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SCOTTISH BULLETIN OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGY

The scope of the *Bulletin* is broadly defined as theology, especially Scottish and Reformed, whether biblical, systematic-dogmatic, historical or practical, and Scottish church history. Articles submitted for publication should be sent to the Editor, books for review to the review editor (see below).

Contributors are free to express their own views within the broad parameters of historic evangelicalism. The opinions of contributors may not be assumed to be those of Rutherford House or the Scottish Evangelical Theology Society.

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EDITORIAL

As this number of the *Bulletin* goes into production, preparations for the Christmas season are well underway in Edinburgh. Festive magazine issues are on the racks, lights are being installed, decorations sneak into place—although there's nothing subtle about the retail arrangements being made. Nor can 'subtle' describe the massive evergreen that will soon be appearing outside New College, festooned with countless bulbs and lit to fanfare worthy of an opening ceremony for the Olympics.

Advent annually poses most poignantly and persistently the age-old conundrum for the people of God: how to live faithfully as people *in* the world, but not *of* it? The question brings a particular crunch to those parts of the majority world where Christianity is still regarded as a newcomer. Christian missionaries have long been accused of cultural imperialism, and sometimes with justification. This perception should be nuanced with an appreciation for their welcome and enduring contributions that came in tandem with a presentation of the gospel. Still, it remains the case that the nature of Christian behaviour in relation to traditional practice in, say, central Africa is felt more sharply as problematic than in the central belt of Scotland.

I wonder if it should be so. I know I'm slow, but it is only in recent years the oddity dawned on me of bringing an evergreen tree of moderate size into one's home for decoration which then serves as a focal point for a pile of presents. What's that about? *Tannenbaum* theology is not hard to find (nor is the 'holly-and-ivy' variety), but it increasingly strikes me as an exercise in optimism, creativity, and wishful thinking. Granting the disputed origins of the practice, its connections to the Christ-event lie somewhere on the continuum of fanciful to blatantly pagan.

In part these reflections are prompted by a recent reading of 2 Kings 17, where the story is told of the resettlement of deportees by the Assyrians in the land of Samaria. Traumas persuade these people of the wisdom of learning the ways of the god of that land, and so a priest of the Lord is sent to them (vv. 27-28). In spite of dedicated teaching, their previous national cults persist even while learning devotion to the Lord. The narrator is clearly uneasy with this state of affairs. While their new worship is described as 'fearing the Lord' (vv. 32, 33, 41), this is 'fear' which is no fear at all (vv. 34, 40).

This story has a frame. Before it (v. 6) we read of the exiles from Israel who simply fade into the places to which they were exiled, the process hastened by years of covenant compromise—especially on the part of those who were meant to be guardians of the tradition as the ensuing comment makes clear. At the other end, we encounter the story of Hezekiah, exemplary king of Judah. With the experience of the 'new Samaritans' fresh in our minds, Hezekiah's clear commitment to the reputation of the Lord loses some of its lustre, ultimately taking on a self-serving sheen and leading directly to the deeply compromised reign of his son and successor, Manasseh.

Meanwhile, in November 2011, a SETS day-conference will be taking place in Inverness. Its theme, 'Being the Church Today', addresses a pressing and pointed question in Scotland but hardly for Scotland alone. Disentangling sacrificial and faithful discipleship from compromising cultural trappings is no simple matter, nor is retreat a viable option. But if 2 Kings 17 tells us anything, it is that we can settle far too easily for a form of 'fear' which is no fear. It's worth at least thinking about that spruce tree.

David Reimer

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THE CROSS AND THE FULLNESS OF GOD: CLARIFYING THE MEANING OF DIVINE WRATH IN PENAL SUBSTITUTION

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I. INTRODUCTION

One of the common concerns about the penal substitutionary construal of the atonement insists that it depicts a sub-Christian God who, like the barbaric gods of paganism, seethes with anger over the deeds of human persons and, in turn, becomes determined cruelly to vent his wrath upon them. For example, Steve Chalke contends that penal substitutionary atonement builds on pre-Christian thinking about divinity, missing the development of atonement theology within the Old Testament literature. For Chalke, while the Pentateuch does employ the notion of propitiatory sacrifice, the prophetic books indicate that Israel underwent a 'journey away from these primal practices towards a new and more enlightened understanding by way of Yahweh's self-revelation'.[1] Moreover, in Chalke's view, the wrath of God in the schema of penal substitution cannot be made to fit with Jesus' commands against retaliation (Matt. 5:38-42) or the Johannine statement that 'God is love' (1 John 4:8, 16).[2]

Such comments raise a number of worthwhile exegetical, historical, and systematic questions. Under the rubric of systematic theology, the present essay endeavours to elucidate the relationship between classical Christian theism's conception of God and consequent account of the nature of theological language and the meaning of divine wrath in the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. Leaving aside for the moment queries about the scriptural basis of the doctrine and the representation of the doctrine in the history of Protestant theology, I wish only to posit that retrieving the resources of classical Christian theism will aid proponents of penal substitution (including this writer) in answering the charge of divine barbarism and restating the doctrine in the contemporary milieu. In order to exhibit the ontology of God in classical Christian theism, I expound certain noteworthy features of the doctrine of God in the theology of Thomas Aquinas and in the writings of John Owen. From here, I invite the help of John Calvin to signal the way in which a more traditional understanding of God and human speech about God may contribute to the task of carefully coordinating the wrath of God and the cross of Christ.

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[1] Steve Chalke, 'The Redemption of the Cross', in *The Atonement Debate: Papers from the London Symposium on the Theology of the Atonement*, ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), p. 38.

[2] Chalke, 'The Redemption of the Cross', p. 40.

II. AQUINAS AND OWEN ON DIVINE ACTUALITY AND DIVINE BEATITUDE

A. Aquinas on Divine Actuality

In view of the teaching of Paul in Romans 1:20, Aquinas judges that by attending to the contours of created reality one can rightly infer the existence of God.[3] Unfolding the first of the 'five ways' of demonstrating the existence of God, Aquinas invokes the concepts of actuality and potentiality. He observes that the world around us displays motion and that nothing is set in motion save by another. Motion consists in the reduction of a thing's potentiality to actuality and thus is made possible only by something already in act, which alone can exert such influence on another. Moreover, with the law of non-contradiction in mind, Aquinas reasons that a thing cannot be in potentiality and actuality in the same respect and at the same time and, therefore, cannot be moved and simultaneously perform that act of movement. In other words, nothing can bring about its own motion. Insofar as the motion perceived in the world is part of a sequence of activity dependent upon the initiative of a first mover, positing an infinite regression of movers is not open to us. Therefore, Aquinas arrives at the existence of an unmoved (*contra* the caricatures, not an inert or pallid) first mover, whom he identifies as the God of Israel named in Exodus 3:14.[4]

The thread of divine actuality wends into the next question of *Summa Theologica* as Aquinas refutes in light of John 4:24 the notion that God has corporeality. He reiterates the proposition that the reduction of potentiality to actuality must be wrought by one already in act. When any entity 'passes from potentiality to actuality, the potentiality is prior in time to the actuality; nevertheless, absolutely speaking, actuality is prior to potentiality'. Hence, the first being is necessarily in act and so, as this first being, God enjoys replete actuality, which runs contrary to the notion of divine corporeality.[5]

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[3] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, vol. 1, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 1948), Ia, qu. 2 art. 2.

[4] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 2, art. 3.

Aquinas proceeds then to argue that God is not composed of matter and form. Of course, the actuality of God excludes the possibility of matter in God, but the perfection and essential goodness of God reinforce this exclusion. Anything composed of matter and form possesses its goodness by virtue of its participation in its form. However, since God is the essential and primal good, he cannot possess goodness by mere participation in a form and, therefore, he is not composed of matter and form. Furthermore, an agent, Aquinas says, acts by the form of the agent and, as the first efficient cause, God is essentially and primarily an agent. God, then, is essentially and irreducibly his own self-subsisting form.[6] Because God is not composed of matter and form, his *suppositum* is not individuated by material accidents and thus God is identical to his own nature: 'He must be His own Godhead, His own Life, and whatever else is thus predicated of Him.'[7] In addition, Aquinas reasons that, not only is God identical to God's nature, but God's nature is identical to God's existence, commenting that 'whatever a thing has besides its essence must be caused either by the constituent principles of that essence... or by some exterior agent.' Nothing whose existence is caused can cause its own existence, leaving only the latter choice.[8] But, since God is the first efficient cause, this too is an illegitimate option. Therefore, God's essence is his existence.

Taking an alternative approach, Aquinas notes that existence is that which renders a form or nature actual. Inasmuch as God is fully in act from all eternity, his essence cannot be other than his existence. From yet another angle, whatever is not identical to its existence is a being by participation. Since he is identical to his essence and is the first being, God must not be participated being but instead essential, subsistent being. However, Aquinas is quick to clarify that this does not entail that God is 'universal being' or 'being in general', which is 'predicated of everything'. There is an apparent congruence between divine being and 'common being' because both are regarded as 'being without addition'. The apparent congruence proves illusory on two accounts. First, divine being is being without addition *realiter* as well as *rationaliter*, whereas universal being is being without addition only *rationaliter*. That is, universal being is nowhere present in the world without addition for individuation but is only considered thus abstractly and heuristically by human knowers. Second, divine being is being without addition in reality and in thought and in both cases is without receptibility of addition. In contrast, common being includes addition for the sake of individuation. Aquinas ventures, then, that, while he is being itself, God is not common being but 'proper', subsistent being.[9]

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[5] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 1.

[6] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 2.

[7] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 3.

[8] In any event, God's existence is uncaused.

The actuality and boundless being of God in Aquinas' theology point toward the impassibility of God. For Aquinas, the divine life includes emotions such as joy and delight, but God's immateriality and actuality preclude God suffering some lack or loss that might induce emotional pain. God's immateriality entails that he does not undergo the bodily changes bound up with human experience of sorrow, anger, and so on and his actuality and limitless perfection mean that even the formal, immaterial dimension of human experience of passions is not present in God.[10] The passions to which God is invulnerable include wrath and here we begin to encounter direct implications for our present task.

However, we first call to mind Aquinas' understanding of human speech about God. He is of the view that God may be named by us both literally and metaphorically. Literal names are those, such as life and love, whose semantic grain is not inherently creaturely and corporeal with respect to the thing signified but only with respect to the mode of signification. That is, they ascribe to God nothing that befits only the creature, though as names for God they are acquired by and annexed from the human practice of speaking about things creaturely, limited, and corporeal. Metaphorical names are those such as rock or fortress that import corporeality with respect to the thing signified as well as the mode of signification.[11] These 'comparisons with material things' are justifiable on several grounds, a few of which we acknowledge here. First, by way of the senses we arrive at knowledge of truth and thus God deploys metaphor in Holy Scripture in order noetically to provide for us according to our nature. Second, metaphor enables even 'the simple' to grasp spiritual truth. Third, in Scripture, 'the ray of divine revelation is not extinguished by the sensible imagery wherewith it is veiled' but its truth obtains and the metaphorical imagery prods the reader to examine the teaching for greater insight. Fourth, the veiling that accompanies the use of metaphor serves to turn away those who wish hastily and impiously to learn of divine truth.[12]

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[9] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 4; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, vol. 1, trans. Anton C. Pegis (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 1.27.11.

[10] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 20, art. 1. It is vital that we recognize the logic of Aquinas' theological move here. He has not sold his Christian birthright in favour of succumbing to an alien Hellenism. Rather, he believes that the biblical Creator, though never cold or aloof, dwells in unshakeable perfection that is not susceptive of fluctuation, ontic, moral, emotional, or otherwise. For more recent literature on divine impassibility, see, e.g., Thomas G. Weinandy, *Does God Suffer?* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000); David Bentley Hart, 'No Shadow of Turning: On Divine Impassibility', *Pro Ecclesia* 11 (2002), 184-206; Paul L. Gavrilyuk, *The Suffering of the Impassible God: The Dialectics of Patristic Thought*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), esp. chaps 8 and 9.

For Aquinas, our literal and metaphorical naming of God always occurs analogically. As the Creator, God has being infinitely qualitatively other than that of the creature. His simple perfection is not precisely or exhaustively mirrored in his creation and cannot be comprehended by creaturely predicates. Therefore, human speech about God is never univocal, that is, applicable to God in the same sense in which it is applicable to the creature. Yet, because knowledge of God is genuinely available to human persons, neither is human speech about God equivocal, that is, applicable to God in only a sense entirely different from the sense in which it is applicable to the creature. Instead, names are spoken of God in an analogous or proportional sense. God possesses with all excellence the perfections found in his creation and receives the predication of these perfections accordingly. When directed toward God instead of created things, our speech has neither 'one and the same sense' nor a sense 'totally diverse'.[13] Assertions about God, then, are subject to the assessment of their truthfulness (the alethic question), may be literal or metaphorical in relation to their subject matter (the referential question), and invariably abide under the banner of analogy (the denotative question).

As mentioned above, in Aquinas' thought, God is not susceptive of emotional fluctuation, including the emergence of anger or wrath.[14] However, one may still speak truthfully of divine wrath if one locates the description within the realm of metaphor and, of course, concedes its analogical character. Metaphorical theological description resonates with its object but only by 'similitude of effect': 'because to punish is properly the act of an angry man, God's punishment is metaphorically spoken of as His anger.'[15] 'When certain human passions are predicated of the Godhead metaphorically, this is done because of a likeness of the effect.'[16] Again: 'neither can those [passions] that even on their formal side imply perfection be attributed to Him; except metaphorically, and from likeness of effects.'[17] To speak of the wrath of God is indeed to gesture acceptably toward theological reality, but it is an instance of metaphor made possible by means of a likeness between how human persons meet evil and how God meets evil. Human persons responsible to confront evil administer punishment with an indignation about moral atrocities committed. God, the righteous Judge, administers punishment according to his wise timing and, though not liable to emotional distress, is said metaphorically to do so with a righteous indignation. To speak of divine wrath is truthfully but 'improperly' to render the holiness of God as it is suffered by the wicked.[18]

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[11] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 3.

[12] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 1, art. 9.

[13] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 5.

[14] We mark in passing that the denial of divine impassibility cuts both ways: men and women can enhance the love of God and could perhaps overwhelm God with fury. Cf. Michael S. Horton, 'Hellenistic or Hebrew?: Open Theism and Reformed Theological Method,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (2002), 331 n 55.

B. Owen on Divine Beatitude

In the work of John Owen one discovers a kindred approach to theological description. His *Vindiciæ Evangelicæ*, a meticulous critique of Socinianism, takes up the matter of the Bible attributing bodily shape and passions to God. The Socinian catechism of John Biddle on which Owen focuses prefers to interpret literally biblical statements traditionally considered anthropomorphic, concluding that God indeed has bodily parts and shape.[19] Negatively, Owen points out the difficulty in being consistent with this exegetical tack:

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[15] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 3, art. 2.

[16] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 19, art. 11.

[17] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 20, art. 1. Before making this comment, Aquinas talks of 'certain other passions... as love and joy' which are not located under the category of metaphor. In his mind, these 'passions' are simply emotions that do not entail creaturely limitation or imperfection and are attributed to God literally and 'properly,' whereas sorrow, anger, and the like are passions in the negative sense of the word.

[18] The holiness of God does not morph into the wrath of God. Rather than the relation of God to the creature being altered, it is the relation of the creature to God that is altered by the creature's rebellion. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia, qu. 13, art. 7.

[19] John Owen, Vindiciæ Evangelicæ, in vol. 12 of *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh and Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1966), pp. 98-103.

> Because the Scripture speaks of the eyes and ears, nostrils and arms of the Lord, and of man being made after his likeness, if any one shall conclude that he sees, hears, smells, and hath the shape of a man, he must, upon the same reason, conclude that he hath the shape of a lion, of an eagle, and is like a drunken man, because in Scripture he is compared to them, and so of necessity make a monster of him, and worship a chimera.[20]

Positively, Owen underscores the biblical theme of the radical difference between the Creator and his creatures (e.g., Isa. 40:18, 25). As Creator of all, God is infinite and immense (1 Kgs 8:27; Ps. 147:5; Jer. 23:24), immutable and impassible (Ps. 102:25-27; Mal. 3:6). The Creator-creature distinction requires that we make space for the *via negativa.* in contemplating the divine attributes, seeking, when attempting to speak literally of God, to cleanse our descriptions of creaturely limitation and imperfection. Thus, Owen says, we are constrained to regard statements implying divine corporeality as anthropomorphic, expressing something true, but not literally so, with respect to God.[21]

Having resisted Socinian literalism in relation to bodily parts and figure, Owen turns to the ascription of 'turbulent affections and passions' to God. He submits that we cannot take issue with anthropopathism *per se*, so long as we esteem it as a species of metaphorical predication funded by a certain correspondence between 'the actings of men in whom such affections are, and under the power whereof they are in those actings' and 'the outward works and dispensations' of God. Put differently, if anthropopathic speech is utilized and interpreted under the tutelage of Aquinas' 'similitude of effect', then it is 'eminently consistent with all [God's] infinite perfections and blessedness'. Unfortunately, Owen laments, this proviso is not upheld in Biddle's catechism, prompting Owen to construct a two-stage counterargument. First, and more generally, if conceived literally, passions such as grief, anger, fury, hatred, jealousy, and so on are incompatible with the perfect, ceaseless beatitude of God (Ps. 50:8-13; Rom. 9:5; 1 Tim. 6:15).[22] To suffer such affections is 1) to be liable to an 'incomplete, tumultuary volition', caught between 'the firm purpose of the soul and the execution of that purpose'; 2) to experience a causal dependency on that which inflamed the affection; 3) to undergo change, for 'he who is affected properly is really changed'[23]; and 4) to be in some respect 'impotent', unable to accomplish that which one desires. Owen recapitulates: 'To ascribe affections properly to God is to make him weak, imperfect, dependent, changeable, and impotent.'[24]

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[20] Owen, Vindiciæ Evangelicæ, p. 103.

[21] Owen, Vindiciæ Evangelicæ, pp. 103-5.

[22] These are texts on which Owen elaborates, but here they are only mentioned for the sake of brevity. I would add to the list Acts 17:24-28 and the indications in John 17 of the Trinity's immanent enjoyment of glory and love.

Endeavouring to address the particulars as well, Owen comments on each of the different anthropopathisms. The responsible exegete must exercise caution in rendering divine anger and wrath, 'assigning them their truth to the utmost' and yet seeing to it that they are 'interpreted in a suitableness to divine perfection and blessedness'. Anger is 'desire joined with grief of that which appears to be revenge, for an appearing neglect or contempt', coupled with 'a kind of pleasure... arising from the vehement fancy which an angry person hath of the revenge he apprehends as future'.[25] Owen wagers,

> Ascribe this to God and you leave him nothing else. There is not one property of his nature wherewith it is consistent. If he be properly and literally angry, and furious, and wrathful, he is moved, troubled, perplexed, desires revenge, and is neither blessed nor perfect.[26]

When attributed to God, anger is 'His vindictive justice, or constant and immutable will of rendering vengeance for sin'. In Romans 1:18, for example, the 'wrath of God' is 'the vindictive justice of God against sin to be manifested in the effects of it'. In other instances, anger or wrath respects simply the effects themselves. Owen locates the 'wrath of God' in Ephesians 5:6 under this category.[27] Thus,

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[23] Strangely, in contemporary evangelical circles where divine immutability on some level is still appreciated, there is some reticence about relating it to divine emotion. See, e.g., Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 235-7. Could it be that, instead of honouring divine emotion, such a passibilism trivializes it by distancing it from the sphere of the divine nature?

[24] Owen, Vindiciæ Evangelicæ, pp. 108-10.

[25] Should we think that perhaps we can purge this definition of its uglier elements in order still to speak literally of divine wrath, we ought to note that, at least on the classical account of divine being, even a more dignified sort of anger cannot be literally in God. While it is commendable for those who might pursue a middle ground here to balk at applying this general definition to divine anger, to the extent that classical theism is correct about the actuality, aseity, and immutability of God the Creator, even a tempered 'God-kind' of anger cannot be present literally in God.

[26] Owen, Vindiciæ Evangelicæ, p. 112.

[27] Owen, Vindiciæ Evangelicæ, pp. 111-12.

> anger is not properly ascribed to God, but metaphorically, denoting partly his vindictive justice, whence all punishments flow, partly the effects of it in the punishments themselves, either threatened or inflicted, in their terror and bitterness, upon the account of what is analogous therein to our proceeding under the power of that passion.[28]

C. Conclusion

We have glimpsed in both Aquinas, a medieval Roman Catholic scholastic theologian, and Owen, a seventeenth century Protestant who believed the Roman Catholic church to be deeply flawed, a common vision of God that is mentored by the biblical motif of the Creator-creature distinction and, from this vantage point, delights in God's interminable life and everlasting felicity. To be sure, Owen is typically the more conspicuous in dealing with the pertinent biblical teaching, but both testify that, in view of the actuality and beatitude of God, human speech about God is under certain strictures that rule out literal talk of divine wrath. At the same time, the two men plainly attest the reality and severity of the outpouring of God's wrath and we leave it to a third theologian to link this to Jesus' crucifixion.

III. CALVIN ON THE WRATH OF GOD AND THE DEATH OF CHRIST

Calvin's thinking too is pervaded by the Creator-creature distinction, on account of which he reckons that God speaks to us with a 'lisp' so that anthropomorphic 'forms of speaking do not so much express clearly what God is like as accommodate the knowledge of him to our slight capacity.'[29] Like Aquinas and Owen, Calvin gives credence to the doctrine of divine impassibility[30] but in deference to Scripture is wont to retain in his atonement theology a place for the wrath of God. The Reformer does not mince words:

> No one can descend into himself and seriously consider what he is without feeling God's wrath and hostility toward him. Accordingly, he must anxiously seek ways and means to appease God – and this demands a satisfaction. No common assurance is required, for God's wrath and curse lie upon sinners until they are absolved of guilt. Since he is a righteous Judge, he does

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[28] Owen, Vindiciæ Evangelicæ, p. 112.

[29] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.13.1.

[30] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.14.2.

> not allow his law to be broken without punishment, but is equipped to avenge it.[31]

With the tradition's conception of divine being and human language in hand, Calvin delivers a guarded exposition of the wrath of God vis-à-vis the cross. First, he suggests that talk of divine wrath is figurative and aims at cultivating gratitude for God's mercy. Aware of an apparent tension between the love and wrath of God, Calvin addresses 'how fitting it was that God, who anticipates us by his mercy, should have been our enemy until he was reconciled to us through Christ'. He stresses the priority and magnitude of this divine anticipation, asking, 'For how could [God] have given in his only-begotten Son a singular pledge of his love to us if he had not already embraced us with his free favor?'[32] Whence, then, the biblical announcements of the wrath of God? Calvin answers,

> Expressions of this sort have been accommodated to our capacity that we may better understand how miserable and ruinous our condition is apart from Christ. For if it had not been clearly stated that the wrath and vengeance of God and eternal death rested upon us, we would scarcely have recognized how miserable we would have been without God's mercy, and we would have underestimated the benefit of liberation... since our hearts cannot, in God's mercy, either seize upon life ardently enough to accept it with the gratefulness we owe, unless our minds are first struck and overwhelmed by fear of God's wrath and by dread of eternal death, we are taught by Scripture to perceive that apart from Christ, God is, so to speak, hostile to us, and his hand is armed for our destruction; to embrace his benevolence and fatherly love in Christ alone.[33]

In short, Calvin navigates through the riddle of divine love and divine wrath as *principia* of the crucifixion by characterizing the notion of divine wrath as metaphorical and identifying its salutary effects.

In the next section of the *Institutes*, Calvin portrays the reality of God's wrath against unrighteousness but qualifies this by noting that the statement of God's wrath is 'tempered to our feeble comprehension'. All of us are 'deserving of God's hatred'. Truly, 'until Christ succors us by his death, the unrighteousness that deserves God's indignation remains in us, and is accursed and condemned before him.' In virtue of the incompatibility of righteousness and wickedness, God is unable genuinely to fellowship with sinners. Nevertheless, the love of God 'anticipates our reconciliation in Christ'.[34] Divine love does not wait upon another to intervene for sinful humanity's sake and then responsively embrace us but assumes the initiative and is manifest in the freedom of the mission of God the Son. In support of the active posture of the love of God, Calvin adduces the audacity of Christ's death in Romans 5:1-11 and the gratuity of God's election in the opening blessing of Ephesians. To finish up, he quotes Augustine:

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[31] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.1.

[32] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.2.

[33] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.2.

> Thus in a marvelous and divine way [God] loved us even when he hated us. For he hated us for what we were that he had not made; yet because our wickedness had not entirely consumed his handiwork, he knew how, at the same time, to hate in each one of us what we had made, and to love what he had made.[35]

Calvin's application of the Creator-creature distinction and its linguistic ramifications to his theology of the atonement supplies a glimmer of the manner in which classical Christian theism and its account of theological description have bearing on the doctrine of penal substitution. Literally speaking, God is incapable of emotional flux and suffering, but the Bible's metaphorical talk of divine wrath is not to be cast aside as naïve or irrelevant to Christian piety. The predicate of divine wrath resonates with its intended object but performs its semantic labours as an instance of figurative speech commandeered by God for our good. Calvin's clarity about God's being and the dynamics of human speech about God enables him to chart something of the inner logic of the cross. Recognizing the non-literality of divine wrath opens up space to honour the torrent of divine love in the death of Christ. God is not emotionally 'out of control' or in need of a propitiatory interlocutor to calm God and prompt God to care for us. To be sure, on supposition of his decree to save sinful men and women God is obliged to act in a manner consistent with his righteousness and, therefore, displays his wrath at Golgotha in the form of punitive justice. Nevertheless, in perfect beatitude and sovereign mercy God himself arranged for the redemptive administration of righteousness, the Father sending the Son to be the propitiation for our sin.

IV. CONCLUSION

With contributions from Aquinas and Owen, we have canvassed a portion of classical Christian theism's treatment of God and human descriptions of God, marking that speech about God's wrath is considered truthful but metaphorical. We have also traced out the way in which this theological configuration shapes Calvin's interpretation of Christ's death. Calvin accentuates the love of God and has room for the wrath of God as a truthful but not a literal predicate. In the work of penal substitution fullness of life and constancy of emotion obtain in God just as they have from all eternity. It should be apparent by now that through the influence of this rendition of the doctrine of God a classic Protestant exposition of penal substitutionary atonement such as Calvin's is impervious to the charge of divine barbarism. Far from resembling an incensed and unprincipled sub-Christian deity, God out of his undiminished life and steadfastness prudently enacts his holiness by unveiling his wrath, that is, by punishing transgression on the cross. Far from childishly losing his temper, God lovingly forges a path along which both justice and mercy shine forth in blessed synergy.

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[34] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.3.

[35] Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.16.4.

Our observations here are not intended to answer every question raised about the viability of the doctrine of penal substitution. For example, defenders of the doctrine must respond to the assertion that in Scripture God's wrath is congruent with his allowing the wicked to persist in wickedness and must establish that Scripture depicts God personally directing his wrath, or punitive justice, toward Christ on the cross. Furthermore, the present essay does not necessarily legitimize all handlings of penal substitution. It may be that some theologians or prominent pastoral guides could sharpen their presentation of the doctrine. Nevertheless, with the support of the actuality of God and the metaphorical character of the predicate of divine wrath, penal substitution can withstand the objection of divine barbarism. God in the penal substitutionary schema is no unstable brute but graciously and judiciously respects his own righteousness as he punishes and thwarts sin on the cross.

JOHN CALVIN: THEOLOGIAN OF HEAD, HEART, AND HANDS

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JOHN CALVIN (1509-64): A GREAT LIFE IN BRIEF

Among leading figures in church history, perhaps none has been subjected to more abuse than John Calvin. A university professor once told his students that his conception of hell was being caught in an elevator stuck between floors for eternity with John Calvin one side of him and John Knox on the other. It is common to find Calvin portrayed as a heartless tyrant, a person without feeling, whose doctrine of predestination caused him to show no concern for the earthly needs of human beings or for their eternal destiny.

Character assassinations of Calvin began as early as 1562, when Jerome Bolsec (d. 1584), a former monk who had embraced the Protestant faith but later returned to Catholicism, produced a biography in which he accused the Reformer of arrogance, deceit, cruelty, and ignorance and charged him with gross immorality, including sodomy and a bogus claim that he could raise the dead. Bolsec reported that Calvin died cursing God.[1]

Catholic Bishop Jacques Bossuet (1627-1704), a learned historian, contended Calvin was obsessed with a desire for fame, a man of authoritarian temperament who dealt cruelly with his critics.[2] J. M. Audin (1793-1851) wrote a biography of the Reformer in which he depicted him as a selfish despot who employed criminals to maintain his rule over Geneva, while André Favre-Dorsaz, writing in 1951, regarded Calvin as a joyless, morose, neurotic, sadistic dictator, a superficial thinker who misunderstood Jesus badly.[3] More recent Catholic authors have been less harsh but still critical. Noted church historian Henri Daniel-Rops (1901-65), for example, admitted Calvin was brilliant but viewed him as a self-centred fanatic with little regard for others.[4]

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[1] A lucid coverage of attacks upon Calvin's character together with a convincing defence appears in Richard Stauffer, *The Humanness of John Calvin*, tr. George Shriver (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2009 reprint of 1971 edition).

[2] Jacques Bossuet, *History of Variations among the Protestant Churches*, quoted in ibid., pp. 22-3.

[3] Stauffer, *Humanness of Calvin*, p. 26.

The famous G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) branded Calvin's theology a version of Manichaeism since, in his judgment, the Reformer regarded God as the source of evil.[5] Richard H. Tawney (1880-1962), a noted economic historian, wrote 'in the struggle between liberty and authority, Calvin sacrificed liberty, not with reluctance but with enthusiasm' under a 'dictatorship of the ministry' comparable to the Committee of Public Safety in the French Revolution of 1793.[6]

Among Protestants too detractors of Calvin have been and continue to be numerous and vociferous. In his introduction to a French edition of Theodore Beza's *La Vie de Jean Calvin*, published in 1869, Alfred Franklin described the Reformer as a cold, domineering person without sympathy for human weakness, one who never displayed emotion. He denied Calvin understood the real character of Christianity, and he concluded Calvin was not sincerely seeking for truth.[7]

Perhaps the most unjust assault on Calvin came from one of his successors as pastor at the Church of St. Pierre in Geneva, Jean Schorer. This enemy of Reformed theology collaborated with Austrian novelist Stefan Zweig in 1930 to produce a biography of Sebastian Castellio (1515-63), a scholar in Geneva who eventually broke with Calvin because of doctrinal disagreements. Zweig took occasion in his book to assail the Reformer and his system of theology. Schorer next published his own diatribe in which he depicted Calvin as a heartless dictator.[8]

Evidence abounds that authors, some poorly informed, others malevolent, have portrayed John Calvin badly and thereby convinced many he was an evil person whose influence has been very harmful. Defenders of the Reformer have, nevertheless, not been few, among them some of the most illustrious and learned theologians, not all of whom wrote as Protestant partisans. Roger E. Matzerath, for example, a professor at Atonement Seminary in Washington, DC, treated Calvin courteously, even paying him tribute where he thought it was due. At the conclusion of his entry in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (1967), Matzerath wrote with reference to the Reformer's ongoing influence:

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[4] Ibid., p. 27.

[5] G. K. Chesterton, *Saint Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1956), pp. 106-7.

[6] Richard H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926), p. 119; Marilynne Robinson, 'The Polemic Against Calvin', in *Calvin and the Church*, ed. by David Foxgrover (Grand Rapids: CRC Product Services for the Calvin Studies Society, 2002), pp. 96-122. This is a keen analysis of how authors have affected Calvin's reputation.

[7] Stauffer, *Humanness of Calvin*, p. 28.

[8] Ibid., p. 30.

> Calvinism as an aim and tendency has contributed significantly to man's understanding of his relation with God, a radical acceptance of the will of God, an insistence on the lowly state of man before God, an insight into the power of grace, a powerful stimulus toward biblical faith in Christ, and most of all, a stern but exalted and even mystical appreciation of the sovereignty of God, the knowledge of whom is true and sound wisdom.[9]

Sometimes tributes have come from observers one might expect to be hostile. Ernest Renan (1823-92) was one such commentator, a renegade Roman Catholic known for his *Life of Jesus*, a thoroughly rationalistic interpretation, Renan maintained Calvin's success as a reformer and theologian was 'because he was the most Christian man of his century'.[10]

While conflicting appraisals of Calvin and his influence may never be resolved, the Reformer's legacy remains substantial and secure because of continuing resort to his voluminous writings available in many languages. John Calvin came from a *bourgeois* Catholic family with close connections to the church hierarchy. Gerard Cauvin, his father, was a notary-accountant serving the cathedral at Noyon, a position which enabled him to arrange subsidies for the education of his son, whom he directed to prepare for the priesthood at the University of Paris, where John earned the Bachelor of Arts at the College de Montaigu, a stronghold of scholastic theology-philosophy. Young Calvin demonstrated exceptional ability in his studies and was poised to pursue a career in the clergy when his father became alienated from the church due to a quarrel with cathedral officials which led them to excommunicate him. The elder Calvin then instructed his son to undertake the study of law, a discipline in which John once again excelled. He received the Doctor of Laws from the University of Orleans but never practiced law.[11] Instead, after his father died, he pursued classical learning at the College de France, where he studied

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[9] Roger Matzerath, 'Calvinism', *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. by Faculty of the Catholic University of America, 17 vols (New York: McGraw-Hill Company, 1967), 2, p. 1095.

[10] Quoted by Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 8 vols (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976 reprint of 1910 edition), 8, p. 280.

[11] There is some uncertainty about where Calvin received his law degree. Theodore Beza, his closest friend, indicated it was at Orleans, but Hughes Oliphant Old places it at Bourges. See Beza, *Life of Calvin* in *Selected Works of John Calvin*, ed. by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnett, I (Grand Raids: Baker Book House, 1983 reprint of 1844 edition), pp. xxii-xxiii, and Old, 'Calvin, John',

Hebrew and Greek. Progress in these languages brought Calvin recognition from Catholic humanists eager for the reform of their church. Some of the critiques coming from those scholars may have aroused Calvin's curiosity about Protestant doctrines, although he had earlier studied with Melchoir Wolmar (1496-1561), an expert in the Greek language, who had serious interest in Luther's ideas.

Calvin's initial publication as a humanist who employed the critical-historical method of scholarship did not impress the academic community in Paris, but he became well known nevertheless when his friend Nicholas Cop (c. 1501-40) incurred the charge of heresy. Cop was to be installed as rector of the university in 1533, but his address on that occasion led theologians there to accuse him of espousing Lutheran teachings. The lecture included criticisms of Sorbonne professors and implied approval of some of Luther's doctrine, especially his distinction between the law and the gospel. How much Calvin contributed to Cop is uncertain, but university officials blamed him for it. Cop and Calvin fled to avoid arrest, and thereafter Calvin studied Luther's writings carefully. By then he had lost all interest in law and had become, without any intention, a theological advisor to people troubled by religious controversies. In his own words, 'in less than a year [after his conversion] all who were looking for a purer doctrine came to learn from me, although I was a novice and a beginner'.[12]

The only personal account of Calvin's conversion appears in the preface of his commentary on the book of Psalms, published in 1557. There he wrote:

> since I was so obstinately devoted to the superstitions of popery to be easily extricated from so profound an abyss..., God by a sudden conversion subdued... my mind, which was more hardened... than might have been expected from one of my early period of life. Having then received some taste of... true godliness, I was immediately inflamed with so intense a desire to make progress therein, that, although I did not altogether leave off other studies, I yet pursued them with less ardor.[13]

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in *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. by Donald McKim and David F. Wright (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), p. 46.

[12] John Calvin, *Calvin: Commentaries*, ed. by Joseph Haroutunian and Louise Pettibone Smith (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), p. 52. The fresh translations in this compendium make a delightful reading.

[13] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms, I*, trans. and ed. by James Anderson (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), pp. xl-xli.

Always a diligent student with a passion for knowledge, after his conversion, John Calvin made the Word of God the object of that passion. His first writing as a Protestant appeared in 1534 as a preface to a French translation of the New Testament, a labour of his cousin Pierre Robert Olivetan (c. 1506-38), one of the early instruments of the Holy Spirit to affect Calvin's conversion. Calvin assisted Olivetan in the translation and wrote a lengthy preface which displays his clear grasp of Evangelical beliefs, even at that early point in his development. He then declared 'every good thing we think or desire is to be found in... Jesus Christ alone... This is eternal life; to know the... only true God and Jesus Christ whom... he has established as the beginning, the middle, and the end of our salvation'.[14]

In this, his pioneer venture as a theologian, Calvin digressed to offer consolation to Protestants enduring persecution in France. To his oppressed brethren he said, 'if we be banished from one country, the whole earth is the Lord's; if we be thrown out of the earth itself, nonetheless we shall not be outside of his kingdom'.[15]

Calvin himself was no stranger to persecution, as his first ministry in Geneva attests. After leaving Paris as a refugee, he spent a few months in Navarre, where Queen Margaret (1492-1549), learned and refined sister of French King Francis I (1515-47), encouraged his efforts to cleanse the church of superstitions and corruptions. Calvin next went to Basel. There he composed the first edition of the book that would make him duly famous, the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in 1536.

The *Institutes* at first served as its author's personal confession of faith, as he appealed to the King of France for toleration of his Protestant subjects whom the monarch had been persecuting.[16] As his book underwent several expansions and translation into many languages, it acquired a status among Protestants comparable to that of the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas (c. 1227-74) among Catholics. Calvin's work differs from that of Aquinas, however, in that the Reformer refrained from blending Aristotle's philosophy with Scripture and relied upon the Word of God as self-attesting. Unlike Thomas, Calvin wrote for the edification and instruction of ordinary Christians rather than for other scholars, which accounts for the often devotional character of his book. As in his sermons, so in all of his writings this Reformer did not seek to display his vast learning but communicated life-transforming truths in simple ways.

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[14] *Calvin: Commentaries*, p. 69.

[15] Ibid., p. 67.

[16] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, rev. ed., trans. and annotated by Ford Lewis Battles from the 1536 edition (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing House, 1986).

On a stop in Geneva, while seeking seclusion for his studies, John Calvin met William Farel (1489-1565), who had been proclaiming biblical doctrines there since about 1521. Convinced Calvin would be a great asset in reforming that vice-ridden city, Farel cajoled the unwilling scholar to join him in the work of reformation. Calvin likened Farel's demand to 'the power of God's hand laid violently upon me from heaven. When he realized I was determined to study... in some obscure place... he said God would surely curse my peace, if I held back from giving help at a time of such great need.'[17]

The ministry of Farel and Calvin in Geneva did not last long, as the ruling faction obstructed the efforts of the reformers, especially in matters of public morality and the government of the church. In 1538 the magistrates expelled the troublesome preachers. In an honest revelation of his character Calvin later exclaimed:

> I am by nature timid, mild, and cowardly, and yet I was forced... to meet these violent storms. Although I did not yield to them, yet since I was not very brave, I was more pleased than was fitting when banished... from that city.[18]

Still seeking a peaceful retreat to pursue his studies, John Calvin went to Strassburg, where Martin Bucer (1491-1551) had been leading the reformation. Rather than providing a serene place for scholarship though, Bucer, like Farel before him, constrained Calvin to participate in the ministry by becoming pastor to French refugees who had fled there to avoid persecution at home. The years 1538-41 in Strassburg were a time of productive writing and personal satisfaction, as Calvin preached regularly, lectured on Scripture, revised the *Institutes*, and published the first of his commentaries on the Bible, an exposition of Romans, in 1539. While in Strassburg he served the Protestant cause by meeting with Roman Catholic scholars to discuss matters in dispute, and during that stay he married Idelette de Bure, who became his loving companion until her death only nine years after their wedding.

While Calvin was enjoying a fruitful ministry and the encouraging friendship of Bucer, Jacopo Cardinal Sadoleto (1477-1542), Bishop of Carpentras in southern France, wrote to the governors of Geneva in an effort to restore Catholicism in that city. Known to be a moderate Catholic who desired reform within his own church and opposed repression of Protestants, Sadoleto may have thought the absence of Calvin made the time opportune for reclaiming Geneva. Since no one then in Geneva was competent to answer the learned cardinal, Calvin, from his exile in Strassburg, accepted the challenge. With perhaps understandable bravado, Theodore Beza declared Calvin had replied 'with so much truth and eloquence that Sadoleto immediately gave up the whole affair as desperate'.[19] While that may be an exaggeration, in the judgments of the magistrates in Geneva, Calvin had triumphed, and in 1541 they urged him to return to their city. He did so but with much reluctance, convinced this was his duty.

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[17] *Calvin: Commentaries*, p. 53.

[18] Ibid., p. 64.

Although his supporters had gained control of the city government, Calvin knew many citizens despised him, and he frankly confessed, 'there is no place on earth of which I am more afraid'.[20] For the next fifteen years he would struggle to free the Reformed Church from interference by civil officials, even though the rulers had agreed to his terms when they adopted the Ecclesiastical Ordinances to regulate church-state relations. As Chief Pastor Calvin organized a consistory (presbytery) and composed a catechism in Latin and French, a work translated into other tongues. Soon critics complained the Reformer had created a Protestant papacy, and before long doctrinal issues agitated much unrest, thereby assuring Calvin he would never realize his desire 'to live in private without being known, [since] God has so much turned me around... that he has never let me rest anywhere'.[21]

THEOLOGIAN OF THE HEAD

While John Calvin proved to be an excellent church leader, one Williston Walker called *The Organizer of Reformed Protestantism*,[22] his legacy to the church at large is primarily his contributions as a theologian and Bible commentator. He was a profound scholar well equipped to aid others who aspired to serve Christ and his church. Preaching and teaching were his passion, tasks he approached with clear understanding of the obstacles to be overcome, if people were to attain to the proper knowledge of God and themselves.[23]

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[19] Beza, *Life of Calvin*, p. xxxv; see *A Reformation Debate: Sadoleto's Letter to the Genevans and Calvin's Reply*, ed. by John C. Olin (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976 reprint of 1966 edition); Richard M. Douglas, *Jacopo Sadoleto, 1477-1547* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959), a fine biography.

[20] Quoted by Willem Balke, *Calvin and the Anabaptist Radicals*, tr. by W. J. Heynen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), p. 169.

[21] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms, I*, trans. by James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979 reprint), pp. xl-xli.

[22] Williston Walker, *John Calvin: the Organizer of Reformed Protestantism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1969 reprint of 1906 edition).

In contrast with the optimistic view of human nature popular among Italian Renaissance scholars and artists, Calvin understood the reality of sin and the damage it inflicts upon peoples' minds. He knew, however, that humans are God's image-bearers, even though depraved in every faculty of their being. Sin has impaired, but not destroyed, man's intelligence, and 'some sparkling bits of light keep darting out of the deep... darkness of the human mind'. People, though unregenerate, still possess a measure of rationality, but they cannot acquire the proper knowledge of God and themselves. Instead, they follow their 'depraved imaginations; they only become insane'.[24] Although a 'seed of religion', a 'sense of deity', remains within them, the *noetic* effects of sin lead them into superstition rather than to the knowledge of the true God.[25] In their corrupt condition people 'have a spontaneous inclination toward vanity and error and will embrace... whatever suits their fancy'.[26]

The tragic state of human minds notwithstanding, Calvin praised God for restraining evil and imparting beneficial gifts to even the most depraved thinkers.

> Glorious gifts of the Spirit [are] spread throughout the whole human race. For the liberal and industrial arts come to us from profane men. Astronomy and the other branches of philosophy [knowledge], medicine, political science—we must admit that we have learned them all from them.[27]

The Reformer of Geneva recognized the distinction between saving grace and common grace, and he knew only regeneration could overcome the noetic effects of sin, and that is a progress which continues throughout the lives of believers, as they experience the grace of sanctification. Like Martin Luther, he knew justified sinners are sinners still—*simul justus et peccator.* Saints are only partly sanctified so, as Calvin expressed the matter:

> Since we carry around with us... the remains of sin, a perfect knowledge of the gospel does not exist in us, it is not strange that no one has rid himself entirely of the unrighteous and stupid desires of his flesh.[28]

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[23] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. by John T. McNeill, trans. by Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1960), I.i.l.

[24] *Calvin: Commentaries*, p. 131.

[25] Ibid., p. 132; *noetic* is from the Greek term *nous*—the mind.

[26] Ibid., p. 280; cf. *Institutes*, II.i.8.

[27] *Calvin: Commentaries*, p. 355.

[28] Ibid., p. 187.

Since Calvin's understanding of total depravity did not imply destruction of the image of God, he called Christians to regard all humans with respect and compassion, however evil they might be. To abuse human beings is to attack God. Even though a believer may view a person as 'contemptible and worthless', he must 'embrace him in love and... perform the duties of love on his behalf'.[29]

Because of mankind's distorted perception of God, people cannot understand themselves properly. They lack that wisdom which comes from the correct knowledge of God and self. No one can understand himself apart from an adequate knowledge of the God who has revealed himself as Creator and Redeemer. This saving knowledge comes from Scripture alone, and that revelation directs readers to Christ, the only Saviour and Mediator with the Father. The Bible is a Christo-centric book. The Holy Spirit implants faith to receive divine forgiveness and life eternal,[30] and 'Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit'.[31]

To reinforce a clear understanding of sin's effect upon human minds, Calvin argued they are in darkness, 'destitute of all wisdom and righteousness'; a condition what leads unbelievers to ridicule the intelligence and learning of Christians. To such critics of the faith

> nothing is too silly for us who hope... we shall be given life by a dead man, ask pardon from a man who was condemned, derive the grace of God from a curse, and flee for refuge to a gallows as the one and only hope of eternal salvation.[32]

Noetic effects of sin prevent humans from perceiving the reality of God despite the brilliance of his revelation as in the *mirrors* of the physical universe, finite creatures of all sorts, and the image of God within them. Sinful minds ignore these witnesses to the Creator and that of Scripture as well. Even sinners who do not deny God's existence desire to confine him to heaven, so they may live without his interference.[33]

The cure for humanity's miserable mental condition requires faith in the 'promises of God which cannot be had without the gospel, for by hearing it and knowing it, living faith is provided, together with a sure hope and perfect love for God and a lively love toward our neighbor'.[34] The gospel is the Word of Christ, and 'all cognition of God apart from Christ is an immense abyss which immediately swallows up our whole mind'.[35] Christ as man is the perfect image of God, the demonstration of God's intention for all human beings.[36]

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[29] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vii.6.

[30] Ibid., I.i.1-2; III.i.4.

[31] Ibid., I.viii.13.

[32] John Calvin, *Concerning Scandals*, trans. by John W. Fraser (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), pp. 20-2.

[33] Calvin, *Institutes* I.v.11-12; a clear, concise study of this matter appears in William F. Keesecker, 'John Calvin's Mirror', *Theology Today*, 17 (1960), 288-89.

Calvin's clear grasp of the human condition put him sharply at odds with medieval Scholastics who pursued the study of theology in a speculative manner which led them beyond the bounds of Scripture and therefore into uncertainty and irrelevance to the needs of the Church. The Reformer of Geneva was highly critical of those who promised a synthesis of biblical revelation with Aristotelian philosophy. Rather than rely on pagan teachers, Calvin constructed his systematic theology on Scripture, in which he had complete confidence. His objective was to assist people in apprehending God's self-disclosure in Scripture and supremely in Jesus Christ. So great was his confidence in divine revelation that he exclaimed:

> Scripture is the school of the Holy Spirit, in which, as nothing is omitted that is both necessary and useful to know, so nothing is taught but what is expedient to know... [The Christian must] open his mind to every utterance of God directed to him.[37]

Calvin maintained that Scripture speaks the Word of God as surely as if God himself were to do so orally.[38]

Humanity's refusal to honour Scripture, Calvin maintained, is evidence of the abnormal condition of human nature since the fall. The Reformer understood sin to entail a corruption that leads man 'to build the world around himself, to corrupt even his best achievements by being conscious that they are *his* achievements'—pride![39] Because of their morally deranged condition, sinners are not able to understand either God or themselves correctly, and hence they do not realize where their own interests lie.

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[34] *Calvin: Commentaries*, p. 67.

[35] Ibid., p. 45.

[36] Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xv.4.

[37] Ibid., III.xxi.3.

[38] Ibid., I.vii.l.

[39] John Dillenberger and Claude Welch, *Protestant Christianity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954), p. 29.

THEOLOGIAN OF THE HEART

A critic of the Reformer of Geneva once remarked, 'from an affair of the heart... Calvin transformed religion into an affair of the intellect'.[40] This is a rather common view among opponents of Calvinism, one which has applied epithets such as 'strict, moralistic, legalistic, authoritarian, rigorous, systematic, biblical theocrat, cold, severe, dictatorial, and austere'.[41] Such defamations of character display far more prejudice than informed judgment, and numerous scholars have supplied effective rebuttals, especially as they have investigated Calvin's correspondence, sermons, and prayers. Even in the *Institutes*, however, the Reformer expressed his passion and compassion as a pastor, as he explained how true faith is not only a cerebral grasp of doctrine but a heart-felt commitment to Christ. Writing about saving faith, Calvin declared:

> The Word of God is not received by faith if it flits about in the top of the brain, but when it takes root in the depth of the heart, that it may be an invincible defense to withstand... all the stratagems of temptation.[42]

Contrary to the depiction of John Calvin as an uncaring logician with a heart of ice and a countenance of stone, his own writings display warm-hearted devotion in response to God's love, as he called Christians to realize the extent of the divine purpose throughout their being, including their emotional lives, for 'when the faithful are convinced... they are loved by God... they are not slightly touched with this conviction, but have their souls thoroughly imbued with it'.[43] Calvin indicated he hoped to persuade people Christian doctrine is not a matter of esoteric speculation but truth which elicits heart-felt affection. To achieve this end, he wrote for common people in language they could understand. This is apparent in his many Bible commentaries in which he took care to correct obscure interpretations of Scholastic authors which often left readers confused. Christo-centric exegesis guided his passionate proclamation of salvation for otherwise helpless sinners, of which he knew he was one. Rather than portray God as a distant autocrat, Calvin preached a merciful Father who, through the gospel, invites the lost to himself.[44]

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[40] Quoted by A. Mitchell Hunter, *The Teaching of Calvin*, 2nd edn (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1950), p. 9.

[41] This is an observation of Randall C. Zachman, 'Theology in the Service of Piety', *Christian Century*, 23 (1997), 419. Zachman himself, however, expressed admiration for Calvin.

[42] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.34.

[43] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to The Romans*, trans. and ed. by John Owen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955 reprint of 1849 edition), p. 194; cf. Eifion Evans, 'John Calvin: Theologian of the Holy Spirit', *Reformation & Revival* 10 (2001), 83-104.

Even when expounding the difficult doctrine of predestination, the Reformer often presented it as a blessed encouragement to troubled Christians, a cause for gratitude and an impetus to love God fervently. Consider this statement:

> As [the Christian] justly dreads fortune [chance], so he fearlessly dares commit himself to God. His solace... is to know that his heavenly Father so holds all things in his power, so rules by his authority... so governs by his wisdom, that nothing can befall [him] except he determine it. Moreover, it comforts him to know that he has been received into God's safekeeping, and entrusted to the care of his angels, and that neither water, nor fire, nor iron can harm him, except in so far as it pleases God... to give them occasion.[45]

In even his most thorough doctrinal treatise Calvin called his readers to consider dogmas as inducements to spirituality. 'Piety was the keynote of his character. He was a God-possessed man.'[46] Rather than deducing conclusions from his assumptions about God and man, Calvin objected to the Catholic Scholastics for that very practice. He emphasized the heart as the seat of faith, which is confidence in God's Word. Intellectual acceptance of divine revelation, though entirely necessary, must be accompanied by a radical change in the condition of the heart. As he said, the assent believers give to God is 'more of the heart than of the brain, and more of the disposition than of the understanding'. He supported this assertion by quoting Romans 20:10: 'with the heart man believes unto righteousness'.[47]

Once the Holy Spirit regenerates a dead heart, the recipient of that grace begins the process of recovery from the noetic effects of sin, and mind and heart together love the Saviour and regard God as both Sovereign and Father, the paternal source of all good things. They serve God because of reverential love.[48]

Although the glory of God was Calvin's foremost emphasis, he always sought the wellbeing of fellow humans. Indeed, he believed extending such care is pleasing to God, a major means of promoting his glory. Convinced the proper knowledge of God and man crushes sinful pride and produces becoming low self-esteem, the Reformer urged Christians to implement love for their neighbours, even when that entailed risk to themselves. This was not just a precept he propounded from the pulpit but one he put into practice, thereby setting an example for his people. In 1538, when he learned a nephew of William Farel had contracted bubonic plague, Calvin quickly went to minister to him without regard for probable contagion. When the boy died, Calvin paid the funeral expenses.[49] During an epidemic of plague in Geneva in 1548, Calvin offered to be chaplain at the city hospital, but municipal officials would not allow him to do so. Upon the death of his friend Guillaume de Frie, the Pastor became guardian for his orphan children.[50]

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[44] Zachman, 'Theology in the Service of Piety', has explained this well.

[45] Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xvii.11.

[46] Hunter, *Teaching of Calvin*, p. 296.

[47] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.ii.8.

[48] Ibid., I.ii.2; Benjamin B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 139-76.

In addition to his ministry to sick and dying people, John Calvin was a counsellor to troubled souls, a role in which he showed great sympathy and sensitivity to the needs of others. When Madame de Grammont learned her husband had been unfaithful, her Pastor urged her to

> pray daily to God that he may change your husband's heart, try to win him back... I know how difficult this is..., since you have been betrayed several times..., but you must still work on it, since it is the best remedy.[51]

Persecution of fellow Protestants caused Calvin particular grief, as his letter to Farel on May 4, 1545 attests. Some Waldenses who had not yet embraced the Reformed faith but had attended the teaching of Farel, fell victims to the wrath of French King Francis I, who slaughtered hundreds of them. Frustrated by inability to help these suffering believers, Calvin closed his letter with these words: 'I write worn out with sadness and not without tears, which so burst forth every now and then that they interrupt my words.'[52] The Reformed Church leaders did send a delegation to Paris which obtained release of some Waldenses. Those so liberated moved to Geneva, there to swell the refugee population.

Concern for oppressed Protestants often led Calvin to send letters of consolation, as when Richard Le Fevre was condemned to die by burning in 1551. The Pastor-Reformer counselled him to prepare for a wedding feast with Jesus.[53] In 1552 Calvin wrote to five missionaries of the Reformed Church sentenced to death in France, assuring them of his prayers and efforts to obtain their release through the intercession of sympathetic people of influence in France. He prayed God would give them cause to rejoice whatever the outcome of their trial.[54]

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[49] *Selected Works of John Calvin, Tracts and Letters*, ed. by Henry Beveridge and Jules Bonnet, 7 vols (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1983 reprint of 1858 edition), vol. 4, letter of August 20, 1538.

[50] Ibid., vol. 7, letter of February 11, 1562.

[51] Ibid., letter of October 28, 1559.

[52] Ibid., vol. 4, letter of May 4, 1545. An interesting account of this episode appears in Chris Accardy, 'Calvin's Ministry to the Waldensians', *Reformation and Revival* 10 (2001), 45-58.

Calvin's capacity to 'weep with those who weep' (Romans 12:15) is especially evident in the manner by which he responded to the death of his only son and that of his wife Idelette. She was a widow with two children when Calvin married her, after leading her and her late husband to renounce Anabaptism and to embrace the Reformed faith. The Reformer heartily adopted Idelette's children, and together he and she produced a son named Jacques, but he died in infancy. The mother never recovered from a difficult pregnancy and perilous delivery of a premature baby. Even before these tragedies, Calvin learned while away from Geneva that plague threatened the city, a development that caused him much anxiety. In a letter to his fellow reformer Pierre Viret (1511-71), his concern is obvious. He wrote: 'what makes my grief grow even more is that I hear they [his wife and children] are in danger, and there is no way I can help them.[55] Calvin cared tenderly for his wife during her final illness, a time when he again wrote to Viret: 'the reason for my sorrow is not an ordinary one. I am deprived of my excellent companion.[56]

To believers enduring afflictions, Calvin exclaimed: 'all those who regard their troubles as necessary trials for their salvation not only rise above them but turn them into an occasion for joy'.[57] Confidence in the sovereign providence of God should lead suffering saints to 'consider it as coming from God and as... intended for our good'.[58] Moreover trials provide opportunities for believers to examine their thoughts and actions to find reasons for divine chastisement.[59]

In addition to his eagerness to console troubled saints, the Pastor-Reformer of Geneva admonished his people not to rejoice over the trials of unbelievers, even though they deserve to suffer. He said 'be sorry for those who are punished, because we may have deserved as much or more', a maxim he supported by referring to Hebrews 10:31, 'it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'.[60] Rather than denigrating the lost and exulting in self-esteem, Calvin admonished readers of the *Institutes*:

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[53] For this information and much more I am indebted to Richard Stauffer and his excellent book *The Humanness of John Calvin*, see p. 90.

[54] *Selected Works of Calvin*, vol. 5, letter of June 10, 1552.

[55] Quoted by Stauffer, *Humanness of Calvin*, p. 41.

[56] Quoted in ibid., p. 45.

[57] John Calvin, *Suffering—Understanding the Love of God: Selections from the Writings of John Calvin*, compiled and annotated by Joseph A. Hill (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2005), p. 30.

[58] Ibid., p. 28.

[59] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vi.6.

> It is of no slight importance for you to be cleansed of your blind self-love that you may be made more nearly aware of your incapacity, that you may learn to distrust yourself... that you may transfer your trust to God... relying upon his help, you may persevere unconquered to the end.[61]

The Reformer maintained the proper knowledge of God always produces low self-esteem.[62]

Although often misrepresented as an austere, unapproachable figure, John Calvin was a warm-hearted pastor, a sensitive person possessed of the whole range of emotions characteristic of all human beings. He formed close friendships, and the loss of friends grieved him deeply. Once, when Theodore Beza lay ill because of plague, Calvin related to a friend in France that he was 'weighed down with a load of grief', and he stated 'I would be destitute of human feeling did I not return the affection of one who loves me with more than a brother's love and reveres me as... a father'.[63] To his great relief, Beza recovered and lived to succeed Calvin as chief pastor in Geneva.

Another of Calvin's dearest friends was Phillip Melanchthon (1497-1560), Luther's closest co-worker in Wittenberg. They met at Frankfort in 1539, later at Worms (1540-41) and at Regensburg (1541). Common concerns and mutual affection bonded them together as comrades in the cause of reformation. This relationship continued even after Melanchthon discarded some of Luther's teachings to which Calvin heartily subscribed. The Reformer of Geneva dedicated his work *The Bondage and Liberation of the Will* to his German friend who had not yet deviated from Luther's position on that subject. In 1546 Calvin translated Melanchthon's *Loci Communes* (systematic theology) into French despite his disagreement with some of the Wittenberg scholar's contentions. When Melanchthon died, Calvin sorrowed profoundly.[64] When the son of his friend M. de Richborug perished because of plague, Calvin wrote to the bereaved father, 'I found myself so distracted and confused in spirit that for several days I could do nothing but cry'.[65]

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[60] Calvin, *Suffering: Understanding the Love of God*, p. 41.

[61] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.viii.6.

[62] Ibid., III.iii.16.

[63] *Selected Works of Calvin*, vol. 5, letter of June 30, 1551.

[64] Stauffer, *Humanness of Calvin*, pp. 65-6.

[65] Quoted by ibid., p. 88.

The John Calvin of legend may appear as a stern person devoid of feelings, but the John Calvin of history was very much the opposite, a scholar who instructed the intellect, yes, but a pastor and friend who counselled and consoled the heart as well.

THEOLOGIAN OF THE HANDS

While Calvin will always be remembered as a profound scholar, the foremost theologian of the Reformation, his contributions to the resurgence of biblical Christianity extend far beyond his academic labours. Never an advocate of learning for its own sake, this reformer sought the application of Christian principles to all of life. As he once declared, 'true religion is founded upon obedience.... God is rightly worshiped only if his Word is obeyed.... Hence the church can be established only where the Word of God rules.[66] The authority of the Word then must not be restricted to the realm of the intellect but applied to behaviour in all areas of life. Like Luther and other reformers, Calvin understood there is nothing Christians could do to enhance the life of God, but they have endless opportunities to show their love for him by serving the needs of their neighbours. When Sorbonne theologians extolled love for self as prerequisite to love for one's neighbours, Calvin retorted:

> our self-love produces a neglect of and contempt for others.... Therefore our Lord demands that it be converted into [true] love... We must seek our brother's advantage no less than our own.[67]

This obligation extends to everyone, to brethren in the faith, of course, but it includes a responsibility to love even those who hate the people of God. As Calvin put it, 'the best evidence of our adoption is to do good to the wicked and the untrustworthy'.[68]

Within the context of sixteenth century Geneva, Christians had abundant opportunities to put their faith to work in tangible ways. Between 1550 and 1560 the population of the city rose to 21,400, an increase of 60%, and many new arrivals were impoverished refugees fleeing persecution in Catholic lands. In a series of sermons on the book of Job, delivered in 1554, Calvin addressed the need to provide for poor people through charity organized so as to make it efficient, and to that end he stressed the role of deacons as ministers of assistance. Those God has favoured with wealth must aid the poor as an expression of love for their neighbours. This was not to impose economic equality but to reduce the sufferings of destitute people. Calvin regarded selfish refusal to aid the poor as theft and willful neglect to obey God's commands. Giving must originate as genuine concern for others. Each person must give according to his means, and no one may stipulate an amount for others. Love for money is idolatry, while self-denial to help others is a consequence of sanctification. Monetary gifts to God and to the needy are acts of worship when offered in a loving spirit.[69]

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[66] *Calvin: Commentaries*, pp. 78-9.

[67] Ibid., pp. 327-9.

[68] Ibid., p. 333.

Calvin very much desired believers to give *hands* to their faith by taking specific measures to help people in need, and the ministries of Geneva's deacons implemented that concern. One prominent example of their labours is the creation of a hospital as specified in the Ecclesiastical Ordinances of 1541. Calvin often appealed to the magistrates to enlarge programs to aid the poor, and he participated personally in collections of funds for charity. Believing Geneva was a Christian community, he favoured cooperation between church and state to relieve the distress of impoverished residents.

His understanding of human depravity kept Calvin from being naïve about poor relief. He knew there were lazy people eager to benefit from the generosity of others, and he expected fraudulent appeals for aid. The Reformer therefore directed the deacons to investigate applicants for assistance before granting them charity. He often railed against laziness, and to combat it, he urged the city to establish industries and so create jobs. Calvin emphasized the dignity of labour and said employers and workers should consider wages as provisions from God. As they do so, both will understand the need for just wages. He believed civil government has a God-given duty to prevent fraud and exploitation in commerce, and to that end he urged price controls to prevent speculation and hoarding goods for sale in times of scarcity.[70]

Calvin explained the duties of the Christian life in connection with his emphasis on self-denial, and that should, he maintained, lead believers to glorify God through seeking the good of their neighbours. Diligent performance of one's common work is a fitting way to do so.[71] Much like

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[69] See Calvin, *Sermons from Job*, ed. and trans. by Leroy Nixon (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), especially the exposition of Job 31:16-23. For an excellent examination of Calvin's thinking about charity, see André Bieler, *The Social Humanism of Calvin*, tr. by Paul T. Fuhrmann (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1964).

[70] Ibid., pp. 33-53. For a perceptive study of Calvin's thinking about economics, see Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), pp. 85-96.

[71] Calvin, *Institutes*, III.vii.4-10.

Luther, the Chief Pastor in Geneva regarded ordinary work as a divine calling, as God equips and assigns each person a place for his or her work. In the case of the elect, this demonstrates God's care for his people, as their labour promotes their sanctification.[72] Calvin showed great disdain for the Roman Catholic practice of applying the concept of *calling* to clerics alone.[73] He denied one form of labour is higher than another. As he expressed this conviction, 'no task will be said to be so sordid and base, provided you obey your calling in it, that it will not shine and be reckoned very precious in God's sight'.[74] Farmers, shoemakers, and barbers should regard their work as dignified because God has called them to it. God's bestowal of talents and opportunities to employ them is then not limited to spiritual gifts but extends to all areas of life in manual and mental labour.[75]

Although Calvin emphasized the virtue of self-denial and Christians' responsibility to care for the poor, he did not promote a severely ascetic style of life. He believed the saints should receive God's material gifts gratefully and enjoy food, wine, clothing, even jewellery and precious metals, but they must not covet them or allow the quest for them to control their lives. To Calvin self-denial meant dying to sin and living for Christ. It does not entail ascetic renunciation of the material creation which God has provided for human benefit and enjoyment. Some French nobles, when they fled to Geneva, brought their love of social status with them and disdained work as beneath their dignity. Calvin rebuked them, contending the biblical mandate to work applies to everyone. The attitude of such aristocrats was fundamentally the same as that of monks who regarded themselves as a spiritually superior social class.[76]

In Calvin's view earthly life is a gift from God, so Christians should despise only the sinful aspects of life in this world. Believers are on a pilgrimage to heaven, and they should avail themselves of earth's wholesome pleasures while they travel.[77]

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[72] Ibid., III.x.6.

[73] Ibid., IV.xiii.11.

[74] Ibid., III.x.6.

[75] *Calvin: Commentaries*, pp. 355-6. A helpful treatment of this matter is by Ian Hart, 'The Teaching of Luther and Calvin about Ordinary Work: 2. John Calvin (1509-64)', *Evangelical Quarterly* 67 (1995), 121-35.

[76] Alister McGrath, 'Calvin and the Christian Calling', *First Things* 94 (June-July 1999), 31-35; Paul Helm, *The Callings* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), pp. 58-60.

[77] John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries: the Gospel According to St. John*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, ed. by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1959), pp. 37-8.

CONCLUSION

Calvin, of course, knew life on earth is temporary, and as he approached his own demise, the Reformer apologized to people he had offended and assured them it was not because of malice but due to zeal for the truth. He maintained his teaching was always scriptural, and he warned that false teachers would soon appear, 'wicked, giddy men, to corrupt the pure doctrine which you have heard from me'.[78]

Among John Calvin's ailments were asthma, tuberculosis, indigestion, ulcerated haemorrhoids, gout, colic, and quartan fever; at times he vomited blood. Beza reported that, when in much pain, his friend exclaimed 'Thou, O Lord, bruisist me; but it is enough for me that it is thy hand'.[79] His soul departed to be with Christ on May 27, 1564. Calvin had 'looked into the mirror of the creation, the Word, and the Word made flesh and beheld the splendor of the invisible God'.[80]

J. I. Packer has provided a fitting appraisal of this often misrepresented and maligned servant of God and mankind.

> What kind of man was he? Not the ogre of legend! Calvin the egotistical fanatic, hard and humorless, the doctrinaire misanthrope, the cruel dictator with his arbitrary, uncaring devilish God is a figure of fancy, not of fact.[81]

John Calvin sought to assist people in acquiring the proper knowledge of God and of themselves, a knowledge which humans by nature do not desire. When regeneration occurs, however, they come to regard themselves as ignorant selfish sinners who urgently need divine forgiveness. Transformed by grace, they seek God's glory in all of life's experiences, as they submit to the authority of God's Word.[82] Calvin himself provided the appropriate prayer for such transformed souls in the devotional ejaculation which became his motto: *Cor meum tibi offero Domine, prompte et sincere*, 'My Heart, I Give to Thee, O Lord, Promptly and Sincerely'. With his *heart* John Calvin gave his *head*, to think God's thoughts after him, and his *hands* to serve God's chosen people.

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[78] Quoted by Beza, *Life of Calvin*, p. xci.

[79] Quoted in Ibid., p. cxv.

[80] Keesecker, 'Calvin's Mirror', p. 289.

[81] J. I. Packer, 'John Calvin and Reformed Europe', in *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, ed. by John D. Woodbridge (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), p. 209.

[82] Ibid., p. 214.

'THAT IT MIGHT LEAD AND DIRECT MEN UNTO CHRIST': JOHN OWEN'S VIEW OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT[1]

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INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I will examine John Owen's (1616-1683) thought on the Mosaic covenant, which is generally understood as a bilateral covenant between God and Israel at the time when Moses was the human leader of the Israelites, thus termed the Mosaic covenant. Sometimes it is called Sinaitic covenant because this covenant was given at Mount Sinai. Owen however calls this covenant the old covenant in contrast to the new or better covenant of Hebrews eight.[2] This sometimes confuses readers because Owen also uses the same term to refer to the covenant of works.[3] Here, however, while the designations Mosaic, Sinaitic, and old covenants may be synonymous, I will employ the former.

In attempting to understand Owen's view of the Mosaic covenant, readers should humbly realize the presence of a predicament: Owen's writings are complicated to read and grasp. This is especially true for those who study him without proper knowledge of the historical background in which he penned his volumes. These people often end up with a wrong conclusion about Owen's view of the Mosaic covenant. Hence, specialists of Owen strongly suggest scrutinizing Owen according to his historical context.[4] Richard C. Barcellos, in his article 'John Owen and New Covenant Theology', states:

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[1] An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the 54th Midwest Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society on March 20, 2009, at the Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, Ohio. The quote is taken from John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 23 vols (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 22, p. 81. Hereafter, the format Owen, *Works*, 22, p. 81, will be used.

[2] Owen, *Works*, 22, pp. 49, 61.

[3] Ibid., p. 61.

[4] See Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Cumbria, U.K.: Paternoster Press, 1998), pp. 1-44.

> It must also be recognized that some things [Owen] said are difficult to understand. Some statements may even appear to contradict other statements if he is not followed carefully and understood in light of his comprehensive thought and the Reformation and Post-Reformation Protestant Scholastic world in which he wrote.
>
> If one reads some of the difficult sections of Owen's writings, either without understanding his comprehensive thought and in light of the theological world in which he wrote, or in a superficial manner, some statements can easily be taken to mean things they do not. When this is done, the result is that authors are misunderstood and sometimes, subsequent theological movements are aligned with major historical figures without substantial and objective warrant.[5]

Then Barcellos cites John Reisinger as an example of one who has misinterpreted Owen's understanding of the old (i.e., Mosaic) covenant. Reisinger is an advocate of the new covenant theology and believes that Owen also held this same view, and this equation Barcellos sets out to disprove in his article. Indeed, many writers have misconstrued Owen's covenant theology. Mostly the misapprehension arises from the question whether Owen's Mosaic covenant falls under the covenant of works or under the covenant of grace, and in what respect Owen understands the Mosaic covenant in relation to the covenant of works and grace.

AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF PURITAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT

Before I present Owen's thought concerning the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to the covenants of works and grace, I will first briefly take an historical look at various views about this issue. As we shall see later, Puritans were divided on this matter. Listen to Edmund Calamy (1600-1666), a Puritan divine and active member of the Westminster Assembly, who wrote a book on the subject of covenants in which he dialogued with other Puritans:

> There be severall opinions about the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of grace, to the great disturbance of many Christians; some hold that there be foure Covenants, two of Works, and two of Grace; the two first, one with *Adam* before the fall, and the other with *Israel* at their returne out of *Ægypt*, and the Covenants of Grace the first to *Abraham*, and the other at the Incar-

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[5] Richard C. Barcellos, 'John Owen and New Covenant Theology: Owen on the Old and New Covenants and the Functions of the Decalogue in Redemptive History in Historical and Contemporary Perspective', in *Covenant Theology From Adam to Christ*, ed. by Roland D. Miller, et al. (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2005), p. 1.

> nation of Jesus Christ; this M. *Sympson* affirmed before a Committee of the Assembly of Divines in my hearing. 2. Others hold that there is but three Covenants; the first with *Adam*, the second with *Israel* at their going out of *Ægypt*, and a third with Jesus Christ, the two first of Workes, and the last of Grace, and this M. *Burroughes* delivered in his Exposition Sermon in *Cornhill* in my hearing. 3. Others hold that there is but two Covenants, the one of Works, and the other of Grace; yet the first they hold was made with *Israel* at *Mount Sinai*, and no Covenant of workes before that, and now it is vanished away, and the other a Covenant of grace yet not made till the death of Christ the testator, and this is affirmed by *James Pope*, in a Book entituled, *the unveiling of Antichrist* [1646]. 4. Others hold that the Law at *Mount Sinai* was a Covenant of grace, implying that there is more then one Covenant of grace, and this is affirmed by Mr. *Anthony Burgesse* in his Vindication of the Morall Law the 24. Lecture, text the 4. of *Deuteronomy*. 5. Others with my selfe hold that there is but two Covenants, the one a Covenant of Workes, and the tree of life, was a Sacrament or signe and token of it, this was made with *Adam* before his fall... But then there was a Covenant of grace which God the Father made with Jesus Christ from all eternity to save some of the posterity of *Adam*....[6]

Calamy's statement suggests that there are at least three views among the Puritans about the Mosaic covenant relating to the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The first view is that the Mosaic covenant belongs to the covenant of works. Observe what he says in the quote: 'some hold that there be foure Covenants, two of Works, and two of Grace; the two first, one with *Adam* before the fall, and the other with *Israel* at their returne out of *Ægypt*.' Here he is telling his readers that those Puritans who believed that there were four covenants incorporated the Mosaic covenant to the covenant of works. This is also his appeal in his second and third points. Puritans who held to this first view were Symson (also spelled as Simpson),[7] Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1600-1646), and James Pope (b. 1621?). The second view that we find in Calamy's observation is that the Mosaic covenant is simply a covenant of grace. Notice what he mentions in his fourth point: 'Others hold that the Law at *Mount Sinai* was a Covenant of grace', which according to him was Anthony Burgess's (d. 1664) position. The third view is that of Calamy himself (in his fifth point) who argued that there are only two covenants, works and grace, and believed that the Mosaic covenant did not belong to either the covenant of works or to the covenant of grace. He said, 'Some object and say the Law at Mount Sinai was a covenant of grace, and others say it was a covenant of works, but I shall prove that it was neither.'[8] To him the Mosaic covenant was 'only given to those that were in covenant as a rule of obedience'.[9] By this he means that the Sinaitic law was given to the Israelites who were already in God's covenant, and was given to them as a rule of obedience. He explains it this way:

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[6] Edmund Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants Made between God and Man* (London: Printed for Thomas Banks, 1647), pp. 1-2 (italics his).

[7] Probably Calamy has in mind Sidrach Simpson (c. 1600-1655), a regular participant of the Westminster Assembly's meetings.

> Thus they were in covenant before the rule of obedience was given, for the Law is not of faith, but the man that doth them shall live in them, *Gal.* 3:12. that is, he that obeyeth that rule being in the new covenant by faith in Christ shall live, yet not for his doing but for his believing, *Rev.* 5:1, 2; *Gal.* 3:26. it was given as a glasse to see their sin, *James* 1:23, 24, 25. by the Law is the knowledge of sin, see *Rom.* 3:20; 7:7. it was given them as a schoolemaster to drive them to Christ, *Gal.* 3.24. as the pursuer of blood drove the murtherer to the City of refuge, *Joshua* 20:3. then the Law at *Sinai* cannot be a covenant of grace.[10]

What I want to point out here is that the Puritans were not united in their understanding of the Mosaic covenant. We have seen three different positions so far: (1) the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works; (2) the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of grace; and (3) the Mosaic covenant as neither a covenant of works, nor a covenant of grace. This I call a 'neither-nor position'. Ferguson calls this third view a 'mediating position', which according to him is what Owen adopted.[11] To quote Sinclair Ferguson: 'In company with a number of others, he [Owen] adopted a third, mediating position.'[12] Ferguson's statement suggests that there were other Puritans who adopted the same position that Owen did. But the problem in this statement is that it assumes that these 'other Puritans' had exactly the same view as Owen, which may not be precisely true.[13] It appears that not all Puritans who held the mediating position had exactly the same perception concerning the Mosaic covenant. There were diversities of opinions even among those who favoured the mediating position. Thus, this mediating position should be further classified. Ernest F. Kevan comments: 'It is not possible to make an accurate classification of the Puritans on the basis of their views about the Mosaic Covenant, because many of them held several of the different views in varying combinations.'[14] In fact, in the writings of Anthony Burgess, there seems to be another view, that is, the Mosaic covenant is a 'mixt covenant of works and grace', which for Burgess, 'is hardly to be understood as possible, much lesse as true'.[15] But this mixed view[16] may simply be another way of stating the 'neither-nor position' because even those who said that the Mosaic covenant was neither a covenant of works, nor a covenant of grace, found elements of truth from both the covenants of works and grace in the Mosaic covenant. In this sense, the Mosaic covenant is a mixed covenant of both works and grace.

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[8] Calamy, *Two Solemne Covenants Made between God and Man*, p. 8 (italics his).

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), p. 28.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ferguson gives one Puritan example, Samuel Bolton (1606-1654), who had the same basic view as Owen. But strictly speaking, the two differ in their understanding of the covenant of grace and its relationship to the Mosaic covenant (see footnotes 20 and 27, below). Nevertheless, Ferguson's statement would have been stronger if he had given more than one example.

I will not go further in elaborating the different views held by the Puritans, but rather address my main concern in this paper—how did Owen understand the Mosaic covenant in relationship to the covenants of work and grace?

AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF OWEN'S MAJOR WRITING ON THE MOSAIC COVENANT

There is no better way to determine Owen's thought on the Mosaic covenant than to peruse his writings themselves. Such a task requires great diligence, considering that Owen's writings are voluminous. However, since this essay is intended to be brief, I will focus on Owen's exposition of the epistle of Hebrews, particularly his exposition of Hebrews eight where he extensively elucidates the Mosaic covenant.

Owen is convinced that the old covenant, which the author of Hebrews had in mind, refers to the Mosaic covenant: 'The other covenant or testament here [i.e., in Hebrews 8:6] supposed, whereunto that whereof the Lord Jesus Christ was the mediator is preferred, is none other but that which God made with the people of Israel on mount Sinai.'[17] Previously, he has mentioned that this other covenant cannot be the covenant of works: 'This is the covenant of works, absolutely the old, or first covenant that God made with men. But this is not the covenant here intended [i.e., in Hebrews 8].'[18] And to him, the new or better covenant in Hebrews eight belongs generally to the covenant of grace: 'This [the better covenant] can be no other in general but that which we call *'the covenant of grace'* And it is so called in opposition unto that of 'works,' which was made with us in Adam; for these two, *grace and works*, do divide the ways of our relation unto God, being diametrically opposite, and every way inconsistent.'[19]

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[14] Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), p. 113.

[15] Cited in ibid., 113.

[16] Samuel Bolton also mentions the mixed view: 'For the clearing of these difficulties, let it be said that divines have distinguished between various kinds of covenants. Some of them have set down these three: a covenant of nature [i.e., works], a covenant of grace, a mixed kind of covenant consisting of nature and grace.' Samuel Bolton, *The True Bonds of Christian Freedom* (1645; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), p. 89.

[17] Owen, *Works*, 22, p. 63.

Here we observe the following: first, Owen calls the covenant at Mount Sinai 'the other covenant or testament'. This may imply that besides the two covenants (works and grace) that he has touched on, there is yet another covenant, the Mosaic covenant. We find also from his writings that he believed in the idea of a covenant of redemption. In reference to the covenant of grace, he asserts: 'it was virtually administered from the foundation of the world, in the way of a promise'.[20] This is basically the notion of a covenant of redemption. Thus, Ferguson's analysis that Owen has four covenants (redemption, works, Mosaic covenant, and grace) is right.[21]

Second, this Mosaic covenant cannot be a covenant of works, nor can it be a covenant of grace, since what Owen considers the covenant of grace[22] is the better or new covenant. Hence, Owen falls under the 'neither-nor position' category. But this idea should be explained more fully. Third, as I have already mentioned in my introduction, Owen uses the term 'old covenant' for the covenant of works. This is somewhat perplexing, since in other pages he employs that same term for the Mosaic covenant.[23] However, we should not conclude that the Mosaic covenant is the old covenant of works, for Owen is very clear that it is not. How then does he understand the Mosaic covenant?

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[18] Ibid., p. 61.

[19] Ibid. (italics his).

[20] Ibid., p. 64.

[21] Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, p. 22. I am aware that I have not really proven that Owen believes in the covenants of redemption, works and grace. I have intentionally refrained from discussing this matter, since this is not my main purpose in this treatise. For a helpful discussion of this issue, see Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, pp. 22-5; and Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 67-98.

[22] Owen further regards this better covenant 'not as absolutely the covenant of grace, but as actually established in the death of Christ, with all the worship that belongs unto it' (*Works*, 22, p. 69). Owen then makes a distinction between the covenant of grace and the better or new covenant. He asserts: 'When we speak of the "new covenant," we do not intend *the covenant of grace absolutely*, as though that were not before in being and efficacy, before the introduction of that which is promised in this place' (*Works*, 22, p. 74; italics his). Ferguson explains this: '[Owen] argues for a *distinction* to be made between the covenant of grace and the new covenant, in terms of salvation in Christ as a principle and a promise, and salvation in Christ established in historical redemption' (Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, p. 30; italics his).

Owen notes that 'the way of *reconciliation with God*, of justification and salvation, was always one and the same; and that from the giving of the first promise none was ever justified or saved but by the new covenant, and Jesus Christ, the mediator thereof'.[24] He adds: 'the writings of the Old Testament, namely, the *Law, Psalms,* and *Prophets*, do contain and declare the doctrine of justification and salvation by Christ'.[25] To Owen then the Mosaic covenant cannot be a covenant of works, simply because in the Mosaic covenant salvation was through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and not through the work of obedience of man as in the 'do this and live' principle of the covenant of works. The Mosaic covenant was not given for saving purposes. Owen asserts: 'by the covenant of Sinai, as properly so called, separated from its figurative relation unto the covenant of grace, none was ever eternally saved'.[26] He further explains: 'This covenant thus made, with these ends and promises, did never save nor condemn any man eternally'.[27] In this way, Owen disagrees with other divines who regarded the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works.

Owen also states that 'the use of all the institutions whereby the old covenant [i.e., Mosaic covenant] was administered was to present and direct [people] unto Jesus Christ, and his mediation'.[28] Thus for Owen the Mosaic covenant was given to point sinners to Christ through all its institutions. He goes on to say: 'That this other covenant [i.e., the Mosaic covenant], with all the worship contained in it or required by it, did not divert from, but direct and lead unto, the *future establishment of the promise* in the solemnity of a covenant, by the ways mentioned.'[29] To put it this way, Owen understands the Mosaic covenant as a subservient covenant to the covenant of grace.[30] As such, he is with Samuel Bolton, who concludes 'that there was no end or use for which the law was given, but such as was consistent with grace and serviceable to the advancement of the covenant of grace'.[31]

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[23] Owen, *Works*, 22, pp. 49, 64, 70. Owen, however, clarifies in the context of Hebrews 8 that he does not use the term old covenant to mean the covenant of works. He says: 'When we speak of the 'old covenant,' we intend not the *covenant of works made with Adam*, and his whole posterity in him' (*Works*, 22, p. 74; italics his).

[24] Ibid., p. 71 (italics his).

[25] Ibid., (italics his).

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., p. 85.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., p. 75 (italics his). The 'promise' Owen has in mind is the one 'given unto our first parents immediately after the entrance of sin' (ibid., p. 78).

Owen also does not favour the view of other divines that the Mosaic covenant was just a different administration of the covenant of grace. He argues: 'But this [i.e., the Mosaic covenant] was so different from that which is established in the gospel after the coming of Christ, that it hath the appearance and name of another covenant.'[32] Then he concludes: 'Wherefore we must grant *two distinct covenants*, rather than a twofold administration of the same covenant merely, to be intended.'[33] Owen therefore sees the Mosaic covenant as a separate covenant, 'made with a particular design, and with respect unto particular ends'.[34] This Mosaic covenant is particular[35] because it 'was never intended to be of itself the absolute rule and law of life and salvation unto the church'.[36] It is another covenant, with a particular design, which is to guide sinners to the new or gospel covenant, as Owen writes: '[it] was given of God for this very end, that it might lead and direct men unto Christ.'[37]

Concerning the Mosaic covenant's relation to the covenant of works, Owen notes that 'this covenant at Sinai did not abrogate or disannul that covenant [i.e., of works], nor any way fulfil it'.[38] However, he believes that the Mosaic covenant 're-enforced, established, and confirmed that covenant [of works]'.[39] He explains it in three ways:

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[30] But one needs to remember that when Owen speaks of the covenant of grace in the context of Hebrews 8, he means not the covenant of grace absolutely, but that which was established in the death of Christ, which he also calls the gospel covenant (ibid., p. 76). In this sense, Owen differs from Bolton, who makes no distinction between the covenant of grace and the new or better covenant in connection to the Mosaic covenant. See footnote 21.

[31] Bolton, *The True Bonds of Christian Freedom*, p. 109.

[32] Owen, *Works*, 22, p. 71.

[33] Ibid., p. 76 (italics his).

[34] Ibid., p. 77.

[35] Owen employs the word 'particular' to mean that the Mosaic covenant was not given as a general rule to the church (ibid., p. 77).

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., p. 81.

[38] Ibid., p. 77.

[39] Ibid.

1. It revived, declared, and expressed *all the commands of that covenant* [of works] *in the decalogue*; for that is nothing but a divine summary of the law in the heart of man at his creation.

2. It revived the *sanction of the first covenant*, in the curse or sentence of death which it denounced against all transgressors. *Death* was the penalty of the transgression of the first covenant: "In the day that thou eatest, thou shalt die the death." And this sentence was revived and represented anew in the curse wherewith this covenant was ratified, "Curse be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them," Deut. Xxvii. 26; Gal. iii. 10.

3. It revived the promise of that covenant,—*that of eternal life upon perfect obedience.*[40]

Hence, later Owen speaks that in the Mosaic covenant there is a 'revival and representation of the covenant of works, with its sanction and curse;'[41] and that in connection to the covenant of grace, there is a 'direction of the church unto the accomplishment of the promise'.[42]

CONCLUSION

Owen has a unique understanding of the Mosaic covenant. He calls it old covenant, in contrast to the new or better covenant, and that these two 'differ in their *substance and end*'.[43] 'The old covenant was typical, shadowy.... The new covenant is substantial and permanent, as containing the body, which is Christ.'[44] However, Owen sees a connection between these two covenants, that the old covenant (Mosaic covenant) functions as a subservient covenant to the new covenant, which is the covenant of grace. Yet, one must understand that when Owen speaks of the Mosaic covenant as a serviceable covenant to the covenant of grace, what he means is not the covenant of grace *promised* after the fall, but the covenant of grace *established* in the death of Christ, which he sometimes calls the gospel covenant.[45] Therefore, to John Owen, the Mosaic covenant is subservient to the gospel covenant; that is, this Mosaic covenant is another covenant whose ultimate end is to guide sinners to the gospel of Christ.

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[40] Ibid., pp. 77-8 (italics his).

[41] Ibid., p. 80.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., p. 96.

[44] Ibid.

[45] See footnotes 21 and 29, above.

CONSULTING THE ORACLE: *SORTES BIBLICAE* IN EVANGELICALISM TO 1900

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Those who read first-hand narratives by early evangelicals will eventually come across an account by an earnest soul who opens their Bible at random to seek guidance. In fact, this practice (*sortes biblicae*) can still be found today at a popular level, making it a topic of ecclesial interest as well as a historical curiosity. *Sortes biblicae* has roots in and beyond the middle ages and saw a resurgence in the first 170 years of evangelicalism. This paper will take a closer look at the practice by examining its background and the several purposes for which it was commonly employed.[1] It will then consider why the practice flourished in early evangelicalism by tracing its development through Methodism, well-known practitioners, and cultural influences.

Sortes biblicae, or 'Bible lots' is the practice of opening the Bible at random and applying the first passage encountered to a specific question or situation of the inquirer. This is also referred to as *bibliomancy* (use of books in divination) or *sortes sanctorum* (use of sacred texts in divination). *Sortes biblicae* is a subset of both of these practices. It can be practiced either formally or informally, by placing a Bible on an altar as part of a ceremony, or the inquirer can simply open the Bible in the privacy of home. The New Testament or Psalter were in some cases used instead of the complete Bible. The Bible was sometimes opened once and sometimes several times, taking each passage as a serial part of the whole message for the inquirer. *Sortes biblicae* has ancient pagan roots, and was most commonly practiced in the middle ages, but experienced a revived interest in Evangelicalism from 1730 to 1900 and is still practiced to some degree today.

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[1] The footnotes will indicate, when known, the denominational affiliation of the practitioner and the year in which the experience was recorded for the readers who are interested in the chronological and denomination clusters of the accounts.

ORIGINS OF USAGE

Sortes biblicae originated as an adaptation of other types of sortilege, such as *sortes homerica* and *sortes virgiliane*, in which the inquirer would draw a random line from the works of Homer or Virgil to predict the future or answer a question. Though usage of *bibliomancy* predates the New Testament, *sortes biblicae* was in its height of popularity in the middle ages, especially the early middle ages.

The most well-known instance of *sortes biblicae* was by St. Augustine of Hippo. In the year 386, he heard the now-famed words of the child in the garden, 'tolle lege, tolle lege' and recalled that Saint Anthony was converted upon a random reading of Matthew 6:21. Augustine opened a Bible at random to Romans 13:13-14 ('Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and impurities, not in strife and envying; but put you on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.'),[2] and later wrote that 'as if before a peaceful light streaming into my heart, all the dark shadows of doubt fled away'. Augustine was converted, calling the experience a direct work of God: 'you had converted me to yourself.'[3]

Church councils forbade the usage of *sortes biblicae*, beginning with the council of Vannes in 461.[4] *Sortes biblicae* and other types of divination were so popular and persistent that many councils after Vannes also condemned it and attached punitive measures to it, including excommunication. Ironically, Augustine himself writes that he disapproves of *sortes biblicae*, but allows it as a concession, suggesting, 'As to those who read futurity by taking at random a text from the pages of the Gospels, it could be wished that they would do this rather than run around consulting demons.'[5]

In antiquity, the practice may at times have been believed to be effective because of the holiness of Scripture itself. The book is hagiography, holy writing, a physical representation of Christ; so, turning to the Bible for guidance was effective in itself, without need to appeal to God to guide the *sortes*. However, many examples in evangelicalism of *sortes biblicae* include an appeal to God for guidance so it can be assumed that, in theory, most evangelical inquirers did not see the act of opening the holy book as effective by itself for divination. In practice, many evangelicals recorded an ethereal experience with the text in which the words of Scripture seemed to glow upon the page. Although these inquirers record a supernatural experience with the text, they likely still understood this as the providence of God rather than magic or fate outside of the providence of God. John Quincy Adams addresses this in a letter in reference to usage of *sortes biblicae*, which he uses himself: 'If there was any Faith in the sortes Virgilianae, or sortes Homerica, or especially the Sortes biblicae, it would be thought providential.'[6]

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[2] King James Version

[3] Augustine and J.K. Ryan, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1960), Bk. VIII, 29-30.

[4] Rulings in other councils: 314 Council of Ancyra (can. 24) forbade divination; 461/91 Council of Vannes condemned *sortes sanctorum* and *sortes biblicae* (can. 16); 506 Council of Agde condemned *sortes sanctorum* and *sortes biblicae* (can. 42); 511 Council of Orleans condemned *sortes sanctorum*, but allowed *sortes biblicae*.

[5] B.M. Metzger, 'Sortes Biblicae,' in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 713.

It is not difficult to see why early evangelicals would have understood their practice of *sortes biblicae* to be biblical and that the outcome would be guided by God. In the Old Testament law, the priest was commanded to cast lots to determine which goat should be sacrificed. Proverbs 16:33 specifically teaches that God determines the result of lots: 'The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD.' In the story of Jonah, the sailors use lots to discern that Jonah was the one who had caused the tempest to endanger their ship. Also, the disciples chose Matthias, the disciple who replaced Judas, by casting lots. These passages all indicate that God makes his will known through lots, and evangelicals who took these examples as instructive had strong basis for defending *sortes biblicae*. This seems to be the attitude of Wesley, who borrowed phrasing from Scripture to support *sortes biblicae*: 'Hereby I am come to know assuredly that if "in all our ways we acknowledge" God, He will, where reason fails, "direct our paths" by lot or by the other means which he knoweth.'[7]

INSTANCES OF *SORTES BIBLICAE* IN EVANGELICALISM

In Evangelicalism from the First Great Awakening until 1900, there are many examples of people recording their experiences with using *sortes biblicae*. Men and women, clergy, evangelists, and laity alike write that they received direction in this way. The set of instances found for this study fall into several categories of situations and questions that the inquirers were turning to *sortes biblicae* to address: theological questions;

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[6] J.Q. Adams, *John Quincy Adams to Arthur Tappan*. Letter 1845. <http://www.yale.edu/glc/archive/1051.htm> [accessed 27 October 2011].

[7] J. Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College*, Oxford (London: J. Kershaw, 1827), p. 79.

assurance of salvation; choice of Scripture passage on which to preach; need for encouragement; a word of knowledge; and direction for action.

One reason that evangelicals chose to consult *sortes biblicae* was to find the answer to a theological question. For example, Joan Webb wanted to know whether people could have assurance of their salvation. She opened her Bible at random to 'a chapter in the epistles of John', and found confirmation.[8] In another case, a young sailor was troubled about the problem of the existence of evil occasioned by the cruelty of an officer. This sailor opened his Bible at random to Psalm 37 and was reassured by the words, 'Fret not thyself by evil-doers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity: for they shall soon be cut down like the grass.' The sailor believed 'it must be the doing of God himself that my eye lighted just on the very passage of all the thousands of verses in the Bible which exactly rebukes my doubt'. This was a pivotal experience in the sailor's life, whereby he ceased to doubt, and gave his life up to God's service.[9]

Another common reason that people used *sortes biblicae* was to seek assurance of salvation.[10] Sarah Osborn, for instance, was concerned that 'her hope would surely perish'. In fear, she opened her Bible and read the first lines she saw. She read from Isaiah 54 and was comforted, observing 'These great promises were so adapted to every particular of my circumstances, and applied by the Spirit of God, with such great power, that they strengthened me exceedingly.'[11] Osborn thus took the words she read as a particular word of God to her addressing her situation and specific concern. Mary Porteus propositioned God even more directly, pleading

> Lord, if thou has not given me up to a reprobate mind, and canst have mercy on such a wretch, let me open thy book on a promise; but if thou hast, let me have a threatening.

She opened her Bible at random (to Hosea 14:4) and reports

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[8] J. Webb [letter], *Early Methodist Volume* located at Manchester, John Rylands Library, Methodist Archives. Webb was a Methodist and had this experience in 1742.

[9] Rev A. M. W. Christopher, 'The Power of the Word,' *The Monthly Reporter of the British and Foreign Bible Society* 13, no. 3 (1884), 48.

[10] This is distinct from Joan Webb's experience, who wanted to know whether assurance was possible, rather than find assurance for herself personally.

[11] S. Hopkins and S. Osborn, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn: Who Died at Newport, Rhode Island*, 2nd edn (Catskill: N. Elliot, 1814), p. 39. Osborn was a Congregationalist and had this experience c. 1737.

> Mercy at once presented to my eye that most encouraging of all passages to a person in my condition--'I will heal thy backslidings, and will love thee freely.' This was enough. I at once believed, and was blessed with glorious liberty. The work was done.

Porteus took this passage as authoritative, binding, and effective. Still, the editors of the volume note here that 'her example here is, we think, not safe for general imitation'.[12]

Evangelical teachers sometimes chose to use *sortes biblicae* for guidance on which passage to preach about. Getting up to preach, Harriet Burnett Hastings 'concluded to let the Lord guide [her], and to frankly tell [the congregation] the truth about the matter'. She

> opened [her] Bible, thinking to take the first text which met [her] eyes. It was this: 'Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hosts with thunder and with earthquake and great noise; with storm and tempest, and the *flame of devouring fire.*'

She did preach on this passage, and later learned that the delivery of this sermon coincided with a great fire in Boston.[13] Revd David Marks likewise desired to preach a sermon against those in his neighbourhood who were given up to the doctrine of predestination. He opened his Bible and preached on the first verse that met his eyes. Marks' passage was Psalm 94:20—'Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee?' Marks taught (apparently convincingly for his audience) that Satan's 'throne of iniquity' was that of fatality without free will. Marks understood this as divine guidance and believed that 'the Lord filled [his] mouth with arguments'.[14]

Further, people used the *sortes biblicae* as a way of finding encouragement from God in their specific situation. Revd Charles Sage wrote that he prayed regarding dark days in his ministry, 'Lord, if you desire me to go on with the work, you will have to encourage me.' He opened his Bible at random to 2 Samuel 18, in which David was in danger and his army came to his aid. Sage took courage from this and went forward with his ministry.[15] Mary Winslow also used the *sortes biblicae* for encouragement: one night, she was struggling with care, anxiety, unbelief, and spiritual strife. She 'went to the Lord and asked for the help which only he could give'. The answer came when she randomly opened her Bible to Isaiah 53:4 ('Surely he hath borne our grief...') and was immediately comforted, assured, and delighted with God's love.[16]

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[12] J. Lightfoot and M. Porteus, *The Power of Faith and Prayer Exemplified in the Life and Labours of Mrs. Mary Porteus, Late of Durham, Who for Fourteen Years was a Local Preacher in the Primitive Methodist Connexion* (Leeds: R. Davies, 1862), p. 28. Porteus was a Primitive Methodist and had this experience c. 1803.

[13] H.B. Hastings, *Pebbles from the Path of a Pilgrim* (London: H.L. Hastings, 1882), p. 269 (emphasis in original). Hastings' denomination is unclear. She had this experience in 1872.

[14] D. Marks and M. Marks, *Memoirs of the Life of David Marks, Minister of the Gospel* (Dover, NH: Free-will Baptist Printing Establishment, 1846), p. 107. Marks was a Free-Will Baptist. He had this experience in 1823.

Another reason that people used *sortes biblicae* was to gain a word of knowledge—to determine specific information regarding a question they had. A Mrs D. 'prayed that she might be directed to some passage of scripture which would indicate [Elder Jacob Knapp's] real character'. She opened to Psalm 91:15-16 and was assured to read: 'He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honor him.' Both Mrs D. and Elder Knapp drew conviction from this that God was on his side.[17]

A final category of guidance people sought from *sortes biblicae* was for direction in action. The evangelist John Berridge, associate of Wesley, turned to *sortes biblicae* to determine whether he should marry or not ('I truly had thoughts of looking out for a Jezebel myself'). He reported in a letter to Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, that the passage that he alighted on was unfavourable to matrimony, so he decided to remain a single man (fortunately for the women of his acquaintance).[18] Revd Joseph Badger, likewise, was lonely and in grief and wished to know what his duty was. He opened his Bible at random to the passage, 'The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved.' This caused him not to doubt his salvation, but to feel called to preach salvation to others while there was still time. Badger recognized this as a specific direction for his life from God as he was 'much satisfied that God was drawing [him] into ministry by these impressions'.[19]

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[15] C. H. Sage, *Autobiography of Rev. Charles H. Sage: Embracing an Account of His Pioneer Work in Michigan, of the Formation of the Canada Conference and of His Labors in various States* (Chicago: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1903). Sage was a Free Methodist. He had this experience in 1879.

[16] O. Winslow, *Life in Jesus: A Memoir of Mrs. Mary Winslow Arranged from Her Correspondance, Diary, and Thoughts* (New York: Robert Carter & Bros., 1860), p. 208.

[17] J. Knapp, *Autobiography of Elder Jacob Knapp* (Boston: Sheldon, 1868). Knapp was a Baptist and a Revivalist.

[18] A. C. H. Seymour. *The Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon. Volume 1.* (London: William Edward Painter, 1840), pp. 388-90. Berridge was an Anglican.

There are several striking aspects that these narratives of usage of *sortes biblicae* have in common. First, in each instance, the inquirer finds an answer to the question he or she is asking. The inquirer does not determine that the passage is unclear or fails to address their issue. Second, the answer that is found is viewed as authoritative. The inquirer attends to and follows or believes the guidance that is found. Third, these evangelicals are unashamed and unapologetic about their usage of *sortes biblicae.* However, at times the amanuensis, biographer, or editor is apologetic. The pratitioners' boldness is striking, especially in the later instances, given that it was a controversial practice, as will be discussed in the next section. And finally, the instances of *sortes biblicae* often lead to a pivotal decision in the life of the inquirer.

It should be noted well that the examples of *sortes biblicae* in evangelical literature are not wholly representative of the actual practice. The very fact that these instances were recorded means that the subjects likely found these experiences especially notable and often the subjects were knowingly publicizing their experience, so the subjects were unlikely to be ashamed of the practice and probably self-selected the 'best' examples of *sortes biblicae.*

NOTABLE PRACTITIONERS OF *SORTES BIBLICAE*

John Humphrey Noyes, founder of the Oneida community, relied on *sortes biblicae* to determine a course of action and to gain spiritual direction. In 1832, Noyes used *sortes biblicae* to decide to enrol in school at New Haven.[20] Two years later, when Noyes became convinced that Wesley's ideal of Christian perfection was a biblical idea, he was struggling with his difficulties at attaining perfection. He opened his Bible at random three times to hear from God on the matter. First to Luke 1:35 ('The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee...'). Noyes says of this, 'The words seemed to glow upon the page, and my spirit heard a voice from heaven through them promising me the baptism of the Holy Spirit and the second birth.' Noyes opened his Bible again, expecting the Lord would speak to him again. The passage was 2 Timothy 4:16-18 ('The Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom...'). Oneida says 'again my soul drank in a spiritual promise appropriate to my situation, an assurance of everlasting victory'. A third time Noyes opened his Bible at random, upon Acts 5:20 ('Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.'). Noyes says of this experience that he 'had conversed with God, that [his] course was marked out,' and that he was on the verge of attaining holiness.[21] Noyes thus felt his experience to be very spiritual, impactful, and was confident that God was speaking to him directly. Both of these incidents occurred while Noyes was still an evangelical, before forming the Oneida community.

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[19] E.G. Holland, *Memoir of Rev. Joseph Badger* (Boston: C. S. Francis and Co., 1854), p. 66. Badger was a Congregationalist.

[20] J.H. Noyes and G.W. Noyes, *Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes, Founder of the Oneida Community* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), p. 57. Noyes was a Perfectionist evangelical at the time of these experiences in 1832 and 1834.

Carry Nation, evangelical temperance crusader, used *sortes biblicae* to find encouragement. In the year 1900, after being thrown into prison for smashing up a bar in Kansas, Nation was in agony one day and told God that he must come to her aid. She opened her Bible at random ('as I often do') to Psalm 144 and found encouragement and affirmation of her work. She says that

> God told me in this chapter that he led me to 'fight with my fingers and war with my hands;' that he would be my refuge and deliverer; that he would use me to bring the people to him.[22]

The Moravian founder Count Zinzendorf employed *sortes sanctorum*, and at times *sortes biblicae* specifically, for decision making and made the practice normative for the Moravians. Moravian historian Joseph Levering reports that Zinzendorf personally used lots very often, and this practice was made a part of the official church government decision-making process and applied in many ways from the governing of the church as a whole to individual church members.[23] *Sortes biblicae* was then used by a wider group of Moravians in decision making.[24] Sortilege was used, for example, in the cases of marriage or ordination of ministers or missionaries. The intent was that the Moravian church should be governed by Christ, like a theocracy. By the General Synod in 1782, though, opposition to this method of governing was so strong that the Moravian church began to reduce its usage of the practice over time until it was completely abolished.[25]

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[21] Noyes and Noyes, *Religious Experience*, p. 57.

[22] C. A. Nation, *The Use and Need of Carry A. Nation* (Topeka, KS: F.M. Steves & Sons, 1908), p. 148.

[23] J. M. Levering, *A History of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1741-1892* (Bethlehem, PA: Times Publishing Company, 1903), pp. 102-3 n. 7.

[24] C. T. Winchester, *The Life of John Wesley* (London: Macmillan, 1906), p. 69.

THE WESLEYS AND *SORTES BIBLICAE*

John Wesley was the most famous and one of the most prolific of the evangelical users of *sortes biblicae*. After the year and a half Wesley spent allied with Zinzendorf and the Moravians he parted ways with them, but his attitude toward *sortes biblicae* demonstrates some of the lasting effects of the experience with the Moravians on his theology. He specifically mentions learning *sortes biblicae* from the Herrnhut Brethren.[26] The attitude that God can and will reliably make his direction known to earnest users of sortilege was the basis of the Moravian practice which Wesley did not cast off when he left the Moravians.

Furthermore, though Wesley intentionally distanced himself in many ways from the mysticism popular with the Moravians, he retained some of the values of mysticism. The mystic quietist view of spirituality emphasizes a direct, personal relationship with God.[27] The practice of *sortes biblicae* is a direct personal experience with God, like the mystics valued, but, for Wesley, led beyond the experience to a practical application of direction for action or belief.

Wesley used the *sortes biblicae* from the very beginning of his Christian life, at his conversion at Aldersgate. In 1738, he was struggling with a feeling of condemnation and seeking assurance of faith. In this state, he opened his Testament at random to 1 Peter 1:4: 'There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises; even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature.' Again he opened the Testament to a random page and read: 'Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.' It was later that day that he professed faith, saying: 'I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.'[28]

Furthermore, Wesley frequently used the *sortes biblicae* to determine a text for preaching, as did many Methodists after him, believing that 'the

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[25] Levering, *A History of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania*, p. 102.

[26] J. Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, p. 79.

[27] J. E. T. Rattenbury, *Wesley's Legacy to the World: Six Studies in the Permanent Values of the Evangelical Revival*, p. 121.

[28] Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, p. 294.

Divine Spirit would guide him infallibly in his choice'.[29] It is notable that he sought guidance from God in several pivotal points in his life—his conversion, leaving the Moravian Church, and his decision to leave his ministry at Oxford to join George Whitefield in Bristol.[30]

John's brother Charles Wesley also used *sortes biblicae*. In one instance, he was meeting with a woman and used *sortes biblicae* for spiritual direction. He sensed that she was inclined toward faith, but afraid to profess it. Wesley 'consulted the oracle for her'. They turned to a series of passages (Isa. 30:18; 2 Cor. 5:17-21; and Luke 8:39), which served to embolden the woman to profess her faith and thanksgiving.[31] In another case, Charles looked to the *sortes biblicae* for direction for action: whether he should interpose for criminals. Turning to Jeremiah 44:16-17, he interpreted that he should not do so.[32]

Devout following of the leading of the Holy Spirit was one of the legacies of John and Charles Wesley to subsequent generations of Methodists. Says J. E. Rattenbury: 'Methodist polity is an evidence that the activities of the Holy Spirit are as operative in modern as in ancient times for men who follow His guidance, as John Wesley did.'[33] Wesley's legacy of looking to *sortes biblicae* for clear, concrete direction from God[34] is evidenced in the examples of usage of *sortes biblicae* by the several Methodists[35] named in this article, as well as Revd John Berridge, who, while not a Methodist, was heavily influenced by Wesley.[36]

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[29] Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, p. 561; H. Taine, *History of English Literature*, p. 96.

[30] Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, p. 169.

[31] C. Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.: Sometime Student of Christ Church, Oxford: The Early Journal, 1736-1739* (London: R. Culley, 1909), p. 98.

[32] C. Wesley, *Journal of Charles Wesley*, p. 6.

[33] J.E. Rattenbury, *Wesley's Legacy to the World: Six Studies in the Permanent Values of the Evangelical Revival* (London: Epworth Press / Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1929), p. 139.

[34] Weeter says that Wesley used *sortes Biblicae* only as a last resort, after much prayer and fasting. I believe this is not correct—while it is true that Wesley understood that he was seeking God, he seemed to use *sortes biblicae* more readily than this. M. L. Weeter, *John Wesley's View and use of Scripture.* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), p. 154.

[35] 'The early Methodist world was supernatural world. They expected to find traces of God's activity and communication throughout.' L. Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality: A Reader* (Nashville, TN.: Kingswood Books, 2005), p. 161.

[36] E. H. Sugden, *The Standard Sermons of John Wesley* (London: John Mason, 1829), p. 97. Sugden believed that Wesley had stopped using sortes biblicae

SORTES BIBLICAE: A PRODUCT OF ITS ERA

In addition to the influence of the Wesleys to popularize *sortes biblicae*, three cultural factors likely drove acceptance of the practice: Romanticism, emphasis on *sola scriptura*, and populism.

Romanticism was an influential movement during much of the period of this study. According to Martin Schmidt, John Wesley introduced the spiritual culture of the Romantic mystics into the eighteenth-century religious climate. Aspects of Romanticism such as individualism/ego, emotionalism, supernatural, and medievalism can all be seen as adding to the popularity of *sortes biblicae.*[37] Romanticism elevated the individual and the ego, which emboldened evangelicals to believe that God would speak to them directly in the large or minute issues of their life through *sortes biblicae.* The emotionalism and sentimentality of Romanticism played into *sortes biblicae* as a dramatic means of decision-making, imbuing the decision with all the more significance upon the belief that it was God's will for the individual. The supernatural inclination of Romanticism was satiated by divination and the principle of *sortes biblicae* that there is an active unseen world and the user can interface with a divine force at any time by simply opening the Bible. One of the longings of the Romantics was to cross over the barriers of history, and the medieval world was especially attractive because of its foreignness and otherness.[38] *Sortes biblicae* may have been especially compelling due to its historical basis in the middle ages.

The concept of *sola scriptura* probably also served as an impetus to the practice of *sortes biblicae* among evangelicals. With the elevation of Scripture as the final authority on matters of faith and practice, believers may have been inclined to accept this authority as broadly as possible. In this case, it meant not only submitting to the Bible's contextual instruction, but also using its words to guide smaller and amoral life decisions beyond the scope its authors intended.

The populist values in early evangelicalism, especially within Methodism, must have been a third factor in the wide appeal of *sortes biblicae.* Christian populism empowered a wide range of people to hear from and to speak for God. *Sortes biblicae*, likewise enabled anyone--regardless of

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later in his life, by 1750, because of the silence about the practice in his sermons after this time.

[37] M. Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), p. 13.

[38] B. M. G. Reardon, *Religion in the Age of Romanticism: Studies in Early Nineteenth Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 12.

education (as long as the practitioner could read), gender, or status in the church and society -to be able to hear from God and feel that they could speak authoritatively about what they heard.

CRITICS OF *SORTES BIBLICAE*

One tactic that contemporaneous critics of evangelical usage of *sortes biblicae* employed was to point out the link and comparison to ancient methods of divination, which nearly all conservative evangelicals would have agreed were unorthodox. The minutes of the 95th meeting of the Congregational Churches disparagingly described *sortes biblicae* as 'the oft-obeyed impulse to open the Bible at random, as the ancients opened their Virgil, as a magic book to tell fortunes by'.[39] Similarly, the Westminster Review reported that

> Superstition was universal [in third century Rome]...the old methods of consulting the gods were still practised — viz., the haruspex, the auspices, the casting of lots, the taking at random of certain verses from Homer, or even Virgil, just as certain devout people, even now, open the Bible at random to find guidance in perplexity.[40]

The New American Cyclopaedia disparagingly claims that *sortes* is a relic of Bath-Kol, an ancient Jewish method of divination.[41] In a related criticism, the New Englander Journal asks, 'Do not even the Mohammedans the same with the Koran?'[42] Thus, the critics made an impactful argument by associating *sortes biblicae* with practices that all conservative evangelicals would have condemned.

Several critics admonished the disposition of the users of *sortes biblicae*, saying that they were being sentimental or unintelligent, believing in a practice that is not based on reason. Congregational minister Spencer Pearsall said: 'The Word of God must be read intelligently. The reader must avail himself of the many invaluable helps which are supplied in critical works on the Bible.'[43] Similarly, an excerpt from the Bell Street Chapel Discourses contrasted *sortes biblicae* and common sense:

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[39] *Minutes of the 95th Annual Meeting, Congregational Churches of Massachusetts* (Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society, 1897), p. 91.

[40] 'The Religion of Rome during the Third Century', *The Westminster Review* 132 (1889), 260. *The Westminster Review* was a skeptical journal.

[41] 'Bath-Kol,' in *The New American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge* (London: D. Appleton and Company, 1859), p. 736.

[42] Revd C. J. H. Ropes, 'The Importance and the Method of Bible Study', *The New Englander* 41 (1882), 572.

> common sense does not feel that in cases of difficulty and doubt it must shut its eyes and open the Bible at random, as some used to do, expecting a magical answer to a prayer for guidance. No, average men and women are to-day so wise in respect to the practical Art of the Religious Life that they deal with facts and inferences at first hand.[44]

Another criticism was that users of *sortes biblicae* were demonstrating an incorrect view of God or the Bible. Charles Vaughan made the criticism that *sortes biblicae* is a misuse of the Bible: 'The oracle itself is vocal only to the wise; only, that is, to those who daily visit it, and seek to frame life and speech, thought and action, habitually by its rule.'[45] Spencer Pearsall said that the user of *sortes biblicae* is disrespectful: 'The custom of reading the Bible at random, and always the smallest portion, or certain favourite parts, is not honouring to God.'[46] Gail Hamilson asserted that Christians who practice *sortes* misunderstand something of God's nature:

> We are ever clamoring that God should be oracular, and he never is. Sometimes we try to make the Bible oracular by opening it at random and putting a blind finger on a verse. But this, also, is vanity. God is inexorable. He will not say to us yea or nay.[47]

Lastly, Samuel Pike, an early evangelical critic of *sortes biblicae*, found several points of contention with the disposition of the inquirer:

> There are some Christians who are fond of using the Bible as if it were a Fortune-Book: When a Difficulty in Prudence or Duty occurs, they will open the Bible at Random, and observe what Text meets their Eyes first; and, according as the wild Imagination applies that Passage to the Point in Question, so they think it their Duty to act. This is a very weak and dangerous Practice, and a

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[43] J. S. Pearsall, 'The Daily Reading of the Scriptures', *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* 1 (1869), 699.

[44] A. G. Spencer and J. Eddy, *Bell Street Chapel Discourses* (Providence, R.I.: Journal of Commerce Co., 1899), p. 71.

[45] C. J. Vaughan, *Church of the First Days: Lectures on the Acts of the Apostles* (Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1864), p. 258.

[46] J. S. Pearsall, 'The Daily Reading of the Scriptures,' *Evangelical Magazine and Missionary Chronicle* 1 (1869), 699.

[47] G. Hamilson, 'The American Vedas,' *The North American Review* 144 (1887), 637.

> sad Abuse of the Word of God, applying it to a Purpose for which the Holy Ghost never intended it.[48]

This sample of pre-20th C. critiques of *sortes biblicae* confirm that the practice was common enough to require refutation, and demonstrate the controversy surrounding it. Comparing *sortes biblicae* to ancient magical practices, criticizing the attitudes of the inquirers, and arguing the theological validity of the practice emerge as common themes in much of the criticism. Nearly all of the criticisms of *sortes biblicae* found for this study were published in the latter half of the 19th century, possibly suggesting that as the influence of Romanticism began to fade, opposition to the practice grew louder.

CONCLUSION

Sortes Biblicae as practiced by evangelicals was used as a way to have a window into God's mind, on matters of belief, practice, and emotional support. Many evangelicals used it boldly, authoritatively, and routinely, although other evangelicals criticized the motives, beliefs, and history that underlie the practice. The practice appears to be especially prevalent in the Methodist tradition, as the Moravians practiced sortilege and influenced John Wesley, who was an avid user of *sortes biblicae.* Some of Wesley's associates, including Charles Wesley and evangelist John Berridge practiced *sortes biblicae* as well. The practice seems to have been embedded in Methodist tradition, as a disproportionate number of cases found in this study were from evangelicals within a Methodist tradition. *Sortes biblicae* can also be seen as, in part, a product of its era, as Romanticism, the Protestant emphasis on *sola scriptura*, and evangelical/Methodist populism held sway among evangelicals from during the time period in question. Perhaps those who encounter its use within evangelicalism today will find that many of those same motivating factors are still in effect.

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[48] S. Pike and S. Hayward, *Some Important Cases of Conscience Answered* (London: J. Buckland; T. Field; E. Dilly; and J. Robinson: 1755), p. 164.

THIS SIDE OF SUNDAY: THEOLOGICAL FICTION IN LIGHT OF G.K. CHESTERTON'S *THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY*

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As borne out again by the recent phenomenon of William P. Young's *The Shack*, the mix of narrative and theology has long had a wide audience and, for good or ill, a pervasive theological influence.[1] It might be argued that Christians are wrong to look to novels for their theology and that novelists should mind their own business, but in recent decades especially it has proven well worth asking not only to what *extent* narrative can be a *vehicle* for theology but also whether it has a certain *appropriateness* to its subject matter that makes it an important theological *mode*. It seems self evident that if fiction can be theological, when it does theology it should not be given a pass from either criticism, praise, or a fair hearing because it is *just a story*. Therefore, with openness to the narrative mode ought to come an analysis of its theological content which is as rigorous as any other theology *and* is directed with a literate awareness of the mode's unique limitations and advantages. As both an exploration of and an exercise in such analysis this paper takes one of last century's finer examples of theology in fiction in order to extract guidance from what it does well.

Consider G.K. Chesterton's 1908 novel, *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*.[2] As an explanation of his conversion to Christianity or apologia set in fiction, it avoids overstating its own argument on one hand and spiralling into mere narcissism on the other. As theology in the narrative mode, painting landscapes and probing minutiae within a storied context, instead of undermining dogmatics or supplanting Scripture, *it partners vitally with the former and faithfully serves the latter.* Accessible yet sophisticated, appropriately reserved and bold, it is a winsome witness and a constructive example for the relation of theology and the arts.

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[1] 'With 3.8 million copies of his Christian novel "The Shack" in print, Young is being hailed as a theological innovator, his book the "Pilgrim's Progress" of the 21st century.' Lisa Miller, 'Belief Watch: A Close Encounter With God', *Newsweek*, Sept. 8, 2008. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/156370>.

[2] First publication, Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1908.

STORIED THEOLOGY

Shortly after his conversion to Christianity around the turn of the 20th century, the young Chesterton confronted the leading thinkers of his time in a series of essays entitled *Heretics.* In it he wrote: 'Life may sometimes legitimately appear as a book of science. Life may sometimes appear, and with a much greater legitimacy, as a book of metaphysics. But life is always a novel.'[3] It is thus not surprising that when readers of *Heretics* challenged him to state his own philosophy in positive terms, *two volumes emerged in one year: Orthodoxy,* an intellectual defence of his conversion, and *Thursday,* a fictional re-creation of the experience. While Étienne Gilson called *Orthodoxy* 'the best apologetic the century had yet produced', Kent Hill has suggested that Chesterton was an even more effective apologist in his fiction'.[4] Though self-defacing in regard to his own art, Chesterton likely thought *Thursday* the more fitting expression of his new-found faith precisely because of its nature as an *adventure story*—free from 'imprisonment in abstraction'.[5]

Chesterton made no secret of the fact that the fables of his youth had a significant hand in leading him to the Christian faith. Once converted, it became clear that these were not only important to him as a medium for his message but as part of the message itself. For him it seems that doctrinal statements, while holding a crucial purpose of their own, lost something vital if totally divorced from persons and settings and situations. In *Orthodoxy* he wrote: 'A man may well be less convinced of a philosophy from four books, than from one book, one battle, one landscape, and one old friend.'[6] As a companion piece, *Thursday* reads as his attempt to provide a battle, landscape and friend to do what *Orthodoxy* alone did not.

Though it would be possible to simply extract and itemize theological positions represented in the novel, I would like keep them embedded in plot and character commentary as much as time will allow before cycling back to highlight theological contributions in order to note boundaries and gains of the narrative mode in which they are displayed.

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[3] G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics* (New York: Dodo Press, 2006), p. 89.

[4] The Gilson quote is borrowed from Kent R. Hill, 'The Sweet Grace of Reason: The Apologetics of G.K. Chesterton', in *The Riddle of Joy: G.K. Chesterton and C.S. Lewis,* ed. by Michael H. Macdonald and Andrew A. Tadie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), pp. 227, 229.

[5] Frank M. Drollinger, 'Paradox and Sanity in *The Man Who Was Thursday*', *The Chesterton Review* 31 (2005), 123. See G.K. Chesterton, *Orthodoxy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1996), pp. 8-58. In a later novel, Gabriel Gale doubts aloud 'whether any truth can be told except in parable'. G.K. Chesterton, *The Poet and the Lunatics* (Cornwall, UK: Stratus Books, 2001), p. 87.

[6] Chesterton, *Orthodoxy,* p. 212.

'A TALE OF EMPTIED HELLS'

Set in Britain around the turn of the century, *The Man Who Was Thursday* is about a secret council of seven anarchists, each aliased according to the days of the week, which is infiltrated by a philosopher-poet turned undercover detective named Gabriel Syme, who usurps terrorist Lucian Gregory's posting to the council and becomes the man code-named Thursday. Perplexed by both the absurdity and wonder of existence, Syme sets out to investigate a murderous scheme and ends up unravelling some of life's deepest mysteries. Readers have long noted the story's wildly autobiographical element and deeper meaning, spurred in part by its dedicatory poem to Chesterton's childhood friend: 'This is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells, / And none but you shall understand the true thing that it tells.'[7] Highly evocative of his own life journey, Chesterton's main character is *caught up with a fellowship of anarchists and detectives in a harrowing pursuit* of Nature personified, only to get around front and finally see the fleeting face of God. This occurs by way of a baffling series of twists and turns which lead to the re-figuring of each character in light of the reconciliation of the police chief and the Anarchist Council President, Sunday.

Along the way, each time an anarchist is unmasked the novel hints at a corresponding philosophy that Chesterton himself had searched and found wanting. *Through them Chesterton presents both an appreciation for and an underlying challenge to the ideologies of his time.* In trademark irenic polemic, *each character brings something important to the pursuit* of Sunday, and yet each unravels along the way; receives a truer garment at the creation feast; and stands confronted by the same climactic words of Christ.

Monday comes close to the kind of person Chesterton saw himself becoming at his darkest moment. Vigilant in asking questions and initiating the book's final barrage, Monday is ever the solipsist—decidedly resistant in the presence of answers from elsewhere. Exposed for his 'inhuman veracity', he is given a black and white costume at the creation feast; the dress of the abstract philosopher.[8] While *his ferocious questioning gives the detectives' quest its vitality,* it is his strident pessimism which keeps him at odds with Sunday.[9] Like Kafka's Joseph K., he succumbs to doubt and despair.

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[7] G.K. Chesterton, *The Man Who Was Thursday: A Nightmare*, ed. Martin Gardner (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999), pp. 25-30.

[8] Ibid., pp. 254-5. See also G.K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1993), p. 136.

Tuesday is a simple-minded man who tries not to think of ultimate realities for the same reason that he does not 'stare at the sun at noonday'.[10] He is Chesterton's 'man on the street', but *he too is counted among the philosophers* because, for all its simplicity, his indifference 'is a point of view'.[11] This view is not without merit, as Chesterton wrote later: 'We must have a certain simplicity to repicture the childhood of the world.'[12] Caught up in the common quest, Tuesday is ultimately able to sum up the detective's philosophical quandaries most poignantly, saying: 'I wish I knew why I was hurt so much.'[13] However, like Mr. Verloc in Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, he is plagued by 'a philosophical unbelief in the effectiveness of every human effort'.[14]

Wednesday is another pessimist - more Oscar Wilde than Franz Kafka - whose doubt has led him into decadence and whose shifting persona leads Gabriel Syme to feel like he is locked in an impressionist painting with 'that final skepticism which can find no floor to the universe'.[15] Exposing Wednesday's Wildean facade allows Chesterton to *convey gratitude as the route to joy*, while exposing unrestrained hedonism as rooted in despair.[16]

The other side of the same coin, *Friday*, thinks the world insane and collapses under the ironic self-indictment.[17] In the face of Sunday's hope, the Nietzschean nihilist retains 'the last and the worst doubts' admitting 'not a creed, [but] a doubt. . . . I do not believe that you really have a face. I have not faith enough to believe in matter'.[18] It is interesting that this is the first ally Thursday makes in his quest, thus *enabling him to frame the quest as a dilemma between essential nihilism and ultimate hope.*

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[9] See Gary Wills, 'The Man Who Was Thursday', in *G.K. Chesterton: A Half Century of Views*, ed. by D.J. Conlon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 338.

[10] Chesterton, *Thursday*, pp. 96, 243.

[11] Ibid., p. 243 (emphasis mine).

[12] Chesterton, *Everlasting Man*, p. 101.

[13] Chesterton, *Thursday*, p. 260.

[14] Joseph Conrad, *The Secret Agent* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 12.

[15] Chesterton, *Thursday*, p. 190.

[16] 'We should thank God for beer and burgundy by not drinking too much of them.' Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 90.

[17] Chesterton, *Thursday*, p. 212.

[18] Ibid., p. 245.

While place is provided for a Kafka, Conrad, Wilde and Nietzsche in Chesterton's quest, it is telling that none are left to themselves, and none is his main character. Instead, they are prodded along by *Thursday*, who *wonders* out loud: 'Bad is so bad, that we cannot but think good an accident; good is so good, that we feel certain that evil could be explained.'[19]

This might have mounted to some kind of over-optimistic apologetic project, except that *in contrast to the pessimism of the others the novel gives us Saturday, the optimistic doctor* representing one of Chesterton's favourite targets for debate; those enraptured by the myth of progress.[20] The strength of Saturday's levity might have made him a candidate to be Chesterton's hero, except that this novel was essentially a theodicy, and held no high ground for humanist naiveté.[21] Well placed as Saturday's hope might be—at the centre of his being—it blinds him to the inherent problems of the human condition. Thus, when it finally comes time to hear the novel's climactic revelation, Saturday has tragically drifted from nightmare into a daydream without sharing Thursday's awakening.[22] Though this *comes by way of revelation and is no mere inner enlightenment*, it is nonetheless significant that *the driving character in Chesterton's quest is a poet-philosopher.*[23]

ON 'THIS GRANTING OF A REAL ROMANCE TO THE WORLD'

By the end of the story, the anarchists have all been unmasked and the detectives are wildly chasing the enigmatic Sunday. At the final confrontation, Sunday answers as if they are Job before God: 'What am I? . . . you will have found out the truth of the last tree and the topmost cloud before the truth about me . . . . Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me like a wolf—kings and sages, and poets and law-givers, all the churches, and all the philosophies. But I have never been caught yet.'[24] Later undaunted but at wit's end from having followed him so fiercely, when finally the detectives are taken in by Sunday they pummel him again with questions of his identity. This time the answer comes back: 'I am the Sabbath . . . . I am the peace of God.'[25] True to form, *in his intellectual honesty Chesterton depicts his characters as being thrown by this state-*

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[19] Ibid., p. 246.

[20] Elsewhere he wrote: 'I propose not to . . . consider your business a triumphant progress merely because you're always finding out that you were wrong.' G.K. Chesterton, *Manalive* (New York: Dodo Press, 2006), p. 120.

[21] Chesterton, *Thursday*, p. 239.

[22] Ibid., pp. 260-3.

[23] Ibid., pp. 38, 80, 224.

[24] Ibid., pp. 224-5.

[25] Ibid., p. 260.

ment into a tailspin of theodicy.[26] When the man who might have been Thursday, Lucian Gregory, accuses Sunday of remaining aloof and thus declares him irrelevant to the peril and suffering of the human race, the answer that comes back is the only overt Scripture reference in the novel: 'Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?'[27]

Blacking out at the words of Christ, Gabriel Syme drifts from nightmare to the wakefulness of the book's closing pages, and readers are left where they began, except now with a call to courage under the hopeful prospect that brought to the end of oneself with Christ one might truly live. It is a narrative apologia that avoids trite downplaying of the difficulties of this world and it is *a theodicy that, rather than bending over backwards with apologies, depicts life in light of Christ as 'a venture of the first order'*, to borrow a phrase from Barth.[28] Chesterton would later put it this way, in *The Everlasting Man*:

> The more deeply we think of the matter the more we shall conclude that, if there be indeed a God, his creation could hardly have reached any other culmination than this granting of a real romance to the world. Otherwise the two sides of the human mind could never have touched at all; and the brain of man would have remained cloven and double; one lobe of it dreaming impossible dreams and the other repeating invariable calculations. The picture-makers would have remained forever painting the portrait of nobody. The sages would have remained for ever adding up numerals that came to nothing. It was that abyss that nothing but an incarnation could cover.[29]

SKETCHING BOUNDARIES AND MARKING GAINS

Having outlined the theological overtones of *The Man Who Was Thursday*, we turn now to an exploration of boundaries it exposes and artfully skirts, with the aim of drawing out some of the examples it sets for theological fiction. Comparison with some well-known interlocutors will serve to highlight these points, but should not be taken as wholesale critiques.

The first question that might be asked is whether an apologia such as this simply too subjective to carry its theological weight. Critics of John Henry Newman's *Apologia* were quick to attribute his Catholic conversion to 'faulty premises logically carried out, to various psychological factors more or less determining his conclusions, or to both'.[30] Bishop

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., cf. Mark 10:38.

[28] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/4 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), p. 204.

[29] Chesterton, *Everlasting Man*, p. 248.

[30] Martin J. Svaglic, 'Editor's Introduction', in John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of His Religious Opinions*, ed. Martin

Wilberforce held that 'Newman's "defection" was due to the "peculiarities of the individual". His mind was eminently subjective and, though honest, had no engrossing affection for abstract truth.'[31] Though any apologia is susceptible to this, the genre does bear the advantage of having to wear its heart on its sleeve, making its author's premises and experiences a part of the work, and perhaps more immediately accessible to theological scrutiny. However, *this should be no license for irresponsible self-narrative passing as theology*. Though the subjectivism may be more disguised, this concern is not diminished by the employment of fantasy. On this front, it has been well noted that Chesterton 'would have had little patience with [any author's] egotistical tendency to say that the only subject for fiction was their own consciousness and its sensations.'[32] This is more than a concern over posture, but has bearings on content as well. Whereas Alan Friedman explains that Conrad and Kafka's stories 'centered (in effect, "zeroed in") on the self', Chesterton's story counter-poses that this is precisely why their nightmares ended the way they did.[33]

There is a caution to be heeded here in overtly Christian fiction as well. Talk as they might about bowing at the feet of God and joining with the saints in the heavenly city or the real world, the overwhelming force of the plot and story-telling in the ever-popular *Pilgrim's Progress* and its grandchild *The Shack* leans toward a solipsist individualism. Each story offers a picture of Christian life in which the protagonist weaves his way alone through struggles, foes and even friends toward a privatized encounter with God. In the most recent of these it is seen just how blatant and deeply ingrained Bunyan's latent individualism has become in the evangelical consciousness. God's self-revelation is tailored to the isolated protagonist to such an extent that the Father is a woman wearing the most nostalgic perfume, Jesus is instantly likable, the Spirit distracts attention even from Jesus, and God is extolled as servant only to be described 'more truly' as '*my* servant'.[34] Although not immune to these concerns, Chesterton's narrated apologia evaded isolationism and subjectivity by catching

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J. Svaglic (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. xlviii.

[31] Ibid., p. l.

[32] Alzina Stone Dale, *The Outline of Sanity: A Life of G.K. Chesterton* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 116.

[33] Alan Friedman, 'The Novel', in *The Twentieth Century Mind I, 1900-1918: History, Ideas, and Literature in Britain*, ed. by C.B. Cox and A.E. Dyson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 415.

[34] William P. Young, *The Shack* (Los Angeles: Windblown Media, 2007), pp. 82, 85, 87, 237, emphasis mine. For more examples and explanations of this see pages 83, 89, 93-94, 113, 175, and 198. For an indication of the problems of an engorged *promeity* of this kind see Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of*

its main character up with a fellowship of jostling pursuants in a common quest, enabling him to present both an appreciation for and a challenge to the contributions of each. This in such a way that could keep their discourse alive without the implied polemic of simple rejection that comes so easily with labelling views, naming problems, and moving on. Readers are brought along as his protagonist is antagonized at every turn and rather than ending *in* himself comes to the end of himself at the feet of another.

A second potential peril of theological fiction is that it may overstate itself, usurping Scriptural language and tradition with a presumptuous confidence in its own re-mythologization. If demythologization re-reads 'texts in such a way that the narrative element is resolved into abstract moral, spiritual or philosophical concepts', then re-mythologization takes the liberty of translating those concepts into new and loosely related stories.[35] *The Man Who Was Thursday* could certainly be seen this way, except that the story is so fantastically bizarre and comedic it seems designed precisely to make the reader aware of its own limits. With the force of the fiction it gestures toward something better rather than reading like a new myth to supplant the old. Materially and stylistically, *The Man Who Was Thursday* points to the church and Scripture with an appropriate self-reserve, thus lending theological credence to what it *does* say, compelling readers further, and serving rather than undermining dogmatics.

For all that might be and has been said about C.S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, the question has to be asked the legacy of these myths was to serve or supplant the gospel they echo. In Lewis case, it can be argued that the nod to Christ is strong and artful enough to have achieved its goal as imaginative witness, and in Tolkien's that the theological overtones are reserved enough to make the myth prod forward rather than curve in on itself. When it comes to our most recent interlocutor, *The Shack*, the anti-theological rhetoric not only disguises the fact that the book is actually a work of theology but steers readers away from further reflection.[36] To be fair, *The Shack*'s apparent aim is

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Faith According to Luther, trans. by M. Cherno (New York: Harper, 1967), pp. 95-115.

[35] Brian Horne, 'Theology in the Narrative Mode', in *Companion Encyclopedia of Theology*, ed. by Peter Byrne and Leslie Houlden (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 960.

[36] It is the thrust of the plot that accomplishes this most forcefully, but the dialogue provides examples of this as well. See Young, *The Shack*, pp. 91, 123, 192, 197. This posture was continued by the author in response to theological critiques of the book. That some critics (many of the foundationalist variety) gracelessly perpetuated Young's false dilemma does not justify it. See one example in Eric Young, '"The Shack" Author Insists Bestseller "is a

to oppose foundationalist intellectualism in favour of a relationship with God that can be had by 'regular people'. Unfortunately, the story presents careful thought and daily relationship as a false dilemma and never escapes.[37] There are late encouragements of further learning and growth, but subtle or ambiguous caveats cannot rein in the rhetorical force of a story.[38] Conversely and quite creatively, via an unruly cast of characters Chesterton's *Thursday* gives place for both the persistent sceptic and the average person, un-awkwardly counted among the contributors and not kept at bay by way of rhetorical or elitist disregard. There is the omission of any female among the sleuths, however, and this is the novel's most glaring weakness, standing out strongly because it comes at the point of one of its greatest strengths.

A third problem raised by Chesteron's novel is that of natural theology. Whatever one's inclinations in this regard, it is noteworthy that if there is any natural theology going on in *The Man Who Was Thursday* it is not an ascent to God through reason but a guided descent with reason to its fitful end, where God in His mercy has stooped and is waiting to save. Even Karl Barth called this the closest thing there is to a point of contact, arguing that while God could not be *deduced* via self-negation, He had already condescended to meet us there. '[A]t the very point where we meet our end we are met by our Lord.'[39] That Chesterton's novel frames its final answer in the form of a question shows just how hesitant he was to dispense easy platitudes or brim with overconfidence in either the philosophical or the imaginative project (in this novel at least). That the nightmare's closing words are stolen from the lips of Christ shows where Chesterton thought people would find their way to wisdom. In a manner important for Christian theology, the definitive revelations of the novel come by way of revelation and not simply by inner or collective enlightenment, even though the good soil for such revelation seems to be a seeking community with room for the poet and the philosopher.

A final dilemma raised by the novel has to do with theodicy. One of the things that has made the fiction of Bunyan, Lewis, Tolkien, and Young so powerful for so many is that the very mode of narrative enabled

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God Thing"', *Christian Post Reporter*, October 27, 2008 <http://www.christianpost.com/article/20081027/-the-shack-author-insists-bestseller-is-a-god-thing/index.html>.

[37] Young, *The Shack*, pp. 89, 95, 181, 197-8, 201.

[38] Ibid., p. 198.

[39] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/2, p. 476. Thus Barth lamented that so many modern novels make readers ripe with longing for salvation but 'do not go beyond what is often a strikingly honest depiction of [humanity's] vileness.' Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1, p. 594.

them to address the struggles of life in a way appropriate to the turbulent human drama in which theodicy is embedded. With varying degrees of theological acuteness each of their novels adeptly met questions face to face from within the messiness of situations and characters rather than from the safe distance of propositions. By no means should fiction and autobiography have the monopoly on this corner of theology, but they certainly merit a place, and so should neither shy away from making theological claims nor from bearing literary-theological critique. The fiction genre offers no immunity from the concern of remaining aloof, of course: A fantasy story can lose its grip on reality just as easily as a cold hard platitude.[40] In this regard Chesterton's novel is a theodicy in which the very real life dilemmas of gratitude and hedonism, nihilism and hope, wonder and suffering, and optimism and pessimism are not only discussed, but *conveyed* and *played out* for the reader intelligently and emotionally, without succumbing to either superficiality or sentimentality.

CONCLUSION

On the heels of his own conversion and the turn of the 20th century, in *Orthodoxy* and *The Man Who Was Thursday* Chesterton presented his case for Christianity with intellectual honesty in the terms of an unfolding theodicy neither trite nor indecisive. A hundred years later, the novel merits attention at least equal to that which has been given its literary companion. By its mode as a compelling narrative *The Man Who Was Thursday* does not assert a series of propositions nor back into a corner by way of defensive caveats but thrusts to the fore a compelling Christian rendering of existence as a *venture requiring courage.* As a whimsical apologia, it avoids overstating its own argument on one hand and spiralling into mere narcissism on the other. As a defence of the faith it refrains from offering natural theology or apologetic proof and contents itself with being a careful servant in the work of theology. As storied Christian theology, its medium is appropriate to its message—which is not reducible to abstractions but is an unfolding plan of redemption. With an accessibility that doesn't sacrifice theological sophistication and an artfulness that remains faithful to that which it points, it is a winsome witness to Christ and a fine example for readers and writers of theological fiction.

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[40] Not to belabour the point, but *The Shack* arguably fails in this regard as well. The fantasy is constructed to carry platitudes into the mess through dialogue and to work everything out in an isolated and illusory paradise where the one in pain is given experiences that are not available in real life. See Young, *The Shack*, pp. 170, 173.

THE NON-ASSUMPTUS AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH IN T.F. TORRANCE

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INTRODUCTION

In his Edinburgh Christology lectures, Torrance divides the biblical narrative of Christ's earthly life into what he calls 'the once and for all union of God and man', and 'the continuous union in the life of Jesus'.[1] The first concerns the event of the incarnation narrowly construed, and is Torrance's remarkably full exposition of the virgin birth. The second covers the historical life of Christ as it unfolds in the gospels. In this paper we shall expound the 'once and for all union' of God and man.

I. THE WORD MADE FLESH

In the fullness of time, as 'flesh of our flesh in Israel, the holy Son of God incorporated Himself into the continuity of sinful human existence'.[2] It is against this deep background in Israel that Torrance expounds the Johannine phrase 'the Word became flesh'.

> All through the history of Israel that Word was behind the law and the cult, the prophets came forward under the constraint of the Word to insist that the Word must become flesh, that is, must be allowed to enter into the very existence of Israel, in judgment and mercy.[3]

Thus, 'John is saying that Jesus Christ is himself the tabernacle of God among men and women, himself the Word of God enshrined in the flesh'.[4]

The crucial question is what does John mean by the word 'flesh' (σάρξ)? Does this term describe 'some neutral human nature', or does it describe

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[1] T.F. Torrance, *Incarnation: The Person and Life of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walter (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008). Chapter three is on the once and for all union and chapter four is on the continuous union.

[2] T.F. Torrance, *Atonement: The Person and Work of Christ*, ed. Robert T. Walter (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), p. 346.

[3] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 60.

[4] Ibid..

'our actual human nature and existence in bondage and estrangement', and thus under the judgment of God? Torrance answers emphatically:

> It was certainly into a state of enmity that the Word penetrated in becoming flesh, into darkness and blindness, that is, into the situation where light and darkness are in conflict and where his own receive him not. There can be no doubt that the New Testament speaks of the flesh of Jesus as the concrete form of our human nature marked by Adam's fall, the human nature which seen from the cross is at enmity with God and needs to be reconciled to God. In becoming flesh the Word penetrated into hostile territory, into our human alienation and estrangement from God. When the Word became flesh, he became all that we are in our opposition to God.[5]

In the same context Torrance cites Romans 8:3, which affirms that Christ was made 'in the likeness of sinful flesh'. He consistently takes this to mean our actual twisted and disordered human nature.

While much of what Torrance says regarding the humanity assumed by Christ can be accounted for in traditional categories, such as assuming a mortal, corruptible body, facing temptation, bearing our curse, stepping into our situation under the wrath of God etc., it is clear that he has more than this in view. Early in his career, as shown in the 1938-39 Auburn Seminary lectures, there is some hesitancy about ascribing corruption, and thereby concupiscence, to the humanity of Christ.[6] Nevertheless, the flesh which Jesus assumes is still called 'the actual form of our humanity under the fall', and 'is not to be thought of in some neutral sense, but as really *our* flesh'.[7] In a 1941 essay, Torrance relates the immanence of God to the fact that 'Christ was made sin for us'. In him, God comes 'near to sinful man, inasmuch as he was 'made in the likeness of sinful flesh'. 'Liberal theology 'refuses to take the thought of this identification of God in Christ with human sin seriously', and thus must be charged with a false transcendence.[8]

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[5] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 61. The phrase 'the concrete form of our human nature marked by Adam's fall' comes straight from Barth. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, trans. and ed. G.W Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957-81), I/2, p. 151.

[6] See the respective discussions on the question of concupiscence in the early Torrance in Duncan Rankin, 'Carnal Union with Christ in the Theology of T.F. Torrance', Ph.D. diss (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 101-10; Joannes S.J. Guthridge, 'The Christology of T.F. Torrance: Revelation and Reconciliation in Christ', Ph.D. diss. (Rome: Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1967), p. 158. Rankin's helpful discussion is clouded by the erroneous assertion that the early Torrance denied that Jesus possessed a human will. Torrance's remark that Jesus was created 'without the will of fallen humanity' simply means that the virgin birth was a 'pure act of God'. T.F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), pp. 118-19.

[7] Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, p. 121.

The question at this early date is how and when the flesh Christ assumed is sanctified. In contrast to Edward Irving, who taught that, having assumed our fallen humanity, Christ remained sinless in it through the indwelling Holy Spirit, Torrance ascribes Christ's purity to his divine person.[9] This purity is whole and intact from the onset of the union in the womb of the virgin Mary. 'In this union the flesh of Christ becomes holy.... Thus we are to think of Christ's flesh as perfectly and completely sinless in his own nature, and not simply in virtue of the Spirit as Irving puts it.'[10] The result is that, after the virgin birth, the early Torrance speaks of Christ entering 'the sphere of our corrupted humanity', or 'our sphere of sin and temptation'.[11]

Nevertheless, as early as 1954 Torrance affirms that Christ enters 'our estrangement in the contradiction of sin', 'penetrates into our sinful humanity', and works out reconciliation 'in the midst of our humanity and alienation'.[12] By 1956 he declares, 'though conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary, Jesus was yet born in the womb of a sinner, within the compass of our sinful flesh'.[13] We read of Christ being 'born into our alienation, our God-forsakenness and darkness', and growing up 'within our bondage and ignorance'.[14] In this context he begins to speak of Christ 'bending back' the wayward will of man into submission to the will of God.[15] Expressions of this sort occur with great frequency throughout Torrance's work and continue to the end of his career.

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[8] T.F. Torrance, 'Predestination in Christ', *Evangelical Quarterly* 13 (1941), 133.

[9] Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, 122-24. 'We cannot think of Jesus as having original sin, for his Person was Divine'.

[10] Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, p. 122.

[11] Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, pp. 122-23.

[12] T.F. Torrance, 'The Atonement and the Oneness of the Church', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 7 (1954), 247.

[13] T.F. Torrance, 'The Place of Christology in Biblical and Dogmatic Theology', in Essays in *Christology for Karl Barth*, ed. T.H.L Parker (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), p. 18.

[14] Torrance, 'The Place of Christology', p. 18. In 1958, we have the unambiguous statement that Christ 'was made in the likeness of the flesh of sin in order that he might condemn sin in our flesh, submit our fallen humanity to the divine judgment on the Cross, and so make expiation for our sin'. T.F. Torrance, 'What is the Church?' *Ecumenical Review* II (October 1958), 13.

[15] Torrance, 'The Place of Christology', p. 18.

Thus, despite the early ambiguity, it is clear that when the Word became σάρξ, he took 'our human nature as we have it in the fallen world'.[16] This entry into our estate is total. It includes, importantly, the assumption of our fallen and 'diseased mind', for Christ enters 'the root of our estranged mental existence',[17] and there works out 'reconciliation deep within the rational center of human being'.[18]

The importance of this doctrine for Torrance cannot be overstated:

> One thing should be abundantly clear, that if Jesus Christ did not assume our fallen flesh, our fallen humanity, then our fallen humanity is untouched by his work – for 'the unassumed is the unredeemed',[19] as Gregory Nazianzen put it.[20]

This fundamental truth, which the church must relearn, having suppressed it,[21] was the 'great soteriological principle of the early church',[22] without which the fathers 'reckoned the church would be soteriologically and evangelically deficient'.[23] To deny it 'is to deny the very foundation of our redemption in Christ'.[24] Rejection of the non-assumptus leads to 'the Latin heresy', which consists of construing salvation in wholly forensic and external categories, and results in an instrumental conception of the humanity of Christ.[25] Torrance states the implication of the denial starkly. 'How could it be said that Christ really took our place, took our cause upon himself in order to redeem us? What could we then have to do with him?'[26] It would mean that the love of God had stopped short of union with us in our actual condition.[27]

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[16] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 62.

[17] T.F. Torrance, 'The Reconciliation of Mind', *TSF Bulletin* 10, no. 3 (1987), 5.

[18] T.F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers and Howard, 1992), p. 39.

[19] This phrase is also known by its Latin shorthand as the 'non-assumptus'. I shall use this phrase as equivalent to 'Christ's assumption of our fallen humanity'.

[20] Torrance, *Incarnation*, 62. See T.F. Torrance, 'The Atonement. The Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross: The Atonement and the Moral Order', in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. by Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1992), pp. 237-38; Torrance, *Incarnation*, 201; T.F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church. Volume 1: Order and Disorder* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 175-78; T.F. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1990), p. 104.

[21] Torrance, *Mediation*, p. 39.

[22] T.F. Torrance, 'The Legacy of Karl Barth (1886-1968)', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986), 306.

[23] Torrance, 'Reconciliation of Mind', p. 5. Here Torrance notes 'that is a truth which I first learned from my beloved Edinburgh teacher, H.R. Mackintosh, who had himself been profoundly influenced by the Christology of these Greek fathers. But it was only when I studied Karl Barth's account of this doctrine that its truth broke in upon my mind in a quite unforgettable way'. For more on the patristic background of the non-assumptus see T.F. Torrance, *The Trinitarian Faith* (London: T&T Clark, 1991), pp. 149-67; T.F. Torrance, *The Christian Frame of Mind: Reason, Order and Openness in Theology and Natural Science* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1989), pp. 6-11.

However, Torrance also asserts 'that in the very act of assuming our flesh the Word sanctified and hallowed it'.[28] Since Torrance conceives of the hypostatic union dynamically, this sanctifying and atoning action refers primarily to the whole of Christ's incarnate life. 'The atonement began with the virgin birth of Christ, entered upon active operation at His baptism and reached its culmination in the crucifixion—the whole of Christ's life and ministry were involved in the work of reconciliation as well as His death'.[29] It is the reality of this healing union, the subject of which is the holy Son of God, which enables Torrance to repeatedly affirm that Christ wears our sinful humanity sinlessly.[30] In the act of taking our flesh, and throughout his life in it, he does not do in the flesh what we do, namely, sin.[31] In fact, both early and later in his career, Torrance affirms the impossibility of sin based on the divine subject of the incarnation. 'If God the Word became flesh, and God the Word is the subject of the incarnation, how could God sin?'[32]

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[24] Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, 1, p. 175.

[25] T.F. Torrance, 'Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 39 (1986), 476-79; Torrance, 'Atonement and Moral Order', p. 238; Torrance, *Mediation*, p. 40.

[26] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 62. 'Otherwise our actual human nature, mental and physical, would not have been brought within the sanctifying and renewing activity of the Saviour'. Torrance, *Karl Barth: Biblical and Evangelical Theologian*, p. 104. If salvation 'does not take place in the ontological depths of human being', then 'there is no profound cleansing of the roots of the human conscience through the blood of Christ, no radical transformation or rebirth of human being in him'. Torrance, *Mediation*, p. 62.

[27] T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconciliation: Essays Toward Evangelical and Catholic Unity in East and West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 201. 'Although it was not often perceived, the really fatal elements derived from an Apollinarian orientation in Christology and soteriology, namely, failure to appreciate the principle that what Christ has not taken into himself from us has not been saved, together with failure to appreciate the fact that if Christ did not have a human mind or a rational soul, the Son of God did not really become incarnate in human being, and his love stopped short of union with us in our actual condition'.

[28] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 63.

[29] Torrance, 'Atonement and Oneness', p. 252.

[30] Torrance, *Atonement*, p. 371.

Our concern here is not with how this is worked out in the continuous union of Christ's life of obedience, but rather with the once for all event of the virgin birth. While Torrance views these as inseparable aspects of one complex event, there are distinct moments in the overall movement,[33] and thus the virgin birth can be distinguished from the whole.

> The egeneto[34] refers to a completed event, one that has taken place once and for all in the union of God and man in Jesus Christ; but it is also a historical event, a dynamic event, a real happening in the time of this world which is coincident with the whole historical life of Jesus. While therefore the incarnation refers in one sense to that unique event when the Word entered time and joined human existence, it also refers to the whole life and work of Jesus, from his birth at Bethlehem to his resurrection from the dead.[35]

The result is that 'the incarnation is itself the *sanctification* of our human life in Jesus Christ'.[36] He sanctifies our fallen human nature *both* 'in the very act of assumption and all through his holy life lived in it from beginning to end'.[37] Thus, the virgin birth, what Torrance calls the 'incarnation in its narrower sense', is a redeeming event.[38] With this background, we turn to Torrance's exposition of the virgin birth in the New Testament.

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[31] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 63. 'In the concrete likeness of the flesh of sin, he is unlike the sinner.'

[32] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 63. For the earlier view, see the Augustinian discussion of peccability in Torrance, *The Doctrine of Jesus Christ*, pp. 125-30.

[33] Torrance, 'Atonement and Oneness', p. 248.

[34] The reference is to the word translated 'made' or 'became' in John 1:14.

[35] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 67. We feel there is a lack of conceptual clarity here. If the 'egeneto' is itself a completed event, and if it *also* refers to, and *is coincident with*, the whole historical life, it is difficult to see how any differentiation can be maintained. Yet, Torrance does make distinctions within the one movement.

[36] In assuming our fallen nature he 'began its redemption and healing'. Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 204. '...that identification of himself with us in our sin, is already our assumption and exaltation', but this saving union 'reaches its supreme point in the cross'. Torrance, *Atonement*, p. 150. The passion 'began with his very birth... but it was in the Cross itself that it had its telos or consummation'. T.F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 154. Alternatively, the resurrection is seen as the telos: 'atoning reconciliation began to be actualised with the conception and birth of Jesus of the Virgin Mary', and 'was brought to its triumphant fulfillment... in the resurrection'. Torrance, *Mediation*, p. 41; Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, 1, p. 242.

II. THE VIRGIN BIRTH[39]

1. John. Surprisingly, Torrance spends very little time on the virgin birth in the synoptic gospels.[40] The theologically substantive points he makes comes from texts in John and Paul, which are not always seen as references to the virgin birth. Regarding John 1:13, 'who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God', Torrance asks if 'who were born' should be singular, in which case the reference would be to Jesus, or plural, where the reference would be to believers. Even granting the plural reading, he sees an 'extended reference to the virgin birth', in that the word for man is ἀνδρός and not ἀνθρώπου, that is, a male or a husband, and not man generically.[41]

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[37] Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 155. The incarnation in the broader sense is not just a once for all event, but includes the whole incarnate life of Christ 'from his birth of the virgin Mary to his resurrection'. T.F. Torrance, *Christian Theology and Scientific Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 96.

[38] Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, p. 156; T.F. Torrance, *The School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 1996), p. lxxxv; Torrance, Incarnation, p. 82. In this context of the virgin birth as a redeeming event, Torrance adds: 'In his holy assumption of our unholy humanity, his purity wipes away our impurity, his holiness covers our corruption'.

[39] Throughout this discussion Torrance is indebted to Barth, *CD*, I/2 pp. 172-202. See also T.F. Torrance, 'Karl Barth and Patristic Theology', in *Theology Beyond Christendom: Essays on the Centenary of the Birth of Karl Barth*, ed. by J. Thompson (Allison Park, PA.: Pickwick Publications, 1986), p. 233. The material in this section from the *Incarnation* volume of the Christology lectures appears, with very little change, in T.F. Torrance, 'The Doctrine of the Virgin Birth', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 12 (1994), 8-25.

[40] There is, however, this forceful assertion: 'The genealogy of Jesus recorded in the gospel according to St. Matthew showed that Jesus was incorporated into a long line of sinners...he made the generations of humanity his very own, summing up in himself our sinful stock, precisely in order to forgive, heal and sanctify it in himself...Thus atoning reconciliation began to be actualized with the conception and birth of Jesus of the Virgin Mary.' Torrance, *Mediation*, p. 41.

[41] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 90. The editor notes here that the NIV has 'a husband's will'. In addition, Torrance adduces manuscript and, in his view, more weighty patristic evidence for the singular reading.

What this does is establish a correspondence between Christ's sanctifying birth 'from above'[42] and our own rebirth out of sin. Thus, in light of 1 John 5:18,[43] Torrance concludes, 'it is upon Christ's unique birth once and for all that our birth depends and in his birth that we are given to share'.[44]

> What happened once and for all, in utter uniqueness in Jesus Christ, happens in every instance of rebirth into Christ, when Christ enters into our hearts and recreates us. Just as e was born from above of the Holy Spirit, so we are born from above of the Holy Spirit through sharing in his birth.[45]

The implication is that in baptism we are born from above because we are incorporated into Christ's birth of the Spirit from above. Thus baptism 'reposes upon the virgin birth of Christ as well as upon his death and resurrection'.[46]

2. Paul. Torrance sees a similar pattern in the way Paul contrasts Christ and Adam. 'Christ as the new man comes likewise from God. His likeness to Adam was not in sin, but in coming into existence and in representative capacity'. The normal New Testament word for human birth, γεννάω, is 'not used of Adam and Paul never uses it of Christ'.[47] First Corinthians 15:47[48] means Christ, like Adam, came into being by divine initiative, and is a virtual affirmation of the virgin birth.

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[42] He takes being 'born from above' in John 3 as having 'primary objective reference to Christ himself' and cites Irenaeus as a witness.

[43] 'We know that any one born of God does not sin, but he who was born of God keeps him.'

[44] Here we note Torrance's persistent conviction that there are not two unions (the incarnational union of Christ with us, and our spiritual union with him), but one union of Christ with us in which we are given to share. See Rankin, 'Carnal Union', pp. 119-45; Kye Won Lee, *Living in Union with Christ: The Practical Theology of Thomas F. Torrance*, Issues in Systematic Theology, 11 (New York: Peter Lang, 2003), pp. 201-2; Phee Seng Kang, 'The Concept of the Vicarious Humanity of Christ in the Theology of Thomas Forsyth Torrance', Ph.D. diss. (Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen, 1983), pp. 307-8; Torrance, *Mediation*, pp. 66-7; Torrance, *The School of Faith*, pp. cvi-cxi. 'There are not two unions, the one which Christ has with us which he established in his incarnation, and another which we have with him through the Spirit or through faith. There is only one union which Christ has created between himself and us and us and himself, and in which we participate through the Spirit which he has given us.' T.F. Torrance, 'The Mission of the Church', *Scottish Journal of Theology* 19 (1966), 133. What is often under emphasized in this connection is the fact that it is Christ's assumption of our actual twisted humanity, conceived in an ontologically realist manner, which drives this notion of a singular union.

[45] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 101.

[46] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 91. A virtually identical discussion is found in T.F. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement in the Church. Volume 2: The Ministry and the Sacraments of the Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 118-19.

Galatians 4 is viewed in much the same way. Throughout the chapter Paul uses γεννάω to speak of human birth,[49] but in Galatians 4:4 he uses γίγνομαι (γενόμενον) to speak of the earthly origins of Jesus.[50] 'That is the strongest disavowal of birth by ordinary human generation in regard to the birth of Jesus.'[51]

Since Christ was 'made[52] of a woman, made under the law...that we might receive the adoption of sons',[53] and Galatians 3 links our sonship with being baptized into Christ, Torrance concludes:

> To be incorporated by baptism into Christ is to partake of his Spirit of sonship which he is able to bestow on us men and women because of his own coming into existence of a woman, as a real man. So Paul can also say, like John, when Christ was born I was born a son of God, for in baptism I partake of Christ and his Spirit of sonship.[54]

Thus, for Paul and John, the virgin birth shows its deep significance by being implicitly woven into the texture of their theology.

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[47] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 92.

[48] 'The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven'.

[49] Galatians. 4:23, 24, 29.

[50] See also Romans 1:3 and Philippians 2:7.

[51] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 93.

[52] In accord with the linguistic argument, 'made', following the KJV, not 'born' is Torrance's preferred translation.

[53] Galatians 4:4.

[54] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 93. 'St. Paul could say, 'It pleased God to reveal His Son in me'. In a profound sense the Word becomes flesh in the Christian by his incorporation into Christ...and that is why real faith is always a virgin birth in the soul, for Christ, as St. Paul says, becomes formed within the believer.' Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, 2, p. 70. 'When were you born again? In your conversion? In your baptism? The profoundest answer you can give to that question is, when Jesus Christ was born from above by the Holy Spirit. The birth of Jesus was the birth of the new man, and it is in Him and through sharing in His birth that we are born again'. Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, 2, p. 128.

3. The Virgin Birth in Doctrinal Perspective. The virgin birth is not a theory explaining how the Son became man, but rather 'an indication of what happened within humanity when the Son of God became man'.[55] Thus, it cannot be 'understood apart from the whole mystery of Christ', for it is a sign pointing to the mystery of the hypostatic union. Nevertheless, it does have much to tell us about the way this mystery has taken 'in its insertion into our fallen human existence at the very beginning of the earthly life of Jesus'.[56]

Since the virgin birth points to the mystery of Christ's person, and the resurrection reveals that mystery, the two are inseparable. The virgin birth 'and the resurrection of Jesus from the virgin tomb are twin signs which mark out the mystery of Christ'.[57] This is the case because the incarnation is a once for all act of assumption of our sinful flesh, *and* a continuous union 'carried all the way through our estranged state under bondage into the freedom and triumph of the resurrection'.[58] At the virgin birth the mystery is veiled because it 'is inserted into the flesh of sin, the *sarx hamartias*, as St. Paul called it'.[59] The resurrection authenticates the virgin birth. 'It is the unveiling of what was veiled, the resurrection out of our mortality of what was inserted into it and recreated within it'.[60] The humiliation of Jesus, as well as the new life of our humanity, begins at Bethlehem, and both are carried through into the unveiling of the resurrection. Thus, 'the virgin birth is the basis of the mystery of the resurrection'.[61]

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[55] Torrance, *Incarnation*, pp. 94-5. Here we see again that the virgin birth into our humanity is conceived as a compressed version of the dynamic hypostatic union wrought out in Christ's historical life.

[56] Torrance, *Incarnation*, pp. 95-6.

[57] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 96; Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, 2, p. 160; T.F. Torrance, 'The First-Born of All Creation', *Life and Work* (December 1976), pp. 12, 14. Like the denial of the non-assumptus, 'to bracket off the Virgin Birth from the death and resurrection of Christ, inevitably leads to a deficient understanding of the atonement as only an external transaction expressible in legal terms'. T.F. Torrance, 'The Truth of the Virgin Birth', *Herald Scotland*, 14 January 1994. The realist manner in which Torrance sees our rebirth as reposing on, or participating in, both of these 'twin signs' is seen in the answer he gave to a highlander's question during his time as moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Asked if he was born again, Torrance replied in the affirmative. Asked when he had been born again, Torrance replied 'when Jesus Christ was born of the Virgin Mary and rose from the virgin tomb'. Torrance, *Mediation*, pp. 85-6.

[58] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 96. 'Both these acts were sovereign creative acts of God's grace in and upon and out of our fallen humanity'. Torrance finds the assumption of our fallen humanity, and thus the bracketing of the virgin birth and the resurrection, as well as our own participation in his birth from above in our baptism in Irenaeus. T.F. Torrance, 'The Kerygmatic Proclamation of the Gospel: The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching of Irenaeus of Lyons', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 37 (1992), 116-17.

[59] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 97.

Torrance summarizes his teaching on the virgin birth under a series of headings. First, it establishes the reality of Jesus' humanity. There is both continuity and discontinuity here.[62] He was born in 'the same flesh as our flesh', yet 'he was not born as other men are of the will of the flesh'.[63] This also entails the denial of any synergism. Man is involved, 'but he is the predicate, not the subject, not the lord of the event'.[64] Second, the virgin birth entails the disqualification of human capability in approaching God. Third, the virgin birth is not an entirely new act of creation, 'not a *creatio ex nihilo*, but a *creatio ex virgine*'.[65] It presupposes the first creation and its fall, and is the beginning of the new creation.[66] Fourth, the virgin birth represents a break in the sinful autonomy of man. Our very existence is 'involved in original sin'.[67] His birth into our condition 'far from acquiescing in its sin, resists it, sanctifying what sin had corrupted, and unites it again to the purity of God'.[68] Thus, in contrast to the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary, we have event which means 'that out of Mary a sinner, by pure act of God, Jesus is born ... and that his very birth sanctified Mary, for it is through her Son that she is redeemed and given to share in the purity and holiness of God'.[69] The setting aside of human autonomy is seen in the fact that 'man in the person of Joseph is set aside'.[70] Fifth, the virgin birth is the archetype for all of God's gracious actions. Mary, seen as passive and receptive, is 'the normative pattern of the believer in his or her attitude toward the Word announced in the gospel, which tells men and women of the divine act of grace and decision taken already on their behalf in Christ'.[71] This point is thus a fuller statement of the fact that our rebirth reposes on Christ's birth of the virgin. All of this means that in the virgin birth 'we have a powerful force keeping the church faithful to the basic doctrine of salvation and justification by the grace of God alone'.[72]

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[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] 'It was a real birth...Jesus was not a product of a casual historical continuity, nevertheless the Incarnation was a coming of God right into the midst of human conditions. Jesus was not created *ex nihilo*, but *ex virgine*, therefore right in the midst of human choices and decisions'. Torrance, 'Predestination in Christ', p. 130. See T.F. Torrance, *Scottish Theology: From John Knox to John McLeod Campbell* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), p. 14.

[63] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 98.

[64] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 99. 'The word became flesh, not through any synergistic activity, but a gracious decision on the part of God... Jesus was not born because of the sovereignty of man, not through the will of the flesh.' Torrance, 'Predestination in Christ', p. 130.

[65] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 100.

[66] Torrance, *Incarnation*, pp. 99-100.

[67] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 100. It is important to note that in calling the virgin birth a sanctifying act Torrance habitually, as here, brings it into close connection with the removal of original sin. Yet it is clear that it is only so inasmuch as it is the origin of the continuous union carried out in Christ's whole life. See Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 82.

[68] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 100.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE ONCE FOR ALL UNION IN THE VIRGIN BIRTH

While Torrance provides a robust and illuminating theological discussion of the virgin birth, his affirmation of the non-assumptus in this context raises a number of questions[73] Torrance is emphatic that Jesus 'incorporated himself into the continuity of sinful human existence'. The virgin birth, as we have repeatedly seen, despite the absence of a human father, 'was truly of the flesh just like that of all other human beings'.[74] Jesus, within the matrix of Israel, assumes our fallen, alienated humanity. Yet we are also told that the virgin birth represents a break in the sinful autonomy of man. It is a sovereign act where man and his sinful will, 'man in the person of Joseph, is set aside'.[75] Christ 'breaks through the continuity of adamic existence and opens up a new continuity in a new adam, a new humanity'. Thus, Jesus 'was therefore *both* in continuity and discontinuity with our fallen humanity'.[76]

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[69] Ibid. Torrance sees the emergence of the doctrine of the immaculate conception as the long term result of denying that in the virgin birth Christ assumes our sinful flesh. 'Thus there developed especially in Latin theology from the fifth century a steadily growing rejection of the fact that it was our alienated, fallen, and sinful humanity that the Holy Son of God assumed... which forced Roman Catholic theology into the strange notion of the immaculate conception'. Torrance, *Mediation*, p. 40. Also, Torrance, 'Latin Heresy', pp. 476-7; Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, 1, p. 149. Of course, classical Protestantism denies the assumption of sinful flesh by Christ and also rejects the immaculate conception. While Torrance acknowledges this state of affairs in the West, he sees an equally strange notion in the 'fundamentalist conception of "verbal inspiration" of the Bible'. Torrance, *Mediation*, p. 40. For him, the assumption of our fallen humanity entails the assumption of the fallen human word of the Bible.

[70] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 100.

[71] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 101; Torrance, *Mediation*, p. 95. In the context of a discussion of predestination, Torrance sees in the relation between the human and divine in the virgin birth the rejection of three common soteriological options. 'We have here therefore a repudiation of adoptionism, that is, correspondingly, Pelagianism ... the repudiation of docetism, that is, correspondingly, determinism ... the repudiation of Arianism, that is synergism.' Torrance, 'Predestination in Christ', p. 131.

[72] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 104.

[73] We shall leave aside the issue of whether σάρξ in John can bear the sense which Torrance gives it, since his exegetical case rests more with the Pauline texts in Romans 8:3 and 2 Corinthians 5:21, especially the former.

The basic framework on which this analysis rests is beyond dispute. The virgin birth as an event, through the flesh of Mary in the womb of Israel, has horizontal continuity with our humanity. In addition, through the sovereign work of the Spirit in the descent of the Son, it vertically intersects that history, so there is also discontinuity. On the traditional view, the continuity lies in the fact that Christ is fully human, mortal, and subject to temptation. The discontinuity lies in his human nature being preserved from intrinsic corruption. This, with all due respect for the mysterious ground on which we tread, gives Jesus continuity with our humanity and discontinuity with respect to its 'fallenness'. Torrance, however, affirms continuity and discontinuity with our *fallen* humanity. This is a less clear conception.

Of course, the reason for this break in sinful continuity is that the virgin birth is a redeeming, sanctifying event. When holy Son of God unites himself to our corruption, the incarnation in the 'narrower sense' cannot but be a healing event. Torrance can speak, as we've seen above, of this sanctification as if it were fully accomplished. The rationale for this lies in the holistic way he views the hypostatic union as a single, complex, dynamic whole. Incarnation and atonement entail one another. The person and work of Christ are inseparable. The work of Christ is not 'added to' the hypostatic union, but simply the hypostatic union in action.[77] Thus, the 'parts' in the historical existence of the Son interpenetrate one another and cannot be artificially separated. As a result, since the hypostatic union commences in the virgin birth, Torrance sometimes speaks of it in terms of what is accomplished by the union as a whole.

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[74] Torrance, *Trinitarian Faith*, p. 151.

[75] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 100.

[76] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 94.

[77] 'Reconciliation is not something added to hypostatic union so much as the hypostatic union itself at work in expiation and atonement.' Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, 1, p. 240.

Two things are certain. Torrance grants that the union has certain 'moments', and his whole treatment of the life of Christ takes seriously the linear sequence and distinguishable quality of the events in view. Thus, organic inseparability notwithstanding, we cannot simply opt out of chronological questions. Second, he is emphatic that the post virgin birth humanity of Christ is our flesh of sin, for he wrestles with it, 'bends it back', throughout the whole course of his life. Large swaths of Torrance's analysis assume not only the full presence of our corruption throughout Christ's life, but the ever increasing intensity of the conflict between our sin and the faithfulness of God within the incarnate constitution of the mediator.[78] Strikingly, he can even say 'that the union of God and man in Jesus Christ is not thought of as somehow ontologically complete at Bethlehem'.[79] The hypostatic union does not reach its telos until the cross and resurrection.

This leaves us with a few critical questions. In what sense does the virgin birth sanctify the humanity Christ assumed?[80] What is the relationship between the sanctification in the virgin birth and the sanctification throughout the whole life of Christ? Is there something analogous to the definitive, progressive, and final sanctification of the believer at work here? In what state does this healing assumption leave the post virgin birth humanity of Christ? Put in Torrance's own terms, just how is Christ's humanity our actual, concrete humanity marked by the fall, *and* in discontinuity with our fallen humanity? Any discontinuity at all, it would seem, leaves Christ with something less than our fallen humanity at the very outset of his life. Of course, the ground of the discontinuity lies in the fact that our diseased humanity is now united to the Word of God; but if this were the *sum* of the discontinuity, as much of Torrance's post virgin birth analysis seems to assume, why is 'man, in the person of Joseph', set aside?[81]

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[78] For one example, see T.F. Torrance, 'The Atoning Obedience of Christ', *Moravian Theological Seminary Bulletin* (Fall, 1959), 70-1.

[79] Torrance, *Scottish Theology*, p. 14. 'It begins there by entry into the enmity between the justice of God and our sin, but it is completed in the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ..'

[80] Donald Macleod, 'Dr. T.F. Torrance and Scottish Theology: A Review Article', *Evangelical Quarterly* 72 (2000), 67. After citing a couple of Torrance's assertions on the virgin birth as a sanctifying event, Macleod says 'such statements desperately need clarification'.

[81] Would not a birth, albeit from above, in which, from the moment of conception, the Word assumed the humanity of Mary and Joseph be more in accord with assuming our fallen humanity?

Clearly, *something* redemptive happens to our humanity in the very act of its assumption.[82] Torrance himself attributes it to the joint action of the second and third persons of the Trinity. It is the Son and Word of God who takes on our flesh, and the conception itself is a *creatio ex virgine*, a transcendent 'act of the Spirit...which breaks into our humanity'.[83] Yet, we are not told precisely what this narrow atoning event consists of, or how it relates to the whole, and that lack of clarity hangs over his subsequent discussion of Christ's life.

We can focus our concern here in the following manner. We shall refer to this as the issue of dyotheletic[84] clarity. It is clear that in assuming our flesh, Christ assumes a will which is enslaved, alienated, and in bondage to sin. Torrance regularly uses the harshest 'reformed' language about the bondage of the will Christ assumes. What precisely happens to this will and, by implication, to the nature of which it is a part, in the virgin birth?

If it is *healed* in the act of being assumed, then Christ's human nature, post virgin birth, is not in fact fallen, and this is clearly not Torrance's doctrine. If the human will is *regenerated* in the act of assumption, then Christ's post virgin birth humanity would be equivalent to our redeemed, but sub-eschatological, humanity and this is clearly not Torrance's doctrine. If the human will is *enabled*[85] in the act of assumption, giving it a measure of freedom whereby it can deliberate, wrestle against itself, and choose obedience, then Christ's post virgin birth humanity would be *almost* our fallen humanity, but not identical with it, and this is clearly not Torrance's doctrine. Yet, it seems that this third option, or something like it, is what Torrance assumes, since it alone allows the humanity of Jesus to be a genuine actor in synergistically (along with the divine nature and the presence of the Spirit) 'bending back' the fallen will in conformity to the divine will. This would create a two stage process. First, in the virgin birth, the will is sanctified, thereby gaining a measure of deliberative capacity. Then, throughout the dynamic, historical union, into the telos of the resurrection, the will is fully healed. This appears to simply convert a reformed conception of the fallen human will into a more 'semi-pelagian' one by means of the virgin birth.

We are fully aware that this 'ordo salutis' characterization is not something Torrance ever attempts. He insists on the holistic nature of what happens to our humanity in Christ. The union *as a whole* is what he calls the 'great *paliggenesia*' of our humanity.[86] Yet, as we indicated above, the question cannot be avoided, precisely because he insists that the virgin birth is itself a sanctification of our nature. The presence of one complex, interlocked event, does not, even in his own exposition, eliminate sequence and decisive moments. His silence on the nature of 'initial' sanctification in the decisive moment the virgin birth results in a lack of clarity about the fallen nature of the assumed humanity. More narrowly, this raises the question of dyotheletic clarity. That is, precisely how does the fallen human will of Christ get 'bent back' into conformity with the divine will by the vicarious *humanity* of Christ? The forceful assertion of the non-assumptus, along with a once for all act of sanctification in the virgin birth, leads to a lack of clarity as to the status of the assumed humanity, and especially the human will of Christ, after the moment of conception.[87]

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[82] Even Mary's humanity is said to be sanctified by the virgin birth.

[83] Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 95.

[84] Referring to the two wills, human and divine, in the person of Christ.

[85] Here we have in mind something weaker than the previous option which left Christ with a humanity identical to that of Christians.

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[86] Torrance, 'Atoning Obedience', p. 71; Torrance, *Incarnation*, p. 119; Torrance, *The School of Faith*, p. xxxviii. The reference is to the Greek word translated 'regeneration'. See Matthew 19:28, Titus 3:5.

> It is significant that the New Testament does not use the term regeneration (*paliggenesia*), as so often modern evangelical theology does, for what goes on in the human heart. It is used only of the great regeneration that took place in and through the Incarnation and of the final transformation of the world when Jesus Christ shall come again to judge the quick and the dead and make all things new.

Torrance is surely correct about the Matthew 19:28 text and its relation to the end of all things. But the Titus 3:5 text is almost surely about 'what happens in the human heart', since it is a *washing* of regeneration coordinate with the renewal of the Holy Spirit who was poured out *on us*. Torrance himself, in another context, sees the text as referring to Christian baptism. However, he sees Christian baptism as reposing on the baptism of Christ and, more decisively, upon the whole descent and ascent of the Son. 'The baptismal language of descent and ascent applies fundamentally to the descent of the Son of God into our mortal humanity and to His ascension to the right hand of the Father.' Torrance, *Conflict and Agreement*, 2, p. 109. See Torrance, *Incarnation*, pp. 76-7. It is in this sense that Torrance affirms 'the Gospel speaks of regeneration as wholly bound up with Jesus Christ'. Torrance, *Mediation*, p. 85.

[87] While we cannot show the implications of this for the continuous life of Christ here, let us state what seems to be the conclusion. In Torrance's exposition of Christ's human life we have a human will which is perfectly obedient, perpetually under condemnation (he 'condemns sin in the flesh' throughout his incarnate life) and in need of being 'bent back' to the divine will, progressively sanctified, and progressively hardened and finally reprobated (and, we might add, ontologically and not merely forensically) at the cross. This anomalous situation is rooted in the lack of clarity at the origin which we have discussed above.

D. A. CARSON'S THEOLOGICAL METHOD

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How does D. A. Carson 'do' theology?[1] Answering that question poses at least two challenges. The first and larger challenge is to systematize Carson's theological method in a way that accurately reflects his voluminous published writings spanning some thirty-five years: over 60 books, 250 articles, and 115 book reviews.[2] Second, though Carson has written an unusual number of works that are directly or indirectly related to theological method, he has not yet written one that systematically presents his theological method as a package. That is what this essay attempts to do. It is primarily descriptive rather than critical, and it begins with a brief biographical sketch.[3]

1. CARSON'S BACKGROUND: SOME FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE HIS THEOLOGICAL METHOD[4]

If postmodernism has taught theologians anything, it is that humans cannot interpret the Bible with complete objectivity. Theologians bring far too much baggage to the interpretive process, including language, culture, religion, education, upbringing, exposure, race, and gender. This biographical sketch mentions some factors that influence Carson's theological method to some degree. As helpful as it is to mention these factors, it raises a methodological question that I am not sure anyone can answer: how does one objectively measure such influences?[5]

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[1] The author has served as D. A. Carson's research assistant since 2006 and is currently Carson's Research Manager. Carson was also his doctoral mentor. This article revises a paper submitted to Kevin J. Vanhoozer in December 2006.

[2] See Carson's comprehensive bibliography the Gospel Coalition website where over 350 of the books, articles, and reviews are available as free PDFs. <http://j.mp/CarsonBiblio> [accessed 16 August 2011]. See my explanation of this resource, 'D. A. Carson Publications' <http://andynaselli.com/d-a-carson-publications> [accessed 16 August 2011].

[3] Three items are noteworthy: (1) All resources cited are authored by D. A. Carson unless otherwise noted. (2) When the footnotes list multiple sources, the citations are arranged chronologically from the oldest to most recent. (3) All italicized words in direct quotations reproduce the emphasis in the original.

[4] This section is based primarily on Carson's anecdotes in his published works as well as in his sermons and lectures, his Curriculum Vitae, personal interaction with him, and a tribute by one of his former PhD students: Andreas J. Köstenberger, 'D. A. Carson: His Life and Work to Date', in *Understanding the Times: New Testament Studies in the 21st Century; Essays in Honor of D. A.*

1.1. Carson's Family

Carson's father, Thomas Donald McMillan Carson, was born near Belfast, Northern Ireland, and his family immigrated to Ottawa, Canada in 1913. Desiring to plant churches in Quebec, he graduated from Toronto Baptist Seminary in 1937 and married Elizabeth Margaret Maybury in 1938. The Lord blessed them with three children, and Donald Arthur Carson was the second, born on 21 December 1946. Tom Carson faithfully ministered in Drummondville, Quebec from 1948 to 1963, a trying time in which he experienced persecution but little apparent fruit at his church.[6] Don Carson, who entered McGill University in Montreal in 1963, spent his formative years in this environment. His family lived simply, too poor to own a home or pay for his university training. His parents loved him and set a godly example. Carson recalls,

> I remember how, even when we children were quite young, each morning my mother would withdraw from the hurly-burly of life to read her Bible and pray. In the years that I was growing up, my father, a Baptist minister, had his study in our home. Every morning we could hear him praying in that study. My father vocalized when he prayed—loudly enough that we knew he was praying, but not loudly enough that we could hear what he was saying. Every day he prayed, usually for about forty-five minutes. Perhaps there were times when he failed to do so, but I cannot think of one.[7]

Carson deeply respected his father and was especially close to his mother, who capably led ladies' Bible studies and could use Greek and Hebrew.

Carson, reared in French Canada, is bilingual and remained a Canadian citizen until he became a United States citizen a few years ago. While working on his PhD in Cambridge, he met Joy Wheildon, a British school-

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Carson at the Occasion of His 65th Birthday (ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough; Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), pp. 349–69.

[5] Carson raised this question when I inquired about influences on his life. Interview by author, 29 November 2006, Deerfield, IL. Digital recording.

[6] See especially *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor: The Life and Reflections of Tom Carson* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008).

[7] *A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), pp. 25–6.

teacher, and they married in 1975. They have two children: Tiffany, a high school teacher in Santa Barbara, California, and Nicholas, a United States Marine.

1.2. Carson's Education

Carson graduated from Drummondville High School (1959–63) with the highest standing. He earned a BSc in chemistry (and mathematics) from McGill University (1963–7), where he took extra courses in classical Greek and psychology. He earned various scholarships and awards while earning his MDiv from Central Baptist Seminary in Toronto (1967–70), and he took four units of NT study at Regent College (1970). His PhD is from Emmanuel College, Cambridge University (1972–75), where he studied under the Rev. Dr (later Prof) Barnabas Lindars, SSF. His dissertation is entitled 'Predestination and Responsibility: Elements of Tension-Theology in the Fourth Gospel against Jewish Background'.[8]

1.3. Carson's Professional Experience

Carson is now a world-renowned evangelical New Testament scholar. He started as a part-time lecturer in French at Central Baptist Seminary in Toronto (1967–70) and in mathematics at Richmond College in Toronto (1969–70). He was an occasional lecturer at Northwest Baptist Theological College in Vancouver (1971–2) while ministering as the pastor of Richmond Baptist Church in Richmond, British Columbia (1970–2), where he was ordained under the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptist Churches of Canada in June 1972. After earning his PhD, he served at Northwest Baptist Theological College from 1975–8. After hearing Carson present a paper at the Evangelical Theological Society's conference in December 1977, Kenneth Kantzer asked him to join the faculty at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, where Carson has served as Associate Professor of New Testament (1978–82), Professor of New Testament (1982–91), and Research Professor of NT (1991–). From 1978 to 1991, he took a sabbatical every third year in England.[9]

He has taught over fifty different graduate courses on various levels. He was the book review editor for the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (1979–86) and the editor of the *Trinity Journal* (1980–6).

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[8] Published as *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension*, 2nd edn (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002).

[9] Instead of the school years being divided into two semesters, they were divided into three trimesters. The professors could take a sabbatical for one trimester every third year if they could justify it with a specific project. They also had the option of taking off all three trimesters, but the second two were without pay.

In addition to editing about twenty-five books, he is the general editor of three major series: Pillar Commentaries on the New Testament (currently fourteen volumes), New Studies in Biblical Theology (currently twenty-six volumes), and Studies in Biblical Greek (currently thirteen volumes). He is cofounder and president of The Gospel Coalition, and he frequently lectures internationally for academic, research, and professional centres.

1.4. Some Other Background Factors

Carson also frequently preaches and teaches internationally at a substantial number of churches, conferences, student groups, colleges, and seminaries, including university missions.[10] He is familiar with most of the major theological figures in evangelicalism on a first-name basis, and he is an avid critic of culture.[11] He reads about five hundred books each year, not counting other periodicals, and his reading expands far beyond theology into science, politics, and more. Ever since his days as a PhD student at Cambridge, he has devoted about a half-day per week to read and catalogue articles in about eighty theological journals, which he now enters in a database with tags that enable him to locate and cite articles efficiently. His personal library consists of about 10,000 'choice' volumes. His reputation among the students at TEDS is legendary, and he upholds daunting standards for PhD seminar papers and dissertations. On a lighter note, he enjoys woodworking and hiking, and when the weather permits it, he rides a motorcycle.

The most prominent focus of Carson's ministry is the gospel. He writes and speaks about it frequently,[12] and he has said something like the following countless times in recent years:

> Recognize that students do not learn everything you teach them. They certainly do not learn everything I teach them! What *do* they learn? They learn

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[10] For example, from 1985 to 2010, Carson made over sixty-five trips to Australia to preach and teach in churches, schools, and conferences (an average of 2.6 times per year).

[11] See especially *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

[12] 'The Biblical Gospel', in *For Such a Time as This: Perspectives on Evangelicalism, Past, Present and Future*, ed. by S. Brady and H. H. Rowdon (London: Evangelical Alliance, 1996), pp. 75–85; 'The Gospel of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:1–19)', May 23, 2007, text, audio, and video <http://j.mp/ruPyDE> [accessed 17 August 2011] ; 'Editorial', *Them* 34 (2009): 1–2; 'What Is the Gospel?—Revisited', in *For the Fame of God's Name: Essays in Honor of John Piper*, ed. by S. Storms and J. Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), pp. 147–70; *Evangelicalism: What Is It and Is It Worth Keeping?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011). For MP3s, see <http://j.mp/oRJ9YX> [accessed 17 August 2011].

what I am excited about; they learn what I emphasize, what I return to again and again; they learn what organizes the rest of my thought. So if I happily *presuppose* the gospel but rarely articulate it and am never excited about it, while effervescing frequently about, say, ecclesiology or textual criticism, my students may conclude that the most important thing to me is ecclesiology or textual criticism. They may pick up my *assumption* of the gospel; alternatively, they may even distance themselves from the gospel; but what they will almost certainly do is place at the center of *their* thought ecclesiology or textual criticism, thereby wittingly or unwittingly marginalizing the gospel. Both ecclesiology and textual criticism, not to mention a plethora of other disciplines and sub-disciplines, are worthy of the most sustained study and reflection. Nevertheless, part of my obligation as a scholar-teacher, a scholar-pastor, is to show how my specialism relates to that which is fundamentally central and never to lose my passion for living and thinking and being excited about what must remain at the center. Failure in this matter means I lead my students and parishioners astray.

If I am then challenged by a colleague who says to me, 'Yes, I appreciate the competence and thoroughness with which you are handling ecclesiology or textual criticism, but how does this relate to the centrality and nonnegotiability of the gospel?' I may, regrettably, respond rather defensively, 'Why are you picking on me? I believe in the gospel as deeply as you do!' That may be true, but it rather misses the point. As a scholar, ecclesiology or textual criticism may be my specialism; but as a scholar-*pastor*, I must be concerned for what I am passing on to the next generation, its configuration, its balance and focus. I dare never forget that students do not learn everything I try to teach them but primarily what I am excited about.[13]

2. CARSON'S CORRIGIBLE PRESUPPOSITIONS

Carson's views of metaphysics, epistemology, and divine revelation are the corrigible presuppositions for his theological method.

2.1. Carson's Metaphysics: God

Confessions of faith and systematic theology textbooks typically begin with Scripture, and an increasing number begin with epistemology. But when Carson drafted the Confessional Statement for The Gospel

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[13] 'The Scholar as Pastor', in *The Pastor as Scholar and the Scholar as Pastor: Reflections on Life and Ministry*, by John Piper and D. A. Carson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 98–99. Cf. Tony Payne, 'Carson on Culture', *The Briefing* 362 (November 2008), 32.

Coalition,[14] he intentionally began with the Triune God, not revelation. He explains why in an essay he co-authored with Tim Keller:

> This is significant. The Enlightenment was overconfident about human rationality. Some strands of it assumed it was possible to build systems of thought on unassailable foundations that could be absolutely certain to unaided human reason. Despite their frequent vilification of the Enlightenment, many conservative evangelicals have nevertheless been shaped by it. This can be seen in how many evangelical statements of faith start with the Scripture, not with God. They proceed from Scripture to doctrine through rigorous exegesis in order to build (what they consider) an absolutely sure, guaranteed-true-to-Scripture theology.
>
> The problem is that this is essentially a foundationalist approach to knowledge. It ignores the degree to which our cultural location affects our interpretation of the Bible, and it assumes a very rigid subject-object distinction. It ignores historical theology, philosophy, and cultural reflection. Starting with the Scripture leads readers to the overconfidence that their exegesis of biblical texts has produced a system of perfect doctrinal truth. This can create pride and rigidity because it may not sufficiently acknowledge the fallenness of human reason.
>
> We believe it is best to start with God, to declare (with John Calvin, Institutes 1.1) that without knowledge of God we cannot know ourselves, our world, or anything else. If there is no God, we would have no reason to trust our reason.[15]

2.2. Carson's Epistemology: Chastened Foundationalism

Carson recognizes both positive and negative elements in the epistemology of premodernism, modernism, and postmodernism. He aligns himself, however, with none of them in its entirety, opting instead for a chastened foundationalism.[16]

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[14] 'Confessional Statement', <http://j.mp/GCConfession> [accessed 17 August 2011].

[15] D. A. Carson and Timothy Keller, *Gospel-Centered Ministry*, The Gospel Coalition Booklets (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), p. 6.

[16] *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), pp. 22, 57–137, and *passim*; 'Maintaining Scientific and Christian Truths in a Postmodern World', in *Can We Be Sure about Anything? Science, Faith and Postmodernism*, ed. by D. Alexander (Leicester: IVP, 2005), p. 109; 'Domesticating the Gospel: A Review of Grenz's *Renewing the Center*', in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. by Millard J. Erickson, Paul Kjoss Helseth, and Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), pp. 45–6, 54–5; *Becoming Conversant with the*

Premodern epistemology, positively, begins with God rather than one's self.[17] Negatively, it is tied to an open universe as opposed to a closed universe (*modern* epistemology) or 'controlled' universe (Carson's view). Modern epistemology is based on foundationalism and the older hermeneutic.[18] It begins with one's self rather than God as the foundation on which to build all other knowledge: 'I think, therefore, I am' (Descartes). Using a scientific method that is '*methodologically* atheistic,' humans can and should reach 'epistemological certainty' and discover what is universally true.[19] The older hermeneutic, based on this epistemology, prescribes exegesis with similar methodological rigor and objectively certain results.

Postmodern epistemology is based on anti-foundationalism and the 'new hermeneutic'.[20]Although it rejects modernism, it is modernism's 'bastard child'.[21] It likewise begins with the finite 'I,' but it rejects foundationalism and universal truth in favour of perspectivalism under the guise of a 'tolerance' that is hypocritically intolerant.[22] The orthodox creed of the 'new hermeneutic,' which is based on this epistemology, is self-contradictory: the only heresy is the view that heresy exists, and the only objective and absolute truth is that objective, absolute truth does not exist.[23] Postmodern epistemology is commendable for emphasizing

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Emerging Church: Understanding a Movement and Its Implications (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 88–124.

[17] *Emerging Church*, pp. 88–90.

[18] 'The Role of Exegesis in Systematic Theology', in *Doing Theology in Today's World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer*, ed. by J. D. Woodbridge and T. E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), pp. 48–56; 'Approaching the Bible', in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. by G. J. Wenham *et al*, 4th edn (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), pp. 10–12; *Gagging of God*, pp. 58–64; 'Maintaining', p. 108; *Emerging Church*, pp. 92–95, 122–4.

[19] *Emerging Church*, pp. 122, 94.

[20] 'Exegesis in ST', pp. 50–6; *Gagging of God*, pp. 19–72, 195–200; 'Maintaining', pp. 108–9; *Emerging Church*, pp. 95–8, 122–4; *Christ and Culture Revisited*, pp. 8, 10–11, 62–63, 67–113, 200, 206–7.

[21] *Emerging Church*, p. 122.

[22] Cf. *The Intolerance of Tolerance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, *forthcoming*).

[23] 'Hermeneutics: A Brief Assessment of Some Recent Trends', *Them* 5 (1980), 14–16; 'Christian Witness in an Age of Pluralism', in *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry*, ed. by D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 33–42; 'Preaching That Understands the World', in *When God's Voice Is Heard: Essays on Preaching Presented to Dick Lucas*, ed. by C. Green and D. Jackman (Leicester: IVP, 1995), 160; *Gagging of God*, pp. 30–5, 45, 54; 'Is the Doctrine of *Claritas Scripturae* Still Relevant Today?' in *Dein Wort ist die Wahrheit – Beiträge zu einer schriftgemäßen*

cultural diversity and human finiteness, especially one's inability to be completely neutral and objective.[24] Its weaknesses, however, outweigh its strengths: it is immoral, absurd, arrogant, and manipulative in its antitheses.[25]

Carson embraces *'chastened' foundationalism.* He includes commendable elements from both the older and new hermeneutic in his approach to Scripture.[26] His 'first theology' is God.[27] Both modernism and postmodernism err by making the 'I' the starting point and then drawing conclusions (e.g., that God exists). But while God is the foundation of Carson's epistemology, Carson recognizes that humans are finite and sinful. That is, unlike God, humans are limited and are deeply affected by the noetic effects of the fall, not least in their reasoning capacity. That is why Carson prefers to modify his 'presuppositions' with the adjective 'corrigible'.[28]

This in turn raises further questions regarding the effects of conversion and the Spirit's illumination, but the bottom line is this: humans cannot know anything absolutely (i.e., exhaustively or omnisciently) like God knows it, but they can know some things truly (i.e., substantially or for real).[29] I have heard Carson make that point at least one hundred

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Theologie, ed. by Eberhard Hahn, Rolf Hille, and Heinz-Werner Neudorfer (Wuppertal: Brockhaus Verlag, 1997), p. 105; 'An Introduction to Introductions', in *Linguistics and the New Testament: Critical Junctions*, ed. by D. A. Carson and Stanley E. Porter; SNTG 5; JSNTSup 168 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), p. 16; 'Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology', *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), pp. 99–100; 'Maintaining', pp. 112–13.

[24] *Gagging of God*, pp. 96–102; 'Claritas Scripturae', pp. 107–8; *Emerging Church*, pp. 103–4.

[25] *Gagging of God*, pp. 102–37; 'Claritas Scripturae', p. 108; 'ST and BT', p. 100; 'Domesticating the Gospel', pp. 46–7; 'Maintaining', pp. 120–2; *Emerging Church*, pp. 104–6, 112–15.

[26] See his 'introductory principles of biblical interpretation' in 'Approaching the Bible', pp. 12–19. Cf. *Exegetical Fallacies*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), pp. 125–31.

[27] Carson, interviews by author, 8 and 29 November 2006, Deerfield, IL, digital recordings.

[28] Carson, interview by author, 29 November 2006.

[29] 'Hermeneutics', pp. 15–16; 'Historical Tradition and the Fourth Gospel: After Dodd, What?' in *Studies of History and Tradition in the Four Gospels*, ed. by R. T. France and David Wenham; Gospel Perspectives 2 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981), pp. 100–104; 'A Sketch of the Factors Determining Current Hermeneutical Debate in Cross-Cultural Contexts', in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: Text and Context*, ed. by D. A. Carson (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984), pp. 12–13, 15–17; 'Christian Witness', p. 60; 'Current Issues in Biblical Theol-

times in various contexts; it is foundational to his epistemology. He often illustrates it in four ways.[30]

1. *The Fusion of Two Horizons of Understanding.* This model consists of two elements: distanciation and the fusion of two horizons, where a 'horizon' refers to one's worldview, including presuppositions and cultural baggage. The horizon of the author's text and the horizon of theologians are initially separated by a huge gap due to differences such as one's historical and cultural location. Theologians may imperfectly but profitably fuse that horizon (i.e., minimize the gap) by deliberately 'self-distancing' themselves from their 'own biases and predilections' in order 'to understand the other's terminology and points of view and idioms and values'.[31]

2. *The Hermeneutical Spiral.* Rather than a vicious hermeneutical circle in which theologians endlessly go round and round between their own presuppositions, systematic constructions, and encounter with the text, this model illustrates that theologians may 'hone in progressively on what is actually there,'[32] gradually minimizing the radius of the circle as their understanding improves with time.

   > Thus instead of a straight line from the knower to the text, what really takes place is better schematized as a circle, a hermeneutical circle: I approach the text today, the text makes its impact on me, I (slightly altered) approach the text again tomorrow, and receive its (slightly altered) impact, and so on, and so on, and so on.[33]

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ogy: A New Testament Perspective', BBR 5 (1995), 34; *Gagging of God*, pp. 349, 544; *Exegetical Fallacies*, pp. 126–8; 'New Testament Theology', in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. by R. P. Martin and P. H. Davids (Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), p. 809; 'Claritas Scripturae', pp. 106, 108–9; 'Introduction', p. 16; 'ST and BT', p. 100; 'Domesticating the Gospel', pp. 46–50; 'Maintaining', pp. 120–2; *Emerging Church*, pp. 105–6, 114, 116, 216.

[30] 'Sketch', pp. 13, 15–16; 'Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture', in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. by D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), p. 38; 'Exegesis in ST', pp. 52, 67; 'Christian Witness', p. 60; 'Approaching the Bible', p. 11; *Gagging of God*, pp. 120–25, 544; *Exegetical Fallacies*, pp. 126–7; 'Claritas Scripturae', p. 108; 'Introduction', p. 17; 'Domesticating the Gospel', pp. 46, 49–50; 'Maintaining', pp. 120–2; *Emerging Church*, pp. 116–21.

[31] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 52; cf. p. 67.

[32] Ibid., p. 52.

[33] *Gagging of God*, p. 71.

'We will never know all there is to know about' the Bible or anything else, 'but we do spiral in closer than we once were'.[34]

3. *The Asymptotic Approach.* 'An asymptote is a curved line that gets closer and closer to a straight line without ever touching it.'[35] Similarly, a theologian's knowledge may get closer and closer to God's absolute knowledge without reaching it. 'Even fifty billion years into eternity, the asymptote will never touch the line.'[36]

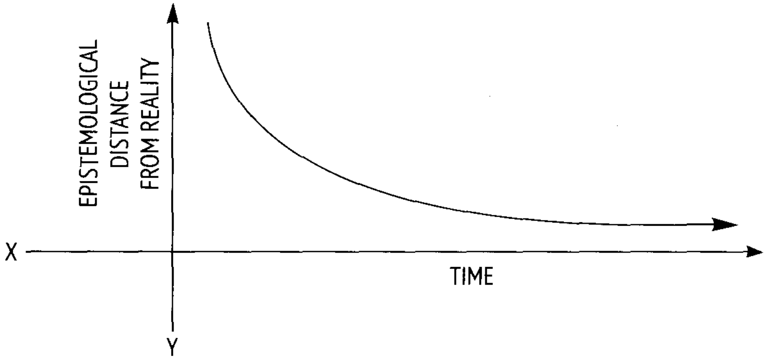

Figure 1: An Asymptotic Approach to Epistemology[37]

4. *Speech-Act Theory.* Building on Paul Ricoeur's insistence 'that the text bridges the hermeneutical gulf between reader *and author*,'[38] speech-act theory allows 'much more interplay than in the past between what a text *means* and what it *does*' while still maintaining 'a chastened version of authorial intent'.[39] 'The Bible's appeal to truth is rich and complex. It cannot be reduced to, but certainly includes, the notion of propositional truth.'[40]

Since theologians will never know anything like God knows, their theology is eternally improvable, and it would be most advantageous if theologians recognized that now. Understood in this light, contextualized theology provides invaluable insights for those from different cultures.

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[34] *Emerging Church*, p. 119.

[35] Ibid., which includes a figure illustrating this.

[36] Ibid., p. 120. Cf. *Christ and Culture Revisited*, pp. 90–91, 101.

[37] This figure reproduces the one found in *Emerging Church*, p. 119.

[38] *Gagging of God*, p. 122.

[39] *Emerging Church*, p. 121. Carson often approvingly cites Kevin J. Vanhoozer's many works on hermeneutics that employ speech-act theory.

[40] *Gagging of God*, p. 163; see also pp. 163–74, 189–90, 348–53; 'Recent Developments', p. 38; 'ST and BT', pp. 94–5.

The insight that comes with different genders and nationalities can highlight issues that others have overlooked.[41] 'Systematicians with comparable training but from highly diverse backgrounds can come together and check one another *against the standard of the Scripture that all sides agree is authoritative.*'[42]

Carson often illustrates this point in lectures by recounting his ten-year experience as the editor of five books sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship. Carson would select international evangelical scholars to contribute to a book project and then chair meetings for several days in which they would discuss each other's papers. In these meetings contributors would criticize each other from their vastly different cultural perspectives, and Carson found that despite their many differences they could reach remarkable unity on four conditions: (1) they were well trained; (2) they were willing to be corrected; (3) they affirmed that Scripture is authoritative; and (4) they had sufficient time.

2.3. Carson's Bibliology[43]

Methodology is important for Carson,[44] and after God himself, bibliology is most foundational. In an essay on how to approach the Bible, Carson begins by explaining who God is.[45] God is personal, transcendent, and sovereign, and since he created the universe, humans are accountable to him.[46] General revelation is limited; special revelation controls it.[47] God has spoken, and his revelation is authoritative.[48] The Bible is uniquely a subset of both 'the word of God' and 'the word of human beings'.[49] 'The locus of God's special revelation is the Bible, the sixty-six canonical books, reliable and truthful as originally given.'[50]

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[41] 'Exegesis in ST', pp. 53–4.

[42] Ibid. Cf. *Gagging of God*, pp. 552–3.

[43] For a brief summary of Carson's bibliology, see 'Approaching the Bible', pp. 1–10. For a fuller summary, see *Collected Writings on Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

[44] Cf. 'Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology', in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. by D. A. Carson and J. D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), p. 78.

[45] 'Approaching the Bible', pp. 1–2.

[46] Ibid., p. 1. Cf. 'Christian Witness', pp. 46–9; *Gagging of God*, pp. 222–38.

[47] 'Exegesis in ST', pp. 43–4; cf. 'Christian Witness', pp. 49–54; 'Approaching the Bible', pp. 1–2.

[48] See *Gagging of God*, pp. 141–91; cf. 547–9; 'Approaching the Bible', p. 5; 'Current Issues in BT', pp. 27–9; 'NT Theology', pp. 806–7.

[49] 'Approaching the Bible', pp. 2–3.

Anticipating that some will criticize his view as 'hopelessly circular' and 'deeply flawed,' Carson adds four further reflections.[51]

1. 'All human thought... is circular in some sense' since humans are finite and must depend on God's revelation by faith.

2. Circularity is not 'intrinsically false'. Further, Christians should 'argue for the utter truthfulness and reliability of Scripture' because Scripture teaches it, 'but they will not want to argue for the utter truthfulness and reliability of their doctrine of Scripture'.[52]

3. 'There are unknowns and difficulties in the formulation of a responsible doctrine of Scripture,' but this is not troubling since 'the same could be said for almost any biblical doctrine.... There will inevitably remain mysteries and areas of hiddenness.'

4. The noetic effects of sin on human thinking are substantial and must not be underestimated. The human desire to control God is idolatry.

3. CARSON'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE TASKS OF THE THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINES

While Carson acknowledges that '*theology* can relate to the entire scope of religious studies,' he uses 'the term more narrowly to refer to the study of what the Scriptures say. This includes exegesis and historical criticism, the requisite analysis of method and epistemology, and the presentation of the biblical data in an orderly fashion.'[53] Theology 'is disciplined discourse about God,'[54] and the Bible 'finally and irrevocably' constrains theology's subject matter.[55] Carson recognizes that his definitions of the theological disciplines (described below) 'do not avoid overlap,' but his distinctions 'are clear enough and are not novel'.[56] So while there is not necessarily anything distinctly 'Carsonian' to Carson's theological method itself, it is worth analyzing for at least three reasons: it differs significantly from how many other exegetes and theologians 'do' theology;[57] it helps us understand the mechanics of how he 'does' theology in his voluminous publications; and it may help us improve our own theological method.

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[50] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 44. Cf. John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); D. A. Carson, 'Three Books on the Bible: A Critical Review', *JETS* 26 (1983), 337–67; D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); Carson, 'Approaching the Bible', p. 7; D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 726–43.

[51] 'Approaching the Bible', pp. 9–10.

[52] Cf. 'Exegesis in ST', p. 55.

[53] 'Unity and Diversity', p. 69.

[54] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 40.

3.1. Exegesis

Exegesis 'is the analysis of the final-form of a text, considered as an integral and self-referring literary object'.[58] It includes but is not limited to parsing, word study, and syntax at various levels (clause, sentence, discourse, genre) while being sensitive to literary features and the running argument.[59]

> In short, exegesis is open-ended. It is not the sort of thing about which one can say, 'I have completed the task; there is no more to do.' Of course, in one sense that is exactly what *can* be said if what is meant is that the exegete has come to the end of the text. The exegesis is complete *at that level of analysis*, when the entire text has been analyzed. But exegesis itself is not a mechanical discipline with a few limited steps that, properly pursued, inevitably churn

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[55] Ibid., p. 44.

[56] 'Unity and Diversity', p. 70.

[57] Carson differs significantly, for example, from Brevard Childs (1923–2007), who put a 'canonical approach' to Scripture on the map of contemporary studies. Carson writes ('NT Theology', p. 804) that for Childs

> the final form of the text and thus the closure of the canon is critical: the challenge is to understand the texts as they have been handed down in final form by the church. Childs never abandons historical criticism and rarely steps outside the bounds of 'mainstream' critical judgments, but their hermeneutical and theological value is relatively small.... [D]espite his many useful suggestions as to how the Bible can be read as one canonical book, it is not clear how Childs's leap of faith to accept the church's canonical judgments, divorced from Childs's historical-critical judgments, will prove more epistemologically enduring than Barth's theology of the Word. Theologically Childs reaches conclusions that are very close to those of, say, Stuhlmacher. But the latter arrives at his destination by means of historical-critical judgments that leave his thought world a unified whole, while the former reaches them by consciously refusing to make much of a tie between his theology and his history.

[58] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 46.

[59] Ibid., p. 47.

> out the 'right answer.' On the other hand, progressively sophisticated levels of exegetical analysis may rapidly illustrate the law of diminishing returns! Exegetes with this view are quite happy to speak of discerning the author's intent, provided it is presupposed that the author's intent is expressed in the text. Only in this way can the intentional fallacy be avoided. There is no other access to the author's intent than in the text.[60]

Because Carson locates the text's meaning in the authorial intention as found in the text, he distinguishes between interpretation (i.e., what the text meant) and application (i.e., what the text means).[61] He is well aware that 'truth is conveyed in different ways in different literary genres'.[62] Carson's dozens of exegetical works demonstrate his proficiency at exegesis.[63]

3.2. Biblical Theology (BT)

BT 'is rather difficult to define'.[64] For Carson, BT may inductively and historically focus on the whole Bible or select biblical corpora.[65] It involves a 'salvation-historical study of the biblical texts (*i.e.* the understanding and exposition of the texts along their chronological line of development)'.[66] At least five elements are essential:[67]

1. BT reads '*the Bible as an historically developing collection of documents.*'

2. BT presupposes '*a coherent and agreed canon.*'[68]

3. BT presupposes '*a profound willingness to work inductively from the text—from individual books and from the canon as a whole.*' Its task is '*to deploy categories and pursue an agenda set by the text itself.*'

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[60] Ibid., pp. 47–8.

[61] 'Approaching the Bible', p. 18.

[62] Ibid., p. 14.

[63] See the resources listed in n. 1, above.

[64] 'Current Issues in BT', p. 17. See pp. 18–26 for a survey of six 'competing definitions' of BT.

[65] Ibid., pp. 20, 23. These are definitions two and three in Carson's survey.

[66] 'ST and BT', p. 90. Cf. 'Unity and Diversity', p. 69; 'Exegesis in ST', p. 45; *Gagging of God*, p. 502; 'ST and BT', pp. 100–101.

[67] 'Current Issues in BT', pp. 27–32.

[68] Cf. 'ST and BT', pp. 91–2, 95–7.

4. BT clarifies '*the connections among the corpora,*' that is, 'it is committed to intertextual study . . . because *biblical* theology, at its most coherent, is a theology of the *Bible*.'

5. 'Ideally,' BT will '*call men and women to knowledge of the living God,*' that is, it does not stop with the Bible's structure, corpus thought, storyline, or synthetic thought; it must 'capture' the experiential, 'existential element.'

BT focuses on the turning points in the Bible's storyline,[69] and its most 'pivotal' concern is tied to the use of the OT in the NT.[70] Theologians, not least OT scholars, must read the OT 'with Christian eyes'.[71] OT and NT theology are subsets of BT.[72] BT 'forms an organic whole'[73] and serves as 'an excellent bridge discipline, building links among the associated disciplines and in certain respects holding them together'.[74]

3.3. *Historical Theology (HT)*

HT is 'the written record of exegetical and theological opinions in periods earlier than our own, a kind of historical parallel to the diversity of exegetical and theological opinions that are actually current'.[75] HT is 'the diachronic study of theology, *i.e.* the study of the changing face of theology across time'.[76]

3.4. *Systematic Theology (ST)*

> [ST] is Christian theology whose internal structure is systematic; i.e., it is organized on atemporal principles of logic, order, and need, rather than on inductive study of discrete biblical corpora. Thus it can address broader

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[69] Cf. *Gagging of God*, pp. 193–314; *Christ and Culture Revisited*, pp. xi, 36, 44–61, 67, 81, 202, 226; *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010).

[70] 'Current Issues in BT', pp. 39–41. Cf. 'NT Theology', p. 811; 'ST and BT', p. 97–8; G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, 'Introduction', in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. xxiii–xxviii.

[71] 'Current Issues in BT', pp. 40–1.

[72] 'NT Theology', p. 796.

[73] 'Approaching the Bible', p. 1. Cf. 'Unity and Diversity', p. 83; 'Sketch', pp. 26–7.

[74] 'ST and BT', p. 91. On the need for wisely integrating BT, see *Christ and Culture Revisited*, pp. 59–62, 67, 71, 81–85, 87, 94, 121, 127, 143, 172, 207, 227.

[75] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 56.

[76] 'ST and BT', p. 91.

> concerns of Christian theology (it is not merely inductive study of the Bible, though it must never lose such controls), but it seeks to be rigorously systematic and is therefore concerned about how various parts of God's gracious self-disclosure cohere. . . . The questions it poses are atemporal . . . the focal concerns are logical and hierarchical, not salvation-historical.[77]

Everyone uses some sort of ST, and it is foolish to denigrate it. The issue is not whether ST is legitimate; the issue, rather, is the quality of one's ST reflected in its foundational data, constructive methods, principles for excluding certain information, appropriately expressive language, and logical, accurate results.[78]

Carson's approach to ST presupposes 'that the basic laws of logic' are not human inventions 'but *discoveries* to do with the nature of reality and of communication'.[79] The Bible is like part of a massive jigsaw puzzle because it contains only a small fraction of the total number of pieces.[80] More precisely, the Bible is like a massive 'multi-dimensional puzzle beyond the third dimension'.[81] ST 'must be controlled by the biblical data' and must beware of going beyond 'how various truths and arguments function in Scripture,' not least because 'a number of fundamental Christian beliefs involves huge areas of unknown,' such as the Incarnation, Trinity, and God's sovereignty and man's responsibility.[82]

The Bible's unity makes ST 'not only possible but necessary,' and 'modern theology at variance with this stance is both methodologically and doctrinally deficient'.[83] An approach that recognizes this unity encourages 'theological exploration' within the canon:

> [J. I. Packer writes,] 'There is . . . a sense in which every New Testament writer communicates to Christians today more than he knew he was communicating, simply because Christians can now read his work as part of the completed New Testament canon.' This is not an appeal to *sensus plenior*, at least not in any traditional sense. Rather, it is an acknowledgment that with greater numbers of pieces of the jigsaw puzzle provided, the individual pieces and clusters of pieces are seen in new relationships not visible before.[84]

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[77] 'Exegesis in ST', pp. 45–6. Cf. 'Unity and Diversity', pp. 69–70; 'Current Issues in BT', p. 29; 'ST and BT', pp. 101–2.

[78] 'Unity and Diversity', p. 78; cf. p. 92.

[79] Ibid., p. 80. Cf. *Exegetical Fallacies*, pp. 87–88.

[80] 'Unity and Diversity', p. 82.

[81] 'Current Issues in BT', p. 30.

[82] 'Unity and Diversity', pp. 82, 93–4. Cf. 'Approaching the Bible', pp. 17–18.

[83] 'Unity and Diversity', p. 95; cf. p. 90.

[84] Ibid., p. 91. Carson is sympathetic with Douglas J. Moo, 'The Problem of Sensus Plenior', in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, ed. by D. A. Carson

Examples of how Carson systematically integrates the theological disciplines include his treatments of compatibilism and theodicy,[85] Sabbath and the Lord's day,[86] spiritual gifts,[87] assurance of salvation,[88] the love and wrath of God,[89] and the emerging church.[90]

4. CARSON'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF THE THEOLOGICAL DISCIPLINES

ST is like juggling: the balls represent the other theological disciplines, and ST's challenge is to avoid serious consequences by not dropping any balls.[91] Exegesis, BT, HT, and ST should be inseparable for theologians,

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and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), pp. 175–211, 397–405, an article that has recently been updated: Douglas J. Moo and Andrew David Naselli, 'The Problem of the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament', in vol. 1 of *The Scripture Project: The Bible and Biblical Authority in the New Millennium*, ed. by D. A. Carson, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, forthcoming in 2012). Cf. 'Exegesis in ST', p. 56.

[85] *Divine sovereignty and human responsibility*; 'Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility in Philo: Analysis and Method', NovT 23 (1981), 148–64; *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); review of N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*, *RBL* (April 23, 2007) <http://bookreviews.org/pdf/5581_5877.pdf>.

[86] Carson coordinated and edited the project (what he calls 'a unified, cooperative investigation', p. 18) that resulted in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982). See esp. Carson's 'Introduction' (13–19).

[87] *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 137–88.

[88] 'Reflections on Assurance', in *Still Sovereign: Contemporary Perspectives on Election, Foreknowledge, and Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 247–76.

[89] *Gagging of God*, pp. 238–42; *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000); 'Love', *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2000); 'How Can We Reconcile the Love and the Transcendent Sovereignty of God?' in *God Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents God*, ed. by Douglas S. Huffman and Eric L. Johnson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 279–312; *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002); 'The Wrath of God', in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. by Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), pp. 37–63.

[90] *Emerging Church*. For example, while critiquing their idea of truth, knowledge, and pluralism, Carson uncharacteristically lists Bible verses with very little commentary, noting that the context of each passage supports his theses: fifty-two verses 'on what is true' and eighty-eight 'on knowing some truths, even with 'certainty'' (pp. 188–99).

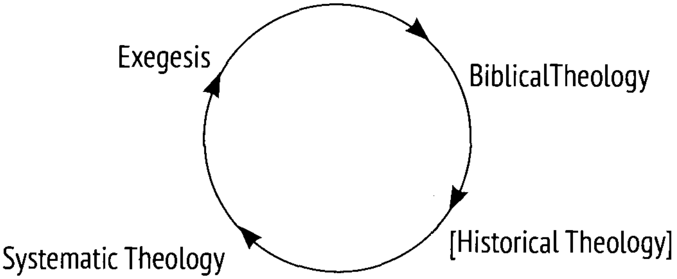
[91] 'Exegesis in ST', pp. 39–40, 72.

but this is often not the case, for example, at American Academy of Religion and Society of Biblical Literature conferences.[92] 'We live in an age of increasing specialization (owing in part to the rapid expansion of knowledge), and disciplines that a priori ought to work hand in glove are being driven apart.'[93]

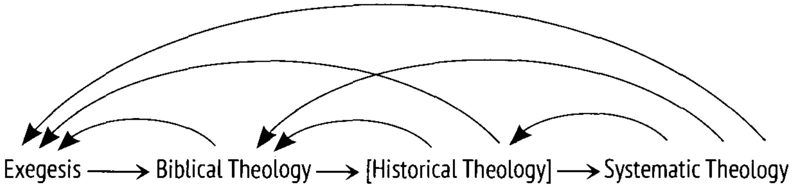
4.1. Theological Hermeneutics

Carson explains the complex interrelationships between the theological disciplines with some diagrams:[94]

> It would be convenient if we could operate exclusively along the direction of the following diagram:
>
> Exegesis → Biblical Theology → [Historical Theology] → Systematic Theology
>
> (The brackets around the third element are meant to suggest that in this paradigm historical theology makes a direct contribution to the development from biblical theology to systematic theology but is not itself a part of that line.) In fact, this paradigm, though neat, is naïve. No exegesis is ever done in a vacuum. If every theist is in some sense a systematician, then he is a systematician *before* he begins his exegesis. Are we, then, locked into a hermeneutical circle, like the following?


Exegesis
BiblicalTheology
[Historical Theology]
Systematic Theology

> No; there is a better way. It might be diagrammed like this:



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[92] Ibid., p. 40.

[93] 'Unity and Diversity', p. 65.

[94] This is from ibid., pp. 91–92. Cf. 'ST and BT', pp. 95, 102–3.

> That is to say, there are feedback lines (and more lines going forward, for that matter). It is absurd to deny that one's systematic theology does not affect one's exegesis. Nevertheless the line of final control is the straight one from exegesis right through biblical and historical theology to systematic theology. The final authority is the Scriptures, and the Scriptures alone. For this reason exegesis, though affected by systematic theology, is not to be shackled by it.

Carson lists four ways to respond to the fragmented 'current state of biblical studies':[95]

1. ignore or marginalize 'all recent developments'—a pious 'recipe for obsolescence';
2. focus 'on just one method, preferably the most recent'—a faddish 'recipe for reductionism';
3. 'rejoice in the fragmentation' and 'insist that such developments are not only inevitable but delightful, even liberating'—a pretentious and absurd postmodern approach;
4. 'try to learn from the most important lessons from the new disciplines—and remain focused on the texts themselves,' emphasizing 'the classic disciplines first' while learning from 'tools, hermeneutical debates, and epistemological shifts.'

Carson takes the fourth approach, insisting, 'All truth is God's truth'.[96]

Carson recognizes that the disciplines are interconnected. If one of the disciplines is a string and one pulls at it, that inevitably affects the other disciplines as well.[97] They are a package, which shows the need for a 'thick' interpretation. Probably the loudest note Carson plays is the christological, salvation-historical unity of the Bible's storyline.

In practice, Carson is a multi-disciplinary theologian, perhaps 'one of the last great Renaissance men in evangelical biblical scholarship'.[98] He is not merely a New Testament scholar. He is also an OT scholar, a biblical theologian, a historical theologian, a systematic theologian, and a practical theologian (e.g., gifted preacher, critic of culture, former pastor, counsellor). He also branches out into philosophy, English literature (e.g., poetry), science, math, nature, and other fields. It is no surprise that Kenneth Kantzer, former dean of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, repeatedly invited Carson to move from the NT to the ST department. Carson explains that he has remained in the NT department 'partly because while I think it is important to feed biblical stuff into ST . . . it's also important to bring breadth of vision to exegesis'.[99] At the 1993 annual meeting of the Institute for Biblical Research, Carson presented this as a formal challenge to BT: '*the daunting need for exegetes and theologians who will deploy the full range of weapons in the exegetical arsenal, without succumbing to methodological narrowness or faddishness.*'[100]

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[95] 'An Introduction to Introductions', in *Linguistics and the New Testament: Critical Junctions*, ed. D. A. Carson and Stanley E. Porter, SNTG 5, JSNTSup 168 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 14–17.

[96] Carson, interview by author, 29 November 2006.

[97] Ibid.

[98] Köstenberger, 'D. A. Carson: His Life and Work to Date', p. 357.

4.2. Exegesis and BT

BT 'mediates the influence of biblical exegesis on systematic theology' because it 'forces the theologian to remember that there is before and after, prophecy and fulfillment, type and antitype, development, organic growth, down payment and consummation'.[101] The 'overlap' between exegesis and BT is the most striking among the theological disciplines: 'both are concerned to understand texts,' and BT is impossible without exegesis.[102] 'Exegesis tends to focus on analysis,' and BT 'tends towards synthesis'.[103] Exegesis controls BT, and BT influences exegesis.[104] BT 'more immediately constrains and enriches exegesis than systematic theology can do'.[105]

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[99] Carson, interview by author, 29 November 2006.

[100] 'Current Issues in BT', p. 34.

[101] 'Exegesis in ST', pp. 66, 65; cf. 58–66. In this regard the finest example of Carson's combining exegesis and BT is probably this dense 44-page essay: 'Mystery and Fulfillment: Toward a More Comprehensive Paradigm of Paul's Understanding of the Old and New', in *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume II: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, WUNT 181; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), pp. 393–436. Cf. my summary, 'Carson: "Mystery and Fulfillment"'<http://andynaselli.com/carson-mystery-and-fulfillment> [accessed 18 August 2011]. Cf. also 'Biblical-Theological Ruminations on Psalm 1', in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church; Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*, ed. by Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2008), pp. 115–34.

[102] 'ST and BT', p. 91.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Carson, 'Exegesis in ST', p. 66.

4.3. Exegesis and HT

The historic creeds are valuable, but they are not ultimately authoritative; only Scripture is.[106] The practice of many theologians, however, is to move directly from exegesis to ST, leaving 'precious little place for historical theology, except to declare it right or wrong as measured against the system that has developed out of one's own exegesis'.[107] 'Without historical theology,' however, 'exegesis is likely to degenerate into arcane atomistic debates far too tightly tethered to the twentieth century. Can there be any responsible exegesis of Scripture that does not honestly wrestle with what earlier Christian exegesis has taught?'[108] HT serves exegesis (and, thus, ST) in three ways:[109]

1. HT opens up and closes down 'options and configurations'.

2. HT shows how contemporary theological views are products of 'the larger matrix' of contemporary thought.

3. HT contributes to ST's boundaries by showing 'remarkable uniformity of belief across quite different paradigms of understanding'.

4.4. Exegesis and ST

Many theologians think that their exegesis neutrally and objectively discovers the text's meaning and that they build their ST on such discoveries, but one's ST 'exerts profound influence on' one's exegesis.[110] Without even realizing it, many theologians develop their own 'canon within the canon,' which to a large degree accounts for conflicting exegesis among Christians.[111] This problem may develop in at least three ways.

1. 'An ecclesiastical tradition may unwittingly overemphasize certain biblical truths at the expense of others, subordinating or even explaining away passages that do not easily "fit" the slightly distorted

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[106] *Gagging of God*, pp. 362–3. Cf. 'Domesticating the Gospel', p. 51.

[107] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 51.

[108] Ibid., pp. 39–40.

[109] Ibid., pp. 56–7; cf. pp. 39–40; 'Recent Developments', p. 18; 'Approaching the Bible', p. 18.

[110] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 51. For example, 'A person profoundly committed to, say, a pretribulational view of the rapture is unlikely to find anything but verification of this view in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18, no matter how 'objective' and 'neutral' the exegetical procedures being deployed seem to be' (p. 51).

[111] 'Sketch', p. 20.

structure that results.'[112] For example, one's understanding of justification in Galatians may control one's understanding of justification everywhere else in the NT.[113] The solution is 'to listen to one another, especially when we least like what we hear' and to employ ST in a way that confronts 'the entire spectrum of biblical truth'.[114]

2. 'An ecclesiastical tradition may self-consciously adopt a certain structure by which to integrate all the books of the canon' with the result that 'some passages and themes may *automatically* be classified and explained in a particular fashion such that other believers find the tradition in question sub-biblical or too narrow or artificial'.[115] Dispensationalism and covenant theology are classic examples, usually employed by earnest theologians who consider their 'theological framework' to be 'true to Scripture'.[116] A more egregious error is a '*paradigmatic* approach' that uses parts of the Bible 'without worrying very much about how the Scriptures fit together'.[117] An example of this error is Gustavo Gutiérrez's making the exodus narrative paradigmatic for modern revolution by the oppressed poor.[118]

3. 'Many others reject parts of the canon as unworthy, historically inaccurate, mutually contradictory or the like, and adopt only certain *parts* of the Scripture.'[119]

4.5. HT and ST

When studying what the Bible teaches about a particular subject (ST), the theologian must integrate HT.[120] 'In some measure,' ST 'deals with' HT's categories, but ST's 'priorities and agenda . . . ideally . . . address the contemporary age at the most critical junctures'.[121]

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[112] Ibid., p. 21.
[113] Cf. Ibid..
[114] Ibid., p. 23; cf. p. 27.
[115] Ibid., p. 21.
[116] Ibid., pp. 21, 24.
[117] Ibid., p. 24.
[118] Ibid., pp. 24–6.
[119] Ibid., p. 21.
[120] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 46; 'Domesticating the Gospel', p. 33.
[121] 'Current Issues in BT', p. 29.

4.6. BT and HT

BT and HT both study 'the changing face of the accumulating biblical documents across time,' but BT has 'abundant interlocking considerations (canon, revelation, authority) that demand distinctions'.[122] Since theologians are finite, BT functions best when interacting with HT's past ('twenty centuries of Christian witness') and present ('the living church').[123]

4.7. BT and ST

BT is historical and organic; ST is relatively ahistorical and universal.[124] Unlike BT, which 'is deeply committed to working inductively from the biblical text' so that 'the text itself sets the agenda,' ST may be 'at a second or third or fourth order of remove from Scripture, as it engages, say, philosophical and scientific questions not directly raised by the biblical texts themselves. These elements constitute part of its legitimate mandate.'[125] Exegesis and BT 'have an advantage over' ST because 'their agenda is set by the text'.[126] ST must build on BT's 'syntheses of biblical corpora' and 'tracing of the Bible's story-line' with the result that 'each major strand' of ST will 'be woven into the fabric that finds its climax and ultimate significance in the person and work of Jesus Christ'.[127]

Literary genre and speech-act theory significantly influence the relationship between BT and ST.[128] Both BT and ST must in some measure 'distort' the text, but BT 'is intrinsically less distorting,' making it 'a kind of bridge discipline between' exegesis and ST.[129] BT 'is admirably suited to build a bridge between' exegesis and ST 'because it overlaps with the relevant disciplines,' enabling 'them to hear one another a little better'.[130] BT is 'a mediating discipline,' but ST is 'a culminating discipline' because it attempts to form and transform one's 'worldview'.[131]

> Systematic theology tends to be a little further removed from the biblical text than does biblical theology, but a little closer to cultural engagement. Biblical

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[122] 'ST and BT', pp. 91–2.

[123] Ibid., p. 101. Cf. 'NT Theology', p. 811.

[124] Cf. *Gagging of God*, pp. 502, 542–3; 'NT Theology', p. 808; 'ST and BT', pp. 94–5, 101–3.

[125] 'Current Issues in BT', p. 29.

[126] *Gagging of God*, p. 544.

[127] Ibid., pp. 544–5.

[128] 'ST and BT', pp. 94–5.

[129] Ibid., p. 94.

[130] Ibid., p. 95.

[131] Ibid., p. 102.

> theology tends to seek out the rationality and communicative genius of each literary genre; systematic theology tends to integrate the diverse rationalities in its pursuit of a large-scale, worldview-forming synthesis. In this sense, systematic theology tends to be a culminating discipline; biblical theology, though it is a worthy end in itself, tends to be a bridge discipline.[132]

4.8. Exegesis, BT, HT, ST, and Practical Theology (PT)

PT—my term, not Carson's—applies (i.e., cross-culturally contextualizes) exegesis, BT, HT, and ST to help people glorify God by living wisely with a biblical worldview. It includes pastoral theology, preaching, counselling, evangelism, ethics, education, and culture. It answers questions like 'How should people respond to God's revelation?' and 'How then should we live?'

Carson is not an ivory tower theologian. He is deeply committed to the purpose for which the theological disciplines exist, namely, 'to serve the people of God,'[133] which includes preaching and polemics.

1. Preaching. Carson, a former pastor, is a preacher.[134] He explains,

> I see myself first and foremost as a pastor, not a professional scholar or writer. The Lord called me to gospel ministry. Three times I have been involved in church planting, and I served a church as pastor before embarking on doctoral studies. If I now teach at a seminary, it is because for the time being I believe the Lord wants me to train other pastors and Christian leaders. But although I may remain here for the rest of my working life, I would certainly not rule out the possibility of a return to pastoring a local church. That is the

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[132] Ibid., p. 103.

[133] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 71.

[134] Ibid., pp. 70–2; 'Christian Witness', pp. 31–66; *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004 [first published in 1993 with a different subtitle]); 'The Challenge from Pluralism to the Preaching of the Gospel', *Criswell Theological Review* 7 (1993), 99–117; 'The Challenge from the Preaching of the Gospel to Pluralism', *Criswell Theological Review* 7 (1994), 15–39; 'Preaching', pp. 145–59; *Gagging of God*, pp. 491–514; 'The SBJT Forum: What do you consider to be the essential elements of an expository sermon?' *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 3, no. 2 (1999), 93–96; 'Athens Revisited', in *Telling the Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. by D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), pp. 384–98; 'The Challenges of the Twenty-first-century Pulpit', in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching: In Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. by Leland Ryken and Todd Wilson (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), pp. 172–89.

> front line, and there are times when working in a quarter-master's slot (which is where I am) prompts me to examine my own priorities.[135]

He maintains a busy international speaking schedule, regularly preaching and lecturing in a variety of forums with audiences consisting of scholars, pastors, laymen, and/or university students (both Christians and non-Christians).[136] 'There is a sense,' Carson explains, 'in which the best expository preaching ought also to be the best exemplification of the relationship between biblical exegesis and systematic theology'.[137] When expounding a passage, 'the first priority is to explain what the text meant when it was written . . . and to apply it, utilizing sound principles (which cannot here be explored) to contemporary life'.[138] The second priority is to trace how various motifs in that passage develop across the story-line of God's progressive revelation 'with some thoughtful reflection and application on the resulting synthesis'.[139] Merely to exegete a passage and stop there 'would be to fail at the same task' because

> the best expository preaching begins with the text at hand but seeks to establish links not only to the immediate context but also to the canonical context, *as determined by the biblico-theological constraints largely governed by the canon itself.* If these lines are sketched out in the course of regular, expository ministry, believers begin to see how their Bibles cohere. With deft strokes, the preacher is able to provide a systematic summary of the teaching to be learned, the ethics to be adopted, the conduct to be pursued, not by curtailing either exegesis or biblical theology, but by developing these disciplines on the way toward synthesis.[140]

The pressing need in contemporary evangelism to postmoderns is to 'start further back and nail down the turning points in redemptive history,' give primacy to BT rather than ST, herald 'the rudiments of the historic gospel,' and 'think through what to say' *and* 'how to live' (i.e.,

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[135] 'The SBJT Forum: How does your role as a scholar, teacher and writer fulfill the Great Commission?' *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 1, no. 4 (1997), 73. See esp. *Memoirs of an Ordinary Pastor: The Life and Reflections of Tom Carson.*

[136] Over 550 of Carson's sermons and lectures are available for free as MP3s at the Gospel Coalitions website <http://www.thegospelcoalition.org>. See my explanation, 'D. A. Carson MP3s Now Hosted by TGC', <http://andynaselli.com/d-a-carson-mp3s-now-hosted-by-tgc> [accessed 18 August 2011].

[137] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 71.

[138] Ibid.

[139] Ibid.. Cf. 'Preaching', pp. 151–4, 160.

[140] 'Exegesis in ST', pp. 71–2.

'contextualization').[141] BT is primary because the gospel 'is virtually incoherent unless it is securely set into a biblical worldview'.[142] Preaching today should often take a BT-approach because modern audiences are largely biblically illiterate and do not understand the Bible's storyline. This is largely what motivated Carson's recent 14-part seminar entitled 'The God Who Is There,' which simultaneously evangelizes non-Christians and edifies Christians by explaining the Bible's storyline in a non-reductionistic way.[143]

2. Polemics. Carson is committed to contextualizing theology, which occasionally involves engaging in controversial theological debates.[144] He characteristically (not without exception) represents his opponents accurately and respectfully and then sheds biblical light (rather than carnal, rhetorical heat) on sensitive, divisive subjects. Hot topics he addresses include divorce,[145] KJV-onlyism,[146] new hermeneutical trends,[147] church divisions,[148] questionable bibliology,[149] poor exegesis,[150] miraculous spiritual gifts like tongues,[151] complementarianism,[152] the Jesus Seminar,[153] assurance of salvation,[154] Bible translation,[155] the new perspective on Paul,[156] and postmodernism and the emerging church.[157]

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[141] *Gagging of God*, pp. 496–511.

[142] Ibid., p. 502; cf. pp. 193–345, 496–505, 542–4; 'Christian Witness', pp. 60–4; 'Approaching the Bible', p. 4; 'The Doctrine of Claritas Scripturae', p. 109.

[143] *The God Who Is There; The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story; Leader's Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010). MP3s and videos of the fourteen sessions are available for free at http://thegospelcoalition.org/the-godwhoisthere.

[144] He briefly reflects on polemical theology in 'Editorial', *Them*, 34 (2009), 155–57.

[145] 'Divorce: A Concise Biblical Analysis', *Northwest Journal of Theology*, 4 (1975), 43–59.

[146] *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978).

[147] 'Hermeneutics'; *Gagging of God.*

[148] 'The Doctrinal Causes of Divisions in Our Churches', *Banner of Truth*, 218 (November 1981), 7–19.

[149] 'Gundry on Matthew: A Critical Review', *TJ* 3 (1982), 71–91; 'Three Books on the Bible: A Critical Review'; 'Unity and Diversity'; 'Recent Developments'; 'Three More Books on the Bible: A Critical Review', TJ, 27 (2006), 1–62.

[150] *Exegetical Fallacies.*

Carson insists that Christians must adopt a biblical stance, 'regardless of how unpopular it is likely to be,' especially with reference to postmodernism.[158] With reference 'to doctrine and cognitive truth,' Carson does not shy away from drawing lines 'thoughtfully, carefully, humbly, corrigibly' yet boldly.[159]

4.9. Spiritual Experience and the Theological Disciplines

Since interpreters are inseparable from the interpretive process, their attitude towards the text is significant. What is the difference between the theological method of a believer and unbeliever (e.g., an evangelical and an atheist)? Will their assessments differ? The answer is not that believers always interpret the text more accurately.[160]

Unbelieving exegetes and theologians must confront four barriers:[161]

1. The 'peer pressure' (my phrase) that unbelievers experience may affect their approach to the Bible. It takes courage 'to break away'

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[151] *Showing the Spirit*; 'The Purpose of Signs and Wonders in the New Testament', in *Power Religion: The Selling Out of the Evangelical Church?* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), pp. 89–118.

[152] "Silent in the Churches': On the Role of Women in 1 Corinthians 14:33b–36', in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991), pp. 140–53, 487–90.

[153] 'Five Gospels, No Christ', *Christianity Today*, 38:5 (25 April 1994), 30–33.

[154] 'Reflections on Assurance', pp. 247–76.

[155] *The Inclusive-Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

[156] D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism* (WUNT 140, 181; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001, 2004); 'The Vindication of Imputation: On Fields of Discourse and Semantic Fields', in *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*, ed. by Mark A. Husbands and Daniel J. Treier (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), pp. 46–78.

[157] *Gagging of God*; 'Domesticating the Gospel', pp. 82–97; *Emerging Church*.

[158] *Gagging of God*, p. 347; cf. pp. 347–67.

[159] Ibid., pp. 365–6; cf. pp. 438–9, 238; 'Athens Revisited', p. 387; *Emerging Church*, p. 234.

[160] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 67.

[161] Ibid., pp. 67–70.

from a vast number of unbelieving scholars whose 'approach to scriptural exegesis . . . is fundamentally uncommitted'.[162]

2. Unbelievers may try to understand 'God's gracious self-disclosure . . . on its own terms,' but that is insufficient if they do not 'respond to God as he has disclosed himself'.[163]

3. Unbelievers faces more than just intellectual barriers; others include 'spiritual experience (or lack of it)' and 'moral defection'.[164]

4. Unbelievers have not embraced the gospel and thus do not approach the text with a worldview that is spiritually discerning (1 Cor 2:14). They prefer to master the gospel rather than be 'mastered by it'.[165]

Regarding Carson's own spiritual experience and theology, he is both scholarly and devotional.[166] He refuses to separate what God has joined together, namely, serious theological study and spirituality.[167] 'Academia has not mastered him—he has mastered academia.'[168]

5. CONCLUSION

A question in the reader's mind at this point may be directed at me: So what do *you* think of Carson's theological method? Frankly, I feel inadequate to critique it. It is the kind of feeling I would have as a trumpet player if I were asked to critique Wynton Marsalis. Does the amateur critique the expert when the former would love to be able to do a small fraction of what the latter does? Nevertheless, it is a fair question, but my answer will disappoint those looking for a devastating critique. I do not mean to sound hagiographic, but my evaluation is that Carson's theological method is outstanding and that his first-class work is the fruit. Both his method and product are worthy of imitation.

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[162] Ibid., p. 67.

[163] Ibid., p. 67; cf. pp. 67–9; 'Approaching the Bible', 10.

[164] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 69. Cf. 'Approaching the Bible', p. 12; *Emerging Church*, p. 118.

[165] 'Exegesis in ST', p. 70. Cf. 'Recent Developments', p. 47; 'Claritas Scripturae', pp. 109–11.

[166] Carson, 'The Scholar as Pastor', pp. 71–106.

[167] 'Approaching the Bible', pp. 18–19. Cf. Köstenberger, 'D. A. Carson: His Life and Work to Date', pp. 359, 366–67.

[168] Ibid., p. 367. See 'The Trials of Biblical Studies', in *The Trials of Theology: Becoming a 'Proven Worker' in a Dangerous Business*, ed. by Andrew J. B. Cameron and Brian S. Rosner (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010), pp. 109–29, which reflects on five domains that students in biblical studies must address: (1) four forms of integration, (2) polar temptations regarding work, (3) five facets of pride, (4) pressures to manipulate Scripture, and (5) three priorities regarding writing. What ties these five interrelated domains together, argues Carson, is humility. Cf. a fuller summary of the chapter at http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2010/03/25/carson-on-the-trials-of-biblical-studies/.

If I had to pinpoint a weakness in Carson's theological method, I might suggest this: his method is so rigorous (especially in his exegesis and BT) that one wonders if a thorough, relatively comprehensive ST is even possible for a single theologian. It is hard for me not to come away from studying Carson's theological method rather discouraged, thinking, 'Wow. Who is gifted enough to do all that? Who is able to master exegesis, BT (both OT and NT theology), HT, and ST?' Not too far into the exercise, I experience 'information overload' and admit that I cannot master it all. It takes a unique individual to be able to work competently with so much data, accounting for Scripture's unity and diversity. It seems impossible to be an expert on both the forest as a whole as well as on all the individual species of trees. Carson recognizes that 'the sheer volume of material' is problematic[169] and that 'Christians need each other; this is as true in the hermeneutical arena as elsewhere. . . . Responsible interpretation of Scripture must never be a solitary task'.[170] Nevertheless, his description of a qualified NT theologian, for example, is daunting.[171]

On the other hand, it is also hard for me not to come away encouraged in at least three ways. First, Carson's example and theological vision is inspiring. I am motivated to consecrate my life to God by using the theological disciplines as a good steward of God's manifold grace (1 Pet 4:10).

Second, I thank God for gracing me with gifts to the church like Carson. Peter O'Brien, a NT scholar and a close friend of Carson's, shared that insight when he addressed a small group of PhD students at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School on 7 September 2006. He shared that he occasionally struggles with feeling inadequate as a NT scholar who is not as prolific as someone like Carson, but that he overcomes that feeling by recognizing that God graced him with gifts to the church like Carson. O'Brien taught me that instead of feeling depressed and inadequate because of scholars like Carson, I should gratefully serve God with the gifts he has given me and not feel inferior for the childish reason that I am not as gifted as someone else.

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[169] 'Introduction', p. 17.

[170] 'Approaching the Bible', pp. 12, 18; cf. 'Current Issues in BT', p. 35.

[171] 'NT Theology', p. 810.

Third, I am excited that Carson is only in his mid-sixties and that he is in good health. If Jesus does not return and Carson's health continues, Carson will very likely equip the church with dozens of more books and articles. His magnum opus will be a two-volume 'whole-Bible' BT. He explained to me that he needs about twenty more years to do this well. He first desires to finish his commentaries on John's letters, Galatians, Hebrews, Revelation, and Ezekiel. Carson is one of those exceptional figures who is equipped to contribute an outstanding integrative BT that would serve as a reliable foundation for ST that is more genre-sensitive and aware of the Bible's storyline.

REVIEWS

Original Sin: A Cultural History. By Alan Jacobs. London: SPCK, 2008. ISBN 978-0-2810-6046-7. 320 pp. £12.99

Sin is 'the ultimate preexisting condition', says Alan Jacobs, who notes that the doctrine of original sin adds insult by declaring that even if we inherit sin we are 'fully, terrifyingly responsible for our condition'. So here we have a doctrine that is at once repulsive and, in major respects, undeniable, given Scripture and our sad experience of the great, rolling momentum of evil across the generations. But it's not quite as crazy as it seems to believe that a person can be sinful without choosing to be: many racists simply inherit their culture's racism, and that doesn't necessarily get them off the hook where blameworthiness is concerned.

Still, plenty of commentators have hated the doctrine of original sin, including many Christians of Pelagian stripe and the evangelist Charles Finney, who believed it undercuts evangelism (tell a man he's dead in his sin, and can't repent without a miracle, and he might believe you). Humanists have long rejected the indignity of being called sinners and Rousseau actually declared children innocent. But Rousseau is out of favour, because child psychology has found the psyches of tykes to be as spotty as our own and, anyhow, 20th century horrors blew away most people's optimism. Now what? Jacobs: 'We feel that we have left Christianity and its "baleful," "repulsive" doctrines behind. But we have also left Rousseau's naiveté behind, so where the hell are we?'

In his book, Jacobs explores how various people have thought about original sin and its like. The exploration is masterful—dense with irony, revelation, and wit. Travelling across centuries and cultures with Jacobs we discover that the ancient Greeks had something like a doctrine of original sin (the Dionysian spark in humanity is in an otherwise Titanic nature), that the doctrine of original sin is inherently democratizing (*all* are born sinners) and that various elites have therefore resented it. We find that Pelagius had good intentions: he wanted people to take responsibility for themselves, but inadvertently sent a cruel form of religion down the ages. What is crueller than driving people into the inevitable oscillation between pride (I'm making it) and despair (I'll never make it)? We get a terrific discussion of the mystery of iniquity via Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings.* ('Do we sin because we heed the devilish voice in our ear? Or do we heed the devilish voice because we have already sinned?') Jacobs gives us Shakespeare on both the majesty and venality of humanity, tells us how Jonathan Edwards defended original sin using a gambling analogy, and why Ben Franklin once emptied his pocket into the collection basket at a Whitefield rally. We find that Steven Pinker has a secular doctrine of original sin. And there is much, much more of interest.

But for me, the saddest and most revealing part of the book is the portrait of the elderly St Augustine, being taunted by Julian of Eclanum, a much younger man he had once mentored. Augustine believed that infant baptism removes original sin and let Julian's taunting drive him to stiffen his conclusion that unbaptised babies, still stained by original sin, therefore go to hell. During succeeding centuries—ones of high infant mortality—Augustine's teaching was believed in Catholic churches, driving to frenzy uncounted mothers and fathers of dead babies who had lost the race to get them into the hands of a priest. All because 'the brilliant and devout old bishop could not resist the controversialist's temptation—to take even a caricature of his view and defend it to the death, rather than show dialectical weakness'. Augustine had spent his Christian life writing against pride.

Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., Calvin Theological Seminary,
Grand Rapids, MI USA

Trauma and Grace: Theology in a Ruptured World. By Serene Jones. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009 (UK: Alban Books). ISBN 978-0-6642-3410-2. 200 pp. £16.99.

Serene Jones, Professor of Theology and President of Union Seminary in New York, has long been interested in a retrieval of Christian theology, particularly the Reformed Tradition, in the interest of ministry to suffering people in a hurting world. In this book she correlates the field of trauma studies with the theology of Calvin and some selected biblical materials. Proposing 'a dramatic rethinking of some basic categories and rituals', she begins her book with the question, 'How do people whose hearts and minds have been surrounded by violence, come to feel and know the redeeming of God's power?'

First she draws upon a case study from her own pastoral experience, utilizing the story of a traumatized woman in her congregation. She delves into the characteristics of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in which people deal with the threat of annihilation. Jones says that trauma studies show that a traumatic event produces in the victim predictable emotional states such as hyperarousal, numbness, dissociation, intrusive memories, compulsions to repeat the event, diminishment of memory, and so forth. I have no way of judging the validity of trauma studies but Jones is convinced that trauma is a widespread emotional malady of modern people and she finds it difficult to 'think of a task more central to Christian theology' than to find a way for the church to minister to the traumatized through the 'reordering of the collective imagination of its people'.

While Jones criticizes the 'liberal Protestant church' for conceding 'its storytelling, meaning-making powers' and 'giving over its imaginative sway to science, to experts, to the rational certainty of modernity', it's difficult to see how Jones avoids doing just that in her deference to the wisdom of 'trauma studies' and its conception of PTSD as a disease and its prescriptions for healing.

Jones' thoughts on trauma seem driven more by certain prior psychological assumptions than by theological ones. When she does theology, her theology feels like a veneer, and a thin one at that, laid over an essentially anthropological solution to a huge human problem. When it comes to a theology of ministry to traumatized people, Jones says to begin with those 'traditions of Christian thought that assert the universal value of human beings'. She also stresses 'grace', though she gives little indication of the content of her definition of grace. With the exception of her creative reading of the story of the walk to Emmaus, seeing it as an instance of Jesus' ministry to the traumatized, disordered imagination of Cleopas, Jesus plays a minor role in Jones' story of what the church offers the traumatized. Jones' imaginary dialogue between Mary and Rachael, women traumatized by a violent world, is evocative but I suspected that her own ambivalence about the Christian concepts of sin and grace, cross and resurrection prohibited her from finding much more to offer these troubled women than a vision of 'beings created and re-created by our Creator God and endowed with creative abilities ourselves'. She is quite taken with Calvin's reading of the Psalms as therapeutically valuable, but her reading of Calvin seems vague and devoid of Christological content, rather 'un-Calvinistic' in my opinion.

Jones' tendency to disregard Christology in her "dramatic rethinking" of the church's ministry to the traumatized is odd, considering the church's historic claim that Jesus is the victim of trauma par excellence. After some wrenching stories of real life trauma, when Jones brings God on the scene, God is at best gracious and creative but not very redemptive. Perhaps her disregard of Christology and her apparent lack of interest in soteriology is due to her lingering feminist concerns about the value of theories of the atonement and her suspicion that some orthodox theologies disempower people and destroy human agency. She does hint that those who have jettisoned some of the violent aspects of Christian salvation have made a mistake – the evil that inflicts trauma is a mysterious, ambiguous phenomenon. And yet Jones seems to find little specifically to commend to the traumatized from within the great theological tradition other than some rather indistinct commodity called grace.

Trauma and Grace is a caring, sensitive work that focuses the church's attention on the tragedy of the traumatized. I learned more about the nature of human trauma and some specific ways that we pastors can minister to people in extremis. I also saw the fruitfulness of reading scripture from a position of solidarity with the traumatized. And yet I felt by the end of this book that the church has much more to offer traumatic people than Jones' therapeutic, gracious word. As Jones says, trauma tends to disorder the imagination of its victims, terribly disrupting their world and robbing them of their sense of agency. Jones has convinced me that trauma is a real, devastating, disrupting intrusion of evil into human life. And yet this book also convinces me that trauma is so serious that it calls for a story more hopeful, more sweeping and eschatological than the merely anthropological and the modestly therapeutic. Human trauma is so devastating that anything less than the cross and resurrection of Jesus is too small a response.

William H. Willimon, United Methodist Church/
Duke Divinity School, USA

Against the Tide: Love in a Time of Petty Dreams and Persisting Enmities. By Miroslav Volf. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010. ISBN 978-0-8028-6506-9. xii + 211 pp. £11.99

This is a collection of short pieces previously published as a regular column in the American periodical *Christian Century*. The section headings indicate a broad scope: God and the Self, The Reality of Evil and the possibility of Hope, Family matters, Church, Mission and Other Faiths, Culture and Politics, Giving and Forgiving, Hope and Reconciliation, Perspective.

It is not easy to review this remarkable volume. Volf, Director of the Yale Centre for Faith and Culture, is a highly respected theologian who makes substantial contributions to systematic theology and to interfaith dialogue. The numerous apposite illustrations from different continents testify not only to his intensive international activity but to his sharp eye for significant imagery.

Volf is from Croatia, and the studies are not lacking in sobering reference to collective horrors. Yet the style is quintessentially American, and cheerfulness keeps breaking through. There is much reference to wife and family – though mercifully not to the family pets. And the messier contemporary aspects of Christian life and community leave a number ungrasped nettles. To be fair, the note of hopeful expectation may stem as much from the author's Fuller Seminary evangelical roots as from transatlantic optimism.

It would be tedious to go through the pieces one by one. Yet the combined effect is anything but tedious, and the thoughtful reader will be rewarded by all manner of sound theological insights into the deep perennial issues of God and community. If there is a single thread, it is of grace as an underlying unforceful force to produce healing and reconciliation out of the most unpromising situation.

George Newlands, University of Glasgow

A Fine-Tuned Universe: The Quest for God in Science and Theology. By Alister McGrath. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009 (UK: Alban Books). ISBN 978-0-664-23310-5. 262 pp. £26.99

In *A Fine-Tuned Universe*, the publication of his 2009 Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen, Alister McGrath applies and expands the natural theology renewal project developed in his book *The Open Secret.*[1]

While most people associate natural theology with the well-worn Enlightenment aspiration of conclusively demonstrating God's existence and predicates through autonomous rational effort, McGrath takes a critical realist approach, recognizing that a person contributes ready-made concepts to all intelligible experience. Thus, the way one 'sees' nature is a joint product of the way one chooses to interpret the phenomena and the way the world is. This 'renewed' natural theology interprets nature with a trinitarian schema that explains the 'surprising' phenomena observed in the universe, and these 'surprising' facts in turn provide an 'empirical fit' or empirical justification for the schema (p. 58). C.S. Lewis aptly describes the approach: 'I believe in Christianity as I believe that the Sun has risen, not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else' (p. 21).

By adopting a trinitarian lens for interpretation, McGrath inherits a wealth of resources from the Christian tradition. Drawing from that tradition, he updates Augustine's doctrine of creation, which asserts that divine creation is a singular (not six) act(s) with built-in potencies sequentially actualized through divine providence, with contemporary evolutionary theory and the big bang theory. Through this modified Augustinian lens, McGrath schematizes nature such that God fine-tunes the big bang to produce a world where the evolutionary process can beget human beings.

Of course, the success of this fine-tuning project hinges upon clear 'surprising' facts that 'fit' empirically with the trinitarian schema. In physics, he notes the vast improbability of the values and ratios of values between the four fundamental forces of nature being such as they are to permit life. In chemistry, he considers the unique and the apparently life-essential qualities of carbon, water, and transition metals. In biology, he mentions at least three ways that evolutionary science points beyond itself: (i) the very ability of evolution to fine-tune itself; (ii) the well-documented convergence consonant with teleology; and (iii) the concept of emergence.

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[1] Reviewed in *SBET* 27 (2009), 215-26.

I see this book making two important contributions to the church. First, it provides a plausible and insightful reconciliation of science and religion. All people that are exposed to both spheres of knowledge have at least a 'working' view of how they relate. Some adopt Steven Jay Gould's no-talking policy between science and religion. Others, less coherently, manifest a cross-disciplinary schizophrenia where they 'believe' certain propositions in a scientific context and 'believe' others in religious contexts. McGrath offers another alternative. He writes, 'a Trinitarian nature theology – can act as a point of convergence between the Christian faith . . . [and] the natural sciences, opening up important possibilities for dialogue, cross-fertilization, and mutual enrichment' (p. xiii). This book provides a framework for a unified account of knowledge that joins a robust Augustinian account of divine creation with the most pervasive scientific account of the universe and our world.

Second, his approach is well suited for a distinctively Christian apologetic. While Paley-type apologetics, if successful, prove a relatively thin concept of deity, McGrath's natural theology argues for a robust trinitarian theism. This is because McGrath's approach begins with an open Bible and certain Christian beliefs. In doing so, McGrath restricts the application of his apologetic. Paley's reason-alone appeal to public evidence can demand assent from anyone if it is victorious, but the success of McGrath's apologetic is limited to those who are willing to view nature Christianly. Is this a problem? I doubt it. In my own experience, apologetics do not bear much fruit without some sort of openness.

Robert J. Hartman, Trinity Christian College and College of DuPage, IL USA

Engaging With Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques. Edited by David Gibson and Daniel Strange. Leicester: Apollos, 2008. ISBN 978-1-8447-4245-5. 416 pp. £16.99.

Karl Barth continues to draw approbation and criticism from evangelicals; this volume offers both, with an accent on the latter. While the twelve contributors are exclusively Reformed—unlike Sung Wook Chung's anthology, *Karl Barth and Evangelical Theology* (Baker, 2008)—this line-up provides a sustained, cohesive comparison between Barth and his own tradition. Four contributors discuss Barth's method: its Christocentricity (Henri Blocher), use of logic (Sebastian Rehnmann), and relation to Reformed orthodoxy (Ryan Glomsrud) and ecclesial tradition (Donald Macleod); seven discuss doctrinal loci: covenant theology (A.T.B. McGowan), election (Gibson), Scripture (Mark Thompson), Trinity (Michael Ovey), atonement (Garry Williams), God's visibility (Paul Helm), and reprobation (Oliver Crisp); Michael Horton concludes by assessing Barth's legacy.

Although the discussion is wide-ranging, two interrelated themes predominate: Barth's 'Christological concentration' and election. Indeed, one of the distinctive strengths of this work is its attention to these elements of Barth's theological infrastructure. Regarding the first, Barth goes beyond Christ's *soteriological* centrality by construing '*every* dogmatic concept in Christological terms' (Blocher quoting Ingolf Dalferth, p. 29). This can be seen in Barth's revisions to covenantal theology: McGowan complains that Barth's Christology tends to collapse all the covenants into one Christological event. The more concerning consequence, though, is hermeneutical: Barth's supposedly 'concrete' Christology is challenged as an abstract Christ principle which over-determines his exegesis; this prompts Macleod to inquire how we know when to accept Paul at face value or when to correct him with the Christ principle and Thompson to remind us that the only Christ we have is the one brokered by Scripture, for Jesus himself unequivocally calls the Scriptures the Word of God. Meanwhile, Glomsrud chastises Barth for accusing the Reformed tradition of anthropocentrism when, in fact, they discussed human reason only insofar as it was *subordinate* to revelation.

The critiques of election are equally penetrating. Gibson offers the news in brief of his doctoral thesis—published as *Reading the Decree*[2]—contending that Barth's exposition of Romans 9-11, the exegetical foundation of his doctrine of election, is brilliant yet inconsistent and unconvincing. Others critique the metaphysical backdrop of election: Barth's account of divine freedom. God cannot freely perform logical contradictions (Rehnmann), is free from external pressures but does not self-assign his identity (Helm, rebuffing Bruce McCormack), and is Triune by nature, not will, lest God's unity modalistically antecede his diversity (Ovey). Additionally, Williams charges that God's self-election in Christ privileges God's mercy over God's justice, in contrast to the Reformed tradition's equal emphasis on both. Finally, Crisp asks whether it is even coherent for Christ to be simultaneously elect and reprobate— after all, if the *divine* Son's reprobation is essential for salvation, how is the intra-Trinitarian breach overcome?

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[2] See the following review. *Ed.*

While some essayists are more persuasive than others, each succeeds at offering cogent criticisms of Barth while acknowledging his positive contribution to theology. Probably the chief weakness of the essays is that their impressive critiques of Barth are not balanced with substantial counter-proposals – though the authors pose difficult questions to Barth, they often do not tackle the questions Barth was asking as fully as they might. On the other hand, the contributors' criticisms are generally constructive, heeding Horton's concluding appeal for evangelicals to learn from the Swiss master by 'moving beyond Barth through Barth' (p. 372). He reminds us that Barth's insistence on the primacy of God's grace makes him an ally in the larger theological world and, indeed, far more 'evangelical' than many 'evangelicals' today. Barth's commitment to Scripture and God's sovereignty make him a crucial conversation partner for evangelical theology, an engagement for which this volume is sure to serve the church well.

Stephen J Palmer, Trinity School for Ministry, Ambridge, PA USA

Reading the Decree: Exegesis, Election and Christology in Calvin and Barth. By David Gibson. London: T&T Clark, 2009. ISBN 978-0-5674-6874-1. 240 pp. £65.00.

One can read Calvin and Barth appreciatively for years without deciding which one was right about the doctrine of election. But if one ever gets around to this question—and takes as seriously as they did one of their most basic concerns, viz., 'Does it stand in Scripture?'—then David Gibson provides an excellent introduction. Applying Richard Muller's distinction between a 'soteriological christocentrism' and a "principial christocentrism" to analyze Calvin's and Barth's doctrine of election, Gibson expands its application to two corresponding hermeneutical programs which he describes as 'christologically extensive' and 'christologically intensive'. It turns out Calvin reflects the former and Barth the latter. But the theological and exegetical evidence Gibson amasses to compare their positions and the care with which he presents them are impressive. The upshot is: both were painstakingly rigorous in their biblical exegesis, but Calvin's soteriological christocentrism and Barth's principial christocentrism (which is sometimes difficult to distinguish from simply an inconsistent and consistent christocentrism) led them to different conclusions. Yet there are surprises along the way.

Contrary to passages where Calvin seems to point to Christ himself, Gibson claims: 'Calvin does not hold to Christ himself as the basis of the revelation of the doctrine of election' (p. 176). Calvin 'does not assert a Christological ground as the basis for overcoming either curiosity or anxiousness about election; rather, he establishes a textual ground'. He gives 'methodological priority to the written rather than the incarnate Word' (p. 175). Gibson recognizes the dilemma he poses and asks: 'What, then, of Calvin's repeated insistence that we can only have certain knowledge of our election by looking to Christ?' Gibson suggests 'it may be helpful to adopt a simple distinction between the doctrine of election, and the assurance of election. The former can be described as a specific Christian teaching apprehended cognitively, but the latter as an emotional or psychological state requiring cognitive recognition of certain facts but which is actually experienced as a spiritual grace' (p. 176). Yet does Calvin really draw such distinctions or leave the material source of our election so ambiguous, Christ or Scripture? If so, he certainly does not seem to do so in his doctrine of faith or Scripture where the question of assurance (though not as 'as an emotional or psychological state') is so important and the object of faith and Scripture is so clear.

Gibson is surely right in claiming Barth overstated his case if he was thinking of Calvin when he accused former interpreters as having set up the doctrine of predestination as an 'independent entity' apart from Christology. But if the distinction between the written and incarnate Word is so important for Calvin, 'with the former truly the source of the revelation of election' (p. 177) and 'Christ's voice is still one voice among a range of witnesses' (p. 176), then it seems Gibson is claiming that it is not Barth, as is often alleged, who forces a choice of emphasis between the Word and the words, but Calvin. And it is owing to his 'biblicistic emphasis' that Calvin emphasizes the latter at the expense of the former, at least with respect to the doctrine of election. But if this is so, how does this square with what Calvin says and does elsewhere? This book raises many such fascinating questions.

Though admittedly short on evaluation, this is an extraordinarily helpful and intriguing study, especially for those who think theology ought to have to do with biblical exegesis and vice versa.

Richard E. Burnett, Erskine Theological Seminary, South Carolina, USA

Origen and the History of Justification: The Legacy of Origen's Commentary on Romans. By Thomas P. Scheck. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-2680-4128-1. 304 pp. £55.00.

This is a marvellous book. The standard wisdom when it comes to the doctrine of justification by faith has been that the writers of the early church fell short of its primary meaning: which was Paul's true intention (despite the fact that Paul never uses the phrase "justification by faith alone") and only rediscovered by Luther and the reformers. The implications of this logic have been enormous, not least of which is that ancient Christianity never grasped Pauline theology.

Thomas Scheck challenges this construction by looking carefully at how Rufinus' Latin version of Origin's Commentary of the Romans was received and interpreted by Augustine, Erasmus, Luther and several writers from the post-reformation in the 17th century. Scheck contends that Origen's use of Paul was completely in keeping with the apostle's thought, a point which Augustine—for all his criticism of Pelagius—himself recognized. If the legacy of Protestantism has been to accuse Origen of salvation by good works, it is partly because Origen comprises that history of the church which had 'fallen' and would not be corrected till the 16th century. It is significant that Origen's faulty exegesis of Romans is factored into the Protestant history, the *Magdeburg Centuries*, as contributing to the church's corruption of the Gospel. The point here is that Origen's theology was not merely regarded as 'Pelagian', but has also suffered from an ignominious historiography for nearly five hundred years.

Scheck begins by looking at the dynamics of Origen's teaching of justification. He rightly observes that the Alexandrian's doctrine is driven by refuting the Christian fatalism of Valentinian Gnosticism and Marcionism. Justification of the sinner must always take into account the free will of the soul since the connection between faith and post-baptismal moral action is inseparable. In this particular sense, justification cannot be by faith alone. And yet Origen felt free to speak of Paul's justification by faith with the qualifier 'alone'. This is because of a further and related element of Origen's theology on salvation: the intimate and inseparable connection between faith and good works as complimentary, not dichotomous. Based on Romans 5:5, justification is described 'as an inpouring of love that enables us to love God' (p. 33), quoting directly from Origen on this important feature: 'For the love of God . . . abounds and is shed abroad into our hearts in view of the fact that it is not sought by human skill but is flooded through the grace of the Holy Spirit.' This is a grace of righteousness infused into the believer. Justification, then, is the beginning of sanctification. In sum, Scheck is claiming that Origen understands the reception of justifying grace as a divinization of the human being.

When we come to Augustine's use of Origen, an important part of this book, Scheck shows that Augustine's early exegesis simply repeats ideas verbatim found in *CommRom*. Like Pelagius, Augustine was dependent upon the exegetical tradition that included Origen for understanding the book of Romans. Following the controversies with Pelagius, Augustine still accepted Origen's fundamental principles but *contra* the Alexandrian came to interpret Paul's polemic against the 'works of the law' as more complex than the Jewish Law which Origen had limited it. Throughout this chapter Scheck interacts with the conclusions of C.P. Bammel who, in several articles in the 1990s, argued that Augustine was far more indebted to Origen's *CommRom* than had previously been recognized. Nonetheless, Bammel maintains Augustine went in a different direction from Origen because of the former's (faulty) understanding of the Latin term *iustificare*, interpreting it to mean a process of becoming righteous or being made righteous. Origen described justification, which Bammel supposes to be the true meaning of the Greek *dikaioune*, 'as a momentary event in which sins are forgiven and the new convert is accounted righteous before God' (p. 101). It would be completely ironic and unexpected if Origen's approach to justification agreed with the later Protestant interpretation of the term: 'to count as just'. Indeed, Scheck wonders whether Bammel is adhering to Alistair McGrath's argument (or perhaps Martin Chemnitz' from the later 16th century) which defends the Protestant view of justification in the same way, and conversely, faulting Augustine for affirming the Latin interpretation of 'being made just'.

Diverging from Bammel's conclusion, Scheck insists that Augustine and Origen were closer to one another in the fundamentals than in the differences: 'It appears to me that both Origen and Augustine conceive of justification as an interior process of 'being made just' through the transformative indwelling of Christ and the Trinity, a process that only begins at faith and baptism' (p. 103). Scheck proceeds in the argument that Paul's terminology, in Greek or Latin, allows for a greater flexibility that the post-Protestant dogmatics have acknowledged. Given his obvious Roman Catholic bias, Scheck reviews Luther's and Melanchthon's estimation of Origen and, not surprisingly, finds them wanting. Regardless of whether one agrees with the author's position, it is perfectly reasonable to question the long-standing assumption that the only biblically appropriate view of justification is the one articulated by Luther *et alia*. Scheck has shown us that Origen was no less biblically oriented and that his works in Latin played an influential role in shaping a millennium of church doctrine. It is wholly inadequate for Protestant writers to assess the patristic era according to the 16th century reformation(s) as if the latter is the doctrinal 'canon' for the former. One does not have to be Roman Catholic to see the faulty assumptions in this line of reasoning.

While the coverage of secondary resources was very adequate, Scheck may have found some grounds for enhancing his argument by interacting with several recent articles that address the same subject but do not appear in Scheck's account. Otherwise, this study will have to figure of any future evaluation of the topic.

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The Christ's Faith: A Dogmatic Account. By R. Michael Allen. London: T&T Clark, 2009. ISBN 978-0-5670-3399-4. xii + 243 pp. £65.00.

Does Jesus Christ have faith? R. Michael Allen demonstrates the importance of the question and why dogmatic theology - not biblical studies alone - must answer it. When 'faith' is properly defined, it becomes clear that what is at stake in what appears to be a matter of curious exegetical semantics is nothing less than the full humanity of Jesus. In *The Christ's Faith* Allen, a graduate of Wheaton College (where this project originated as a doctoral dissertation), proves himself well-suited to the task.

Can a Christ who does not have faith be fully human? Or, if he does have faith in God the Father, does this diminish his divinity? What role does Christ's faithfulness play in the redemption of sinners? The correct translation of *pistis Christou* in Paul, such questions make evident the theological importance of Allen's question. In Chapter 2 he introduces Thomas Aquinas as his primary interlocutor, explicating and critiquing the thirteenth century divine's position on the faith of Christ. Thomas casts the issue primarily in terms of faith understood as knowledge, based on Hebrews 11:1—faith is 'the certainty of what things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen'. Jesus, Thomas argued, does not possess the attribute of faith as we do because, unlike other human persons, he possesses the fullness of divine knowledge and lived his earthly life in immediate possession of the beatific vision. Allen challenges this on the grounds of Scripture's portrayal of Jesus' kenotic limitedness. Christ certainly did not possess a 'human omniscience' on earth, which at once both affirms the reality of his humanity and disqualifies Thomas's objection that he did not need faith because he had perfect knowledge.

In Chapter 3 Allen presses Thomas for a fuller definition of faith. The conclusion is that Thomas is wrong on two accounts—not just the dehumanising attribution of perfect knowledge to the human Christ, but also defining faith so narrowly that he misses 'the breadth required by Scripture' (p. 69). To identify this breadth, and thus the definition of faith, Allen turns to Calvin and the Reformed confessional tradition. Thomas identifies faith as the chief virtue of the human turned to God, but for Calvin faith is tied up in God's relation to his people through Christ. Thus it is no surprise that later Reformed thinkers tied faith increasingly to the *ordo salutis*. Yet this dogmatic relocation is equally problematic, Allen says, because it 'considers God from a position of sinfulness' and limits faith to a redemptive function—thus ruling out any possibility that Christ could have faith (p. 73). Theologians must therefore acknowledge a difference between faith in general and faith in Jesus unto salvation, a categorical subset.

Chapter 4 explores the labyrinth of the metaphysics of the incarnation. Here the author's agenda is to demonstrate that dogmatic space exists, particularly within Reformed theology, for the doctrine of Christ's faith, perhaps surprising to those who think the New Perspective must be rejected for the preservation of Reformed soteriology. He argues well that divine transcendence is a controlling doctrine for classical christology, maintaining the very Creator-creature distinction which makes possible the incarnation as a dyophysite phenomenon. Jesus Christ may be constituted as fully divine and human, in other words, because these two things are qualitatively distinct. Transcendence further demonstrates the metaphysical asymmetry (superiority) of the divine, while stressing that divine and human agencies are non-competitive in their relational unity. It also commends the use of analogy as the basis for theological speech, on Allen's account. Though faith is rightly associated with human existence and not with divinity, he concludes that this transcendence, accompanied by a distinctly Reformed approach to the *communicatio idiomatum* as a hermeneutical device (and not a metaphysical explanation of the *unio hypostatica*) as well as affirmations of the fallenness of Christ's humanity and the work of the Holy Spirit to sanctify that humanity, combine to open up space for speaking of Christ's faith.

Chapters 5 and 6 consider the place of Christ's faith within the *loci* of soteriology, covenant and eschatology. The first engages in a 'thought experiment' that considers how Christ's faith would impact these areas in the theologies of Thomas, federal theology and Barth. The final chapter turns to ethics, where Allen lifts up *imitatio Christi* and suggests that Christ's faith is for Christian disciples the example *par excellence* of witness to the grace of God. Christ's faith must inform Christian ethics 'precisely because the human life of Christ not only includes Christians redemptively but also invokes their own corresponding acts of faithfulness' (pp. 199-200).

Allen's study is lucid and engaging, but not without its problems. Insofar as Allen confines himself to the metaphysical categories of orthodox Christology, his discussion is illuminating. Yet, theology today would be better served by attention to a postmetaphysical reckoning. Despite the author's attention to Barth, this is unfortunately absent from the book. How he can suggest that Barthian christology follows the project of classical metaphysics (p. 177) is mystifying. Accounting for the postmetaphysical critique (for example, that which Barth lays out with specific reference to the *communicatio idiomatum* in §64.2 of *CD* IV/2) would, on the one hand, give greater insight into contemporary figures such as Wolfhart Pannenberg, who as it stands receives only a passing glance in the prolegomenal chapter. On the other hand, it would allow him to transcend the very problems he himself notes in medieval theology (defining 'perfection' and 'true humanity' in abstraction, without reference to Christ, cf. p. 41). For he himself must assert 'true humanity' and 'God' as predefined categories into which the human life of Christ's should fit (p. 37). The fourth chapter, for example, opens with the insistence that 'to say that Christ is God requires some awareness of the term "God" prior to predicating this term of Jesus' (p. 106), which Allen then tries to fill out with YHWH's self-definition in Exodus 3:14 (and, secondarily, even secular philosophy, p. 146). Though he acknowledges the postmetaphysical critique of this move, he does not engage it (cf. p. 109), turning instead to a broad affirmation of classical theism and the 'attributes of God'. This certainly colours his dogmatic conclusions in significant ways. One example is his insistence upon treating the *communicatio idiomatum* as strictly 'hermeneutical'. This means that christology must be controlled by a metaphysical doctrine of God which says, for example, that God cannot bleed. And so the New Testament texts which affirm such things without qualification (e.g. Acts 20:28) are judged, however 'true and appropriate', to be imprecise and theologically troublesome (cf. p. 125).

The Christ's Faith is remarkably accessible and commendable to pastors and educated laypersons, as well as academics. Allen's presentation is straight-forward and unambiguous, making this book a challenging entry into a live debate over *pistis Christou*—demonstrating in particular how the subjective genitive is not only commensurate with traditional theology but also beneficial to it, so that a retreat from the exegetical debate to the dogmatic impropriety of 'Christ's faith' is no longer permissible. Thomas' rejection of Christ's faith based on his understanding of faith as knowledge, and Christ's humanity as existing continually in the presence of God the Father, no longer stands unchallenged—nor does the Reformed tendency to read 'faith' flatly as a subjective element of humanity's *ordo salutis*, that which justifies the sinner (and perhaps does nothing else). If faith is a vital trust in and obedience to God, as well as a real correspondence to Christ, then neither of these calcified positions are sufficient.

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The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical and Theological Studies. Edited by Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009. ISBN 978-1-8422-7641-9. xix + 350 pp. £14.99.

Few debates amongst biblical scholars have mustered energy, fervour, and feistiness quite like the *pistis Christou* debate. The question is remarkably simple: how should we translate and interpret the phrase 'faith of Christ' that appears several times in the letters of Paul—as human faith in Christ (the 'objective' reading) or Christ's own faith or faithfulness (the 'subjective' reading)? Michael Bird and Preston Sprinkle have compiled essays on this debate, seeking to 'lead others to understand more properly what the debate is about, what the main options are, what is at stake, and why there is a debate in the first place' (p. xiii). Beyond that, they manage to include some voices and proposals that are either new to the debate or as yet underappreciated.

Bird introduces the volume and the debate. His essay is followed by two background studies: Debbie Hunn's account of the history of the debate in the twentieth century and the linguistic analysis of Stanley Porter and Andrew Pitts. Exegetical essays appear at the hand of Douglas Campbell (on Romans 3:22), Barry Matlock (on Gal 2-3, Rom 3, and Philippians 3), Paul Foster (on Eph and Philippians), and Richard Bell (also on Eph and Philippians). 'Fresh approaches' are then provided by Mark Seifrid (arguing for a reading of the phrase as faith brought by Christ: a source genitive), Francis Watson (showing that the rendering of the phrase is bound up with Paul's reading of Hab 2:4 in a non-Messianic manner), Preston Sprinkle (who looks to Gal 3 for help in understanding the phrase as a reference to the Christ-event or the gospel message itself), and Ardel Caneday (who surveys the function of the phrase in Galatians as a whole). The wider New Testament witness is brought in to test the canonical fittingness of differing interpretations, with contributions from Peter Bolt (the synoptic Gospels and Acts), Willis Salier (John's Gospel), Bruce Lowe (Jas 2), and David DeSilva (Rev). Finally, Mark Elliott addresses the history of interpretation with a keen eye to patristic and medieval exegesis, and Benjamin Myers considers the approach of Karl Barth as a helpful framework for the debate.

This volume attempts to survey the territory by including perspectives on linguistic, exegetical, canonical, and theological aspects of the debate. In most respects, it should be viewed as a success in that it fairly represents the current state of discussion and even offers new proposals for possible paths forward. Essays by Watson and Sprinkle are especially fruitful, suggesting new paths forward. The contrasting interpretations of Foster and Bell showcase careful exegesis going in two directions, providing an illuminating point/counterpoint for students new to the debate. Bird's introduction and Matlock's essay would also serve well as introductions. There is much to celebrate here, and much from which those as yet uninitiated and those familiar to the debate may learn.

The biggest lacunae are surely the missing chapter on Christ and faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the pressing need for a dogmatic analysis of the whole issue. Too many of these essays continue to overload the debate with significance that it cannot possibly bear: with the 'subjective' reading fuelling a supposed 'christocentric' approach to Paul and the 'objective' reading funding an 'anthropocentric' (and individualistic) paradigm (e.g. pp. 68-71). Watson goes some way to showing that such cataclysmic claims are altogether inaccurate (p. 159), and Myers suggests that Barth managed to avoid any reductionistic dichotomy between 'christocentric' and 'anthropocentric' approaches, but a wider doctrinal proposal would further solidify these promising analyses. All told, then, this book goes far in sustaining a viable and vital conversation, but the debate still needs to include more synthetic analysis.

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Aufgabe und Durchführung einer Theologie des Neuen Testaments. Edited by Cilliers Breytenbach and Jörg Frey. WUNT 205; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007. ISBN 978-3-16-149252-5. xiii + 364 pp. £80.00.

This volume represents a mixture of New Testament scholars and Systematicians discussing the place of New Testament Theology (NTT) within the wider domain of New Testament studies and theology. The monograph was occasioned by the publication of Ferdinand Hahn's two volume *Theologie des Neuen Testaments* (2002).

The opening essay by J. Frey presents a very thorough overview of the issues that NTTs have wrestled with since J.P. Gabler's distinction between biblical theology and dogmatic theology. These issues include the meaning of 'theology', the limitation of a canon, unity and diversity, and history and dogma. R. Hoppe summarizes the contributions of Catholic scholars to NTT in the twentieth century (Schlier, Schelke, Gnilka, Weiser, Thusing) and proceeds to discuss the church's role in the making of a NTT. J. Reumann looks at the utility of biblical theology in an ecclesial and ecumenical context where he gives an overview of the state of biblical theology in the USA and notes different functions of the Bible in various ecclesial settings. Robert Morgan notes in his essay that the NTT genre has been very much a German and Lutheran endeavour. He notes trends and tensions in the field of NTT and proposes his own 'Anglican' approach that is more canonically shaped than merely an exercise in *Sachkritik*. He would approach NTT with Gospels (Part I), authentic Pauline letters (Part II), and the rest of the NT (Part III).

Jürgen Becker tackles the subject of theological history or theology of the New Testament as alternatives to the study of the religious history of early Christianity. Largely in dialogue with Ferdinand Hahn, Becker strives to integrate historical and theological perspectives in the task of NTT. Jens Schröter analyzes the interpretation of the canon for a theology of the New Testament where he identifies the canon as part of the religious growth of early Christianity and not necessarily an artefact opposed to a religious-historical approach to the New Testament. François Vouga sets forth several theses and hypotheses about the task of NTT as it relates to hermeneutics, history, and the church in his essay 'Die Aufgaben der Theologie des Neuten Testaments'. Heikki Räisänen advocates a move 'Towards an Alternative New Testament Theology' in the Wredean tradition that focuses on religious history instead of theology. To that end, he examines different concepts of divine and human roles in the economy of salvation in early Christianity. He identifies a plurality of views and finds a shared core belief restricted to (a) God's mercy and grace are indispensable but only effective when humans cooperate with it; and (b) the Messiah is indispensable as the indicative element of salvation. C.K. Barrett examines the link between history and theology in 'Historia Theologiae Genetrix' by looking at issues in Paul, John, and Jesus that show how history can flow into theology. James Dunn's essay 'Not so much "New Testament Theology" as "New Testament Theologizing"' believes that the primary task is 'theologizing' rather than 'theology'. That means an ongoing engagement with the living world of the texts and contexts of the New Testament. Johan S. Vos engages the topic of 'Theologie als Rhetorik' that looks at NTT in light of British, American, and German studies on rhetoric. For Vos, rhetoric is a way of identifying a core and contingency in the NT.

The final section of the book represents a number of engagements with NTT from the vantage point of Systematic Theology. Contributors include Notger Slenczka, Friedrich Wilhelm Horn, Peter Neuner, Wolf Kröotke, Karl Kardinal Lehmann. There is a final afterword by Ferdinand Hahn at the close of the book. Hahn's afterword engages with several of the essays and affirms the challenges of doing NTT that were identified in the volume.

The book is dense, but is a good synopsis of debates and currents in academia about NTT, especially in dialogue with Ferdinand Hahn. The introduction by Frey was a very good opener to the book and to the subject. The essays by Schröter, Morgan, Barrett, and Dunn were the most helpful in my mind. This is a very technical volume. But anyone engaging the subject of NTT at a serious depth will want to access it at some point.

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Paul and Scripture. By Steve Moyise. London: SPCK, 2010. ISBN 978-0-281-06103-7. viii + 151 pp. £12.99.

Steve Moyise adds to an extensive list of publications on the use of the Old Testament in the New this volume on Paul's use of scripture. Less of a focused argument than an extensive exploration, *Paul and Scripture* investigates how Paul uses and interprets various parts of the scriptures of Israel. After some introductory notes, the first four chapters assess Paul's engagements with various parts of the Pentateuch, beginning with creation (ch 1) and then looking at Abraham (ch 2), Moses (ch 3), and the Law (ch 4). Two chapters cover the prophets, one focusing on Israel and the Gentiles (ch 5), the other covering life in Christian community (ch 6). After one chapter on the writings, with special attention to the Psalms (ch 7), Moyise concludes with a survey of modern approaches to Paul and scripture (ch 8).

As this outline indicates, Moyise chooses to follow the Old Testament as the organizing principle rather than the order of the quotations in Paul's letters. This approach has both advantages and disadvantages for the reader. On the positive side, Moyise is able to draw attention to passages that command more of Paul's attention, reflecting on ways that the passages themselves have shaped Paul's thinking. Moreover, by assessing various employments of the same passage side-by-side, Moyise is able to draw the reader's attention to the diversity of ways in which Paul might interpret or deploy a given OT story. One of the greatest strengths of this approach comes when Moyise takes the opportunity to explore both the original author's intent and Paul's Christologically reinterpreted use of the passage in question, thus highlighting the differences.

The drawback to Moyise's approach is that his allusions to Paul's letters, and the significance of the OT passage being cited there, can at times be difficult to follow. In addition, the import of Paul's citations for the arguments in which they appear in the letters is lost. What the book gains in drawing attention to various uses to which Paul might put a single OT passage it often loses in the area of helping the reader make sense of Paul's letters themselves.

The other major strength of the book comes when Moyise engages different scholars' approaches to a given passage or issue. When this is done, the book becomes much sharper. It could have profited from more of such engagements. In particular, the reviewer would have liked to see direct engagements with scholars who explain Paul's interpretation of the Old Testament as giving little more than the natural, grammatical-historical reading of the passage in question. While Moyise presents considerable evidence to the contrary of such a position, the overall lack of explicit engagement with such potential conversation partners might leave the full ramifications of his project underappreciated by some readers.

In all, Moyise has written an accessible introduction to Paul's use of the scriptures of Israel. The book provides pastors and seminary students with a solid overview of the Old Testament as it impacts Paul's writing and it raises several guideposts for those who wish to delve deeper into this exciting field of study.

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An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible. By Walter Brueggemann. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8006-6363-6. xx + 212 pp. £14.99.

This is a revision of portions of Brueggemann's 1997 *Theology of the Old Testament*, namely Part 3, 'Israel's Unsolicited Testimony'. The topic is worthy of further attention in its own volume because it addresses a timely and relatively unexplored dimension of Old Testament theology: 'the God of ancient Israel… is *a God in relationship*, who is ready and able to make commitments and who is impinged upon by a variety of "partners" who make a difference in the life of God' (p. xi). To put it another way, the God of Israel is in dialogue with numerous parties, and that dialogue—by virtue of what the very term connotes—is 'potentially transformative for all parties… including God' (p. xii). Foundational to Brueggemann's thesis is that the Old Testament's own portrayal of God leads invariably to this conclusion.

Brueggemann begins in chapter one with an important and programmatic point that is central to his argument. He reminds his largely Christian readership that YHWH is portrayed in the Old Testament as a 'dialogical character'. Rather than an apathetic sovereign or philosophical principle, YHWH 'is a fully articulated personal agent, with all the particularities of personhood and with a full repertoire of traits and actions that belong to a fully formed and actualized person' (p. 2). In order to embrace this biblically demonstrable characteristic of God, Brueggemann encourages Christians to refrain from tidying up the text by imposing foreign theological categories, and instead to allow the complexities of the text to stand as is. This is to say, Brueggemann is asking Christians to adopt a Jewish model of reading, which embraces the provisional quality of all readings of Scripture rather than the Christian tendency to provide closure. The Old Testament itself, because of its dialogical nature, not only invites but also demands such an open hermeneutical posture.

The heart of the book is Brueggemann's patient review of four of God's dialogue partners that are not only prominent in the Old Testament but 'continue to be front and center in our contemporary world' (p. xiii): Israel; the Human Person; the Nations; and Creation. The resulting portrait of God is in tension with classical theology, where God's being in relationship is characterized by his immutability, aseity, and sovereignty, not his willingness to take risks and engage in actual give and take with his creation. Certainly some theologians will protest that such a God is not very God-like. But Brueggemann understands these classical formulations of God, that focus primarily on his omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, to take inadequate account of what the Bible says about God.

Such a classical one-sided portrayal of God is 'no longer adequate or satisfying for either faith or intellect', and Brueggemann finds a way forward by engaging the 'complex, dynamic, and fluid character of the faith of ancient Israel' (p. xii). Questioning traditional Protestant doctrinal formulations, therefore, is not naïve or trendy, but necessary in view of the disjunction between those formulations and the biblical data. The Hebrew Bible presents a God who is affected by those with whom he is in dialogue. He is moved, persuaded, angered, convinced; he loves, enjoys, rejoices, pities—in short, everything one might expect of someone who is in true relationship with another. Any Christian reader, regardless of his or her own portrait of God, will need to account for the plentiful biblical data. Brueggemann's treatment is a compelling place to start.

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The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate. By John H. Walton. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8308-3704-5. 193 pp. £9.99.

John Walton is a professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College, and his new book is short, ambitious, and original. His goal is to show that Genesis has nothing to do with science and thus can be accommodated to Darwinian biology. First, he argues that 'people in the ancient world believed that something existed not by virtue of its material properties, *but by virtue of its having a function in an ordered system*' (p. 26; his italics). In other words, the author of Genesis thought that things do not really exist until 'people (or gods) are there to benefit from functions' (p. 27). Genesis accepts (as does Walton) that God created the material that comprises the universe. Nevertheless, Walton is convinced that the Bible evinces absolutely no interest in how or when God brought matter into being.

Second, Walton wagers that Genesis teaches the purpose of the cosmos is to give God a place for divine rest. Walton shows that ancient Near Eastern religions typically treat temples as microcosms of creation. In Egyptian temples, for example, floors represent the earth, columns are decorated with plant life, and ceilings symbolize the sky. Genesis, according to Walton, reverses this relationship by using Temple imagery to illustrate how God constructs the cosmos as a kind of temple. The six days of creation are the installation of the cosmic temple furniture, one could say, while the seventh day is God making himself at home.

Both of these points are creatively presented, but there is little if any biblical evidence and even less theological or philosophical warrant for holding either of them. Indeed, this book gets into so many exegetical and theological conundrums, if not downright contradictions, that it demonstrates how far some scholars will go to make Genesis look like anything but an account of the origin of all things.

Let me make several points. First, Walton is not clear about what function (his key term) means. At one point he says, 'Creation thus constituted bringing order to the cosmos from an originally nonfunctional condition' (p. 35). This means that whatever existed before creation was fundamentally changed by becoming informed with purpose (chaos turned into cosmos). Presumably, for something nonfunctional to become functional, it has to go through substantial, visible alteration. Function is merely an alteration in how we perceive something. Contradicting this insight, however, Walton frequently claims that divine creation as depicted in Genesis did not change the material or empirical aspect of the world in any way. Creation for the Israelites, he argues, simply meant 'assigning functions', (p. 46), and a function means that something becomes meaningful to humans. In fact, Walton equates functionalism with the idea that 'in Genesis, creation is not set up for the benefit of God but for the benefit of humanity' (p. 69). In other words, Genesis gives the world an anthropomorphic feel, but tells us nothing about what the world actually (re: scientifically) is. (Walton admits that the great sea creatures of day five do not appear to serve any purpose for humanity, but he tries to save his thesis by declaring that Genesis tells us that these creatures have a purpose for God.)

The problems with this account of functionalism are deep and wide. To suggest that the Israelites (or any ancient people other than the Greeks, for that matter) distinguished form and substance so clearly attributes a metaphysical depth to them that they did not possess. Indeed, Walton's definition of function—that looking at what a thing does involves bracketing how a thing exists—is utterly modern (even, one dares to say, Husserlian). The Greeks, of course, underwent tortuous metaphysical complexities in trying to understand what matter is shorn of form, but I do not think those metaphysical difficulties led the author of Genesis to focus solely on the function, rather than the origin, of the various kinds of things in the world. In fact, Walton's separation of purpose from the origin of things is made possible only by a Darwinian worldview. Darwinism teaches that purpose is in the mind of the beholder, rather than being an aspect of things in themselves, and that is precisely what Walton thinks Genesis teaches. Ironically, his attempt to save Genesis from evolutionary critique ends up reading Darwin back into the minds of the biblical writers.

Second, Walton does not consistently follow his own hermeneutical principle, which is a strict adherence to the intention of the author. This principle is, of course, extremely problematic with regard to the creation account in Genesis, and, in fact, Walton offers virtually no source criticism or analysis of the original audience of the text. But the real problem is that he repeatedly muddles and often downright violates this principle when he insists that 'it was not God's purpose to reveal the details of cosmic geography' (p. 18). That is a theological, not a hermeneutical point, and cannot be based on an analysis of what the original author thought. Moreover, he even contradicts this point when he admits that Genesis does teach cosmic geography. For example, he writes that the Israelites, like all ancient peoples, believed in a solid sky, so that, if the Hebrew term for firmament 'is to be taken in its normal contextual sense, it indicates that God made a solid dome to hold up waters above the earth' (p. 57). So how can Genesis reduce creation to mere functionalism while at the same time depicting how God created a solid dome to hold back the cosmic waters? Walton deals with this problem by declaring, 'We should not worry about the question of 'truth' with regard to the Bible's use of Old World science' (p. 61). In other words, Genesis does refer to material origins—how things got to where they are and what they are doing there, not just what they mean to us—but if we interpret Genesis to refer only to functions, then we will more easily accommodate the Bible to Darwinian science. Thereby Walton undermines his own hermeneutical principle in order to facilitate Christian acceptance of evolution.

Third, his theology of biblical authority is inconsistent and confusing.

He appeals to similarities between Genesis and other ancient Near Eastern creation accounts to make his key points, even though he also insists he believes 'the nature of the Bible to be very different from anything else that was available in the ancient world' (p. 13). He is also convinced that God would not inspire an ancient text to speak to modern scientific problems. He supports this move by insisting that, 'Through the entire Bible, there is not a single instance in which God revealed to Israel a science beyond their own culture' (p. 19). Yet the idea that God can inspire authors to convey meanings that transcend their own particular culture is the foundation of any theory of divine inspiration.

Fourth, he presents minimal evidence that the Israelites considered the cosmos to be a divine temple. Indeed, Genesis is much closer to describing the Garden of Eden as God's holy place than the world as a whole. Heaven is the location of God's throne, not the earth, which is a mere footstool (Isa 66:1-2). Where are the sacrifices, if the cosmos is God's temple? And what happens to Walton's anthropomorphism if the world is now seen as a place God made just for himself? Scholars are not even sure if Israel practiced enthronement festivals at their Temple, which makes the idea that the six days of creation are an inauguration account of the world as God's Temple a real stretch. The Bible is full of evidence that Solomon's Temple was connected to the Genesis creation account (Solomon gives a speech with seven sections and so on), but arguing the reverse—that divine creation is a template of temple construction—is another matter altogether. The Israelites were much too wary about pantheism and divine combat myths to depict the cosmos as a temple.

Fifth, and finally, Walton unequivocally rejects any attempt to accommodate Genesis to Darwinian science (he groups such attempts under the rubric of concordism), yet that is precisely his own goal. Indeed, he devotes more pages to arguing why his approach is better suited to Darwinism than he does to defending his particular interpretation of Genesis. In his anxiety to demonstrate that Genesis has nothing to do with science (ancient or modern) and that its meaning is purely religious and symbolic, he ends up where all liberal interpretations of Genesis end up—a concordism of a higher order.

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The Historical Jesus: Five Views. Edited by James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8308-3868-4. 312 pp. £14.99.

The book under review brings together essays on the historical Jesus by five scholars, whose views are quite diverse. Following each essay are four responses by the other four scholars. It makes for interesting reading and, in a way, creates a measure of coherence that normally would not be found in a collection of studies.

The book begins with an excellent introduction to the quest of the historical Jesus. The editors trace the quest from Reimarus to Schweitzer, from Schweitzer to Käsemann, from Käsemann to James Robinson and others, and from the 1980s to the present. Major figures during this period include Ben Meyer, E.P. Sanders, John Meier, N.T. Wright, and some of the members of the North American Jesus Seminar (Borg, Crossan, Funk, and the like). The balance of the introduction is given over to an assessment of assumptions, goals, methods, and prospects. This probing discussion is alone worth the price of the book.

The order of chapters begins with the most radical perspective and moves toward the most conservative. First up is Robert Price who thinks the evidence for Jesus is so thin that we may wonder if he really existed at all. What leads Price to this eccentric position (which is followed by almost no bona fide historian) is the presence of many parallels with other traditions. What Price fails to do is to make the distinction between the historical figure (be it Jesus of Nazareth, Alexander the Great or Julius Caesar), on the one hand, and the way this person's story is told (with implicit or explicit comparisons with epic events of the past or myths or whatever), on the other hand. Alexander and Caesar do not "vanish" because those who narrated their lives and accomplishments sometimes indulged in myth-making. Neither does Jesus, even if it turns out that the evangelists presented his activities and teachings in the idiom and imagery of Old Testament Scripture.

Next comes Dominic Crossan who rightly emphasizes Jesus' place in the context of the Roman Empire. Jesus, Crossan believes, taught his disciples to resist evil (oppression, violence, injustice) in non-violent ways. For Luke Timothy Johnson, questers go astray in seeking after the details of the historical Jesus and neglecting to embrace the living Jesus today. James Dunn does not agree, arguing instead that the faith of Jesus' followers provides the 'surest indication of the historical reality and effect of his mission' (p. 202). Dunn is rightly critical of the criterion of dissimilarity that insists that the authentic Jesus be different from his Jewish context and what his dear to his own followers. And finally, Darrell Bock, relying on multiply attested material, cites a number of actions that Jesus almost certainly performed (e.g., associating with sinners, proclaiming God's kingdom) and things that almost certainly happened to Jesus (e.g., condemned for blasphemy, executed as king of the Jews) that provide pretty clear indications of Jesus' aims, which in turn cohere with the four portraits of Jesus provided by the evangelists.

Space does not permit discussion of the mostly excellent and insightful responses to the five essays. Readers will find them very helpful. The publisher and editors are to be commended for putting together a collection of studies that clarify many important issues so well.

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The Historical Jesus of the Gospels. By Craig S. Keener. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8028-6292-1. 869 pp. £40.99.

Reading Craig Keener is an event. Whether it is his commentaries or his other topical treatments on subjects pastoral and theological, Keener is always worth reading. He has a penchant for leaving readers with a helpful overview both of scholarly arguments and of the historical perplexities surrounding texts. His handle on both primary and secondary sources is remarkable.

The Historical Jesus of the Gospels is par for the Keener course. Though the bulk of the book is an intimidating sight—the book nears 700 pages!—the actual reading of the volume is surprisingly manageable. The reader need only read 349 pages to walk away with a beginner's grasp of the issues surrounding the study of the historical Jesus, the main players and ideas currently operative, and a sense of what the sources for historical reconstruction are. The other chunk of the book is a vast expanse of endnotes, appendixes, indexes and bibliography. In this sense, the book is really two books in one: the first half or so for the general reader and the second for the more advanced and daring student.

Keener's guiding assumption throughout the project is that 'there is much that we can know about Jesus historically, and that the first-century Gospels preserved by the church remain by far the best source for this information' (p. 349). In Keener's estimation, talk about the "historical Jesus" invariably centres on the 'nature of our sources'; this 'is the primary subject of this book" (p. xxxii). This is key for Keener: his focus is not on reconstructing another portrait of Jesus but on the nature of the historical sources themselves. Nevertheless, Keener does offer something of a profile, suggesting that 'Jesus prophetically summoned his people to prepare for the kingdom, offering radical ethical demands to prepare them for it. But Jesus himself had a mission that would involve confronting the ruling elite, as the powerful figures of this present age, and lead to his martyrdom. This, too, was connected to the coming kingdom, a connection understood by his followers in terms of the resurrection' (p. 164).

The book is divided into three main sections: 'Disparate Views about Jesus'; 'The Character of the Gospels'; and 'What We Learn about Jesus from the Best Sources'. Sadly, Keener decides to bracket out any discussion on miracles for a 'separate work' (p. xxxii). But given the size of the volume as it currently stands it was perhaps the right move.

Despite its glowing strengths and shrewd judgments—and it is difficult to overstate them—there are a few deficiencies worth noting. Keener is heavily swayed by an eschatological framework for understanding the mission of Jesus. This is fine. But to suggest that those who doubt such an orientation are paying 'insufficient attention to Jesus' immediate Jewish environment' strikes me as too much (p. 18). As Fiorenza has argued, "eschatology" is a social construction, and the realities behind the label of "eschatology" are hardly as neat as often purported. I confess I was a bit uncertain what Keener was on about with respect to what seemed like equating later sources (non-canonical "Gospels") with the "lives of Jesus" from nineteenth-century Germany (p. 48). There is a notable difference in using third or fourth century texts which may or may not be appropriating authentic memories of the historical figure and scholarly reconstructions eighteen hundred years later. I was also a bit unsure what it means to speak of "literary liberties" on the part of ancient historians and biographers (p. 127). The aim of the so-called quest for the historical Jesus is to present Jesus *in the common vernacular.* It is precisely *because* sensibilities are different that (modern) historical reconstructions persist. I also wonder if his assertion that 'early Christians plainly did not indulge the temptation to create answers for their own situations in the Jesus tradition preserved in the Synoptics' (p. 143) seems to be in tension with the favourable quote of E.P. Sanders on page 150. The fashioning of the Gospel material betrays communal concerns. Moreover, sprinkled throughout the volume are statements like 'Christians would not have invented this' or the like (e.g. pp. 258, 260, 290, 331). Frankly, such statements strike me as a bit too confident. From time to time there are odd repetitions—sometimes verbatim (pp. 93 and 127; 434 n.106 and 436 n. 8; 439 n. 64 and 443 n. 44; and 435 n. 130 and 458 n. 198), and here and there the project feels a bit apologetical—perhaps stemming from a conversion from atheism (pp. xxxv, 383-88)?

But these criticisms hardly soften the enthusiastic recommendation from this reviewer. The book is a model in the rigorous handling of sources, judicious selection of thematic investigation, organization of material, clarity of thought, and charity toward opposing voices. In the so-called quest for the historical Jesus, Craig Keener is an admirable guide.

Michael J. Thate, University of Durham

World Upside Down: Reading Acts in the Graeco-Roman Age. By C. Kavin Rowe. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-1953-7787-3. x + 300 pp. £40.00.

Kavin Rowe teaches New Testament at Duke Divinity School and has quickly established himself as an authoritative voice on Luke's writings. Having previously written on Luke with his well-received *Early Narrative Christology,* he now turns his attention to Luke's second volume. Reading

Acts within its Graeco-Roman context, he finds that Luke does not have an apologetic purpose, but writes for his fellow Christians. His aim is that of culture-formation (p. 4). That is, Luke directs his readers' attention to the manner in which the knowledge of God is instantiated or embodied in the life of Christian communities. The knowledge of God, according to Rowe, is a community that functions as an utterly unique body politic.

In the first stage of his argument, Rowe describes how the worship of the Christian God directly confronts all forms of pagan religious behaviour. Because day-to-day life patterns are the embodiments of religious 'belief', the holistic Christian way of life—socially, economically, and politically—stands utterly unique in the Graeco-Roman world and is incommensurate with any other way of life. The inevitable collision between Christians and their surrounding cultural contexts arises from the breach between God and his world (p. 50). Worship of the one true God, therefore, will inevitably confront and collide with forms of life that embody idolatry and ignorance, resulting in cultural destabilization.

This effect of the Christian mission is not because of any subversive or seditious impulse, however, as Rowe argues in chapter 3. In fact, when Roman officials have opportunity to rule on leaders of the Christian movement, they judge in their favour, finding no fault with them. This is so because 'Paul and his crowd preach the resurrection of the dead Jesus, not the treasonous overthrow of Rome' (p. 87).

We have, then, this tension: Christians proclaim repentance unto an alternative form of life, destabilizing established cultural patterns. At the same time, however, they eschew treason and sedition and do not seek to gain political power nor march on Rome. This tension, as Rowe demonstrates in chapter 4, is the necessary correlate of the Lordship of Jesus and the communal performance of this reality. That is to say, when Christian communities embody the reality of the resurrected Lord Jesus (i.e., holistic worship of God as the 'body of Christ' on earth), a collision with idolatrous forms of life is inevitable, and a resistance of the temptation to grab for power.

This is a work of impressive scholarship. Rowe engages the literature on Acts and an astonishing range of Graeco-Roman sources without producing laborious prose. Rowe has also given a wonderful gift to the church. Pastors preaching through Acts will do very well to begin with this volume as it provides a compelling vision of ecclesial life as the covenanted community of alternative and life-giving practices that bears witness to the God who raised Jesus from the dead. His articulation of this reality fires the imagination with possibilities for cultivating contemporary practices that will simultaneously confront the world and announce the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ.

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In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity. By Hal Taussig. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8006-6343-8. x + 262 pp. £25.99.

It is generally a delight to read a work produced by a mature scholar which builds on a lifetime of study of a single aspect of early Christianity. Hal Taussig's *In the Beginning Was the Meal* is just such a book. Taussig's expressed intention is 'to study a major social practice of early Christians and ask what the social practice says about early Christian identities' (p. 9). He has admirably accomplished his objective in this engaging and stimulating scholarly monograph.

His treatment ranges from (a) careful social description of Hellenistic meals and their Christian parallels to (b) a sophisticated consideration of how social identity was constructed in the context of specifically Christian gatherings. Taussig (correctly in my view) finds the stylized setting of the Hellenistic meal—where eating together (the *deipnon*) preceded a more informal time of entertainment and interaction (the *symposium*)—to be the primary social environment in which the early Christians met together to negotiate both in-group social relations and their stance vis-à-vis the dominant Roman imperial culture. The more theoretical portions of the book (where Taussig draws upon ritual analysis and social identity theory) will appeal to some readers more than others, while the background materials on Hellenistic meals alone are worth the price of the book.

The payoff of Taussig's study for our understanding of the NT is considerable. Any attempt to read early Christian texts through the lens of a single social practice will necessarily be somewhat reductionistic. This is both a strength and a weakness of this treatment. Not all of the readings convince. One wonders, for example, whether a meal is actually in view in the *koinonia* of 1 John 1:1-3.

Given the centrality of meals in early Christianity, however, most of the Taussig's interpretations are at least plausible, and many are, in fact, quite probable. Two examples will suffice. Consider Taussig's understanding of Ephesians 5:18-19 ('Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts', NRSV). This reviewer's tendency (as an individualistic Westerner) is to read the initial prohibition (v. 18a) in terms of personal morality and the rest of the passage (vv. 18b-19) in terms of activities at a formal church service. Taussig convincingly demonstrates that this text assumes the *symposium* portion of a (Christian) Hellenistic meal, where wine-drinking and the singing of songs (often hymns to a god) were the norm. The second chapter of Galatians also potentially benefits from Taussig's meal paradigm. Given the importance of the vexing issue of table fellowship in Galatians 2, Taussig may very well be right to suggest that the 'right hand of fellowship' in 2:9 refers not to a handshake but, rather, 'to having a meal together where—according to standard practice—one ate only with the right hand' (p. 50).

Finally, a word about the author's theological location as a NT scholar: Taussig is not evangelical. To be sure, his treatment is not beset by the extreme historical pessimism characteristic of some minimalist scholarly traditions, and the focus on social practice will prove helpful to readers of all theological persuasions. Nonetheless, Taussig's methodology is almost exclusively constructivist in its orientation. To his credit, he is explicit about his approach from the outset: 'It is not possible to account for Christian beginnings by identifying who the founding figure was, what the essential beliefs were, what the guiding social principles were, or what transformative event triggered it all' (p. ix). Readers of this journal, many of whom will disagree with this categorical assertion, will nevertheless benefit significantly from Taussig's study of the importance of meals as the social context for the negotiation of early Christian theology and community formation.

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When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community. By Joseph H. Hellerman. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009. ISBN 978-0-8054-4779-8. v + 231 pp. £17.99.

This volume explores the metaphor of family for Christian community in the first few centuries of the church. It subsequently considers how these ancient aspects of church life might be recaptured in today's churches (principally engaging with the contemporary, 'individualist', American, evangelical scene).

The identity of the individual in ancient Mediterranean society was bound up with the group, and the individual was expected to give priority to the needs of the group when making decisions. A person's strongest group affiliation was that of his or her family. Within this family context, the relationship and solidarity between siblings offered the closest relational bond in the ancient world, closer even than that between husband and wife, or parent and child. It is this familial/sibling bond that lies at the foundation of the Jesus movement. This bond is further extended by a counter-cultural prioritizing of the fictive 'sibling' relationships of the church family even over one's natural family and siblings. Thus, for Paul, his contemporary conceptions of sibling language are at the heart of his church values, including unity, loyalty, solidarity, and material needs. These remained core, admired features for the first three centuries of the Christian church.

Subsequent sections of the book focus on the consequent conclusion that salvation should distinctively be worked out in a community context (rather than individually). One's relationship with God's people is integral to one's restored relationship with God, and is evidenced by radical solidarity with the church family, rather than consumerist individuality. The 'group comes first' philosophy means that one's own life decisions are made with a view to the over-riding priority of the good of the broader Christian group within which one is embedded.

This volume offers a profound challenge to dominant patterns of church, which both assume and pander to Western consumerist individualism. It helpfully highlights ways in which contemporary notions of family and brother/sister are so very different from ancient concepts. This allows Hellerman to redress widespread misreading of the Bible, which transpose onto the familiar vocabulary of the New Testament meanings that are quite alien to the original authors and contexts.

In my view, the only anomaly, in an otherwise consistently compelling picture, are elements of the chapter on 'Leadership in the Family of God'. It is clear that Hellerman is making a critique of the executive, senior pastor model, so prevalent in American, evangelical churches. His argument is based, in large measure, on evidence that a plurality of leaders is a fundamental feature of the earliest Christian communities. The anomaly, as I see it, occurs at two points. First, the post-New Testament period was one which witnessed the emergence of the singularly preeminent leader over a large congregation – notwithstanding Hellerman's evidence for its continuing, strong focus on community. Secondly, it seems to me that the Pauline communities, by virtue of their 'household' setting were fundamentally focused on a single, 'head of household' model (the overseer). Key to this, of course, was the basic unit of a local church consisting in a number of related small, domestically-located groups, each with its own head (overseer), rather than a single, large congregation. The role, authority, and sphere of influence of the plurality of elders differed from those of the overseer, who alone had pastoral jurisdiction for his own small, household group. The metaphor of the church as family is most strongly played out in such small groups, with their overseeing head of household. This feature of the early Pauline congregations offers further support to the 'church as family' motif, while nonetheless opposing the 'executive' model, in which power lies in the size of a single, centralized congregation together with a complex hierarchy of subordinate leaders. Paternal authority was at the heart of the ancient family, and was a feature also of the Pauline communities (including Paul's relationship with them). Paul's 'family' model lay in adopting and adapting the widespread model of an authoritative 'head of household' (overseer), and combining it with the equally widely understood model of a 'village eldership', which had a different role and sphere of influence.

Although a book clearly aimed at local church leaders (including those with roots in the emerging church scene), rather than academics (there are few footnotes and no bibliography), this volume is the product of much detailed research, especially during the 1990s, together with many years of reflection on pastoral praxis. Joe Hellerman writes as both Professor of New Testament language and literature at Talbot School of Theology, and one of the pastors at an evangelical church in California which is seeking to focus on church as family. This book is readable and challenging, and I highly commend it.

Andrew D. Clarke, University of Aberdeen

Beyond the Reformation? Authority, Primacy and Unity in the Conciliar Tradition. By Paul Avis. London: T & T Clark, 2008. ISBN 978-0-5670-3357-4. 234 pp. £25.00.

Paul Avis has quietly emerged as one of the premier Anglican and Protestant theologians of his generation. The author and editor of over two dozen books, he has written extensively on ecclesiology, ecumenical theology, and – importantly for this book – on related fields of political and social thought. The latter have not always been brought to bear upon Christian thinking about the church, except in certain avowedly ideological contexts. But they should be, and Avis' book on the Conciliar Tradition provides a powerful case for why, historically, and how, more constructively.

'The right combination of conciliarity, collegiality and primacy is the Holy Grail of modern ecumenical dialogue', he writes (p. 184); but it has also proved the common goal for each separated church's self-ordering. Each depends on the other, Avis writes, noting that today 'all Christian churches are in the same boat' in terms of their ongoing failures to shape their own lives faithfully in this regard (p. 185). Understanding the Conciliar Tradition is an essential element in ecclesial health.

Much of Avis's volume constitutes an historical overview of this tradition, first articulated clearly by the late medieval Conciliar Movement in response to the weakness of the Western church that culminated in the 'catastrophic event' of the Great Schism of 1378-1417 that divided the Roman church into two competing papal jurisdictions. The book traces, in a generally chronological fashion, the thinkers and main events from this period, and the outworking and revision of their ideas by Protestants, mainly, during the Reformation and after.

Along the way Avis teases out key elements of ecclesial life and self-definition, to which he returns in his final more analytic chapter: notions of the Common Good and Natural Law, especially, as they must continue to shape the Christian Church's existence. Avis argues that the common Conciliar Tradition both 'bridges' the apparent disjunctions among post-Reformation churches, but also provides the necessary tools for a 'realistic' understanding of the Church that can take account of human sin as it distorts, often destroys relations, and corrupts institutions and polities. The Conciliar Tradition's focus on the sociality of the Church, in terms of its forms, dynamics, and lived responsibilities remains a key basis for the contemporary healing and renewal of the churches in their life within the world.

This is a survey, but an analytic and evaluative one that lays out material, material that, as Avis notes, has been forgotten, especially by Protestants, and only fitfully and often antagonistically and narrowly reassessed by some Roman Catholics, all to our common detriment. As in all surveys, some important elements are lost or unduly diminished, others aligned in contestable ways (e.g. his treatment of Wycliffe). And, often, Avis tends to work with general concepts, rather than lived appropriations – there is no historical or social analysis of synodical life itself in its political outworking – so that the actual significance and risks of certain ideas from a Christian perspective are obscured. These drawbacks are minor.

Although the prose is not inspiring, Avis writes with a clarity, the cumulative force of which is quite powerful. With Francis Oakley's more Catholic-oriented *The Conciliarist Tradition* (2003), Avis has provided a superb historical and conceptual framework for ecclesial renewal that all Christians must seriously engage.

Ephraim Radner, Wycliffe College, Toronto

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