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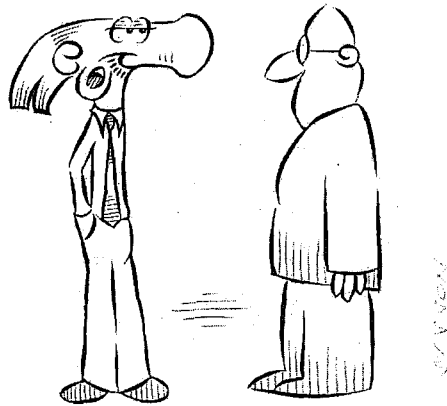
*ADVANCING THE
CHRISTIAN TRADITION
IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM*

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BOOK REVIEWS

JESUS AND THE RELIGIONS: A RESPONSE TO A REVIEW

Gerald R. McDermott



WELL, THANKS FOR THE COMPLIMENT, BUT I
JUST PRETTY MUCH SEE MYSELF AS A TOOL.

I am grateful for Professor Leicester Longden's review of my book, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions: Jesus, Revelation and Religious Traditions*, which appeared in this quarterly journal (vol. 13, no. 3 [Summer] 2004). He is generous in his comments on my chapters defining evangelicalism and discussing Islam. But I am puzzled by a number of things in his review.

First, Longden thinks my title (*Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?*) is "condescending," while at the same time conceding that I am a "committed evangelical." Let me assure him and the readers of this journal that the title is not meant to be derogatory in the least. Rather, it asks genuine questions that more and more Christians are asking: What has been the relationship of Christian faith to other religions? Can we learn anything from this relationship?

Second, Professor Longden complains that my references are "frequently" to secondary sources. This is true. But when I explain three non-Christian traditions (Taoism, Confucianism, and Islam), the majority of my citations are to those traditions' principal religious texts (in translation).

Third, his principal criticism of my book seems to be that, in my discussion of Buddhism, I ignore Eastern Orthodoxy's apophatic tradition, which can also teach us what I claim Buddhism can teach. What puzzles me is that the apophatic tradition can help in only one of the five areas that I suggest Buddhism can inform. What of the other four? Does Professor Longden concede that in those areas Buddhism might indeed have something to teach us? What about the host of other lessons the book proposes can be learned from Christian engagement with the religions? It is interesting, and to the point, that Eastern Orthodoxy's apophatic

tradition has itself been influenced by Neo-Platonism, which is a distinctly non-Christian faith.

My point is not that evangelicals should suddenly fly to other religions to learn, or that other religions have truths that the Bible itself does not contain. My point is that throughout the history of revelation, and historical theology's understanding of revelation, God's people have used learning from outside the church to better understand the blinding revelation that came in the history of Israel and Jesus Christ.

Perhaps Professor Longden's material objection to my book is implied by his remark that other religions "may just as easily lead evangelicals astray." As I said in the book, they may do just that—especially for the young believer. Hence I warn young believers to first get grounded in the Christian faith. But mature believers who are solidly anchored in Scripture and theology should investigate the religions, if for nothing else than to better understand their own faith. It may also make them wonder what is the relation between truth in the Bible and truth in the religions. Which leads to the title of my book.

Hence my biggest source of puzzlement was that Professor Longden never directly grappled with my central argument—that God has often taught his people better understanding of his truth by the mediation of other traditions.

The author of Psalm 104, for instance, seems to have learned from the Egyptian hymn of Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten, early fourteenth century BCE).¹ Both the psalm and hymn (which praises the deity manifested by Aten, the sun disk) contain remarkable parallels: God sending rain to water the earth and satisfy the beasts of the field and birds of the air, the earth returning to darkness and lions emerging when the sun retires, God's manifold works fulfilling the divine will, ships and fish sporting in the oceans before God, humans getting their food from God, and all creaturely life depending on the divine spirit. To be sure, there are differences between the two accounts, such as the elements being in different order and the presence of especially vivid images only in the Egyptian poem. But two possibilities seem likely: (1) these ideas were common to the ancient Near East and the psalmist used them, or (2) there was direct borrowing.² In either case, non-Hebrew

sources influenced the Hebrew writer. Proverbs 22:17–24:22 is another example. According to James D. G. Dunn, it is well known that this text is "most probably drawn" from an earlier Egyptian wisdom tradition known as the Teaching of Amenemope.³

In the New Testament Jesus praises the faith of pagans and urges Jews to learn from these pagan examples. He commended both the widow at Zarephath and Naaman when visiting Nazareth (Luke 4:14–30). Both were pagans who had put their faith in the word of a Hebrew prophet. Jesus was "amazed" by the faith of the centurion who sought healing for his slave, observing that he had not seen such faith among Jews (Luke 7:9). The centurion most likely knew Jesus as little more than a miracle-worker, not his larger claims to be Son of God or Messiah. Jesus also lauded the faith of the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15, recommended the ethical behavior of the Good Samaritan, and pointed out that a "foreigner" was the only leper among the ten to "return and give praise to God" (Luke 17:18). In all three cases Jesus applauded the acts of faith made by people who were not yet inside the Jewish or Christian circles of faith, and recommended that his hearers learn from their examples.⁴

Peter seems to have learned from the religious experience of someone who had not yet been introduced to the gospel. He appears to have learned something new and profound about God from what he observed God to be doing in and for Cornelius before Cornelius heard about Jesus. When he heard that Cornelius had heard from an angel to come to his (Peter's) house, Peter's eyes were suddenly opened to God's ways with the Gentiles: "[Now] I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34–35).

Paul tells pagans in Lystra that the living God had revealed himself to their forefathers while at the same time permitting them to go their own ways; in the process God "did not leave himself without witness" (Acts 14:17). In Athens, Paul claimed a heathen altar as the property of the God he preached and enforced his doctrine not by miracles but argument founded on the words of pagan poets.

Most of these examples and others I have found⁵ are connected

in some way with Jewish communities of faith or Jesus. Therefore, they constitute hints and suggestions rather than proof of revelation among pagans. Nevertheless, they demonstrate that biblical authors believed there was knowledge of God outside the church, and indeed that Jesus and Paul believed there was truth among those who knew little or nothing about the Christ.

Don't get me wrong. I am not proposing that anyone can be saved apart from Jesus Christ, or that there is knowledge among pagans which is not "hidden [in Christ's] treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). But I am proposing that just as Augustine learned from Plotinus things that helped him better elucidate the gospel, and Aquinas from Aristotle things that shed light on the faith-reason connection, and Calvin from Renaissance humanism; perhaps then in our struggle with other religions we can sharpen our understanding of the riches of Jesus Christ.

This is the argument that I wish Professor Longden had engaged. The reader can better follow these arguments by reading the book with these thoughts in mind.

AUTHOR

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NOTES

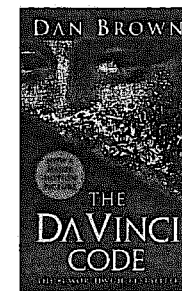
1. For Akhenaten's hymn, see "The hymn to the Aton," in James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East, Vol. 1: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 226–30.
2. See A. Barucq, *L'expression de la louange divine et de la prière dans la Bible et en Égypte*, Bibliothèque d'Étude Tom. 33 (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie

Oriente, 1962); K.-H. Bernhardt, "Amenophis IV and Psalm 104," *Mitteilungen des Instituts für Orientforschung* 15 (1969): 193–206; P. C. Craigie, "The Comparison of Hebrew Poetry: Psalm 104 in the Light of Egyptian and Ugaritic Poetry," *Semitics* 4 (1974): 10–21; G. Nagel, "A propos des rapports du Psaume 104 avec les textes égyptiens," *Festschrift A. Bertholet*, ed. W. Baumgartner, et al (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950); Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 21 (Waco: Word Books, 1983), 28–31.

- 3 James D. G. Dunn, "Biblical Concepts of Revelation," in Paul Avis, ed., *Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 7.
- 4 Naaman and the widow were putting their faith in prophets of Israel's God, but there is no sign that they became members of the Jewish community; interpreters debate whether Naaman's faith was in fact saving (see for example, Jonathan Edwards, *Notes on Scripture*, ed. Stephen J. Stein, vol. 15 in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998], 564–69). According to Craig Keener, Jesus' point was that "non-Jews [from Sidon and Syria, two particularly despised pagan areas] were the ones to accept two of the major signs prophets of the Old Testament," while Jews in Nazareth were not willing to accept him. Hence, his hearers were to learn from the faith of those who were manifestly un-Jewish. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 199–200.
- 5 McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn?*, chap. 3.

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT MARY . . . THAT THE CHURCH DOESN'T WANT YOU TO KNOW: REFLECTIONS ON THE DA VINCI CODE PHENOMENON

Richard J. Vincent



The church is the ultimate enemy. Its message is intentionally deceptive. The truth is "out there"—but it is hidden in a vast web of conspiracies, secret societies, and buried documents.

Such is the world inhabited by Robert Langford, the protagonist of *Angels & Demons* and its sequel *The Da Vinci Code*. It is an adventurous world of fast-paced action, mind-boggling riddles, and thrilling mysteries. Both books share the same formula: surrounded by danger at every step, symbologist Robert Langford is led to discover ancient secrets by solving a series of arcane puzzles.

In Robert Langford's world, conspiracy theories are "substantial"

and public consensus is riddled with deception. Almost everything has a double meaning—pyramids, circles, roses, playing cards, and so forth. For example, in *The Da Vinci Code*, Langford points out how the four suits of playing cards—spades, hearts, clubs, diamonds—are all “Grail-related symbols” (391). Troubadours are “traveling servants or ‘ministers’ of the Church of Mary Magdalene, using music to disseminate the story of the sacred feminine among the common folk” (390). Apparently, there is nothing “common” or “ordinary” about a friendly game of cards or a group of traveling musicians. Or most anything else, for that matter! After awhile, the connections become so commonplace that one wonders if anything exists that does *not* contain a hidden meaning.

THE ULTIMATE ANTAGONIST: THE CHURCH

Uncovering conspiratorial connections would be harmless fun if not for Langford’s target: the church (specifically, the Roman Catholic Church, but his critiques certainly encompass more than this tradition). The church is the ultimate antagonist in both Langford adventures.

In *The Da Vinci Code* Langford makes harsh accusations against the church. The church wages an “age-old war to rewrite history” (268). The “Church’s purpose” is to further “the great deception” (295). The church is not a faithful witness of Jesus, but rather, intentionally deceives its adherents: “Since the days of Constantine, the Church has successfully hidden the truth about Mary Magdalene and Jesus” (407). Langford concludes that the influence of the church is nothing less than “insidious”: “The Church may no longer employ crusaders to slaughter non-believers, but their influence is no less persuasive. No less insidious” (407). Sinsister, dangerous, deceptive, and menacing—the church lurks in the shadows of Robert Langford’s adventures as an evil villain that must be stopped.

CONSPIRATORIAL HISTORY

Obviously, *The Da Vinci Code* is a work of fiction. Therefore, we must not get too worked up concerning its content. However, the

church that Langford accuses is not a fictional character. Dan Brown certainly knew that his blanket condemnations against the church would ruffle feathers—especially when the alternative “truth” he proposes involves a complete rewrite of Christian orthodoxy and history.

What is his alternative? Chapter 55 of the book provides the most extensive development of Langford’s revisionism. It goes something like this.

The Roman Emperor Constantine—“a lifelong pagan,” according to Langford—faked conversion to Christianity as a power play to maintain the unity of Rome. He gave into the rise of Christianity and declared it the official Roman religion—but not without fusing it with pagan elements in the process.

In order to unify the Roman Empire and the church as an entity with unchallengeable power, it was crucial to regard Jesus as divine. This was a completely new step in church history—one that had no clear basis in early Christian tradition. Before Constantine and the Council of Nicaea in the fourth century, nobody viewed Jesus as divine: “until *that* moment in history [the Council of Nicaea] Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet . . . a great and powerful man, but a *man* nonetheless. A mortal” (233). To assure the deification of Jesus, “Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ’s *human* traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike” (234).

At the Council of Nicaea, Jesus was declared deity by a majority vote of power-hungry church leaders, forever obscuring Jesus’ original message. Why did Constantine do this? According to Langford, “It was all about the power. . . . Many scholars claim that the early Church literally *stole* Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power” (223).

And what was the original message? Jesus was simply a mere mortal who married Mary Magdalene—who is herself the Holy Grail—and fathered a royal bloodline: “Mary Magdalene was the womb that carried His royal lineage” (255). The reason this message was suppressed by the church was to perpetuate the myth of Jesus’ deity: “The Church, in order to defend itself against the Magdalene’s

power, perpetuated her image as a whore and buried evidence of Christ's marriage to her, thereby defusing any potential claims that Christ had a surviving bloodline and was a mortal prophet" (254).

The shocking truth is that Jesus' deity is a work of fiction—the product of a human vote—while Mary Magdalene's "Goddessness" is a fact, even though suppressed. For centuries the church has done everything in its power to hide the truth about Jesus and Mary. Meanwhile, the secret society, the Priory of Sion, has preserved the truth of Mary's divinity. "The Priory of Sion, to this day, still worships Mary Magdalene as the Goddess, the Holy Grail, the Rose, and the Divine Mother" (255).

The reason that the church has intentionally suppressed the truth about Mary is that, as a male-dominated institution, it has no place for the "sacred feminine": "The Priory believes that Constantine and his male successors successfully converted the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity by waging a campaign of propaganda that demonized the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion forever" (124).

Ultimately, Jesus is not God, but Mary most certainly is the Goddess. One day the Priory of Sion will release this shocking truth to the world, and the church will come crashing down—once and for all exposed as the fraud that it truly is.

Langford concludes his historical revisionism with this bold statement: "the historical evidence supporting this is substantial" (254).

REVISIONISM ADDRESSED

Langford simplifies and misrepresents history at every turn. His revisionism is so extensive that it would take a great amount of time to address every problem. I simply offer a few brief responses.

Certainly, politics were involved in the early church councils, but not exclusively. Simply writing off the fruit of the councils as political power plays misrepresents the deep issues of faith that were debated and addressed.

The early church was well aware of numerous "gospels" but chose through general consensus—a consensus established by their use in ecclesiastical worship—the four Gospels found in the

New Testament. Contrary to Langford's simplification, the canonical Gospels clearly relate the humanity of Jesus. In them Jesus cries, hungers, and thirsts; he is surprised, frustrated, angered, ignorant of certain facts, and so on. The testimony of the early church is that Jesus truly was mortal—truly a man—and yet, more than a man. The full humanity of Jesus is a stable fixture of orthodox Christian doctrine, as is his full deity. It is the mystery of the incarnation—God made flesh—that is at the heart of the church's message of grace, truth, life, and love.

As odd as it may seem to orthodox believers steeped in the stories of the Gospels, Jesus' full humanity and deity would not be compromised if he had married and fathered children. Contrary to Langford's claim, this would not cause the entire church to crumble to the ground.

It certainly is not true that no early Christians held Jesus to be divine until the vote at the Nicaean Council. The earliest letters of the New Testament contain hymns sung to Jesus as Yahweh (e.g., Philippians 2:5–11; Colossians 1:15–20). Though the primitive church existed in a wide variety of expressions, an early consensus on Jesus' deity quickly developed and was formally established and preserved by the earliest church councils.

Langford claims that the "early Jews believed that the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple housed not only God but also His powerful female equal, Shekinah" (309). This is unheard of in Hebrew literature.¹ If any one thing defined the Jewish religion in contrast to surrounding religions, it was its strict adherence to monotheism. The *shema*—prayed daily by faithful Jews—confesses the oneness of God (Deuteronomy 6:4–6). The early church would have fundamentally denied its Jewish heritage if it had embraced polytheism. Instead of rejecting monotheism or embracing polytheism, the early church reshaped its monotheism to facilitate its understanding of Jesus and his unique relationship to the Father and the Spirit. The full conceptual fruit of this is established as public consensus at the early church councils, but the seed of this is found in the revelation of Jesus in the Gospels and Epistles.

Contrary to Langford's claim, the historical evidence for his reconstruction is not "substantial" but strained in every possible way. Indeed, one is tempted even to say, a complete work of fiction.

REFLECTIONS ON THE POPULARITY OF THE DA VINCI CODE

The popularity of *The Da Vinci Code* certainly goes beyond the fact that it is a well-told, engaging—even thrilling—story. It demonstrates that the general public is still fascinated by the person of Jesus—even when he is detached from orthodoxy!

Jesus is a compelling, mysterious, and provocative figure. Even the writers of the Gospels recognize that there is more to Jesus than they can proclaim (see especially John 21:24–25). Thus, it makes sense that Dan Brown would feature Jesus in a novel about puzzles, mysteries, and profound secrets. We should not fault him for this. In fact, we should take a step back and ask ourselves if our presentations of Jesus are equally provocative—or simply dull. Even if Brown gets everything else wrong, at least his Jesus is not dull!

What about the recovery of the “sacred feminine”? It takes little effort to prove that the church is guilty of patriarchalism, but the solution is not to run to the other extreme. In *The Da Vinci Code*, the sacred feminine is recovered through public sex rituals. In the story, Sophie Neveu secretly stumbles upon an ancient sex ritual where her grandfather copulates while surrounded by robed worshippers. She is deeply offended and doesn’t speak to her grandfather for ten years. Robert Langford convinces her that she should not be shocked by something so “natural.” He argues that her inhibitions are largely due to the extensive influence of the patriarchal church. If not for this, people would be less likely to be offended by ritual sex. Surprisingly, this explanation seems to be enough to turn her thinking.

Apparently, if the sacred feminine had not been suppressed by the patriarchal church, the “holy communion” of the divine feminine would involve ritual sex along with the corporate meal of the Eucharist. I wondered as I read this: Is this appealing to feminists? Is this appealing to anybody? Isn’t there more to femininity than sexual intercourse?

One thing evangelicals need to wrestle with in the wake of the popularity of *The Da Vinci Code* is this: Why is the church such an easy target for suspicion and blame? Why is it so easy to imagine that the church fosters deception rather than illuminates truth; that its ultimate intentions are evil rather than good; that it is not

a friend of humanity but exists for its own self-interests? I am sure that the harsh railing of some Christians against *The Da Vinci Code* book and movie will do nothing to correct this negative perception and may indeed actually backfire and so exacerbate this problem in the public’s eye.

There is something else to think about as well: Why is *The Da Vinci Code* so threatening to evangelicals? Ultimately, Dan Brown has said nothing that has not been said before. He has simply packaged it in a new and novel form. I believe that evangelicals are threatened because we are ignorant of our own tradition. We simply don’t know the history of the church well enough to know whether Robert Langford’s story is true to the facts or not.

A healthy dose of church history would do us good in this regard. We need a more robust view of the church and its tradition. We need a clearer view of the development of Christian orthodoxy. The Bible alone cannot stand against revisionist history. It needs the support and context of history and tradition to speak most clearly and truly.

Perhaps, this is another reason evangelicals are suspicious of *The Da Vinci Code*: namely, it reminds us that we too are often suspicious of the church. We simply do not trust that God guided the path of the early Christians in such a way that the truth was carefully preserved and faithfully passed on.

If Dan Brown is guilty of anything, it is that he makes connections where none really exist. But before we are too hard on him, we should examine our own evangelical best seller—the *Left Behind* series. I would contend that almost everything in these novels is mistaken, misleading, and untrue. Yes, Jesus is coming back, but that is about the *only* thing that LaHaye and Jenkins get right—and it takes them twelve books to finally get there! We have unleashed our own share of speculation, fantasy, and drawing connections where none exist. We should notice the log in our own eye before we complain about the speck in Dan’s. (In one sense, both books—*Left Behind* and *The Da Vinci Code*—share something in common: both are deeply suspicious of the institution of the church.)

A WORLD OF MEANINGLESS MYSTERY

The truly tragic thing about the character of Robert Langdon is this: Even though he lives in a world filled with secrets, clues, codes, double meanings, and profound mystery, he has no place for religion. In the end, religion—even the pagan religion of Mary Magdalene—is of limited value to Robert Langdon. In *The Da Vinci Code*, Langdon says to his partner: “Sophie, every faith in the world is based on fabrication. That is the definition of *faith*—acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove” (341).

The only God that Langdon allows is a God of metaphor. He accepts that religion helps people, but it is not because religion is necessarily true. “Religious allegory has become a part of the fabric of reality. And living in that reality helps millions of people cope and be better people” (342).

It is interesting that Dan Brown spends so much time destroying something that, in the end, has no more value than does providing an illusionary coping mechanism for those unable to see the hidden meaning in things—a hidden meaning that, itself, ultimately has no meaning.

Put simply, in *The Da Vinci Code* religion is central to the story but, ultimately, is irrelevant. It is my fear that this may reflect all too clearly the sentiments of many of its readers. A religion of codes and puzzles is infinitely flexible. With no fixed meaning, it can appeal to everyone’s tastes—and still mean nothing in the end.

AUTHOR

Rich Vincent is the Senior Pastor of Immanuel Church in West Bend, Wisconsin. He is married to Elizabeth and has three children: Carmen (7), Owen (4), and Adam (3). He is also the WebSerVanT of www.TheoCenTriC.com.

NOTES

1. Langford makes a big historical blunder when he states: “The Jewish tetragrammaton YHWH—the sacred name of God—in fact derived from Jehovah,

an androgynous physical union between the masculine *Jah* and the pre-Hebraic name for Eve, *Havah*” (309). This explanation is, in fact, backwards. Jehovah is a word derived from combining the vowel sounds of *Adonai* with the tetragrammaton YHWH. The tetragrammaton came first, and Jehovah followed.

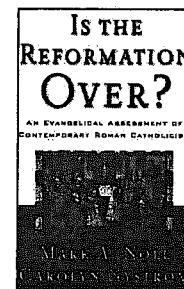
IS THE REFORMATION OVER? AN EVANGELICAL ASSESSMENT OF CONTEMPORARY ROMAN CATHOLICISM

Mark A. Noll and Carolyn Nystrom

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic Books (2005)

272 pages, cloth \$16.50

by Ralph MacKenzie



Mark Noll, who coauthored this book with a former student, Carolyn Nystrom, is the former McManis Professor of Christian thought at Wheaton College. He is the author of a number of books including, *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada*, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*, and *Turning Points*. Dr. Noll is noted for his objectivity and balance in treating complex historical events and different understandings of doctrinal issues between groups within Christendom.

The volume includes an introduction, nine chapters, a section on further reading, and an index. The introduction sets the major theme of this book by detailing the extent to which the hostility that has existed between Catholics and Protestants, since the Reformation, has recently abated. Doctrinal issues have been reexamined, and while significant differences still remain, new understandings have developed between the two groups. Since I coauthored (with Norman L. Geisler) a book dealing with the same topic,¹ I was interested to see how Noll and Nystrom would treat the same issues. Our book was published in 1995, and much has happened since then concerning relationships and interaction between Catholics and evangelical Protestants.

Among these developments are the expansion of the

Colson/Neuhaus Evangelicals and Roman Catholics project; the appearance of Vatican documents such as the various papal encyclicals from the late John Paul II and *Dominus Iesus* (DI), a declaration in August 2000, which was produced by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith—led at the time by Josef Cardinal Ratzinger.² About the same time, after thirty years of theological dialogue, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the Pontifical Commission for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) approved a statement, the “Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (JDDJ).³ The authors also write concerning other ecumenical activities, such as the Alpha courses (which have become very popular), cross-denominational Bible studies, and many Catholic/evangelical discussions as well.

In chapter 1, “Things Are Not the Way They Used to Be,” the first example of change involves the career of Billy Graham. During the 1950s, Catholics were forbidden by their church authorities to attend his meetings. On his part, “Graham was equally antagonistic toward Catholics” (17). This began to change in 1964 when Richard Cardinal Cushing invited Graham to New England “with the prayer of Catholics in the Boston area that God will bless his preaching and crusade, and will lead many to the knowledge of our Lord” (18).⁴

Relations between Billy Graham and some Catholic leaders continued to improve. Cardinal Karol Wojtyla (who would soon become Pope John Paul II) invited Graham to visit Poland, and in October 1978, the American evangelist preached in St. Anne’s Church in Krakow.⁵ In 2002, a group of Catholic leaders attended a conference in Amsterdam sponsored by Billy Graham. Its purpose was to promote the preaching of the gospel. After this meeting, “Bishop Michael Warfel, Chairman of the U.S. Bishops’ Committee on Evangelization, said, ‘I wish I could get more Catholics to have such enthusiasm for their faith in Christ’”⁶ (19).

In the section “Evangelicals at the Vatican,” mention is made of an audience that John Paul II held in December 2003. In attendance were Thomas Oden and some of his coeditors who are publishing the Ancient Christian Commentary series with InterVarsity Press.⁷ “The purpose of the Vatican invitation to these evangelical scholars was for the pope to pronounce his blessing on the first

volume of the commentary series into Spanish and Italian and to commend personally its evangelical editors” (21).

Leaders of the Alpha Course have visited the Vatican as well.⁸ They were introduced to several official Catholic organizations, including the Congregation on the Doctrine of the Faith and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. A personal meeting was arranged between the Alpha keynoter Nicky Gumbel and Pope John Paul II by Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, who had known Gumbel for several years.⁹ These encounters had a positive impact on the Catholic leaders including “four cardinals who made public comments recommending this evangelical program to their own Catholic faithful” (21).

In a section called “Shared Resources,” we find the following: “In yet another indication of the distance moved on questions of evangelism, the staunchly evangelical American Tract Society issued a tract in 2003 titled, ‘The Road to Heaven: According to Catholic Sources’” (22). The biblical quotes in this tract are from the *New American Bible*, which is the translation favored by Catholic leaders for use by their laity. Commentary is drawn from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The tract’s format bears a close resemblance to Campus Crusade’s Four Spiritual Laws, a theme familiar throughout the evangelical world: recognize that God is holy; acknowledge that man is sinful; believe that Christ alone paid for your sin; and repent and trust in Christ for your salvation. Only here a fifth law is added, which increases its appeal to a Catholic audience: live your faith by good works. This inclusion is appropriate and indeed makes the point of a statement that has its origin in the Protestant Reformation: “We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is not alone.”

Evangelicals read popular books written by Catholics such as J. R. R. Tolkien and G. K. Chesterton, and offerings by the Anglican apologist C. S. Lewis can be found to rival in number those of Bishop Fulton Sheen on the shelves of Catholic book stores. Protestant titles such as *Martin Luther: Prophet to the Church Catholic*¹⁰ and *The Riddle of Roman Catholicism*¹¹ are mentioned. (One volume not noted, but of value in assessing the events surrounding Martin Luther and the Reformation, is that by a Lutheran convert to Catholicism, *The Spirit and Forms of Protestantism*.¹² Also

helpful is a book written by an Augustinian theologian addressing the issue of *sola Scriptura*¹³). The authors close out the chapter by noting interaction between Catholics and evangelicals in countries such as Italy, Poland, France, and Ireland.

Chapter 2, "Historic Standoff," begins thus: "Once upon a time, within the memory of many people still very much alive, Catholics and evangelical Protestants regarded each other with the gravest suspicion . . ." (37). Noll and Nystrom survey the many individuals, groups, and volumes coming from both Catholic and Protestant perspectives, which addressed the relationship between both groups. Receiving mention is a work by Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice*, which details the extent that Catholic misogyny—once thought dead—is alive and well.¹⁴

Catholics did not receive this criticism of their faith lying down; they responded in kind. For example, in replying to *sola fide*, Catholics said that evangelicals "offered a 'salvation' by faith that denied the need for holiness before God" and "foolishly neglected the seven sacraments that brought God's grace to every crucial point in a person's life . . ." (42).

Not all evangelical leaders in nineteenth-century America held the notion that the Roman Catholic Church was apostate. In spite of teaching doctrines that evangelicals find at variance with their own, the Roman Church is still a part of the true church. Charles Hodge, respected Reformed theologian who taught at Princeton Seminary, "called down great wrath on his own head by defending the validity of Catholic baptism, even though that defense fully maintained Protestant arguments about the mistakes of Rome" (43). In fact, "if the church of Rome is antichrist . . . how can its ordinances be Christian sacraments?" (44).¹⁵ The chapter closes with examples of events such as the Council of Regensburg (1541), where Catholic and Protestant leaders met to discuss issues that led to the Reformation. Also mentioned is the eminent Catholic scientist/philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–62) "who was treasured [by evangelicals] for both his attacks on the Jesuits and his positive Christian statements" (51).

In chapter 3, "Why Did Things Change?" the authors make the point that despite the claim of ecclesiastical uniformity, the Roman

Catholic Church is not monolithic. It reflects national and cultural differences as illustrated by the way liberation theology was embraced by many Catholics in Latin America.¹⁶ Also, varieties within Catholicism may be distinguished, such as "ultra-traditionalists" (followers of the schismatic Archbishop Lefebvre), "orthodox Catholics" (who follow the lead of Avery Cardinal Dulles and Benedict XVI), "charismatics," "folk" Catholics (who are found in abundance in Latin America and Haiti), and other subcultures as well.¹⁷

In the section "Changes within the Catholic Church," the II Vatican Council is mentioned as crucial to understanding the new relationship between Catholics and evangelicals. Protestants are now called "separated brethren," and Catholics are told to become involved in ecumenical Bible studies.¹⁸ Also, "the shift to the south in the center of gravity for world Christianity has relativized the antagonism inherited from European church history" (63).¹⁹

The Catholic Charismatic Renewal was in place even before the II Vatican Council. This movement, influenced by exposure to Protestant Pentecostals and charismatics, "blurred lines of distinction between Protestants and Catholics as they sang common worship songs, spoke in tongues, developed a personal relationship with Jesus, and praised God together" (65).²⁰ The chapter ends with a discussion of major differences that have occurred within evangelicalism. Included is mention of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together initiative (see chapter 6), the acceptance of a textbook written by a lay Catholic apologist and a Jesuit priest,²¹ and other examples of ecumenical interaction between Catholics and evangelicals which had been non-existent in earlier times.

Chapter 4, "Ecumenical Dialogues," deals in detail with differences among Protestant denominational groups and their interaction with Catholics. Anglicans and Catholics met from 1966 to 1996, which produced a declaration in 1996 on areas of agreement and also a list of ongoing disagreements; at the same time, Methodists and Catholics entered into dialogue as well. Pentecostals joined the discussion with Catholics from 1969–97 at the urging of David du Plessis, a well-known Pentecostal leader who had been an observer at Vatican II; Reformed (1970–90), Lutheran (1972–99), and Disciples of Christ (1977–93) leaders also

dialogued with Catholics. As the Protestant participants were from mainline denominations in fellowship with the NCC and WCC, they were not taken to addressing controversial theological issues that might cause discomfort between the dialogue partners. Evangelical and Baptist groups entered into conversations with Catholics between 1977 and 1988. The chapter continues by reflecting on the previously noted dialogues, noting their agreements and existing disagreements. Doctrines such as ecclesiology, apostolic succession, priesthood of all believers, salvation, sacraments, and doctrines surrounding Mary²² are examined. Topics of special concern for evangelicals including evangelism (Catholics use the term "evangelization"),²³ issues concerning missionary efforts, and the complex aspects surrounding the doctrine of justification are covered. Concerning the latter doctrine, mention is made of JDD), which is a document signed by Cardinal Edward Cassidy of the Vatican and German Lutheran Bishop Christian Krause.²⁴

Chapter 5, "The Catholic Catechism," addresses the importance of this latest catechism. The authors state: "If something is not in the *Catechism*, it is not Catholic teaching. If some thing is in the *Catechism*, it is official Catholic teaching" (116). This is important for evangelicals to know, in that they have been exposed to information that is in error concerning Catholic doctrine and teaching. (This is also true of many lay Catholics as well.) Background is covered concerning the purpose of catechisms in general; the catechism, which emerged from the Council of Trent (1562), and the more recent *Baltimore Catechism* (1884) are also mentioned. Concerning areas of agreement, "Evangelical Protestants reading through the Catholic Catechism will be surprised by how much of it they can affirm" (119).

In addition to commonality concerning basic Christian doctrine, evangelicals will find in the *Catechism* much to enrich their faith and devotional life. Noll and Nystrom also point out that (the aforementioned agreements notwithstanding) evangelicals will not be able to affirm all Catholic spiritual devotions: exercises involving rosaries, relics, sacred places, pilgrimages, and the like remain problematic to most Protestants who believe these Catholic exercises come uncomfortably close to the prohibitions found in the second commandment against idolatry. The *Catechism* addresses a

number of subjects that should be of concern to all Christians regardless of ecclesiastical affiliation. These include respect for life, sexual ethics, family issues such as marriage and divorce, social justice, and spiritual authority. The authors also discuss Catholic /evangelical differences such as the Virgin Mary, baptism, and salvation by works or grace, as these topics are addressed in the *Catechism*. The chapter closes with the following: "Is the Reformation over? Maybe a better question we evangelicals should ask ourselves is, Why do we not possess such a thorough, clear, and God-centered account of our faith as the *Catechism* offers to Roman Catholics?" (150).²⁵

Chapter 6, "Evangelicals and Catholics Together," addresses a project that is ongoing between the two groups. Although ecumenical discussions between Protestants and Catholics could be found in the early 1990s, "Many evangelicals, because of their historical aversion to official ecumenism, whether from the World Council of Churches or the Vatican, did not take seriously the content of these dialogues" (151). This situation changed when close friends and colleagues Charles Colson, who founded Prison Fellowship, and Fr. Richard John Neuhaus, editor-in-chief of the ecumenical journal, *First Things*, decided to try a new approach. The Colson/Neuhaus project had been preceded in the early 1980s by an ecumenical endeavor begun by the Center for Pastoral Renewal. Annual conferences involving evangelical Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox believers addressed cultural issues of common concern. A number of volumes were later published that included presentations from these events.²⁶

Also, the impact of the Second Vatican Council on improving evangelical and Catholic relationships should not be discounted. Concerning the theological makeup of the council, "delegates of Vatican II represented the whole of the theological spectrum, from the most liberal to the most conservative."²⁷ The conservatives reflected the theology of the Counter-Reformation, while "the new thinkers are considerably more flexible in their approach and . . . relatively undogmatic."²⁸ By adapting a more irenic attitude toward non-Roman Catholic Christians (evangelical Protestants were called "separated brethren") and encouraging Catholics to participate in ecumenical Bible studies, opportunity for dialogue between the

two groups was made available.

The chapter summarizes the documents to emerge from the Colson/Neuhaus project beginning with the first, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* “The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium” (ECT I), 1995. These were followed by “The Gift of Salvation” (ECT II) 1997, “Your Word Is Truth” (ECT III) 2002, and “The Communion of Saints” (ECT IV) 2003.²⁹ The various reactions to the ECT projects are noted. Many evangelical leaders took exception to the notion that the Roman Catholic communion is a “true” church that contains converted Christians. Some evangelical leaders who signed ECT I (including Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ; and Charles Colson and Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention) saw their ministries suffer a dangerous drop in donations.

Subsequent discussions, however, caused reevaluation among influential thinkers from both sides of the Reformation. “For example, evangelical Timothy Phillips, a theology professor at Wheaton College, was startled to hear Catholic theologian Avery Dulles say that he had moved closer to the evangelical understanding of salvation in the past decade. . . .” Indeed, says Phillips, “I was stunned! Here the dean of Roman Catholic theology in America was affirming that he had become more conservative . . .” (159). Evaluations by evangelical leaders such as Timothy George, dean of Beeson Divinity School, and the widely respected Anglican theologian J. I. Packer are noted. Also, Catholics including the aforementioned Avery Cardinal Dulles and Fr. Francis Martin, professor of biblical studies at the John Paul II Institute for Studies on Marriage and Family, weigh in with new insights on issues that have caused “heartburn” between Protestants and Catholics since the rupture at the Reformation; doctrinal differences are handled by both sides with honesty and candor.³⁰

Chapter 7, “Reactions From Antagonism to Conversion,” continues a discussion of the issues addressed in the previous chapter. A. J. Gordon (who was instrumental in the founding of Gordon College and Seminary) and the dispensationalist movement are mentioned as early critics of Roman Catholicism. R. C. Sproul, a respected Reformed thinker, has been resolute in his view that the Catholic Church rejects the gospel.³¹ The doctrine that was central to the dispute during the Reformation—namely justification

by faith alone—is at the center of the critics’ concern.³² J. I. Packer, who was an early supporter and participant of the ECT project, is quoted at length in his defense of his involvement.

The authors kindly make reference to my church, Mount Soledad Presbyterian Church, which sponsors conferences including both evangelical and Catholic speakers. Tom Oden’s *Ancient Church Commentary* series is mentioned as exposing evangelicals to what seventy early Christian teachers had to say about each text of the Bible. The chapter closes with a discussion by a number of evangelicals, who come to the decision that “Rome is home.” Among those mentioned are Thomas Howard, who taught at Gordon College, and Peter Kreeft, who began his spiritual journey as a Dutch Reformed Calvinist. Although these evangelicals became Catholic, they retain their love and respect for their evangelical roots. All new converts to Roman Catholicism, unfortunately, do not share this irenic spirit. Some can be disagreeable and reflect a triumphalism, which can be off-putting.³³

Chapter 8, “An American Assessment,” deals with “both the place of evangelical Christianity in shaping the early character of American public life and the place of Roman Catholicism . . . in that same public life” (209). This involves addressing complex cultural and political issues; the authors are to be complimented for unpacking the events of our early history dealing with Protestant/Catholic understandings. Most American evangelicals were comfortable with political liberalism, while Catholics in America were not. This explains “why so many non-Catholic Americans once looked upon Catholicism as a civil as well as a religious threat” (210).³⁴ In a section titled “Change Since the Mid-twentieth Century,” we find “whatever once had been the case, Vatican II moved Catholicism as a whole in the direction of political liberalism. Much in Catholic tradition that had cut against American democratic ideals was gone” (221). The sex scandals that have bedeviled the American Catholic Church are briefly noted, and the chapter ends by noting that—earlier tensions notwithstanding—“political realities have eased the way to a more propitious relationship” (228).

Chapter 9, “Is the Reformation Over?” is the last chapter and addresses the title of the book. The key to understanding the new relationship between the two groups is that “evangelicals open to

closer cooperation with Catholics have usually had positive contact with individual Catholics who, for one reason or another, leave a strong impression of devotion to Jesus" (229). Concerning the full inspiration ("inerrancy") of Scripture, orthodox Catholics and evangelicals are on the same page. This comes as a surprise to some evangelicals who have believed that official Catholicism takes the same position on Scripture as that held by the destructive higher critics, such as those involved in the infamous Jesus Seminar.³⁵

The authors revisit issues discussed earlier in the book, such as justification by faith, the mass, the papacy, the Virgin Mary, and the sacraments. Clarifications are noted, and they identify the most serious disagreement between the two groups as being the nature of the church.³⁶ Concerning continuing differences between Catholics and evangelicals, perhaps they occur "for reasons having more to do with historical circumstances than with sinful error, mistakes, or the exercise of power" (241). Concerning the question posed in the title of their book, Noll and Nystrom suggest that, in spite of the differences that still exist between the two groups, on the one hand, "Catholics find among evangelicals . . . the joyful personal experience of justification by God's free grace and the beauties of activist personal piety"; and on the other hand, "evangelicals find among Catholics . . . a functioning concept of church, a powerful Christian sense of the material world, and a long tradition of balanced political theology" (249).

The authors deserve our appreciation for a job well done. They have helped us to see "that while evangelical Protestants and [believing] Roman Catholics have and will continue to have differences . . . in the words of Cardinal Suenens, 'the walls of separation do not reach up to heaven.' He that is with us is stronger than those that are against us."³⁷

NOTES

1. *Roman Catholics and Evangelicals: Agreements and Differences* (hereafter RC&E) (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995).
2. For an analysis of the DI document, see Ralph E. MacKenzie, "Christianity, Salvation and Roman Catholicism," *LOGOS Quarterly*, vol. 2, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 3, 6, 7, and 9.
3. Ralph E. MacKenzie and James White offer divergent opinions on JDD in "Pro

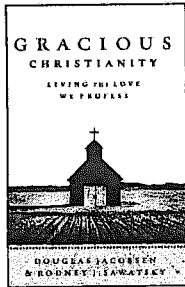
- and Con: Two Journal Contributors Respond to the Joint Declaration on Justification," *Christian Research Journal*, 22:4 (2000) (more on JDD) in due course.)
4. Also, see RC&E, 411–14.
 5. George Weigel, *Witness to Hope: The Biography of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Harper Collins Books, 1999), 248.
 6. An article, "How the Pope Turned Me Into an Evangelical," was posted on the *Christianity Today* website, April 4, 2005. A *Christianity Today* associate, Agnieszka Tennant, describes growing up Catholic in John Paul II's Poland. She writes, "I thank God for his ecumenism, which gave me permission to explore the religion of Billy Graham—whom the pope, while he was still a cardinal, invited the preacher in his pulpit in Krakow, against the annoyance of the Polish Catholic establishment, in a sign of things to come."
 7. When completed, the series will be twenty-eight volumes of commentary on the Scriptures from the early church fathers. Oden, originally a theological liberal, is now a committed evangelical. The editors include Roman Catholics, Orthodox, as well as evangelical Protestant scholars.
 8. Alpha developed at Holy Trinity, Brompton, England and is a fifteen-session, practical introduction to the Christian faith. Thousands of these courses are running throughout the world. Most denominations (including Roman Catholics) are involved, and church leaders are reporting the astonishing impact the course has had on non-churchgoers and existing Christians in the areas where the courses have been utilized. The leader of Alpha is Nicky Gumbel, who practiced as a barrister before being ordained into the Church of England. He joined Holy Trinity, Brompton, as curate in 1986 and began running their Alpha Course in 1990.
 9. Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa is an important player in his own right in meetings between evangelicals and Roman Catholics. He has been Preacher to the Papal Household since 1980. He is a member of a Franciscan order and is trained and has taught classical philology, literature, and systematic theology. In 1975, he became aware of the influence of the charismatic movement in the Roman Catholic Church. He subsequently had a powerful experience of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He spoke on these experiences in an address, "Jesus said, 'Will you give me the reins?'" given at Holy Trinity Brompton, August 2003. He has written a number of books including: *Come, Creator Spirit* (The Liturgical Press, 2003). This is a fine treatment of the person and mission of the Holy Spirit using Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. Fr. Cantalamessa is indeed a hero in the Catholic/evangelical renaissance.
 10. James Atkinson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).
 11. Jaroslav Pelikan (New York: Abingdon, 1959).
 12. Fr. Louis Bouyer (Westminster, Maryland: The Newman Press, 1956).
 13. Fr. George H. Tavard, *Holy Writ or Holy Church* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959).
 14. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2003). Jenkins, once a Roman Catholic but now a member of the Episcopal Church, has written another important book,

- The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), which tells of the changing face of the Christian faith.
15. On Charles Hodge and Catholicism, see Ralph E. MacKenzie's review of William Shea's *The Lion and the Lamb: Evangelicals and Catholics in America* (Oxford University Press, 2004), in *Christian Apologetics Journal*, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 135.
 16. RC&E, 464–65. See also Ralph Martin, *A Crisis of Truth* (Ann Arbor: Servant, 1982).
 17. RC&E, 473–76.
 18. "Bill Creasy, Catholic Bible Teacher Extraordinaire," RC&E, 388.
 19. An important book, which deals with this phenomenon, is Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
 20. Not mentioned in this work are Ralph Martin and Steven Clark, who were central in the development of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. They have organized conferences ("Allies for Faith and Renewal") and written a number of books addressing the need for Catholics and evangelicals to join forces in combating unbelief and negative forces in our culture.
 21. Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, S.J., *Handbook of Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994).
 22. The topic of the Virgin Mary comes up time and again in discussions with Catholics. A significant treatment of this topic is Dwight Longenecker and David Gustafson, *Mary: A Catholic-Evangelical Debate* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2003). Both authors were students at Bob Jones University. Gustafson is a member of a conservative Episcopal church and is an assistant chief in the United States Department of Justice. Longenecker has become a Roman Catholic and is a freelance writer and broadcaster in Chippenham, England.
 23. See Ralph Martin and Peter Williamson, eds., *Pope John Paul II and The New Evangelization: How You Can Bring the Good News to Others* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995). In addition to Catholics, this volume includes evangelical contributors such as Charles Colson and addresses the need to evangelize nominal Catholics (pp. 30, 35, 37, 44, 45).
 24. The signing of JDDJ has attracted considerable attention among Catholics and Protestants alike. For both a positive and negative evaluation, see footnote 3. Also helpful in understanding the debate is the work of an evangelical scholar who teaches at London Bible College, Anthony N. S. Lane, *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Evangelical Assessment* (London: T&T Clark, 2002).
 25. In RC&E, extensive use of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* is made in examining the agreements and differences between evangelicals and Roman Catholics. Also, biblical citations used are taken from the New American Bible (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1986), which is acknowledged by many authorities as an accurate translation.
 26. These would include: *Christianity Confronts Modernity* (1980), *Summons to Faith and Renewal* (1982), *Christianity in Conflict* (1985), *Christian Allies in a*

- Secular Age* (1986), and *Courage in Leadership* (1988). All the above are published by Servant Books, Ann Arbor, Michigan. The participants include Catholics such as Fr. Michael Scanlan and James Hitchcock, and evangelicals such as Charles Colson and Harold O. J. Brown.
27. RC&E, 467.
 28. David Wells, *Revolution in Rome* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1972), 28. Wells is a respected evangelical scholar and his treatment is insightful. The Vatican II Council has been examined from every angle including Gerald M. Fagin, S.J., editor, *Vatican II: Open Questions and New Horizons* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1984) and Ralph M. McInerney, *What Went Wrong With Vatican II: The Catholic Crisis Explained* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 1998). The former work reflects the Catholic progressive perspective; the later is a Catholic orthodox treatment.
 29. The latest document is *The Call to Holiness* (ECT V) 2005, which appeared too late to be mentioned in this volume.
 30. In the many works that have resulted from this new breakthrough between evangelicals and Catholics, Anthony N. S. Lane's *Justification by Faith in Catholic-Protestant Dialogue* is helpful, in which he offers great insight concerning the issues being examined.
 31. Sproul is joined in this view by a number of others including, Robert Godfrey and Michael Horton of Westminster Seminary in California. Sadly, this disagreement has broken many friendships between other evangelicals that had been developed over the years.
 32. See the aforementioned Anthony N. S. Lane for insightful analysis on this issue. Also valuable is Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, vols. 1 and 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
 33. One such ex-evangelical is Robert A. Sungenis, whose sectarianism embarrasses even his fellow Catholic colleagues.
 34. See William Shea, *The Lion and the Lamb*, writing from the perspective of a progressive Catholic, who does a good job of addressing the dynamics of this period in our history.
 35. See Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma* (Rockford, Illinois: Tan Books, 1960), 92. See also Fr. William G. Most, *Free From All Error* (Libertyville: Prow Books, 1985), 37.
 36. For a helpful treatment of the sixteenth-century misunderstandings and differences and the current approach concerning them, see Alister E. McGrath, "What Shall We Make of Ecumenism?" in John Armstrong, ed., *Roman Catholicism: Evangelical Protestants Analyze What Divides and Unites Us* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 199–217).
 37. Harold O. J. Brown in the forward to RC&E, 13.

**GRACIOUS CHRISTIANITY:
LIVING THE LOVE WE PROFESS**

Douglas Jacobsen and Rodney J. Sawatsky
Grand Rapids: Baker (2006)
144 pages, paper, \$12.99



The debate is all too common in our ranks. Which is more important, “The faith or living the faith?” Put another way, “Which comes first, establishing a sound and well-developed theology or Christians living out the faith practically day-to-day?” The authors of this book understand the questions and provide a provocative, but gentle and gracious, response.

In a culture that clearly prizes both tolerance and pluralism, how is the Christian faith heard and experienced by multitudes who see and hear our internal debates? What does the fruit of the Spirit have to do with theology, and how do we stand for what is true and also follow Christ’s mandate to love both God and neighbor? Jacobsen and Sawatsky provide a readable and easy-to-follow proposal, in this primer and passionate call, for how to recover *Gracious Christianity*. They show, very plainly, how historic and orthodox Christian theology supports graciousness in faith and life. Their eight chapters deal with God and creation, humankind, hearing God’s voice, the fullness of salvation, the Spirit and life, being the church, the Bible, and the future. Their treatment is that of “mere Christianity,” and thus their words can appeal to people from many different rooms in the catholic household. Their ecumenical spirit is also evident and appeals deeply to this reviewer.

One of the important contributions the authors make is connected to their understanding of how the kingdom relates to the church. They write: “The goal of the church is to establish the kingdom” (93). Since the kingdom was a key theme in Jesus’ teaching and ministry (one is tempted to say “the” key theme), the reign of God is the chief concern of the church, not its own survival or prosperity economically or numerically. And the authors wisely note, “Unlike the church, the kingdom of God is not something to

which a person *belongs*; instead, it is something in which one *participates* to a greater or lesser extent” (93).

One of the extremely valuable aspects of this little book is the highlighted practical questions that appear throughout. In the section on the kingdom, cited above, questions appear on pages 94–95 that ask:

What is the church’s current reputation in the world? Are Christians more well known for doing good or harm? Regardless of whether that reputation is deserved, what can be done to improve it?

Is there a tension between justice and kindness? Are both justice and kindness required of peacemakers? How is humility related to the task of working for peace and justice?

Citing Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann’s insights on the kingdom, the authors note that the action that calls the kingdom of God into existence in a given society will “almost always spring from sorrow rather than from anger” (97). The public purpose of the church, they argue, is prophetic. This calls us, *together*, to “feed the hungry, clothe the naked, care for the weary, and ask questions about why so many people are poor and naked and weary” (97). But a church that exists to grow and prosper will never see this purpose clearly, choosing rather to promote its own purpose, namely the comfort and blessing of its members and their children.

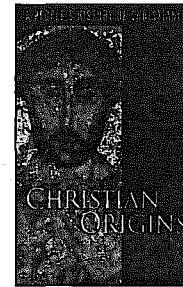
The section titled, “What is the Bible?” is worth the book alone. Simple and memorable analogies abound in this book. One, on the Bible, says it so well. The Bible, say the authors, should be thought of like a “refrigerator door in the kitchen of a large family. The door is plastered with notes, messages, and momentos held by magnets or pieces of tape” (102). Then, of course, there are family pictures, grocery lists, announcements of upcoming meetings, someone’s art work, coupons, etc. Jacobsen and Sawatsky add, “The mix may not make sense to a visitor—it can look rather haphazard—but family members can usually explain why most of it is there” (102). *Thus the Bible reflects human life, and family life, in all its complexities.* What distinguishes it, however, is “that God is also

there, sometimes in ways we expect and sometimes in ways that surprise us or even trouble us" (103).

If the reader wants every issue settled and all the controversies solved, then this book will not satisfy you! You would be far better served to read your favorite polemical theology and adopt the party line that you already favor. But if you want to enter an ongoing theological conversation with other Christians about what they believe, and how we can together love God and our neighbor, then this is a marvelous place to begin your journey.

Rarely does a book take theology, in all of its important categories, so seriously while at the same time fleshing out the *implications* of Christian theology for everyday life. This is a gem and a book I will read again and recommend widely.

—JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Carol Stream, Illinois

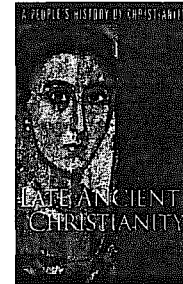


CHRISTIAN ORIGINS: A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY

Richard Horsley, editor
Minneapolis: Fortress (2005)
318 pages, cloth, \$35.00

**LATE ANCIENT CHRISTIANITY:
A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY**

Virginia Burriss, editor
Minneapolis: Fortress (2005)
318 pages, cloth, \$35.00



For much of church history the anonymity of the real members of Christian churches has hidden the corporate and personal witness of everyday Christians from us. There are several reasons for this way of hearing the story of the church. Perhaps the most important one is the illiteracy of most early church members. Their inability to write their own story of faith has made the story less than complete. We have traditionally heard the story only as it has come from the leaders of the church who could write, namely bishops and theologians, with the occasional saint's writing to add some color. This would be the equivalent of believing that the modern church story is told only by pastors and theologians who write formal books. Increasingly, modern journalists have worked to listen to the church, all of it. One thinks of several best-selling books that allow us to "hear" what is really being lived and said by Christians in America. Well, the same is true with regard to early church scholarship. We are finally hearing the story, all of it. The traditional accounts, written for us by bishops and theologians, can now be increasingly compared to the story we are getting from ordinary Christians. This is one of the truly great

advances in modern historical research. Records studied from archaeology and other contemporary sources help us reconstruct the life and faith of early Christians in extremely important ways. We can now begin to really answer the question: "How did ordinary men and women live in the early church?"

The approach the contributors make to these two volumes focuses very purposefully on "the people's story." The result is a patchwork that is engaging and highly profitable. For example, how did early church members handle the separation from the Jewish origins of Christianity that came in the later decades of the first century? And how did the early Christians develop a unique consciousness of their Christian identity? For example, how did they manage allegiances to two different social groups? And how did they deal with issues connected with wealth and poverty? And, even more importantly in some sense, how did the church deal with the presence of slaves and women in the church community?

Editor Richard Horsley, one of the more important scholars of the early church writing today, provides a chapter titled: "Jesus Movements and the Renewal of Israel." It is well worth the volume itself. And William Herzog's, "Why Peasants Responded to Jesus," is both provocative and particularly insightful. Social patterns and practices are examined under the categories of family life, slaves and their relationship to the community of the church, poverty and injustice, and the role of prophets, prophetic movements, and women.

The second volume of the two, *Late Ancient Christianity*, covers the developments in the earliest era of Christianity following the death of the apostles. It looks at issues like asceticism, class and gender, as well as martyrdom. Local practices such as children's play, baptismal rites and church architecture, food and ritual, personal devotions, and life in the city all follow. Part three deals with Christian identity at the boundaries of early Christian faith and life. How was heresy viewed and how did these believers deal with growing diversity, the inevitable result of mission and development?

During this late ancient period the church moved from being a marginal sect to the dominant religion in the empire. This we know. But how do we add "color" to this story? What was this time period like for ordinary believers who prayed, worshiped, and followed Christ as Lord? This volume probes the prayers and prac-

tices, the beliefs and values, of such Christians. The diversity and complexity of lived faith becomes evident to the reader.

Modern historian and religion critic, Martin Marty, says of these two volumes: "These stories [of the type used to produce this series of volumes] may come up from the basement of church history, but news about their existence deserved to be shouted from the housetops." That says it very well. Scholars, pastors, teachers, and interested lay readers will all profit from these two helpful volumes.

These are the first two volumes in a projected seven-volume series.

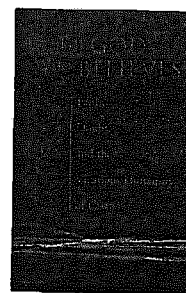
—JOHN H. ARMSTRONG
Carol Stream, Illinois

*THE GOD WHO BELIEVES: FAITH, DOUBT,
AND THE VICARIOUS HUMANITY OF CHRIST*

Christian D. Kettler

Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books (2005)

220 pages, paper, \$24.00



At least since the age of René Descartes, doubt has become a veritable virtue. Among many theologians and philosophers the act of doubting is a sign of the intellect at work, releasing itself from the shackles of stifling tradition or straight-out ignorance. In modernity, it is only through doubt that we can discover certainty. Doubt, it is thought, helps to make one's convictions one's own. The so-called postmodern

turn in contemporary culture would seem to have carried this virtue of doubt to unprecedented heights. However, doubt has also given way to a pervasive skepticism whereby all truth claims are seen to be a form of projection, wish fulfillment, or an attempt to control others. Further, atrocious "crimes against humanity," environmental crises, and natural disasters have peppered the last cen-

ture. Who can honestly say they believe in God in such a world?

Christian D. Kettler, professor of theology and philosophy at Friends University in Wichita, Kansas, attempts to provide an answer. Through an appropriation of the Christology of Thomas F. Torrance and Karl Barth, Kettler shows that the only one who can sustain faith is and has been Jesus Christ. All other humans have given way to the weight of doubt and disbelief. Only Jesus has believed and believes still. Yet, this is not all. If it were all, the persistent belief of Jesus would be at best an unattainable example of belief. We, however, would ultimately be thrown back on our own feeble resources in our attempt to emulate his faith. Our situation is so dire that we need someone to believe *for us*. According to Kettler, Jesus does this too, through his vicarious humanity. When the Word became flesh, Jesus assumed all our doubt and disbelief such that he is able to cry from his cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Matthew 27:46). The cry of dereliction expresses Jesus' assumption of our doubt on our behalf. Yet Christ's ongoing faith in his Father—"Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit" (Luke 23:46)—becomes our faith. Jesus is the Word of God to humanity and the faithful response of humanity to God. Apart from the middle element that is the humanity of Jesus, we are forced to rely on our own efforts to believe (not to mention, obey and worship), something we have proven entirely unable to do. For "the life which [we] now live in the flesh [we] live by the faith of the Son of God" (Galatians 2:20—note the subjective genitive). The faith of Jesus is such that by it we are freed to participate in Jesus' vicarious faith.

Kettler explores these themes by expositing the dynamics of faith and doubt in modern literature. In particular, he traces the narrative of Wendell Berry's *Jayber Crow*, who struggles with the faith to pray "Thy will be done." At one time thinking that he was called to be a pastor, Jayber Crow suffers through a barrage of doubts that lead him to abandon his ordination track. Instead, he finds himself in a country town working as a barber and in love with Mattie, a married woman. It is his hidden love for Mattie that kindles faith in him once again, but of a different sort. Loving Mattie teaches Jayber the dynamics and differences between true faith, "wish-dream" projections, and dogged doubt. Yet, the real-

ity of his love for her persists, winning the victory of faith over doubt. Kettler implements this story, as well as narratives from John Updike and Fyodor Dostoyevsky, to ensure that his readers do not abstract conceptions of faith and doubt from the reality of concrete life. There are no ivory towers here.

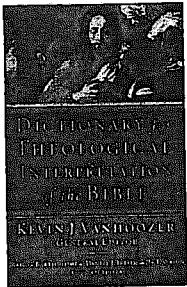
The God Who Believes is refreshing in that Kettler has so ably located the problem of faith and doubt in a christological context. Epistemology and experience are both interpreted in the light of the God-Man. For this, Kettler is to be commended. Yet, I remain hesitant about how Kettler (and for that matter, Torrance) has construed the relationship between Christ's vicarious humanity and our human agency. Both Kettler and Torrance are adamant that Christ's humanity does not cancel our human agency and that the two co-exist. Indeed, Kettler states that Christ's humanity frees, elicits, and gives significance to our human actions. But the precise relationship between the Christ's human agency and ours has not yet been adequately delimited, in my estimation. Both Torrance and Kettler often use the word "participation" in reference to how our human agency intersects with Christ's humanity: we are freed to participate in Christ's perfect faith. Participation is, however, an ambiguous term. What is the nature and mode of that participation? Presumably, there is a pneumatological element to human participation in Christ's humanity, but Kettler is far less explicit on this point than is Torrance. In addition, I have often wondered about those who remain ignorant of or resistant to Jesus' ongoing work of providing the human response to God: what about those who cannot or choose not to "participate"? The end of Kettler's book gives some indication of his perspective on the subject when, in reference to those whose lives are so determined by their circumstances that their belief in God is "impossible" (e.g., those whose lives are enmeshed in tragedy, aborted babies, those people "unreached" by Christian missions), Kettler asks: "Who will believe for the victims of life? . . . [H]as Someone else believed for all of us in the poverty of our twisted and grim existences? The good news of Jesus Christ says, 'Yes, Someone has'" (194). Here, it would seem, Christ's objective faith overshadows our subjective appropriation, rendering it unnecessary.

Finally, one note needs to be made in reference to the form of the book as a whole. The reader will find multiple points where more rigorous editing would have been useful. As well, this text seems to be overly burdened with citations, many of them repeating concepts or sources referenced earlier in the work. This has resulted in a “choppy” feel for the reader.

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DICTIONARY FOR THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BIBLE

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, General Editor
Grand Rapids: Baker (2005)
896 pages, cloth, \$54.99



“Another dictionary?” That is the question general editor Kevin Vanhoozer, research professor of systematic theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School asks in presenting this new work to the reader. So what is Vanhoozer’s justification for this new academic dictionary? He answers that this particular work will be unique in that it combines “an interest in the academic study of the Bible

with a passionate commitment to making this scholarship of use to the church” (19). To accomplish this goal he has assembled over 150 contributors from various academic fields, the largest single group being connected with British (and other European) universities.

In the introduction Vanhoozer informs the reader that in this tome there are four basic types of articles. First, there are *texts*. These include an article on each of the books of the Bible (plus some particular groupings, such as Wisdom Literature, or the Pauline Epistles). Some articles deal with textual features, e.g., the canon. In dealing with the individual books there is generally a consistent format which emphasizes the message

rather than the process of composition. The major categories are (1) history of interpretation, (2) the message, (3) its place in the Canon, and (4) the theology of the book.

Second, there are articles here dealing with *hermeneutics* (interpretation/exegesis). Here the main thrust is upon theory of interpretation and general interpretative approaches. There is, e.g., an important article on “Culture and Hermeneutics,” by E. Yao-Hwa Sung (150–55). Included also are articles on philosophic and literary approaches. Third, articles relating to *interpreters and interpretative communities*, including also reader interpretation. Karl Barth and African biblical interpretation are samples of the materials here. Fourth, this category includes *doctrines and themes*. These come out of reflection on biblical texts, yet provide new lenses through which to interpret the text. Some of the elements in our worldview(s) impacting interpretation are, e.g., effects of sin, the role of the Holy Spirit, and Christology.

Summing up the reason for this kind of dictionary, Vanhoozer states, “to help promote the knowledge of God, the good, and the gospel by the practice of biblical interpretation.” He sees the “ultimate justification” of the dictionary in its usefulness in aiding the promotion of the awareness of what God has done in Israel and in Jesus Christ to foster the good of the world. The book is written on a scholarly level, yet is readable for the educated person. Most articles have a good bibliographic listing at the end, thus opening up the way for additional investigation of the particular topic.

Some of the entries will be useful, especially to readers looking for descriptive references to biblical commentaries and dictionaries/encyclopedias. See, e.g., the inserts by J. B. Green, “Commentary” (123–27) and “Dictionaries and Encyclopedias” (175–77). While fairly brief, they tend to be definitive and give helpful examples of available works.

Along with these, see the articles on “Doctrine,” by A. McGrath (177–80); “Historical Theology,” by M. S. Horton (293–95); “Practical Theology,” by R. S. Anderson (612–14); “Spirituality/Spiritual Formation,” by E. H. Peterson (766–69); and “Systematic Theology,” by Kevin J. Vanhoozer (773–79).

These units come at "theology" from a variety of perspectives, giving the reader a basic introduction to, and the developing direction of, these disciplines.

Another type of writing concerns the relation between the Old Testament and the New Testament (or Judaism and Christianity). See especially the "Jewish Context of the New Testament," by D. C. Harlow (373–80); "Jewish Exegesis," by C. A. Evans (380–84); and "Relationship Between the Testaments," by R. T. France (666–72). These articles would be samples of current endeavors to give a religious/cultural/political context for the reading of the NT.

Finally, one could peruse articles such as those on biblical interpreters, e.g., Augustine (76–78), medieval biblical interpreters (499–503), Luther (471–73) and Calvin (96–97), followed by a variety of Protestant biblical interpretation (633–38), Roman Catholic (102–06), and Orthodox (554–58) biblical interpretation. There are also units on various modern attempts to deal with Scripture and theology. Among these are Asian biblical interpretation (68–71), feminist biblical interpretation (228–30), postmodernity and biblical interpretation (20–21, 600–07), and psychological interpretation (653–55).

I would say that this publication is a major step in making available to the reading public a basically lucid reference volume on the various aspects of interpretation of Scripture. The general editor and the many contributors have accomplished the giant task of writing and assembling a mass of material that will serve the serious student well in endeavoring to plumb the depths of the riches of Scripture, and to "fully furnish" the person who is willing to expend the energy to mine those riches.

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