faith" represent a universal experience, rooted in human nature. According to Fowler, faith is "a universal human concern," "an essential human quality," "*an apparently genetic* consequence of the universal burden of finding or making meaning," and "a generic *human* phenomenon—a way of leaning

<hr />

[15] Fowler, *Stages,* 9.

[16] C. Christian, "The Concept of Life After Death in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards, Friedrich Schleiermacher and Paul Tillich" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1965) 205–06; Christian, *Schleiermacher,* 78; *Glaubenslehre* 3:4, 15:1-16:2; Fowler, *Stages*, 11–15, 119–21, 205–09.

[17] Downs, "Power of Fowler," 76; J. Fernhout, "Where is Faith?" in *Faith Development and Fowler* (ed. C. Dykstra and S. Parks; Birmingham: Religious Education, 1986) 69; J. Fowler, "Faith and the Structuring of Meaning," in *Faith Development and Fowler* (ed. C. Dykstra and S. Parks; Birmingham: Religious Education, 1986) 25–26; J. Fowler, "Faith, Liberation, and Human Development," in *Christian Perspectives on Faith Development* (ed. J. Astley and L. Francis; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 11–12; *Glaubenslehre* 3:3; Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 82.

[18] *Glaubenslehre* 3:3; Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 82.

[19] Christian, "The Concept," 205–06; Fowler, *Stages*, 11; J. Fowler, "Dialogue Toward a Future in Faith Development Studies," in *Faith Development and Fowler* (ed. C. Dykstra and S. Parks; Birmingham: Religious Education, 1986) 278; Fowler, "Faith, Liberation, and Human Development," 11.

into or meeting life."[20] Similarly, the *Gefuehl* is "a universal element of life. . . . It does not rest upon any particular modification of human nature but upon the absolutely general nature of humanity."[21]

Fifth, Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* and the reality to which Fowler refers as "faith" develop in stages that become increasingly open to that which is "other"—i.e. to that which is unlike oneself and to the ultimate reality that is "Wholly Other."[22] According to Fowler, advanced development according to his stages "generates and maintains vulnerability to the strange truths of those who are 'other.' [It becomes] ready for closeness to that which is different."[23] This vulnerability involves an increasing openness to ultimate, transcendent value.[24] Likewise, for Schleiermacher, an essential element of the *Gefuehl* is the individual's awareness of a "coexistence with the Other"; this awareness grows through increasing reciprocity between the human subject and "the corresponding Other."[25] Those that attain the highest developmental stage of Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* have learned to synthesize their awareness of their unity with others with their awareness of themselves in contrast to others.[26]

Finally, Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* and Fowler's "faith" both develop in stages that become increasingly communal. For example, at the second stage of the development of the *Gefuehl* and at Fowler's Synthetic-Conventional Stage (Stage 3), the individual becomes conscious of herself in contrast to her context.[27] This self-awareness creates new possibilities for the individual's involvement in particular groups.[28] In more advanced stages, Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* and Fowler's "faith" enable individuals to become simultaneously aware of their places in

---

[20] Fowler, *Stages,* xiii, 5, 33; J. Fowler, "Stages of Faith: Reflections on a Decade of Dialogue," in *Christian Education Journal* 13 (1992): 13–24; J. Fowler and A. Vergote, *Toward Moral and Religious Authority* (Morristown: Silver Burdett, 1980) 52; Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 129. Cf. D. Hay and R. Nye, *Spirit of the Child* (Loveland: Fount, 1998) 10.

[21] *Glaubenslehre* 33:1.

[22] Cf. E. Brunner, *The Christian Doctrine of God* (trans. O. Wyon; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950) 158; S. Kierkegaard, *The Sickness Unto Death* (trans. W. Lowrie; Princeton: Princeton University, 1941) 207.

[23] Fowler, *Stages*, 198; see also G. Allport and J. Ross, "Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice," in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 5 (1967): 434–35; A. Black, "The Impact of Theological Orientation and of Breadth of Perspective on Church Members' Attitudes and Behaviors," in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24 (1985): 93; C. Green and C. Hoffman, "Stages of Faith and Perceptions of Similar and Dissimilar Others," in *Review of Religious Research* 30 (1989): 247–53.

[24] Fowler, *Stages*, 9.

[25] *Glaubenslehre* 4:1–2.

[26] Christian, *Schleiermacher,* 83–84; *Glaubenslehre* 5:1–3.

[27] *Glaubenslehre* 5:1–3; Fowler, *Stages*, 153; see also Christian, *Schleiermacher*, 83–84.

[28] Fowler, *Stages*, 172.

particular faith-communities and in the universal community of humanity.[29] As the *Gefuehl* develops, persons become increasingly communal and more aware of their places "in a universal nature-system."[30] Likewise, at Fowler's Universalizing Stage (Stage 6), the individual becomes keenly cognizant of his or her vocation within the "universal community" of humanity.[31]

Schleiermacher's Gefuehl *and Fowler's "Faith" as Spiritual Transcendence*

After considering the close correspondence between Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* and Fowler's "faith," it seems that both thinkers were describing a single phenomenon—Schleiermacher, from a theological perspective, and Fowler, from a structural-developmental perspective. The term that I have chosen to denote the phenomenon mutually described by Fowler as "faith" and by Schleiermacher as *Gefuehl* is "spiritual transcendence."[32] The operative definition of spiritual transcendence in this study is as follows: It is the sequence of human responses to transcendent reality by which individuals become increasingly aware of and open to that which is sacred or "other."[33] (One wonders if this sequence is also the phenomenon that David Hay, in his seminal study of children's spirituality, has referred to as "relational consciousness" and has defined as the awareness "that there is something Other, something greater than the course of everyday events."[34]) If indeed Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* and Fowler's "faith" correspond to the phenomenon described here as spiritual transcendence, the evangelical theorist is compelled to ask, "What part should spiritual transcendence play in evangelical theology and education?"

---

[29] See e.g., Christian, *Schleiermacher*, 67, 84.

[30] *Glaubenslehre* 34:1; see also Schleiermacher, *Speeches*, 208–09, 276; *Glaubenslehre* 5:1–3.

[31] Fowler, *Stages,* 15, 23, 205.

[32] This term has been derived from R. Piedmont, "Does Spirituality Represent the Sixth Factor of Personality?" in *Journal of Personality* 67 (1999): 985–1013. Piedmont's research defines spiritual transcendence as "a fundamental capacity of the individual" that involves "connection with a larger sacredness."

[33] Fowler, *Stages,* cover, 9–13. For one's relationship with that which is "other" as essential to spirituality, see E. Levinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind* (trans. B. Bergo; Stanford: Stanford University, 1998); E. Levinas, *God, Death, and Time* (trans. B. Bergo; Stanford: Stanford University, 2000). The essence of Levinas's philosophy was "to see the face of God in the face of the other."

[34] Hay and Nye, *Spirit,* 54. Hay offers this description of the developmental possibilities inherent in relational consciousness: "Each of us has the potential to be more deeply aware of ourselves and of our intimate relationship with everything that is not ourselves" (Hay and Nye, *Spirit,* 9).

The Place of Spiritual Transcendence in Evangelical Theology

What will be proposed in the remainder of this paper is that the function of the *sensus divinitatis* ("sense of divinity") in Calvin's theology provides a paradigm for the most adequate function of spiritual transcendence in evangelical theology. This is not to say that the *sensus* of Calvin's theology is identical to the *Gefuehl* of Schleiermacher's theology or to the reality to which Fowler referred as "faith." (The phenomena do seem to be conceptually related, but Calvin's derivation of his anthropological categories from Plato and Aristotle[35] did not allow for a transcognitive developmental phenomenon such as Schleiermacher's *Gefuehl* or Fowler's "faith.") It is, rather, to say that the most appropriate functions of the two phenomena in their respective contexts are analogous.

The Function of the *Sensus Divinitatis* in the Theology of John Calvin

In the theology of John Calvin, the *sensus divinitatis* is a natural instinct, universally present in every human being. The *sensus* arises from the divine imprint of *conscientia* ("conscience") upon the human intellect and discloses to humanity that there is some deity (*esse aliquod Deum*) that created the cosmos.[36]

This knowledge of a divine creator would have, apart from the primal fall (*si integer stetisset Adam*), led humanity into authentic knowledge of God.[37] The primal fall, however, so profoundly affected humanity that the awareness of God now available through the *sensus* is "transient and on the verge of vanishing," "confused" and clearly distinguishable from "the reverent devotion from which true religion is born."[38] Instead of leading humanity into authentic knowledge of God, this "meager taste of divinity" produces only momentary flashes of light, flashes that fade before the proper path is seen.[39] "We discern that there is a Deity," Calvin wrote, "then, we conclude that we must worship this Being, yet

---

[35] R. Muller, "*Fides* and *Cognitio* in Relation to the Problem of the Intellect and the Will," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 25 (1990): 212, 217.

[36] John Calvin, *Institutio Christianae religionis* (1559 ed.), in *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia* (Brunswick: Schwetschke and Bruhn, 1863–1900) 1:3:1, 3; 1:6:1; 1:10:3; 2:6:1–4; 3:2:1 (hereafter, e.g. *Inst.* 1:3:1, 3; 1:6:1; 1:10:3; 2:6:1–4; 3:2:1). Cf. R. Zachman, "The Awareness of Divinity and the Knowledge of God," in *Revisioning the Past* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992) 136–38.

[37] *Inst.* 1:2:1; 1:15:7.

[38] *Inst.* 1:3:3; 1:4:4.

[39] *Inst.* 2:2:18.

our discernment fails before it determines who or what God is."[40] At best, this discernment leads to recognition of divine wrath.[41] For the pre-regenerate person, the result of this recognition is not repentance but rebellion. For this reason, Calvin could claim that, alone, the *sensus* produces only the vilest fruits.[42]

For the individual who has exercised faith in Jesus Christ, however, the *sensus divinitatis* has a wholly different function: The amorphous awareness of divinity that once led to idolatry becomes *knowledge of God*—which is to say, for Calvin, *faith in God*—as the gracious creator.[43] "For the godly, the dispositional response elicited by this doctrine is joy"—joy at the presence of divine grace in the individual's life long before the individual was willing or able to recognize it as grace.[44] In this way, what once served as the foundation of condemnation is transformed into a fount of worship and adoration.

The *sensus divinitatis* is, therefore, simultaneously *necessary for* knowledge of God and, yet, *not descriptive of* this knowledge. The *sensus* cannot describe the knowledge of God because, apart from the knowledge of Jesus Christ as divine redeemer, the *sensus* only leads individuals deeper into idolatry. At the same time, the *sensus* is necessary for the knowledge of God because it is the universal means by which persons experience an initial awareness of a higher power in which they may believe. The knowledge of God has its basis in the *sensus,* but, prior to faith, it remains only potential knowledge, with a wholly negative function.[45] Building on this formulation, one might state that the *sensus* provides the *context* for the knowledge of God but that

---

[40] John Calvin, *Commentarii*, in *Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia* (Brunswick: Schwetschke and Bruhn, 1863–1900) Rom 1:20 (hereafter, e.g. *Comm.* Rom 1:20).

[41] *Inst.* 1:3:3.

[42] *Inst.* 1:4:1–4. At this point, Calvin's understanding of the *sensus* and *conscientia* departed from the Scholastic theologians. According to the Scholastics, following the dictates of *conscientia* and *sensus* could lead to a full life, lacking only the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love. For Calvin, it was precisely the theological virtues that made life full. Apart from faith in Jesus Christ, no fullness of life is possible—only the rebellion and idolatry (A. Verhey, "Natural Law in Aquinas and Calvin," in *God and the Good* [Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 1975] 82; cf. W. Klempa, "Calvin on Natural Law," in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform* [ed. T. George; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990], 84; J. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Teaching of the Reformers," in *The Journal of Religion* 26 [1946]: 180).

[43] *Inst.* 1:2:1; 2:6:1; see *Inst.* 3:2:7, 19.

[44] S. Jones, *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1995), 29–31.

[45] *Inst.* 2:2:18; cf. *Inst.* 1:4:2; 1:3:1; 1:6:1; 1:10:3; 2:6:1–4; 3:2:1; W. Bouwsma, *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (New York: Oxford, 1988), 104; R. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 103, 137–38.

the *sensus* does not and cannot provide the *content* that comprises that knowledge.

Christian Faith and Spiritual Transcendence

Like the knowledge of God in Calvin's theology, Christian faith necessarily entails commitment to particular content and to a particular person; therefore, spiritual transcendence cannot be descriptive of Christian faith. At the same time, because Christian faith requires a precedent awareness of that which is "other," spiritual transcendence is necessary for Christian faith. In other words, the phenomenon of spiritual transcendence describes the context from which Christian faith emerges, but the contents and structures of the two phenomena remain fundamentally distinct.

It is now possible to return to the earlier question: "What part should spiritual transcendence play in evangelical theology?" The simplest paths are those of rejection or accommodation. Both paths are, however, problematic: To reject the cultivation of spiritual transcendence within the context of evangelical Christianity is to reject the contextual foundation from which Christian faith emerges. Yet, to accommodate either phenomenon to the other is to compromise the very content—whether the particularity of Christian faith or the universality of spiritual transcendence—that comprises the phenomenon's essential structure.

It is at this point that Calvin's perspective on the *sensus divinitatis* becomes crucial. Previous to authentic knowledge of God, the *sensus* has a wholly negative function, leading only to idolatry and condemnation. After the personal reception of divine grace, however, the *sensus* becomes an inner call to worship. Although the essential nature of the *sensus* remains the same, the function of the *sensus* is transformed. As such, whether the *sensus* is a positive or negative phenomenon depends not on the phenomenon itself but on the status of the individual with reference to the grace of God.

It is the contention of this researcher that contemporary evangelicals could view spiritual transcendence in similar terms. Prior to Christian faith, the cultivation of spiritual transcendence leads only to idolatrous allegiances. Whether to nature or to angels, to peace with oneself or to peace with others, such allegiances—apart from faith in Jesus Christ—endow penultimate entities with ultimate concern and, therefore, constitute idolatry.[46] Following the personal reception of divine grace,

---

[46] While interest in spiritual matters has increased in recent years, involvement in Christian community has decreased. For statistical descriptions of this phenomenon, see L. Sweet, *Post-modern Pilgrims* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 37–41; R. Cimino and D. Lattin, "Choosing My Religion" in *American Demographics* (April 1999): 64.

however, this longing to enter into vulnerable, existential encounter with that which is "other" becomes the inner compulsion that drives the believer toward deeper intimacy with God and others.[47] The *essence* of spiritual transcendence remains unchanged; however, through the event of Christian faith, the *function* of the phenomenon is transformed. Like the *sensus* of Calvin's theology, whether spiritual transcendence functions positively or negatively depends not on the phenomenon itself but on the individual's status with reference to God's grace.

If this hypothesis is correct, a comprehensive understanding of Christian formation would entail the recognition and articulation not of one phenomenon but of two—Christian faith *and* spiritual transcendence. Christian faith represents the soteriological event and the sanctifying process, rooted in allegiance to a particular person and in assent to specific content, by which persons become conformed to the character of Jesus Christ. Spiritual transcendence represents the broader psychical context, with its own content and developmental structure, within which Christian faith emerges but from which faith remains distinct.

To reject spiritual transcendence because of its discontinuities with Christian faith is to diminish Christian development to the single phenomenon of faith. To accommodate either phenomenon to the other is to rob Christian development of its multidimensional richness. In both cases, without adequate recognition of the "other-awareness"[48] that emerges from deepening spiritual transcendence, it is my suggestion that Christian faith tends to become individualistic rather than communal, a habit of doing rather than a process of being, an exercise in cognitive reductionism rather than an existential encounter with triune mystery.

Foundational Thoughts for the Formation
of an Evangelical Model of Christian Development

In sum, Fowler's model does not depict Christian faith but spiritual transcendence, a phenomenon that is simultaneously *distinguishable from* yet *necessary for* Christian faith. As such, Fowlerian stage-development may neither be equated with Christian faith nor amended to correspond to Christian faith. An adequate, evangelical model of Christian development would require a structural-developmental model that recognizes, clarifies, and integrates both phenomena.

If these contentions are correct, perhaps evangelical faith-development theorists should rethink the current tendency of seeking either to adapt Fowler's stages for evangelical usage or to replace Fowler's stages with a developmental model that more clearly reflects

---

[47] Cf. Hay and Nye, *Spirit,* 113–14.
[48] See Jones, "An Analysis," 9–10.

the contours of Christian faith. Perhaps the first item on the agenda should be, instead, to recognize the distinctive developmental features of each phenomenon and to articulate more clearly the relationship between them.

Book Reviews

A Hebrew Reader for Ruth. By Donald R. Vance. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003, x + 85 pp., $12.95 paper.

I must confess that I feel somewhat ambivalent about *A Hebrew Reader for Ruth* and books similar to it. I am definitely in favor of works that purport to help students transition from completing introductory grammar exercises to reading the biblical text on their own. This is the stated purpose of Vance's little volume.

Books like *A Reader's Hebrew-English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Terry A. Armstrong, Douglas L. Busby, and Cyril F. Carr (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1980-82) and *A Lexicon for the Poetical Books* by Neal D. Williams (Irving, TX: Williams & Watrous, 1977) do this admirably well because they list only those words in each verse that occur fewer than a set number of times in the Hebrew bible (50 or fewer times for Armstrong, Busby, and Carr and less than 70 times for Williams). The Hebrew word listed is followed by a simple translation and usually frequency statistics for its use in the particular book or the entire Hebrew Bible. Armstrong, Busby, and Carr also list the relevant page where the word is found in BDB [Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1907)]. Both of these texts offer a means to a more rapid reading of the Hebrew text. Neither gives a full translation of the Hebrew, and the student is able to supplement their own knowledge of the vocabulary and move quickly on.

The key, of course, is how much information the student is actually given. More than 75 years ago, A. R. S. Kennedy produced a short work entitled *The Book of Ruth: The Hebrew Text with Grammatical Notes and Vocabulary* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1928). Kennedy's purpose was also to assist beginners in the study of Hebrew. He reprinted each verse of the Hebrew text of Ruth and provided excellent grammatical notes on selected items that he considered would be confusing to the student. Forms are parsed and references are made to pertinent sections of a standard grammar of the day. A full translation is not provided and not every word is discussed. Students must also do part of the work.

Norman H. Snaith also contributed a series of small volumes of notes on several biblical books (e.g., *Notes on the Hebrew Text of Jonah* (London: Epworth Press, 1945)) designed for students reading their first Hebrew text. Snaith parses and discusses particular forms that might be difficult for the student. Occasionally, Snaith makes a reference to BDB. Again, however, not all the words in a given verse are listed, and no full translation is offered.

In my opinion, the best example of this type of Hebrew reader still in print is *The Story of Joseph: A Philological Commentary on Genesis 37; 39-47* (2nd rev. ed.) by Isaac Jerusalmi (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1968). Jerusalmi combines the best of Kennedy and Snaith, offering beginning students of Hebrew careful discussions of morphology, parsing, grammatical

charts, and cognate forms in Aramaic, Syriac, and Arabic. The grammatical notes and charts alone amount almost to a full-fledged grammar of Hebrew and are well worth investing in Jerusalmi's philological commentary. But again, not all the words in a given verse are discussed or listed and no full translation is offered. The basic purpose is to facilitate learning by more rapid reading of the Hebrew text. Jerusalmi expects the students to continuously add to their basic Hebrew vocabulary as they read. Consequently, no page references are given to any Hebrew lexicon.

Unfortunately, not all Hebrew readers are that helpful. It is possible to give the student *too* much help, and it is also possible to provide the wrong kind of help. For example, the four volume *Analytical Key to the Old Testament* by J. J. Owens (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989-92) offers a list of every word in each verse with a BDB page number, a grammatical identification (parsing), and a translation. Generally, Owens simply offers the Revised Standard Version as the English translation. In a few cases, a section reference is also given to *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, edited by E. Kautzsch and translated by A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1910). In that all of Owens' scholarly source materials are hopelessly out of date, he provides the wrong kind of help; in that he gives everything to the student, he provides too much help. What does he leave the student to do? Everything is provided!

I am afraid that computer Bible software is moving in this direction. Morphologically tagged and parsed texts are only as good as the scholarship that is expended to create them. Students are not helped when they bring them into class because they too give everything. Students do not learn on their own to parse the form, search for the meaning, or recognize a special grammatical circumstance.

So where does Vance's *A Hebrew Reader for Ruth* fit into this paradigm? Vance is certainly to be commended, with minor reservations, for his current scholarship (see the bibliography, ix-x). In addition, the grammatical notes offered for many of the forms in Ruth are concise and clear giving the student a fine rendition of the current thinking on any particular problem of translation. A good example is found in the note on Ruth 4:1 for the rare Hebrew phrase translated "so and so" (68). His translation of each verse is neither excessively dynamic nor wooden. (Students tend to need literal translations at first, however.)

Vance follows the pattern laid out by Kennedy and Snaith. He also effectively brings Kennedy up to date. But the problem is that by giving everything he gives the student too much help. Vance reprints the Hebrew text, provides a full translation, and then lists every form in the verse. It does not help the student to list over and over again personal nouns (Boaz, Ruth, Naomi, Moab), direct object markers, prepositions, and common verbal forms ("and she said") and nouns (field). Ostensibly, the student would have acquired this type of knowledge in the first year course and should not need constant reference to it here. That is, of course, if the student did actually acquire this basic level of reading in the first year of Hebrew study. My fear is that the publication of *A Hebrew Reader of Ruth* suggests otherwise.

Vance's reader provides little challenge for the student precisely because he gives them everything. Since it does not challenge them, I will not use it as a

textbook. Unfortunately, it also effectively rules out the use of Ruth as a beginning text for my Hebrew classes. Even if I did wish to read Ruth, enterprising students would wind up finding and acquiring this book. I am afraid that the creative and investigative skill that students may exercise to find the book would stop right there because with Vance's reader there would be nothing for them to add on their own. I am also afraid that this text would encourage average students to rest on Vance's spadework and not get sweaty themselves in lexical digging. Where is the learning in this?

The workbook sheets available online are also perplexing to me. Why make the students rewrite what the textbook already gives? The idea that only the teacher should have the textbook and the students the workbook sheets negates the whole idea of a reader. Vance's work is valuable for his listing of some of the current research on various grammatical issues in Ruth. But on the whole, in my opinion, Kennedy's little book is more conducive to learning biblical Hebrew, and hence, probably more productive for beginning students.

<div align="right">

Stephen J. Andrews
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

</div>

Fortress Introduction to the Prophets by Rodney R. Hutton. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004, 115 pp., $16.00 paper.

Dr. Rodney Hutton believes, as does this reviewer, that Israel's prophets spoke about the future in order to change the present. True, the prophets did more, testifying to the sovereignty of God when they announced God's future activity. But God's spokespersons came with God's fresh and immediate word concerning what needed to be done in the present. They came at specific times, when the nation was suffering, turning away, or in love with prosperity. These men and women often expressed God's passion for His people in their personal lives, so they lived out their messages. Prophets prayed for God's people, too. Still, the premise of this little book, that Israel's prophets had to do as much with their past and present as their future is true. God's past actions reflected His purposes as would His future actions.

Dr. Hutton, a Ph.D. from Claremont Graduate School, has taught at Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, Ohio since 1982. He has written numerous articles, including several for the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday, 1992). Among his works is a book entitled *Charisma and Authority in Israelite Society* (Augsburg/Fortress Press, 1994), a book which shows his long-standing interest in the prophets' role in Israel.

Dr. Hutton identified his audience as either those first encountering prophetic literature in a serious study or those seeking to see again the "forest" instead of the "trees" as they face weekly lectionary texts. He wrote that he wanted to help such readers by introducing the critical issues related to Israel's prophetic texts. Unfortunately, the book seems to be least helpful to the novice or the preacher who knows little of the ongoing scholarly debates. Moreover, while Hutton appreciates the work of the ancient spokespersons, readers of a more conservative perspective will notice some problematic "flags." Reference

to prophetic "legends," Second and Third Isaiah, Second Zechariah, and the biblical historian's "embellished" account will turn away some readers.

Unfortunately, the size of the volume under review does not give full play to Dr. Hutton's subject. A short work such as this cannot match in scope such volumes as Joseph Blenkinsopp's *A History of Prophecy in Israel* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1996) or C. Hassell Bullock's *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Moody Press, 1986). Worse, although this *Introduction* contains a bibliography, it has no footnotes or endnotes, leaving the reader wondering whether Hutton's positions are conjectural or based on scholarly evidence or scholarly consensus.

A quick review of the table of contents shows Hutton's real interest. After an introduction to Old Testament prophecy and a survey of the pre-exilic writing prophets (in chronological order), the author devotes less than ten pages each to Amos, Hosea, and Micah, and only sixteen pages to Isaiah (the so-called Jerusalem Isaiah associated with the first portion of that book). Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk are discussed as the "interim" prophets. The remainder of the volume, almost half of the book, is devoted to discussion of the person and book of Jeremiah. Even within the chapters given to a particular prophet, treatment of the prophetic book is unequal, perhaps leaning more toward modern interests than a presentation of the ancient prophet's message.

The Minor prophets receive relatively minor treatment in this work and not always in a systematic fashion. Hutton wanted to make their message relevant to our age. Thus, he viewed Amos's message as being concerned with how one relates worship to a life of justice and mercy. The dark tones of Amos's preaching caused Hutton to reflect: "One can only hope that Amos's word is a word that no generation has to endure. It is, however, a word that every generation needs to hear" (19). The author viewed Hosea's message as addressing Israel's apostasy, but Hutton revealed his own heart and interest when he implied that Hosea's concern for religious infidelity was a pedantic concern (25). Except for the prophet's social concern, Hosea would be (in Hutton's view) socially irrelevant (24).

In the two chapters devoted to Isaiah, Hutton viewed eighth-century Isaiah's ministry as divided into three parts: the first pre-742 B.C. before Uzziah's death, the second connected with the 735 B.C. Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis, and the third when Isaiah came out of retirement as Hezekiah faced a crisis with the Assyrians in 705 B.C. Hutton chose to focus on the Syro-Ephraimitic Crisis and the Assyrian invasion. Discussing these two moments, Hutton saw Isaiah's message as one of trust in God, realistic and not naive. But little is new in Hutton's treatment of Isaiah's work.

Micah, viewed by many as the Amos of the South because of Micah's concern for social justice, was Hutton's test case for "failed prophecy." Hutton maintains that Micah 3:12, a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction which was remembered in Jeremiah's day and seemingly not fulfilled prior to the seventh century, was such a failed prophecy. Hutton wrote "God remains unbound even by the prophetic word, free to change the course even of the divinely spoken word. The greatest success a prophet can have is...the repentance of the people and the renewal of their relationship with God." (47)

Hutton also seemed more concern with his own reconstruction of Manasseh's reign than the message of Zephaniah. Likewise, while providing good material on the impact of Nahum's powerful poetic imagry, the message seems discounted. Habakkuk was treated somewhat better because of famous dictum "the just shall live by faith" (Hab. 2:4c). Hutton did note that this was not a recipe for how to secure eternal life (60).

Because he viewed Jeremiah as the greatest prophet in pre-exilic Isael, Hutton devoted five chapters of his work to the man and the book. The five chapters generally deal with the prophet's date, the structure of the book of Jeremiah, the person of the prophet, and the two-fold aspect of his call and ministry—plucking up and tearing down, building and planting. Here, although Hutton was careful to expain Jeremiah the prophet's historical setting, the discussion of the material seems to indicate Professor Hutton's real concern was with literary issues. He saw the depiction of Jeremiah, the historical figure, as shaped and even enhanced by a later writer. Moreover, while Hutton maintained the importance of keeping the historical Jeremiah in view, he seemed more interested in finding a threefold literary development of the book of Jeremiah (chapters 1-25, 26-35, and 37-44). When Hutton finally moved beyond literary concerns, he was able to discover and to describe four deadly themes that brought God's judgment on the nation: the loss of Israel's "pristine" holiness, Baal—the big lie, the other lie—false confidence in God, and the irrevocability of judgment. Based on the canonical shape of the book, Hutton found Jeremiah's building and planting beginning even as the sounds of demolition echoed through Jerusalem.

This volume does possess merit. Concerned with why God's agents spoke as they did, Hutton set each of the prophets firmly in that prophet's respective historical circumstances, the religious, social, and political settings which prompted a fresh word from God. Moving beyond that, Hutton encouraged modern readers to study the structure and purpose of the prophetic book as well as the prophets themselves. "Historical Micah," has interest and importance, for instance, but he may be of less importance than the final canonical shape of the book of Micah (and thus the book's message). Prophetic books were for later readers, not those who had witnessed the prophets' ministries firsthand. What additional message, beyond the prophets' immediate word, was communicated by the structuring of the prophets' preaching? The book's brevity and Hutton's positions mean this book is more helpful for someone already familiar with the prophetic books. It is not, however, an introduction for the novice or the unprepared.

<div align="right">

Albert F. Bean
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

</div>

Breaking the Da Vinci Code. By Darrell Bock. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004, 188 pp., $19.99. *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction*? By Hank Hanegraaff and Paul Maier. Wheaton: Tyndale House, 2004, 81 pp., $4.99.

Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* has sold millions of copies and has generated a great deal of discussion including several made-for-TV specials. Brown's book is an imaginative blend of conspiracy theory and a Gnostic/pagan worldview. An excellent story-teller, Brown's plot revolves around the death of the Louvre's curator and a supposed attempt by nefarious "Christians" to suppress the "hidden" truth that Jesus was actually married to Mary Magdalene. Clues to these secrets are supposedly found in Leonardo Da Vinci paintings, thus the title, *The Da Vinci Code*. Brown's novel is so fraught with historical and theological inaccuracies that it would be laughable except for the fact that the prevailing biblical illiteracy in our society makes many people susceptible to his bizarre theories. *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* by Darrell Bock and *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?* by Hanegraaff and Meyer are two good responses to Dan Brown's distortion of the Gospel. I've included both books in one review because they target different audiences and serve slightly different purposes.

The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction? is a brief survey co-authored by Christian radio personality Hank Hanegraaff and ancient history professor Paul Maier of Western Michigan University. This book is divided into two parts. Part one is written by Maier and is a brief refutation of the most glaring historical and theological inaccuracies of *The Da Vinci Code*. Commenting on Brown's core premise that Jesus was married, Maier says, "Now, if there were even one spark of evidence from antiquity that Jesus even may have gotten married, I would have to weigh this evidence against the total absence of such information in either Scripture or the early Church traditions. But there is no spark–not a scintilla of evidence" (18). Part two is written by Hanegraaff and is a brief summary of why Christians believe core doctrines like the Deity of Christ and the Inspiration of Scripture.

Breaking The Da Vinci Code by Darrell Bock of Dallas Theological Seminary is a more detailed, comprehensive and scholarly rebuttal of Brown's claims. Bock shows that most of Brown's ideas are really borrowed from other conspiracy theorists. Most significantly, he borrows heavily from the 1982 book by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln entitled *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* (New York: Doubleday). Bock distills *The Da Vinci Code* into seven different "codes" based on faulty assumptions and these serve as the outline for his book. The seven issues Bock addresses are as follows: confusion on the identity of Mary Magdalene, confusion over whether Jesus was married, the singleness of Jesus in a Jewish context, the Gnostic Gospels, development of the New Testament canon, the supposed apostleship of Mary Magdalene, and the remaining relevance of *The Da Vinci Code*. With great precision Bock dismantles Brown's novel piece by piece and exposes the numerous and fatal flaws in *The Da Vinci Code.*

Both of these books are worthy responses to Dan Brown's novel and seem to serve slightly different audiences. *The Da Vinci Code: Fact or Fiction?* is written in a non-technical language appropriate for a wide audience. The short length and low cost make it appropriate for mass distribution by churches who

might consider using this new challenge to the Gospel as an opportunity to share the *real* Jesus. Bock's *Breaking The Da Vinci Code* is more appropriate for pastors or laypeople who desire a more detailed analysis. One might consider reading Hanegraaff and Maier's work first. Then, if the reader desires a more detailed response, purchase Bock's book.

A film based on *The Da Vinci Code* is scheduled for release in May 2006. Christian leaders should read one or both of these books in order to have a ready response to Dan Brown's fallacious claims.

<div align="right">

Alan Branch
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

</div>

Translucence: Religion, the Arts, and Imagination. Edited by Carol Gilbertson and Gregg Muilenburg. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004, xx + 220 pp., $15.00 paper.

Early in Norman Maclean's novella, "A River Runs through It," the narrator remarks that at "sunrise everything is luminous but not clear." Such a description could be used by the authors represented in *Translucence* to approach the metaphor and central quality animating their individual essays.

Translucence grew from an ongoing conversation begun at a 2001 Academy of Lutheran Scholars seminar at Harvard. In the arts, and more broadly in the human imagination, the book argues, God can be perceived shining through the work, not clearly but in a necessary and edifying manner. In other words, when one is not hearing God speak in a transparent manner, one can still hear his mediated voice in Handel's *Messiah* or, presumably, Miles Davis, in Flannery O'Connor or Virgil.

Translucence, however, is not simply an alternative form of communication. It is a necessary form, allowing discourse that could not be advanced by traditional Enlightenment-inflected truth claims and logical constructions. Gregg Muilenburg, one of the volume's editors and the author of "In Praise of Subtle Thinking," traces the dichotomy between traditional philosophical-theological language and translucent communication most clearly. The "subtle thinking" that he describes is contrasted with the "precise thinking" characterizing traditional philosophical thought. While agreeing that precise thinking can be traced to the birth of philosophy, Muilenburg argues that, at least until relatively recent times, philosophy has possessed a second sort of thinking, more akin to the work of the artist than to that of the doctor. Where precise thinking is governed by the syllogism, subtle thinking has the metaphor, a term which Muilenburg defines very broadly. The central section of this essay, "A Basic Theory of Metaphor," stands as perhaps the strongest material in the collection. The metaphor, he argues, involves a radically different use of language (or other medium) about the subject, a language that simultaneously strikes the reader as true and announces its falseness. For metaphor to be effective, the reader must "get it," leading to a compulsion for paraphrase. No paraphrase of a metaphor is absolute, the reader recognizes, just as no metaphor is absolute. The Lord, after all, is not actually my shepherd, yet that metaphor and effective paraphrase of it,

can communicate theological truth on a level that the more analytic forms of systematic theology cannot reach.

The book's eight essays, presented by a diverse cast including three theologians, two English professors, two musicians, and a pastor-poet, explore the limits and ramifications of the "translucence" metaphor in various fields: the writers' individual disciplines, the individual believer's thought, and the church. Like most attempts to critique, supplement, or replace traditional scholarly discourse and thought, this book struggles between two poles. On one hand, if the writers abandon the strictures of academic communication and simply demonstrate translucence, they will be not be taken seriously by the audience they most hope to affect. On the other hand, if they stand exclusively within the norms of scholarship, they undercut their own credibility, attempting to praise subtle thinking solely by use of precise thinking. It is because of this difficult position, perhaps, that the overall effect of *Translucence* is "luminous but not clear." Like the literature and music these authors champion, their work cannot be reduced to thesis statements and logical constructs.

Several of the book's essays provide not a settled answer but a domain for contemplation. Curtis L. Thompson's "Interpreting God's Translucent World" explores the interpretation of both scripture and creation in light of Luther's hermeneutics. Thompson's work, read quickly, seems to verge on panentheism. Such is not, on closer inspection, his intent, however. "The Translucent Word," the offering from the book's other editor, Carol Gilbertson, reads like a manifesto for the judicious inclusion of religious belief in the literature classroom. Gilbertson, of all the contributors, is the most successful at both infusing the translucence metaphor naturally into her work and arriving at concrete results that appreciation of translucence would effect. Karen Black's "Musical Gifts for the Worshipping Body" uses the idea of translucence coupled with the metaphor of music as a gift exchanged between God and man, to create a more expansive and spiritually rich view of worship music.

Unfortunately, however, in too many cases "luminous but not clear" effectively describes not only the idea of translucence but the individual essays as well. Kathryn Pohlmann Duffy's essay, "Discerning the Composer's Voice," appears as simply a study in historical musicology with a few paragraphs utilizing the translucence motif appended at the end.

The poetics of Martin Luther and the theology of W. H. Auden form a peculiar intersection in Bruce Heggen's "To Tell the Truth but Tell It Slant." Heggen, drawing on a sixteenth-century theologian and a twentieth-century poet (and titling his essay with a line from nineteenth-century Emily Dickinson), creates some interesting claims about the translucence of poetry. One is never clear, however, whether this essay uses Auden to speak about Luther's poetics, Luther to speak about Auden's verse, or both to say something on the nature of poetry. His essay also illustrates a shortcoming that emerges in several of the book's contributions. Their almost exclusive use of Luther as the theologian and the theorist creates a slight sense of parochialism that greater attention to other thinkers might have easily eliminated.

James Hanson's article discussing the particular glories of the aural reception of scripture, while interesting, takes a worthwhile idea, which could be amply explored in a few pages, and ruminates on it unproductively for more than thirty.

Paul Beidler's essay, "Deconstruction as Spiritual Quest," which contributes to an appreciation of the theological uses to which Derrida's work may be applied, undermines that contribution by overreaching in its claims for deconstruction. "Deconstruction is not nihilism, relativism, skepticism, or any other ism," Beidler claims toward the end of his work, a reasonable claim that he has earned in preceding pages. The essay, however, ends with an unwarranted overstatement that also closes the book: "Deconstruction is reality, since it is always already at play, and since it also structures us, it is our communion with reality. Ultimately, deconstruction is prayer."

In the end, *Translucence* does not posit a unified view of theology or warrant a Copernican shift in thinking. Its components, like the metaphor they explore, stand provisional and incomplete. This is not to deny merit to the work. Like the dawn that Maclean described, these works taken together are "luminous and not clear," yet like the Montana landscape, they command our attention. Gilbertson, Muilenburg, and their contributors deserve credit for placing before our eyes the expansive landscape that they celebrate.

Mark Browning
Johnson County Community College, Overland Park, KS

A Genetic History of Baptist Thought. By William Brackney. Macon: Mercer University Press, 2004. 592 pp.

In *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought*, William Brackney, Professor of Church History and Director of the Program in Baptist Studies at Baylor University, has provided his audience with a well-written and researched book depicting the various traits that encompass the Baptist genetic code. Brackney's book is divided into eleven chapters covering a broad spectrum of Baptist thought. Included among those discussed below are chapters on early Baptist pastors and writers, British Baptists, and American Baptist and Southern Baptists and their schools.

The strengths of Brackney's work are numerous. The readers will be pleased with the author's discussion of confessions of faith in chapter one. Rather than attempting to build a case for one particular group's domination of Baptist theology, he demonstrates that Baptist confessions of faith show distinct strands of Anabaptist, Puritan, and Separatist doctrines. Each of these, he claims, has lefts its mark in the genetic code of Baptists. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book.

Chapter two entitled "Singing the Faith" is also quiet strong. Rather than merely discussing Benjamin Keach and Baptist internecine struggles over the validity of hymn singing, Brackney demonstrates how hymns served as Baptist catechisms. His delineations cover not only British and American Baptists but also the importance of Black Baptist hymns to the genetic makeup of all Baptist groups.

Because Baptist historians often center on the theological significance of British and American Baptists and their contributions to the common genetic code, Brackney's chapters on "African American Baptist Traditions" (8) and

"Canadian Baptist Theological Foundations" (9) were much-needed and welcomed additions. The author points out the different theological traditions in Canada and how they are directly related to the Canadian Baptist Schools (McMaster, Acadia, and Aberhart). When dealing with the African American Baptists, Brackney takes a different approach than many of his predecessors. Rather than discussing Black theology within the framework of a distinctly Black perspective, Brackney brings to light Black Baptists who have made a theological impact on the larger Baptist community. Rightly, James Deotis Roberts takes center stage in the section.

Brackney concludes his work by listing seven of the most significant "Baptist Theological Genes in Retrospective." These Baptist genes are a belief in the authority of Christ, the priority of the Bible, the importance of Christian experience, a modified reformed tradition, a church composed of believers, a gospel-oriented membership, and a love of freedom.

With 1,476 notes, Brackney's work will be a blessing for researchers. Moreover, these are footnotes helpfully dispersed throughout the text, not endnotes hidden away at the back of the book. The index is concise and the bibliography is excellent.

I question, however, the author's decision to include the chapter on "Baptist Theologians and Diaspora" (10). Without a doubt, E. J. Carnell, F. F. Bruce, and Bernard Ramm are theologians who are Baptist, but not theologians of the Baptist tradition. Their addition may have been Brackney's attempt to broaden the ecumenical circle of Baptist theologians and theology.

In every aspect, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* is an excellent book. I can foresee Brackney's work becoming the standard textbook at a myriad of Baptist colleges, universities, and seminaries. I will certainly use it as my textbook. William Brackney should be commended for his excellent work. I highly recommend this book to anyone and everyone who wants to get at the genetic threads which run through the broadest definition of what it means to be Baptist.

Joe Early, Jr.
Cumberland College

The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research. By R. Timothy McLay. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, xiv + 207 pp., $ 30.00 paperback.

The publication of McLay's study is an important contribution not only to the recently growing list of tools available for Septuagint research, but, even more significantly, to the narrower and particularly barren field of studies designed to explore the use of the Septuagint (LXX) in the New Testament (NT). After a period of significant neglect, with few books published outside the Septuagint and Cognate Studies guild, the last decade has seen a much-needed reversal of the situation with the publication in English of such authoritative works as N. Fernández Marcos, *The Septuagint in Context* (ET; Leiden: Brill, 2000), M. Müller, *The First Bible of the Church* (Sheffield: SAP, 1996), M. Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scriptures* (ET; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2002), E. Tov,

The Text-Critical Use of the Septuagint in Biblical Research (Jerusalem: Simor, 1997), and most recently, K. Jobes and M. Silva, *Invitation to the Septuagint* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000).

McLay continues the trend set by these volumes by further exploring the use and significance of this textual tradition for NT studies. According to the author, this is the first published volume to provide "a framework for understanding how the NT writings have been influenced because of their linguistic relationship with the Greek Jewish Scriptures" (2). No one can read these studies, especially McLay's, without a growing realization that the Septuagint can no longer be confined to its classical role of a mere handmaid to the textual criticism of the Hebrew Bible. McLay contends that "given the fact that the NT, like the LXX, is written in Greek and that many of the citations of Scripture in the NT agree word for word with how the passage reads in Greek, it becomes all the more likely that the Greek Jewish Scriptures were a significant influence on the NT" (4). The Septuagint, therefore, must be reckoned as a textual as well as theological tradition in its own right, and that is precisely the aim of the book and the task undertaken by McLay, known to Septuagintalists for his earlier work on the Greek versions of Daniel, *The OG and Th Versions of Daniel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

The book is designed to be a theoretical as well as practical guide, especially, but not exclusively, for the prospective student in the field. Following the introduction, which addresses background issues such as terminology, canon, and the current state of LXX research, there are five chapters covering the most important issues pertaining to the study of the LXX and its use in the NT. A final chapter wraps up the investigation and proposes several directions to be explored in the future. A very useful summary concludes each chapter. The book includes a glossary of terms, a fairly extensive bibliography, and indices of authors, scripture and ancient writings.

Chapter one, "The Use of Scripture in the New Testament," is designed to take the reader through the necessary steps involved in a thorough analysis of the LXX's use in the NT. Rather than limiting himself to presenting a mere theoretical approach, McLay chooses the use of Amos 9 in Acts 15 as a test case of the process. First, the source text of the quotation is examined in its main textual traditions, and variants are explained and checked for their semantic significance. Second, the source text of the quotation is compared with the target text in the NT, a stage which gives the author the best venue to venture into several related aspects. These aspects include explaining the differences between the NT text form of the quotation and all the other existent forms, the need to recognize the relevant sources, and the practice of the NT authors of citing and expounding the Scriptures.

Chapters two and three, "Identifying a Source as Greek or Hebrew" and "A Model of Translation Technique," stand together as an in-depth analysis of translation technique (henceforth TT). Since the identification of the source for a quotation is a rather complex process, McLay's study proposes an approach based on linguistic principles. He rejects as unsatisfactory an approach to TT built on the overly simplistic concept of literalism and replaces it with one established on five presuppositions. Each one of these presuppositions pertains to the nature of TT, which essentially should be descriptive, primarily

synchronic, accounting for both *Langue* and *Parole*, structural, and taking the source language as it starting point. With these presuppositions in place, a model for the analysis of TT is provided, which focuses on four cardinal issues: translation, adjustment, motivation and effect on meaning. McLay proceeds with methodological clarity and insightful practical advice, displaying all the while a competent grasp of linguistics and solid experience forged in decades of working with the Septuagint text.

Reading these two chapters, one finds in McLay a representative of the Septuagintalist school that holds to the centrality of TT for assessing the value of the LXX, both as a text and as theological legacy. Given the limits of the volume, it is not surprising that other schools of thought are given little or no consideration, particularly those who do not share McLay's confidence in the presuppositions of TT or his optimism in the result of such an approach. The reader would have benefited from McLay's engaging with those of a different persuasion, such as J. Schaper and the position he advanced in his monograph *Eschatology in the Greek Psalter* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1995), one of the few significant titles that is missing from the otherwise rich and comprehensive bibliography.

In chapter four, "The Origin of the Septuagint and Its History," the historical dimension of the Septuagint as a text known for its convoluted history takes the central stage, and justifiably so. Without a proper understanding of these aspects, it would be hard to appreciate the difficulties facing a pertinent study of the LXX. In a concise *tour-de-force* of the history of the Septuagint, spanning from the original work of translating the Torah into Greek to Origen's Hexapla, McLay highlights many of the aspects that have made this field so controversial. Surviving fragmentary manuscript evidence and the bewildering maze of texts and manuscripts resulting from revisions and recensions make the study of the Septuagint one of the most complex and difficult fields of Biblical research.

The value of this information comes to practical fruition in the seven-step algorithm suggested for analyzing a citation of the OT in the NT. Step one consists of a thorough comparison between the NT and LXX texts, followed by a larger scale investigation (step two) of the evidence gleaned from other potential Greek sources, such as the versions. Step three calls for a comparison of the NT text with the Masoretic Text (MT), in order to assess the hypothesis of a causal link between a Semitic *Vorlage* and the NT text. During step four, other possible Semitic sources are to be collected and compared, with special attention given to the alternative readings. Step five proposes various explanations for the differences between all the texts surveyed and the NT text, assessing also any contextual clues that might be responsible for the differences. Step six broadens the scope of the investigation by looking at the larger theological, canonical and extra-textual factors that might have influenced the changes, while step seven sorts out the outstanding issues for which the available textual evidence are insufficient.

In the final chapter the author's discussion brings to culmination the topic of the volume, the impact of the LXX on the formation of the NT, and its use in the Early Church. There is a brief discussion about the nature of the Jewish canon in the first century A.D., an issue on which McLay favors a rather minimalist view. He assembles the evidence that allegedly contests the existence of a Hebrew

canon in the first century A.D., and consequently, of a canon of the Jewish Greek Scriptures available for the early Christian church. The author then addresses the implications of what seems to be axiomatic for his perspective, the fact that Greek Scriptures had "at least equal authority to the Hebrew Scriptures" (144). Through the examination of three cardinal issues, the influence of the LXX vocabulary on the NT, the LXX citations in the NT, and, ultimately, the LXX influence on NT theology, McLay sets out to prove that the "content of the NT is substantially different than what it would have been if the Greek translations of the Hebrew Books and other Greek Scriptures had not existed" (144). The cumulative evidence of the well-chosen examples in each of these three areas support the author's point of view.

This reviewer, however, wonders if the issue has been sufficiently explored. Is the claim that the NT would be substantially different had the NT authors used exclusively the Hebrew Scriptures provable? Two considerations deserve to be taken into account before reaching a verdict. First, several NT authors displayed a willingness to choose whichever textual tradition best fit their argument. Second, the variety of exegetical procedures employed by the NT authors allowed them a measure of flexibility in expounding the Scriptures. Consequently, it is not always easy to decide whether the source of their exposition was a Hebrew or a Greek text. More objective criteria are needed to avoid presuming too much about what the NT authors could or could not have done with their Scriptural sources.

McLay has achieved admirably what he set out to accomplish in this useful manual. While no new ground has been broken in Septuagintal studies, the book will nonetheless put many readers in its debt for the subject matter, clarity of exposition, comprehensiveness, and practicality. To have all this valuable information between two covers is a worthy accomplishment that any prospective Septuagintalist will welcome. Whoever engages in the captivating study of the use of LXX in the NT now has the choice of either reaching to the shelf for McLay's book, or, alternatively, perusing over at least a dozen of other books, articles and monographs, in order to compile a personal approach and methodology. McLay is to be commended for making this choice an easy one.

<div style="text-align: right">

Radu Gheorghiță
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

</div>

The Galatians Debate. Edited by Mark D. Nanos. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2002, lvi + 517 pp., $34.95 cloth.

With the present volume, Hendrickson publishers are adding another very informative and useful title to their "Debate" series. The editorial work for the volume has been undertaken by Mark Nanos, well-known for his work in Pauline studies through two noteworthy monographs, *Mystery of Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1996) and *Irony of Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2002). The volume gathers more than twenty relevant articles written over the last three decades on various aspects pertaining to the ongoing debate on one of Paul's cardinal letters, the epistle to the Galatians. The editor

has cast his net wide, succeeding in coagulating a strong international panel for this debate, with the participation of some of the most representative contributors on the topic, including H. D. Betz, J. Barclay, J. D. G. Dunn, N. Dahl, A. E. Harvey, R. Jewett and J. Louis Martyn, to mention only a few.

The overall goal of the volume is "to help facilitate familiarity with the contemporary issues central to the interpretation of Galatians, the prevailing points of view as well as some recent challenges to them, and to help penetrate the specialist's technical terminology" (xi). In order to achieve its stated goal, the editor decided to devote the book entirely to more recent developments in the scholarly dialogue, and steer away from the classical debates, many of which have allegedly galvanized attention for too long and have virtually reached a stalemate.

The articles are grouped in three areas of focused interest. Part One deals with issues of literary genre. Attention is evenly divided between two relatively recent breakthroughs in the area of genre studies, which propose two competing literary conventions against which Paul's argument should be read. Thus, the letter could be perceived either as a rhetorical (essentially, oral) discourse, or as an epistolary (essentially, written) discourse. Part Two addresses issues pertaining to the correct construal of the autobiographical narrative in Gal 1:1-2:14–the longest such material in Pauline literary corpus–which, in turn, could be explored either with the *instrumentarium* of the rhetorical sciences or with that of the socio-historical sciences. In Part Three, the attention is devoted to the historical and religious situation in the churches of Galatia, focusing primarily not on Paul's addressees, but on his opponents, in an attempt to draw a cohesive and realistic sketch of their intentions, interests, and message. The articles in each group are presented in chronological line, ensuring that the reader can follow the evolution of the debate and its landmark ideas and positions, an arrangement particularly helpful in those groups of articles in which the interaction between the different contributors is less than optimal.

In the Introduction, essentially a *status quaestionis* on Galatians, Nanos offers a cogent presentation of the volume, a most useful, perhaps even needed, prolegomena for the student who embarks on the reading of the upcoming 500 plus pages. He summarizes the main thrust of the articles, while providing a welcome aid in tracing down the critical issues and emphasizing their complexity and interrelatedness. This is an imperative task for a collection of articles, which, with only two exceptions, were not originally written as part of this compendium. The volume includes a useful glossary, lists of scriptural, name and topic indices, and ends with a very extensive bibliography.

For this reviewer, the goal set for the volume has been thoroughly achieved, not least when one considers the constraints of the editorial work for the selection of both the contributors and the issues addressed. As far as the former is concerned, it would be difficult to think of a more qualified and diverse list of contributors. Yet, even with this excellent selection, some readers might regret that the voices of some long-standing participants to the Galatians debate, such as those of N. T. Wright or Richard Hays, have not joined in the forum. More susceptible to criticism, however, is the editor' s choice of topics selected to stimulate the dialogue; perhaps not so much with regard to what has been included in the volume, but rather with what has been left out. The reader might

well wonder whether the narrow topical focus of the volume does indeed full justice to the complexity of the issues worthy of discussion in a "Galatians Debate" volume. As any of the Pauline epistles, Galatians is replete with many exegetical conundrums and intricate theological issues, which deserve a fresh and robust analysis. Including one or two such issues in the debate would have strengthened the theological component of the volume, and would have enhanced the overall value of this prolegomenon to Galatians' studies.

In all fairness to the editor, no selection can or will ever satisfy completely. Within the confines of the present choices, however, the reader of this volume can be confident that he holds a very judicious and unique premier in the study of the letter and historical situation of the epistle. I can think of no other volume that could provide a better tour-de-force of the recent scholarly debate, especially regarding the literary aspects, the socio-historical and religious backgrounds, of what will continue to be a much loved and studied epistle.

Radu Gheorghiță
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

How Jewish is Christianity?: Two Views on the Messianic Movement. Edited by Louis Goldberg and Stanley N. Gundry. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003, 192 pp., $16.99.

The essays and articles in *How Jewish is Christianity?* were written by a number of authors: William Varner, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, David H. Stern, John Fischer, and Gershon Nerel. The introduction to this book, written by Louis Goldberg (editor), gives a clear and concise overview of how Messianic congregations appeared, disappeared, and reappeared. The remainder of the book is organized in two major sections: the first section discusses the unnecessary existence of Messianic congregations, and the second section discusses the permissible existence of Messianic congregations as long as they act in accordance with the New Testament. In both of the sections one author contributes his stance on a topic. The chapters thereafter are then responses to the first stance. Now that a clear foundation for the book has been laid, each of the chapters can be analyzed accordingly.

The introduction was quite necessary, for who can understand different views of the topic if they are not properly educated? Goldberg brings up important eras of the Messianic movement. He cites the first through fifth centuries as the centuries with the most widespread introduction into the Judeo-Christian culture, spread primarily by the apostle Paul. Later, persecution and massacres were the ultimate causes for the dissolution of the Messianic congregations. Goldberg said many Jews had to "renounce all ties with Judaism and accept wholeheartedly an identity with Christianity in all its facets" (20). New believers were also given new "Christian" names so that people could differentiate between Jews and their converted peers. However, the Renaissance and the Reformation led to the ultimate emancipation of the Jewish people and the general public began changing their attitudes toward them. Today, the

number of Jewish believers compares with the number of Jewish believers in the first century.

In the first section, Varner gives his opinion about Messianic congregations: that they are in fact not necessary this side of the cross. He writes from the perspective of a Gentile, yet a scholar of Judaism. He claims he only aims to rebuke in love, as he quotes Proverbs 27:6, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend" (31). Varner inserts multiple quotes from David Baron, a former orthodox Jew now converted to Christianity. He says, "The New Testament nowhere tells the Gentile believer that he is 'free' from anything from which the Jewish believer is not freed" (34). His reason for quoting so much of Baron's work is to draw attention to the law-keeping tendencies of Jewish believers. Varner also states that Paul actually refers to his Jewishness as in the past, not present. Paul finds his identity in Christ, and not his Jewishness. He furthermore argues that any characteristics that divide us are dissolved when we come to the Lord. Another one of his arguments is that the congregations tend to emphasize the shadow of the Old Testament as opposed to the reality of the New Testament. His closing remarks signal his tendency to separate culture from worship, putting Christ as the center of fellowship, but culture as irrelevant.

The second section written by John Fischer gives a stark contrast to Varner's exposition. Fischer says it is necessary to have Messianic congregations. His point is that messianic congregations actually better mimic the first churches because of their unity of believers. He argues that there are actually Jewish and non-Jewish members represented in most Messianic congregations. In rebuttal to the shadow comment that Varner made, he sites R. Alan Cole saying, "…a shadow cannot highlight anyone, even the Messiah, if it is totally removed from the picture" (55). Fischer also argues that the apostle Paul actually still participated in Judaism. Another concern Fischer raises is that Varner suggests there is some way to worship that is culture-neutral. To illustrate his point, he uses other ethnic congregations and the variances of worship styles found within. Fischer also notes "the clarity and the centrality of Yeshua and his message" within Messianic synagogues (65).

The next section, written by Fruchtenbaum, cautions Varner not to discount all Messianic congregations because of a few unbiblical types of congregations. He lists several points of agreement with Varner, such as the idea that Paul actually wrote about his past when referring to his Jewishness. The slight area of disagreement is in the fact that Paul did not mean ordinances (such as the Lord's supper) are rubbish, but only when compared to knowing Christ, which is far greater. He also believes that the Old Testament law is no longer mandatory. However, his points of disagreement are that he believes Varner's "brush is too broad" (72), blanketing all Messianic congregations under one category, and that Messianic congregations are dangerously adding to the Word of God. Fischer states, "If [traditions] are not mandatory, and if they do not violate New Testament revelation, then they become a valid option" (77).

Goldberg writes the next section in response to Varner. Goldberg believes that contextualization is the key to heart-felt worship. He says, "…most missiologists today not only allow but insist that believers within each country or within each cultural expression have the right to contextualize their faith and lifestyle in accordance with their cultural background, as long as no basic

biblical doctrine or teaching of Yeshua is ever twisted" (80). Goldberg says that the message is still the same, but the context is what is different. According to Goldberg, the Jewish believer can still behave biblically in regard to practices.

The next section, written by Nerel, states that it is imperative that we have Messianic Jewish congregations. He states that most Jewish believers share the vision of becoming just as Jewish as Jesus and his disciples. He is, however, against the practice of outwardly dressing Jewish in order to be accepted by the mainstream Jews. In fact, he goes so far as to say Jewish believers should embrace the fact that the High Court of Justice considers them ex-Jews due to their overt belief in the Messiah. They should, conversely, consider this biblical term for themselves: "Disciples of Yeshua." Nerel also uses the analogy of women and men meeting in the same church as one body to illustrate a point about Jews and Gentiles meeting in the same church as one body. He states, "…it is natural to distinguish between Jewish and Gentile believers in Yeshua" (102). He believes it is the Jewish believers' calling to remind the Gentiles about their Jewish roots in Jesus and to read scripture in light of those roots. It is Nerel's personal belief that believers should neither "Gentilize" nor "Judaize" others. He says, "Conversion to 'Judaism' by circumcision or any other external practices should be fully rejected. Similarly, [Jewish Yeshua-Believers] should not be gentilized by denying their right to corporately observe the God-given—not rabbinical—customs of the Jewish people" (105). He believes the two congregations should work alongside each other in order to influence each other for the better.

Moving along to the second section, Fruchtenbaum writes about the function of the Messianic congregations complimentary to the New Testament. He states that new faith does not change one's ethnicity and Jews and Gentiles make up one body of Christ. Therefore, the body of Christ has Jews within it and they will worship Christ differently than Gentiles. He also lists a series of problems within the churches in regard to their attitude toward Jewish believers. Along with the problems, he lists a series of solutions that counteract these problems. In addition to this advice on how to solve the problems that arise in the local church, Fruchtenbaum offers the foundations of Messianic congregations. He discusses the role of Mosaic Law, rabbis, ritual observances, and a way to apply them to a Messianic congregation. He also states that he is part of a Messianic congregation that shows a real sign of maturity in that they allow great freedom for the members to practice to what extent they choose. Some choose to wear a tallitot; others do not. Some choose to refer to Jesus as Yeshua; others refer to him as Jehovah.

In the next chapter, Fischer responds to Fruchtenbaum's thesis. For the most part, Fischer agrees with Fruchtenbaum. He addresses many of the same issues, but raises an eyebrow where the area of Mosaic Law is concerned. To Fischer, the issue is not as "clear-cut" (130). He sees many loopholes in the interpretation of Scripture. He says, "…the new covenant ratifies the Mosaic covenant; it does *not* replace it" (132). He camps out on this issue, and that of the Law of Christ for a matter of pages. In conclusion, he stresses the importance of having Messianic congregations in our world today.

Next, Goldberg writes a chapter in response to Fruchtenbaum. His concern is that Jewish believers should determine how much of the traditions of Judaism

should be appropriated today. He goes on to state what these traditions are in an attempt to weed out the ones that are not necessary in light of the ones that are essential. He picks out different topics, such as the Mosaic Law, worship, identity in regard to other believers who are not Jewish, and the oral law.

The next chapter was written by Nerel. In this chapter, he argues that many Jewish believers choose to ignore the teachings in the Old Testament, namely the oral law, in relationship to the teaching in the New Testament. In Nerel's opinion, one should survey the words of Christ as opposed to the words of Paul in order to verify the validity of the Torah. He also emphasizes the need to focus on Christ as being the validation of the Torah in an authoritative way. Nerel also addresses a different theme—the function of the rabbinical institutions. He also addresses the act of circumcision, observing the Sabbath, eating kosher meals, and observing Jewish festivals, and whether or not it is biblical for Jewish believers to follow through with these ordinances. In both of these topics, Nerel's overlying theme is that these ordinances or practices must be seen as optional and not prerequisites for the act of salvation. They should, however, be "understood and implemented by [Jewish believers in Yeshua] through the guidance of the Holy Spirit" (164).

Varner's section is next with the fourth question (one that he would add to Fruchtenbaum's list of three), which is "*Should* there even be Messianic congregations?" He demonstrated the weakness in the cultural argument of Judaism. Because Fruchtenbaum claimed it is another ethnic group, Varner opposes this view and says that since they do not speak their own language, and since their cultural group is many times American by heart, this argument for the Jewish believers being a cultural group is weak. His other concern in this section is regarding the identity of Jewish believers—that the believer is actually adding to his identity in Christ by becoming Jewish. This could be dangerous territory since it could lead to a belief in Christ's insufficiency.

David H. Stern writes the very last chapter. The topic of this section is the future of Messianic Judaism. He applauds the efforts that have been made and urges for the Messianic congregations to press on, not allowing each other to settle into a comfort zone. He also lists six goals that the congregation should be pressing toward: seeking emotional healing, defining and pursuing community, developing a proper expression of Jewishness, engaging in evangelism, preparing for the land of Israel to become the center of Messianic Judaism, refining our theology so as to help end the schism between the body of Messiah and the Jewish people.

For the most part, I was pleased by the variety and explanation of viewpoints offered. I first saw the book and thought it would be only two views of Messianic Judaism. However, when I read through the whole book, I discovered there are really several different views within the book. No two contributors said exactly the same thing in their expositions. On the one hand, I think this fact illustrates the beauty in diversity. Just whenever I would come to an agreement with someone on an issue, I would turn the page and a new section would start, causing me to question everything I had once read and thought was truth. This examination demonstrated to me how many different, viable ways people can interpret the same scripture.

On the other hand, I found myself thinking that the authors should have displayed much more exegesis when explaining their different viewpoints. Several New Testament books address Jewish-Gentile tensions in the early church (Ephesians, Romans, Galatians, etc.), and yet the authors did not go into very much depth with them. Thorough exegesis of passages within particular NT books would likely have made one viewpoint more convincing than the others.

A few statements in the book were disconcerting to me as well. One of those statements is on page 115. Fruchtenbaum writes, "The primary purpose [of a Messianic congregation] should not be for the sake of the unbelieving Jewish community but for the sake of the Messianic Jewish community." When I first read those words, I thought he was going to say, "but for the sake of God's name and glory only." I was distressed to read at the end of that sentence that he believes the primary purpose of having a Messianic congregation is for the Messianic Jewish community. He does not stop there, either. When he addresses the issue of why Messianic Jewish congregations exist, he says "We do this for our own benefit . . ." (116). Statements like these disturbed me as I thought about what the primary focus and purpose for a church should be. We should be focused specifically upon Christ and carrying out his Great Commission and not be concerned so much about ourselves. Fruchtenbaum's statements suggested to me otherwise.

The book provided useful information on a question that is being asked by more and more Christians. Despite the book's few shortcomings I would recommend it to anyone wanting to know more about this subject.

Jessica Johnston
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation. By David A. deSilva. Downers Grove, IL. InterVarsity Press, 2004, 975 pp., $40.00 hardcover.

Within the crowded niché of New Testament introductions one might ask why deSilva has invested his scholarly time and effort here. He answers this query by stating the need for a thorough NT introduction which takes up both the devotional/ministerial and academic contexts within which the NT is read. "This introduction," deSilva asserts, "seeks to nurture this kind of integrated approach to Scripture, attending both to the methods and results of academic and critical study of the New Testament as well as to the ways that these texts continue to speak a word from the Lord about discipleship, community and ministry" (20). To this end *An Introduction to the New Testament* takes on the Herculean task of not only providing an introduction to the history, culture, literature, and theology of the NT documents but also offering an overview of a variety of critical methodologies while considering how these texts are taken up in the ministry to God's people.

One must acknowledge that deSilva's framework for structuring all he is to say by way of introduction to the NT is fitted by Vernon K. Robbins' "socio-rhetorical" approach. His states his apology for this hermeneutic especially for

those involved in Christian ministry "since the goal of socio-rhetorical interpretation is to enter as fully as possible into how a text works to persuade its hearers at every level, using a great variety of resources, and to nurture and sustain Christian community in the face of the exigencies of a particular situation" (23). Further evidence of deSilva's debt to Robbins may be found in his index of exegetical skills which is annotated according to the different facets of the "socio-rhetorical" approach (27).

After an opening chapter briefly considering the pastoral nature and formation of the NT ("The New Testament as Pastoral Response"), chapters 2-3 ("The Environment of Early Christianity: *Essential Landmarks*," and "The Culture and Social World of the Early Church: *Purity, Honor, Patronage and Kinship*") situate the documents of the NT historically and socially. While providing a clear historical timeline of major social, political and religious developments of the intertestamental period, deSilva provides his readers with the particular service of considering both the Greco-Roman and Jewish backgrounds of the NT. Interspersed throughout this section he also includes short introductions to specific bodies of literature, namely the Septuagint, the Old Testament Apocrypha, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and later Gnostic texts. The third chapter is largely an abridgment of deSilva's *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL. InterVarsity Press, 2000), where he broaches the particular set of cultural values of the first-century, including the "socially conditioned" ways of viewing the world and how individuals relate within them.

The rest of the text directly considers the NT with critical issues rather than canon dictating the order in which books are considered. In chapter 4 deSilva introduces several issues relevant to the study of the gospels ("The Four Gospels and the One Jesus: *Critical Issues in the Study of the Gospels*). Here we find surprisingly up-to-date discussions regarding gospel genre (*bios*, *vita*), historical Jesus research, oral tradition behind the gospel material, the literary relationship between the gospels and helpful definition and assessment of form and source criticism. From here Mark is the first gospel taken up (chapter 5) then Matthew through Acts (chapters 6-8). He then considers the Gospel of John and the Johannine Epistles in successive chapters (9-10). Chapter 11 ("A Prologue to the Study of Paul's Letters") serves as an introduction to Paul's life history and its relationship with Acts, after which deSilva considers the Pauline corpus in chronological order (chapters 12-19). Chapters 20-24 take up the rest of the NT roughly in canonical order with the exception of Jude and 2 Peter being taken together (chapter 23).

Each chapter directly addressing a NT text follows the same basic outline. First, deSilva surveys the historical and pastoral context of the document, which at times includes issues of audience, genre, and structure. Second, the message or persuasive intent of each text is probed. Here the rhetorical flow of the text is analyzed topically for the salient points each author is attempting to communicate. Third, interspersed throughout each chapter are different "Exegetical Skill" sections which take up a particular exegetical method and, via step-by-step instructions, applies it to the text at hand. This is clearly one of the most useful features of the text. And finally, at the end of each chapter deSilva offers his reflection over how that particular book may be used in ministry

formation. Another feature of these chapters is the frequent use of text-boxes and helpful diagrams and pictures taking up specific issues appropriate to the text under discussion. For example, in his discussion of Mark's audience deSilva examines the new proposal of R. Bauckham regarding the scope of the gospels' first audiences ("Who Was the Evangelist's Audience?", 197) or, while discussing Galatians, he offers additional information regarding "The 'New Perspective' on Paul and Early Judaism" (500-501) and "Criticisms of the 'New Perspective'" (518-19). These side notes effectively introduce current critical issues while maintaining the basic flow of the narrative. And both within each aside, and at the end of each chapter he offers essential and up-to-date bibliography for further reading on the particular critical issue or book.

In a very crowded market deSilva provides a uniquely integrated approach to NT introduction which will be appreciated for its critical engagement and pastoral sensitivity. This volume is quite readable as it deals with vast areas of scholarship with judicious efficiency. Though at times there is evidence it was rushed through the editorial process (e.g. increasing typos in the latter parts of the book and James 1:26-27 missing from deSilva's outline, see 820) the text is well structured and aesthetically pleasing with different fonts for asides and additional information and distinctive shading for the "Exegetical Skill" sections. DeSilva, as a seasoned instructor, invites the reader into his classroom in this valuable text, bringing together historical and cultural awareness while taking up and introducing a number of methodological strategies all with a minister in mind. This work will be particularly helpful for seminary students and pastors needing a solid introduction to NT which takes into account both critical and ministerial issues.

Darian R. Lockett
University of St. Andrews, Scotland

Awakening: The Life and Ministry of Robert Murray McCheyne. By David Robertson. Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster/Authentic Media 2004, 201 pp., paper.

I suspect this relatively small book may well be overlooked by many, as it looks like an average paperback of no particular value, having a dull, light brown cover with no portrait of the subject. Instead, the cover contains simply a picture of a bridge over lots of water. Such a result would be a real tragedy, for the subject of this small book was one of the godliest men that was ever raised up in the days of revival in nineteenth century Scotland. Robert Murray McCheyne was surely one of Scotland's greatest and most influential preachers, one who showed his devotion to Christ through his personal walk with his Lord, his preaching and study of the Bible, and his pastoral care and concern for people.

But do not be misled, Robertson's work is much more than simply an historical biography, for McCheyne's published and private papers would teach us many valuable lessons for today. What I see as particularly valuable about this twenty chapter volume, is that it is not written by someone with maybe just a passing interest in McCheyne, but by the present minister of McCheyne's own

church, St Peter's. And that is something remarkable in itself, that the site of so much of the outpouring of God's Spirit in the past, is now being led by another evangelical, seeking to give God the glory and to make Him and His salvation known once again.

At this point I would declare a personal interest, in that I have recently published three volumes of previously unpublished sermons from McCheyne, and so know firsthand, something of the challenge that McCheyne's words bring even today. That is not to say that Baptists would agree with everything that McCheyne believed. We would take issue for example, with his position on baptism, but there is no denying his challenge to us in so many other areas: a commitment to missions and evangelism; the practice and discipline of journal keeping; a passion and zeal for the things of God; a life drenched in prayer; and last but not least, the holiness of a life lived before a holy and sin-hating God. McCheyne is not a figure to become acquainted with lightly, for he will as he always did, challenge God's people to be what God called them to be, salt and light. I do not believe it's a coincidence, that the Church planted in the past by St Peter's, was recently sold due to lack of a viable congregation to a Muslim businessman.

If you are looking for a book to challenge you in your walk with Christ, read this volume (together with McCheyne's *Memoir and Remains,* edited by Andrew Bonar, which is constantly reprinted by Banner of Truth). If you are looking for a book to encourage church planting, then use this book too, for there is so much valuable material on that subject. Robertson tells us for example, that his view of church planting was that God would send the showers and the churches were the cisterns to collect the rain. In fact, McCheyne oversaw the establishing of more than 180 new churches.

If you are interested in a book that will make the case for how theology and ministry must go together, then this too is that book. As Robertson explains, it was McCheyne's theology that shaped his ministry and his character. Theology for McCheyne was the study of God, and McCheyne was absorbed by Jesus. McCheyne recounts his own days in the University classroom and the impact one of his professors had on him, namely the renowned Pastor-teacher and theologian Thomas Chalmers, whose aim was to inspire and motivate, as well as inform. What lessons there are in that for those of us who would stand in tradition of Chalmers today! If you are seeking a book that also speaks of the importance of the Biblical languages in reading and preaching Scripture, then that too is here. For example, in his notebook of 1837, it records that he was studying and making exegetical comments on at least 20 verses in Hebrew every day.

Another area in which this book has proved to be of immense value, was recounting McCheyne's thoughts of, and role in, the Disruption. The Disruption occurred in 1843, when the evangelical ministers of the Church of Scotland could no longer accept the direction of the liberals within the Church, and who following Chalmers, physically and determinedly walked out on their beloved Church (a move which included forfeiting home and income), to found a new, evangelical Free Church of Scotland. McCheyne would speak to us therefore, of the need to stand for truth even when it may cost so much, but which to not to would cost so much more. There are so many parallels between the stand of the

evangelicals of McCheyne's day and the conservative resurgence which took place in the SBC. There is much to ponder on in this area too in Robertson's work.

There are some mistakes in the book, such as the mistaken spelling of Edward Irving's name on page 28. The date 1936 on page 63 should read 1836. Finally, on page 146, the Roman numerals from McCheyne's gravestone are incorrectly printed as MDCCCXILIII, instead of MDCCCXLIII.

Each of the twenty chapters is concluded with very helpful questions for meditation. I would suggest that they could as equally be valuable as questions for group discussions. Robertson is well aware of the high regard that many have for McCheyne's memory, and the danger is that some make McCheyne the equivalent of a Protestant saint, something Robertson himself says "often happens" (158). But the author would have his readers know, that in writing and researching his book, he has not only been, "provoked, amused, challenged, delighted, stimulated and deeply moved" (158), but that his thoughts have also been, "drawn less and less to McCheyne and more and more on the sheer glory, wonder, grace and love of Jesus Christ. That is of course what McCheyne would have wanted. It is also my desire for you" (159).

Michael D. McMullen
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Dictionary of Baptists in America. Edited by Bill J. Leonard. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994, 298 pp., $20.00.

One may wonder why a book that was published in 1994, even as important as a dictionary of Baptists in America might be, which has not been revised, would still be reviewed in a Journal in the 21st Century. The reason is that the way the book was presented in advertising, made it seem to appear that it was indeed a new edition, sadly this was not the case. In fact, it seems somewhat remarkable that a dictionary that deals with a body as disparate and ever-changing as the Baptists in America have been, has not been revised–especially with all the fundamental changes that have taken place within the Southern Baptist Convention in the decade since the book originally appeared. Part of the argument of this review is that such a new volume is particularly needed, for as the cover of the original volume itself says, this dictionary has hundreds of articles on, "contemporary developments, movements and organizations." As this volume has enjoyed a fairly wide readership, it was felt useful to proceed with a constructively-critical review in the hope that the present volume's approach might be better understood, and that someone might be encouraged to take on the task of creating a more up to date volume.

The editor, Bill Leonard is a well-known figure within Baptist life in America. An author of at least 14 books, including a forthcoming volume, *Baptists in America,* Leonard is dean and professor of church history at Wake Forest Divinity School, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. His dictionary contains 650 articles by more than 100 contributors which seek to explain or define significant issues, events, figures, movements, institutions and groups with

connections to Baptist life in America. Leonard begins with an introductory essay, 'The Baptists: A People, a History, and an Identity', in which he provides an introductory insight into the origins, beliefs, and practices of Baptists in America. Then follow the articles, which range in length from a short paragraph to several pages.

It should not take long for the average reader to appreciate that there is clear bias in the theological approach contained within this volume. One example would be the article on Broadman Press, where it mentions briefly Broadman's publishing of Ralph Elliott's *The Message of Genesis* (1961). When referring to the content of Elliott's controversial volume, the article here speaks of the book's "alleged liberal content" (65). In addition, the article on the Inerrancy Controversy would be seen by many as particularly biased. At the same time, however, it would only be right to mention that there are articles by such conservative figures as Timothy George and Tom Nettles, but they are clearly in the minority.

There are examples of particularly well-written articles, the ones on Isaac Backus and Roger Williams are particularly memorable. But what was a little puzzling was the inclusion of articles on John Smyth and Thomas Helwys, both early *English* Baptist leaders. One surmises that they are present for the significant part they played in early Baptist development worldwide. There was disappointment at the absence of articles dealing with J.M. Carroll's *Trail of Blood* (1931) and with Ralph Elliott, as previously mentioned. Other minor disappointments included the lack of detail in the article dealing with the significant figure in Southern Baptist life, Isaac Tichenor; and that there was no mention of Spurgeon's library now being housed at William Jewell College, Missouri, in the article on William Jewell College.

As for justifications for the necessity of an updated volume, the following are simply examples that are pertinent to Southern Baptist interest: the fact that the Baptist Faith and Message has been revised, and the implications that stem from that for Baptists; the further developments that have taken place within the Seminaries; the creation of institutions such as Truett Seminary at Baylor University; the fact that several SBC agencies are now defunct, including the Historical Commission; the lack of articles on significant figures within recent Southern Baptist history whose inclusion must be valid no matter one's theological outlook, especially individuals such as Paige Patterson and Al Mohler. And finally, the fact that while there is an article by W.R. Estep on the theological Journal published by Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, no such article exists concerning the Journal published by Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in which this very review appears.

Even with all the caveats and criticisms that have hereto been made, the dictionary does still have much of value. For example, it introduces or reminds one of the sheer varieties of American Baptist bodies that have existed, or still do. Bodies such as the Western Baptist Convention, which lasted for only 9 years in the 1830s; Union Baptists, which consist of only 34 churches; the National Southern Baptist Charismatic Conference, which is not viewed too positively by the majority of Southern Baptists; and the National Baptist Evangelical Life and Soul-Saving Assembly of the United States of America, which is defined as an African-American evangelical organization and splinter

group of the National Baptist Convention of America. It also introduces or reminds one of the incredible number of Baptist institutions of education that have or still exist, testimony to the fact that Baptists have always usually had a high regard for education, whether it be in the form of schools, colleges, institutions, seminaries or universities. Examples include Adelphia College, WA; American Baptist Seminary of the West, CA; Baylor University, TX; California Baptist College, CA; Dallas Baptist University, TX; Virginia Intermont College, VA; Vermont Academy, VT; Wake Forest University, NC; and William Jewell College, MO.

The *Dictionary of Baptists in America* has little real competition. Volumes dealing with Baptist history are few, and so this present work will probably remain a staple for many until a more fair and balanced and up-to-date volume is written.

Michael D. McMullen
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Sinners in the Hands of a Good God: Reconciling Divine Judgment and Mercy. By David Clotfelter. Chicago: Moody Publishers 2004, 296 pp., $18.99 paper.

On his afternoon radio show on December 12, 2004, host Bill O'Reilly had the opportunity to respond to one caller's position that it was vital for high-school students to be taught about the significant impact Christians had on the history and development of early America, especially Christian leaders such as Jonathan Edwards. O'Reilly stated that while he was in general agreement with the caller's argument, he would not encourage anyone to study Jonathan Edwards for he was a fanatic who preached a destructive Christianity. Sadly, there was no further explanation of how he came to such a conclusion.

One wonders if O'Reilly, like millions of others, had been introduced to Edwards solely through the very narrow window of one particular sermon he preached at Enfield in July 1741. For it is that sermon, 'Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God', that creates the idea in the minds of many, that the outlook of Edwards was singularly narrow, cruel and hell-bent. This is a massive tragedy, for such a representation is obviously only a caricature. The context of 'that' sermon, is that Edwards regarded the congregation at Enfield as particularly hard-hearted and in such a need of awakening, that he crafted this particular message for them. This is not to say however, that the sermon's themes of the gravity of sin, the wrath of a holy God, and the certainty but unexpectedness of judgment, were not integral to Edwards's theology, for they most certainly were, but it is not the whole picture by any means.

All the above has mainly been said in order to put David Clotfelter's book *Sinners in the Hands of a Good God: Reconciling Divine Judgement and Mercy* into some kind of context. The title of his book is obviously a play on the title of Edwards's sermon already mentioned, a sermon which has become probably the most infamous sermon in the history of American preaching. Using that as his starting point, the author tells us that the aim of his book is to consider such questions as whether there is an eternal hell; how a good God could send people

there and leave them there; whether or not God has the power and goodness to save everyone; and why He doesn't do it? These are obviously not new questions, and in that sense, these are not new themes and issues the author is tackling, but that doesn't make this book any the less valuable. For this work is the record of one man's struggle to attempt to understand Divine truths, his wrestling to reconcile the doctrines of God's justice with his mercy. Many have walked that path and many will still, and I believe this book could be of real value to both.

The first part of the book defends the truth of eternal punishment against the theories of universalism and annihilationism. Part two defends the doctrine of election against some opposing views. The third part of the book examines the meaning of the Cross in the light of man's guilt and God's sovereignty. In the final chapter, Clotfelter attempts to draw together all the threads of the discussion.

One might ask the question, that while the author discusses many thinkers in this book, why the names of George McDonald and Jonathan Edwards are especially prominent? The answer is that Clotfelter desperately wanted McDonald to be right. He wanted to believe for example, just as McDonald did, that because a good and loving father would never condemn his children to endless punishment, then neither would a heavenly Father. But the author tells us he soon ran into trouble, for as much as he liked McDonald's view of God, he soon discovered that it didn't match up with Scripture. "I wanted him to be right," says Clotfelter on page 16, "I wanted it so badly." But after a lot of turmoil he laid aside the sermons of McDonald and turned to the Bible, and then to the task of trying to make sense of God's justice. It was in that task he tells his readers, that it was the writings of Jonathan Edwards of all people, who was of the most help: the clarity of thought he brought to Clotfelter's questions, and Edwards's tenacity in following the Bible's teaching.

Any honest, theological attempt to understand, much less reconcile God's justice and his mercy, will by necessity have to deal with and confront many complex issues, as Clotfelter himself appreciates in the preliminary questions he raises. That fact alone, could have led to a book that is academically unconnected from real life, tedious, and of little spiritual value.

Thankfully, that is not the case here. The book is both very challenging and very encouraging. The author gives two main reasons why he has written this book: to help people who, like himself, find the biblical presentation of divine justice difficult to understand or accept; and the second is to promote and encourage revival, by encouraging pastors and preachers to examine the content of their messages, "to make sure that the message we are preaching is really the gospel."

I don't personally believe there could be any greater reasons. He reminds his readers that conferences have been attended, churches have been marketed, tongues have been spoken, self-proclaimed prophets have been listened to, signs and wonders have been pursued, worship styles have been changed, the art of communication has been studied, sermons have been well crafted, drama and multimedia presentations have been incorporated into worship, but still revival has not come.

This valuable book should act as a wake-up call to Christian leaders. For it is very true that there are doctrines that offend, and too often they are not being preached for fear we'll drive people away. But what this book would remind us is that so often in the modern Church God's hatred of sin doesn't pierce us, his wrath does not terrify us, and his sovereignty does not humble us. So instead of preaching strong doctrine, powerfully presented and closely applied, many only give tips for successful living, and we continue to hope, "that somehow, by means of some new insight or book or technique, we will 'release' God's power for revival"(19).

This is not a book for the easily offended. Nor is it, says the author, for professional theologians; it is for the ordinary believer. In one sense, I would very much disagree. This is a book for all believers. I would have liked to have known more about the author of the book. We do learn from the acknowledgements that he is the Pastor of the Chinese Christian Alliance Church, but disappointingly we're not told much more. From other sources one discovers that the author has degrees from Yale and Fuller, a Ph.D. from Claremont Graduate School, and that the Church he pastors is in Northridge, California. One especially nice touch in the book, and maybe a little unusual in a book covering such themes, are the inclusion of prayers at the end of each chapter. The author says they are to emphasize the truth that the study of theology, and especially the study of the issues contained in this book, should never be undertaken without prayer.

Michael D. McMullen
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Book Review Index

List of Publishers

Augsburg Fortress Press, P. O. Box 1209, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55440-1209, (800) 328-4648

Eerdmans Publishing Company, 255 Jefferson Ave. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503, (800) 253-7521

Hendrickson Publishers, P. O. Box 3473, Peabody, Massachusetts 01961-3473, (800) 358-3111

InterVarsity Press, P. O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, Illinois 60515, (800) 843-7225

Moody Press, 820 N. LaSalle Blvd., Chicago, Illinois 60610, (800) 678-8812

Paternoster/Authentic Media, P. O. Box 300 Kingstown Broadway, Carlisle, Cumbria, United Kingdom CA30HA, 0800-834315

Thomas Nelson, Inc., P. O. Box 141000, Nashville, Tennessee 37214, (615) 902-2246.

Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 351 Executive Drive, Carol Stream, Illinois 60188, (800) 323-9400

Zondervan Publishing House, 5300 Patterson SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49530, (800) 926-6548

Books Received

Allen, Ronald J. *Preaching: An Essential Guide*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002, 135 pp., $16.00 paper.

Anderson, Kenton C. *Preaching with Integrity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003, 144 pp., $10.99 paper.

Anthony, Michael and Warren Benson. *Exploring the History and Philosophy of Christian Education*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003, 443 pp., $22.99 paper.

Bailey, Richard A. and Gregory A. Wills. *The Salvation of Souls (Nine Previously Unpublished Sermons on the Call of Ministry and the Gospel by Jonathan Edwards)*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003, 176 pp., $19.99 hardcover.

Benson, Clarence H. *Biblical Faith (Doctrines Every Christian Should Know)*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003, 112 pp., $10.99 paper.

Bevington, Linda, M.A. et.al. *Basic Questions on Genetics, Stem Cell Research, and Cloning.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004, 125 pp., $5.99 paper.

Birkitt, James N. *Birkitt's Bible Concept Search.* Glen Allen, VA: Biblical Research Center, $139.95 CD.

Bisagno, John R. *Principle Preaching.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 208 pp., $14.99 paper.

Blackaby, Henry Notes by. *Experiencing the Word New Testament.* Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 2001, 640 pp., $17.99 paper.

Blackaby, Henry T. and Melvin D. Blackaby. *Experiencing God Together.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 320 pp., $19.99 hardcover.

Boa, Kenneth. *Augustine to Freud.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2004, 288 pp. $14.99 paper.

Borchert, Gerald L. *The New American Commentary (John 12-21).* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 398 pp., $29.99 hardcover.

Caner, Ergun and Emir Caner, eds. *The Sacred Desk: Sermons of the Southern Baptist Convention Presidents.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004, 358 pp., $29.99 hardcover.

Clark, David K. *To Know and Love God.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003, 540 pp., $35.00 paper.

Cooper, Anna. ed. *Ishmael My Brother: A Christian Introduction to Islam.* Grand Rapids, MI: Monarch, 2004, 352 pp., $13.99 paper.

Dever, Mark. *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004, 256 pp., $15.99 paper.

Dockery, David S. and Gregory Alan Thornbury. *Shaping a Christian Worldview.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 206 pp., $12.99 paper.

Draper, James T. Jr. ed. *Preaching with Passion: Sermons from the Heart of the Southern Baptist Convention.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004, 629 pp., $24.99 hardcover.

Easley, Kendell H. *Holman Quick Source Guide to Understanding The Bible.* Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 2002, 405 pp., $19.99 paper.

Erickson, Millard J. et. al. *Reclaiming the Center.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004, 416 pp., $20.00 paper.

Feinberg, John S.. *The Many Faces of Evil.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004, 544 pp., $35.00 paper.

Habermas, Gary R. *The Risen Jesus & Future Hope.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003, 239 pp., $24.95 paper.

Heimbach, Daniel R. *True Sexual Morality.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004, 448 pp., $25.00 paper.

Hemphill, Ken. *Empowering Kingdom Growth: The Heartbeat of God.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004, 308 pp., $19.99 hardcover.

Hodges, Andrew. *Jesus: An Interview Across Time.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003, 385 pp., $16.99 paper.

Holman, Maps by. *Atlas Biblico Conciso Holman.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2000, 47 pp., $7.99 paper.

Holman. *Yeso Est'a Enla Biblia?* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 563 pp., paper.

Holman Christian Standard Bible. *New Testament with Psalms & Proverbs-Ultratrim.* Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 2002, 684 pp., $5.99 paper.

Holman Christian Standard Bible. *Share Jesus Without Fear (TruthQuest Student Evangelism New Testament).* Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 2001, 464 pp., $12.99 bonded leather.

Holman Christian Standard Bible. *The Gift (The New Testament for New Believers with Psalms & Proverbs).* Nashville, TN: Holman Bible, 2002, 592 pp., $9.99 paper.

House, Wayne H. *Charts on Open Theism and Orthodoxy.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003, 139 pp., $19.99 paper.

Hyman, Gavin. *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology.* Louisville, KY:Westminster John Knox, 2001, 198 pp., $24.99 paper.

International Bible Society. *Walking With Jesus New Testament.* Colorado Springs, CO: International Bible Society, 2002, 373 pp., paper.

Kostenberger, Andreas J. *God, Marriage and Family.* Wheaton, IL: CrosswayBooks/Good News, 2004, 448 pp., $20.00 paper.

Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. *Glorious Christianity.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books/Good News, 2004, 320 pp., $24.00 hardcover.

Maalouf, Tony. *Arabs in the Shadow of Israel.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2003, 367 pp., $14.99 paper.

MacArthur, John. *Think Biblically.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books/Good News, 2003, 368 pp., $19.99 hardcover.

McKenzie, Alyce. *Preaching Biblical Wisdom in a Self-Help Society.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002, 255 pp., $22.00 paper.

Morgan, Christopher W. ed. et. al. *Hell Under Fire*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004, 256 pp., $19.99 hardcover.

Morgan, Robert J. *Evidence and Truth (Foundations for Christian Truth).* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003, 128 pp., $10.99 paper.

Moyer, R. Larry. *21 Things God Never Said.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 176 pp., $10.99 paper.

Nassif, Bradley. *Three Views on Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelism.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004, 294 pp., $14.99 paper.

O'Mathuna, Donal P. et.al. *Basic Questions on Healthcare.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004, 112 pp., $5.99 paper.

Parry, Robin A. and Christopher H. Partridge. eds. *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate.* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004, 319 pp., $27.00 paper.

Patterson, Dorothy Kelley. *A Handbook for Ministers' Wives.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 244 pp., $16.99 hardcover.

Perry, John. *Walking God's Path: The Life and Ministry of Jimmy Draper.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2004, 256 pp., $19.99 hardcover.

Piper, John. *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 286 pp., $14.99 paper.

Reid, Alvin L.. *Raising the Bar: Ministry to Youth in the New Millennium.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004, 412 pp., $29.99 hardcover.

Robertson, A. T. *Word Pictures of the New Testament: Volume One.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2004, 412 pp., $29.99 hardcover.

Ryken, Leland. *The Word of God in English.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books/Good News, 2003, 336 pp., $15.99 paper.

Schapiro, S. A. *The Holocaust.* Milwaukee, WI: New Millennium Publishing Co., 2002, 201 pp., $20.95 paper.

Silzer, Peter and Thomas Finley. *How Biblical Languages Work.* Grand Rapids,MI: Kregel Publications, 2004, 258 pp., $16.99 paper.

Smith, Mark. *The Memoirs of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004, 208 pp., $21.00 paper.

Stiver, Dan R. *Theology after Ricoeur.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001, 257 pp., $39.95 hardcover.

Thomas, Robert L. Ed. *Three Views on the Origins of the Synoptic Gospels.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2002, 400 pp., $18.99 paper.

Vaughan, Curtis and Thomas Lea. *I Corinthians. Founders Study Guide Commentary*. Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2002, 176 pp., paper.

Ware, Bruce A. *God's Greater Glory.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books/Good News, 2002, 240 pp., $17.99 paper.

Wells, C. Richard and A. Boyd Luter. *Inspired Preaching.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 240 pp., $19.99 paper.

Wiencek, Henry. *An Imperfect God.* New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003, 416 pp., $26.00 hardcover.

Wilson, Stephen G. *Leaving The Fold*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004, 176 pp., $25.00 hardcover.

Wise, Kurt P. *Faith, Form, and Time.* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 287 pp., $14.99 paper.

Midwestern Journal of Theology
Subscription Form

Name_____

Address_____

_____

City_____State_____Zip_____Country_____

Phone ( )_____E-mail_____

____One year—$20 ____Two years—$35 ____Three years—$50

____Please find payment enclosed.

____Please add me to your general mailing list.

Please send my friend a subscription (payment enclosed):

Name_____

Address_____

City_____State_____Zip_____Country_____

— —

Clip and mail to: Editor, *Midwestern Journal of Theology*,
MBTS, 5001 N. Oak Trafficway, KC, MO, 64118

The faculty of Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
invites you to subscribe to the
Midwestern Journal of Theology,
a scholarly journal written to assist Christians and churches
in making disciples throughout the world.

Published biannually, each issue includes exegetical and theological
articles, inspirational sermons, and reviews of recent important books.

Please visit the MBTS website at www.mbts.edu