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Jim Lytle
President

Wayne Slusser
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Mark McGinniss
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Daniel Wiley
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From the Editor's Desk

Dear Reader,

It is my pleasure once again to offer a sampling of articles that were presented at the Council for Dispensational Hermeneutics (CDH) September 2020. This year's theme covered the topic: Dispensationalism, Politics, and Culture. These articles will enrich your mind and soul in these vital areas.

The website for the Council for Dispensational Hermeneutics (CDH) can be found at <https://dispensationalcouncil.org>. It has a wealth of resources and news of upcoming conferences.

At the *JMAT* we seek to serve our Savior, and you, our reader. I look forward to hearing from you as you profit and enjoy this issue of the *JMAT*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark McGinniss', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark McGinniss, Ph.D.
Lead Editor

A Critical Examination of the Church's Reception of Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan of AD 313

Jeremiah Mutie

Abstract: Although it is logical that every prudent politician will ignore the largest religious movement in his or her time at his or her own peril, Christians of every age will be better served if they critically evaluate their reception of each major policy that is clearly aimed at their benefit. With this background, this article will attempt to critically examine the reception of Constantine's edict by the church in the years immediately following its enactment. Two early exhibits will be brought to bear here: the Donatist controversy and the Arian controversy. Looking at these exhibits demonstrates that, while Christians had every reason to celebrate the enactment of the edict, down the road, an uncritical adoption of the emperor's policies and favors towards the church opened a door for an unhealthy marriage between earthly powers and the church, proving detrimental in the ensuing years. As such, the church's reception of the Edict of Milan continues to be a lesson to Christians of every age in their relationship with the political leadership of their time.

Key words: Constantine, Edict of Milan, Donatist Controversy, Arianism, Nicea

Introduction

Church historian Robert L. Wilken begins his review entitled "In Defense of Constantine" with these words: "The ritual pronouncement of anathemas against Constantinianism has become so commonplace that the historical

Jeremiah Mutie, Ph.D., is a Professor of Theology and Church History at Southern California Seminary. Jeremiah can be reached at jeremiah.mutie@socalsem.edu.

Constantine (A.D. 288?–337) has slipped from our sight.”² What Wilken is getting at here is the immense attention that has been given to the “negative” implications of Emperor Constantine and his policies toward Christianity as evidenced in subsequent Constantinian scholarship. Indeed, the place of Constantine in Christianity has been continually debated.

For the most part, the argument has been that, in accepting the offer of toleration from Constantine together with all the favors that came with the conversion of Constantine, Christianity lost her authentic Christian witness. For example, in his work entitled *The Politics of Jesus*, after listing a number of problems that were a result of Constantine’s interaction with Christianity, the pacifist Obery M. Hendricks concludes,

Unfortunately, this is not all. Constantine’s adoption of Christianity as the de facto religion of the Roman Empire had another result as well: it sped the Church’s slide down the slippery slope of assimilation to the social mores and values of Greco-Roman culture. This was a disastrous development in that these values, such as social elitism, instructing slaves to honor their enslavers, and endorsing male domination of women were in direct opposition to the gospel of freedom and equality taught by Jesus. In reality, though, the post-Constantinian Church only heightened the move toward assimilation that had been begun long before. In part, it is already evident in the New Testament letters known as 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus.³

² Robert Louis Wilken, “In Defense of Constantine,” *First Things* 112 (2001): 36.

³ Obery M. Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus: Rediscovering the True Revolutionary Nature of Jesus’ Teachings and How They Have Been Corrupted*, repr. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 92. This echoes John Howard Yoder’s earlier observation that Christians in the fourth century who found themselves “in positions of social responsibility... had to go for their ethical insight to other sources than Jesus” (Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 135). He further argues that these changes were inevitable in the age of Constantine, writing, “The real reason we should not be surprised that the church at the age of Constantine had to resort to other models for the construction of a social ethic in Christendom was that, quite simply and

Indeed, the idea that the credibility of Christianity was severely impacted negatively by the actions of Constantine runs deep in scholarship.⁴ And, as noted, the main reason for this argument is that Constantine's conversion was itself insincere. Hendricks' comment is typical of many others concerning Constantine's conversion. He argues that the "problems caused by the Roman Empire's acceptance of the faith seem to mirror the questionable conversion of Constantine himself."⁵ While the question of Constantine's conversion will be briefly treated, suffice it to say that, as Latourette noted in the last century, "whether he [Constantine] was a Christian from political motives or from sincere religious conviction has been hotly debated."⁶ However, the focus of this article is on Constantine's edict of toleration: its reception by the church and its impact on her. Hence, the question of Constantine's personal conversion will be treated to the extent that it is pertinent to the main issue that is being addressed in this paper.

logically, Jesus had nothing much to say on the subject. And if, perchance, Jesus might be said to have spoken in this area, due to vestiges of the prophetic tradition which he took up only to transmute them into something more existential, then at least it is clear by the time of the Pauline churches any such dimension was lost" (ibid., 135–136).

⁴ While not naming Constantine specifically, historian of doctrine Adolf Harnack sees the development of early Christian doctrine as regress instead of progress. He writes in his *History of Dogma*, for example, that "the Gospel entered into the world, not as a doctrine, but as a joyful message and as a power of the Spirit of God, originally in the forms of Judaism. It stripped off these forms with amazing rapidity, and united and amalgamated itself with Greek science, the Roman Empire and ancient culture, developing, as a counterpoise to this, renunciation of the world and the striving after supernatural life, after deification. All this was summed up in the old dogma and in dogmatic Christianity" (Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. Neil Buchanan [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1894–1899], 7:272. See also Harnack, *Das Wesen Des Christentums* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1902).

⁵ Hendricks, *Politics of Jesus*, 87.

⁶ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1953), 92.

The Edict of Milan: The Setting, Stipulations and Meaning of the Edict of Toleration

Historians note that the so-called “Edict of Milan” is intrinsically tied to the conversion of Emperor Constantine himself. Although specifics differ from historian to historian, there are some agreeable traits in the report of Constantine’s conversion to Christianity, which, according to Henk Singor, “is one of those momentous events in history of which nobody doubts the importance but of which it is nearly impossible, or so it seems, to grasp the reality of what actually occurred.”⁷ While it is believed that he was exposed to Christianity through his mother, many agree that his conversion is connected to the sign that he saw while battling his co-heir, Maxentius, in the battle of Milvian Bridge in AD 312.⁸ The main Christian source for the

⁷ Henk Singor, “The Labarum, Shield Blazons, and Constantine’s Caeleste Signum,” in *The Representation and Perception of Roman Imperial Power: Proceedings of the Third Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, C. 200 B.C.–A.D. 476)*, Netherlands Institute in Rome, March 20–23, 2002, ed. Lukas de Blois (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 2003), 481.

⁸ According to Zosimus, while Maxentius was the son of Emperor Maximian and the son-in-law of Emperor Galerius, Constantine is believed to have been “born out of the relationship between an ignoble woman and the emperor Constantius, who was not her lawful husband” (Zosimus, *Historia nova*, II, 8, quoted in Sam Lieu, “Introduction: Pagan and Byzantine Historical Writing on the Reign of Constantine: The Latin Historians and Epitomators of Late Antiquity,” in *From Constantine to Julian: Pagan and Byzantine Views: A Source History*, ed. Samuel N. C. Lieu and Dominic Montserrat (London: Routledge, 1996), 14. Lieu further elaborates that “the issue of [Constantine’s] illegitimacy resurfaces at the proclamation of Constantine by the army—the soldiers proclaimed Constantine emperor because they felt that none of Constantius Chlorus’ legitimate heirs was fit to rule, thereby confirming Constantine’s status as a bastard. This is reinforced by Maxentius’ resentment at the proclamation: he ‘the son of Maximianus Herculus thought it intolerable that Constantine, born of an ignoble woman, should achieve his ambition, whereas he, son of so remarkable an emperor, remained at the whim of chance while others exercised his father’s power. ...The soldiers wanted Constantine not because of his ability to command but because of his fine looks and particularly because of his liberality with donatives” (ibid., 15).

events that took place in this battle on October 28, AD 312, is Eusebius' *Life of Constantine* (*Vita Constantini*). According to this official biographer of Constantine, in the vision, Constantine saw a sign by which he was to conquer his nemesis, Maxentius, in this battle. Eusebius writes concerning this sign (of the cross?) in *Vita* 1.28.2: "He [Constantine] said that about noon, when the day was already beginning to decline, he saw with his own eyes the trophy of a cross of light in the heavens, above the sun, and bearing the inscription, CONQUER BY THIS. At this sight he himself was struck with amazement, and his whole army also, which followed him on this expedition, and witnessed the miracle."⁹ As it can be observed, this report came from Constantine himself many years after the event. This may explain why the report does not appear in Eusebius' more famous work entitled *Ecclesiastical History*.¹⁰ But what did Constantine see and what did his conversion mean?

Debates concerning what kind of a "sign" Constantine saw and what his conversion means continue. The Greek phrase of what he saw is simply this: Ἐν Τούτῳ Νίκα ("in this [sign], conquer"). The question remains: what was the *actual* sign that he saw? The earliest account of what the sign was comes from Lactantius who, writing in AD 315, described it not as the

⁹ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 1.28.2. For this work, I am using Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904).

¹⁰ Eusebius also notes that Constantine reported that he also had a dream the same night in which the Lord appeared to him and asked him to protect him from his enemies. Eusebius writes in *Vita* 1.29: "He said, moreover, that he doubted within himself what the import of this apparition could be. And while he continued to ponder and reason on its meaning, night suddenly came on; then in his sleep the Christ of God appeared to him with the same sign which he had seen in the heavens, and commanded him to make a likeness of that sign which he had seen in the heavens, and to use it as a safeguard in all engagements with his enemies." Lactantius (*De Mortibus Persecutorum* 44.5) says that the emperor was admonished in this dream to "note 'the heavenly sign of God' (*caeleste signum dei*) on the shields before going into battle" (quoted in Singor, "Labarum," 482).

“chi/rho/Christogram (i.e., ☩)—a schematic representation of the first letters of the name ‘Christos’ in Greek—but as a ‘staurogram’ (⌞)—a tau cross surmounted by a half a circle.”¹¹ But, as Lenski argues, “the first datable appearance of the labarum [the military banner] in an epigraphic context—on two inscriptions from North African milestones dated to early 313—represents not the staurogram but the Christogram.”¹² So, did Constantine see a staurogram, as Lactantius notes, or a Christogram, as evidence seems to suggest?¹³

While it may be impossible to resolve this discrepancy concerning the sign that Constantine saw, the most likely explanation is that there was a process of the adaptation of the sign from an earlier military ensign to a Christogram with Christian implications. Both J. D. Zwaan and Lenski arrive at this

¹¹ Noel Lenski, *Constantine and the Cities: Imperial Authority and Civic Politics* (Philadelphia: U of PA P, 2016), 9.

¹² Ibid. Lenski further notes, “So too with the coinage, for a Christogram is also depicted on the front roundel of Constantine’s helmet in the famous Ticinum medallion, which is usually dated to 315 – the same year that Lactantius was writing” (ibid.).

¹³ One of the more interesting exercises is to see how non-religious historiographers of Constantine describe this vision. Copying probably from the historian Eunapius, Zosimus, presenting what would be a typical interpretation of the sign from a non-religious historian, provides a pagan interpretation of the sign, writing, “The event revealed the truth: in fact when Maxentius brought his army out before the city of Rome and crossed the bridge which he himself had built, a numberless crowd of screech owls landed on the wall and covered it; when Constantine saw this he instructed his forces to form battle lines; when the armies were in position face to face, flank against flank, Constantine sent his cavalry forward which advanced and defeated the enemy horsemen” (Zosimus, *Historia nova* II, 16,2, quoted in Lieu, “Introduction,” 15). Thus, for him, the “sign” for Constantine, was the “screech owls.” However, as Lieu correctly observes, the “episode of the owls, only found in Zosimus, is probably an invention of Eunapius’ sources intended to counter Christian stories of Constantine’s visions” (Lieu, “Introduction,” 15). For a critical examination of Constantine’s signs, see Rajiv Kumar Bhola, “A Man of Visions: A New Examination of the Vision(s) of Constantine (Panegyric Vi, Lactantius’ *De Mortibus Persecutorum*, and Eusebius’ *De Vita Constantini*)” (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2015).

conclusion, noting that the Christogram resembles the Egyptian symbol *ankh* (☩), which, “whatever its origin, was a sign for life and similar to the sign of the cross.”¹⁴ Therefore, according to this hypothesis, particularly in Egypt where most of the earliest archeological evidence for the Christogram comes from, “Constantine’s Egyptian subjects and those familiar with Egyptian iconography were thus likely to have seen in the labarum a further confirmation of Constantine’s well-documented attachment to the divine Sun.”¹⁵ The implication is that, by the time of the establishment of the archeological artifacts, the Christogram had fully been recognized as the closest representation of Constantine’s sign that led to his conversion.

In any case, everyone agrees that whatever sign Constantine saw led to his dramatic conversion. And, while, as noted earlier, debates continue as to whether his conversion was sincere, there is no doubt that whatever happened brought about a dramatic change in the emperor’s life. Bart Ehrman captures this change: “Later historians would sometimes question whether the conversion was genuine,” he writes, concerning Constantine’s conversion, noting further that “to Constantine himself and to spiritual advisers close to him, there appears to have been no doubt.”¹⁶ In other words, to Constantine and his advisers, his

¹⁴ J. De Zwaan, “Another Strain of Symbolism in the *Chi-Rho* as a Monogram of Christ,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 21, no. 84 (1920): 332.

¹⁵ Lenski, *Constantine*, 11. As Zwaan further explains, the symbol’s “appropriateness for Christian use is for both reasons clear enough, and it was a plausible hypothesis that ☩ should be but the christened form of the pagan ☩” (Zwaan, “Another Strain,” 332).

¹⁶ Bart D. Ehrman, *The Triumph of Christianity: How a Forbidden Religion Swept the World* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2018), 13. This is a really interesting concession from the usually very skeptical historian. Ehrman further remarks that “few events in the history of civilization have proved more transformative than the conversion of the emperor Constantine in the year 312 CE,” adding that “He [Constantine] had shifted from one set of religious beliefs and practices to another. At one point in his life he was a polytheist who worshipped a variety of pagan gods—gods of his hometown Naissus in the Balkans, gods of his family, gods

conversion was *genuine*. And, as an immediate consequence, Constantine would issue the Edict of Milan a few months after his conversion.

The Edict of Milan

As noted above, the results of Constantine's conversion were tremendous. The most significant of these developments was the enactment of the Edict of Milan in AD 313. The occasion of the enactment of this edict has led to some lively debates in Constantinian scholarship. For example, while it is generally agreed that the document was the product of a meeting between emperors Constantine and Licinius, some, like Ehrman, have pointedly argued that this "so-called Edict ... was not an edict and was not from Milan."¹⁷ The reasoning behind this conclusion by Ehrman is that rather "than being an imperial edict issued from Milan, it was a letter from Licinius based on an agreement he and Constantine had reached at a meeting they had held earlier in Milan."¹⁸ The meeting in question here, was the meeting between Constantine and Licinius (the emperor of Macedonia and Greece who was in the crosshairs of Constantine because of his cruel treatment of his subjects, and whom Constantine had, thusly, divested of his power) took place in Milan a few months after the conversion of Constantine. According to H. A. Drake, the occasion that brought both emperors together "was the marriage of Licinius and Constantia, the traditional manner for

connected with the armies he served, and the gods of Rome itself. At another point he was a monotheist, worshipping the Christian god alone. His change may not have been sudden and immediate. It may have involved a longer set of transitions than he later remembered, or at least said. There may have been numerous conversations, debates with others, and reflections within himself. But he dated the event to October 28, 312. At that point he began to consider himself a Christian" (ibid.). This may explain why Constantine delayed his baptism up to just a few moments before his death (he was baptized by the Arian bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia, in AD 337). However, Constantine may have been concerned with post-baptismal sins and, thus, delayed his baptism until very close to his death.

¹⁷ Ibid., 35.

¹⁸ Ibid., 299n. 22.

Romans to seal an alliance.”¹⁹ As a result, they worked on details of the relationship “which included agreement on a postpersecution policy.”²⁰ This policy is what is popularly referred to as “The Edict of Milan.” And, while their meeting was cut short by the reports that Maxentius’ ally, Daza, had launched an assault and had to rush back east, when “he returned to Nicomedia that June, Licinius publicly posted a letter to the provincial governor announcing the allies’ policy toward religion, whence it found its way into Lactantius’s *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*.”²¹ Surviving in different forms, it is now traditionally known as the “Edict of Milan.”²²

¹⁹ H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance, Ancient Society and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U P, 2000), 193. Concerning how Licinius’ realm came to be under Constantine, Lieu explains, “In his flight [from Constantine], Maxentius met the kind of death that he himself had often thought up in order to destroy his enemies, and fell into the ditch that he had dug. [Then] some Romans cut off his head, stuck it on a pole and walked with it through the city” (Lieu, “Introduction,” 7). He further explains that Constantine “had learned that Licinius was also treating his subjects with inhuman cruelty [like Maxentius]... Unable to tolerate this unbearable treatment of his fellow citizens, Constantine undertook an expedition against him in order to make him exchange his tyrannical ways for a sovereign’s attitude” (Ibid., 7–8). Licinius was able to escape the fate met by Maxentius by swearing to Constantine that he would be good to his subjects.

²⁰ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 193.

²¹ Ibid., 194.

²² Although there are some minor debates on the text, it survives in Lactantius’ *De Mort. Pers.*, ch. 48. Here a modern translation of the Edict: “When I, Constantine Augustus, as well as I, Licinius Augustus had fortunately met near Mediolanum (Milan), and were considering everything that pertained to the public welfare and security, we thought that among other things which we saw would be for the good of many, that those regulations pertaining to the reverence of the Divinity ought certainly to be made first, so that we might grant to the Christians and to all others full authority to observe that religion which each preferred; whence any Divinity whatsoever in the seat of the heavens may be propitious and kindly disposed to us, and all who are placed under our rule. And thus by this wholesome counsel and most upright provision, we thought to arrange that no one whatever should be denied the opportunity to give his heart to

the observance of the Christian religion, or of that religion which he should think best for himself, so that the Supreme Deity, to whose worship we freely yield our hearts, may show in all things His usual favor and benevolence. Therefore, your Worship should know that it has pleased us to remove all conditions whatsoever, which were in the rescripts formerly given to you officially, concerning the Christians and now any one of these who wishes to observe Christian religion may do so freely and openly, without any disturbance or molestation. We thought it fit to commend these things most fully to your care that you may know that we have given to those Christians free and unrestricted opportunity of religious worship. When you see that this has been granted to them by us, your Worship will know that we have also conceded to other religions the right of open and free observance of their worship for the sake of the peace of our times, that each one may have the free opportunity to worship as he pleases; this regulation is made we that we may not seem to detract from any dignity or any religion. Moreover, in the case of the Christians especially we esteemed it best to order that if it happens anyone heretofore has bought from our treasury from anyone whatsoever, those places where they were previously accustomed to assemble, concerning which a certain decree had been made and a letter sent to you officially, the same shall be restored to the Christians without payment or any claim of recompense and without any kind of fraud or deception. Those, moreover, who have obtained the same by gift, are likewise to return them at once to the Christians. Besides, both those who have purchased and those who have secured them by gift, are to appeal to the vicar if they seek any recompense from our bounty, that they may be cared for through our clemency. All this property ought to be delivered at once to the community of the Christians through your intercession, and without delay. And since these Christians are known to have possessed not only those places in which they were accustomed to assemble, but also other property, namely the churches, belonging to them as a corporation and not as individuals, all these things which we have included under the above law, you will order to be restored, without any hesitation or controversy at all, to these Christians, that is to say to the corporations and their conventicles: providing, of course, that the above arrangements be followed so that those who return the same without payment, as we have said, may hope for an indemnity from our bounty. In all these circumstances you ought to tender your most efficacious intervention to the community of the Christians, that our command may be carried into effect as quickly as possible, whereby, moreover, through our clemency, public order may be secured. Let this be done so that, as we have said above, Divine favor towards us, which, under the most important circumstances we have already experienced, may, for all time, preserve and

The general scholarly consensus is that this document is one of the most significant developments in early Christianity. While the movement towards the toleration in Christianity had been building up for some time (the Edict of Toleration by Galerius, for example, in AD 311 was a major development towards the granting freedom of worship to Christians “provided they do nothing contrary to good order”), the provisions of the Edict of Milan went much further than any other of such agreements in the past. Citing Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, Wilken correctly observes that Lactantius, whose views are particularly the essence of this Edict, “was the first Western thinker to adumbrate a theory of *religious freedom* rooted not in notions about toleration but in nature of religious belief.”²³ Thus, as Wilken further observes,

[B]y mentioning not only Christianity...but other forms of worship, the decree forth a policy of religious freedom, not simply the toleration of a troublesome sect. As the emperors put it, each person should be given the freedom ‘to give his mind to the religion

prosper our successes together with the good of the state. Moreover, in order that the statement of this decree of our good will may come to the notice of all, this rescript, published by your decree, shall be announced everywhere and brought to the knowledge of all, so that the decree of this, our benevolence, cannot be concealed” (University of Pennsylvania. Department of History, *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, vol. Series 1 v. 4 [Philadelphia: Dept. of History, University of Pennsylvania, 1897–1898], 29–30). For a recent critical analysis of the text of the Edict of Milan, see Xu Jia-Ling and Li Jirong, “A New Study of the ‘Edict of Milan,’” *Journal of Sino-Western Communications* 6, no. 2 (2014): 32–33.

²³ Wilken, “Defense of Constantine,” 36. See also Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius and Rome* (New York: Cornell U P, 2013). Drake further notes that, with the requirement of the “Edict of Milan” that Christian exiles be returned and seized property be restituted, “the Edict of Milan goes substantially beyond the edict of Galerius two years earlier, which showed no willingness to concede that the Christians had been harmed in any way and thus made no provision for restitution” (Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 194).

to which he felt was most fitting to himself,' for the supreme divinity is to be served 'with free mind.'²⁴

Indeed, as Drake declares, the Edict "constitutes a landmark in the evolution of Western thought—not because it gives legal standing to Christianity, which it does, but because it is the first official government document in the Western world to recognize the principle of freedom of belief."²⁵ In other words, this Edict was the first official document to clearly stipulate the concept of freedom of religion/worship, an idea that will later become one of the principal concepts in the formulation of the United States' Constitution.

With the main details of surrounding the enactment of the Edict of Milan having been highlighted, the focus now shifts to this the central question: how did the church receive and utilize the provisions of this Edict? How did, for example, the outright involvement the emperor in church matters, and of bishops in politics, impact the church? What are, if any, lessons present-day Christians can learn from this past experiment?

²⁴ Wilken, "Defense of Constantine," 37. As Anastos Milton explains, "Although the Edict guaranteed freedom to all religions, the emphasis throughout is on the Christians, who had never before been granted this privilege so unreservedly. The studied ambiguity in the references to the Godhead, on the other hand ... as many have remarked, was both acceptable to the Christians, whom it was the primary purpose of the Edict to conciliate, and also at the same time inoffensive to the pagans, who were too numerous ... to alienate. Since the latter constituted the majority throughout the Empire, especially in his portion of it, Constantine, despite the sincerity of his conversion to Christianity, would have made a special effort (as in the choice of an innocuous substitute for the divine name in this Edict) to avoid alarming them or goading them into rebellion under the banner of the ancient gods. Similar considerations would have weighed heavily also with Licinius, in whose part of the Empire the Christians, though more numerous than in the West, were nevertheless outnumbered by the pagans" (Milton V. Anastos, "The Edict of Milan [313]: A Defence of Its Traditional Authorship and Designation," *Revue des études byzantines* 23 [1967]: 38).

²⁵ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 194.

A Critical Examination of the Church's Reception of the Edict of Milan

As the introductory scan has demonstrated, the interpretation of the church's reception of the "Edict of Milan," has been mixed. This reception, sometimes referred to as the doctrine of "Constantinianism," is "an accommodation between the churches and political authority in which the churches 'identify themselves with the power structures of their respective societies instead of seeing their duty as calling these powers to modesty and resisting their recurrent rebellion.'"²⁶ Understood this way, "Constantinianism" is akin to some aspects of postmillennialism in its view of the world. For example, it "holds that the world is already 'by itself' on the way to achieving the 'fullness' of salvation," and the Church is to be but an instrument to aid it on its way."²⁷ But, is this so? Or better, how did the church understand and relate with the "Constantinian settlement" immediately after and the centuries succeeding the enactment of the "Edict of Milan?" While it is impossible to deal with every single development concerning this matter, a few aspects will be examined here.

Although generalizations in scholarship sometimes tend to mask rather than to reveal, in some cases, not only are they helpful, but are also the most accurate assessment of the issues. At the risk of over complication, therefore, it can be stated that the church's reception of the provisions of the Edict of Milan brought with it both positive and negative results. That is, while on the one hand, the provisions provided an insurmountable relief to Christians from the persecutions that had been codified by such emperors as Diocletian through their successive edicts, on the other hand, it led to an admixture of Christianity and politics that was to prove detrimental in the succeeding centuries. A few of these results are highlighted here.

One of the most significant and immediate consequences of the issuing of the Edict of Milan was the legalization of

²⁶ Wilken, "Defense of Constantine," 39. It should be observed that Wilken is quoting John Howard Yonder here, a severe critic of "Constantinianism" as noted in the introduction.

²⁷ Ibid.

Christianity. That is, while Constantine did not make Christianity the official religion of the empire (doing so would not have been politically expedient since the empire was polytheistic), Christianity moved from being *religio illicita* to *religio licita*. However, “Christianity was not only decriminalized; it went from being a persecuted faith to being the religion of most-favored status.”²⁸ And, as expected, the bishops returned the favor to their favorable benefactor: they invited Constantine to be involved in the affairs of the church. As a response, the emperor was involved in at least two key church affairs: the Donatist and Arian controversies. It is possible that Constantine did this out of his sincere commitment to the Lord. Ehrman is perhaps correct in observing that, despite the incredulity of some scholars concerning Constantine’s conversion, “his deep personal commitment to Christian causes, if nothing else, should lay all suspicions to rest.”²⁹ Thus, the theological onus was on the church leadership: in which areas and to what extent should they involve political leaders in theological and ecclesial matters? The two issues highlighted here serve to demonstrate that by inviting and/or letting Constantine lead the way in matters of doctrine and polity, the bishops set a problematic precedent that would in later years prove detrimental to both entities. Both are analyzed here briefly.

The Donatist Controversy

In a very truncated manner, this controversy is named after Donatus, who was the leader of a schismatic group in North Africa at the time of the enactment of the Edict of Milan. Donatists were concerned with the question of traditores. This was a term that referred to members of the clergy who had turned over the Scriptures to authorities to be destroyed in accordance

²⁸ Ehrman, *Triumph of Christianity*, 35.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 230. Ehrman further notes, in addition to Constantine’s actions, his words should also put aside all of those doubts, writing: “As should his own words, found repeatedly throughout the sources, as in a letter he sent to those living in Palestine: ‘Indeed my whole zeal and whatever breath I draw, and whatever goes on in the depths of the mind, that I am firmly convinced, is owed by us wholly to the greatest God’ (*Life of Constantine* 2.29)” (*ibid.*).

with Diocletian's first decree of AD 303. As Ehrman explains, most "Christians saw this not only as an awful policy of the persecutors but also as an act of sacrilege for anyone who complied."³⁰ However, after persecution ended, there were multiple questions concerning what to do with *traditores* who had come back to the church. For example, were they to be rebaptized or was their baptism still valid? Or, better, "if a bishop had been ordained by laying on of the hands of a *traditor*?"³¹ Donatus and his followers took a very stringent approach to the issues. "In particular," Ehrman writes, "Donatus argued that the bishop of Carthage, Caecilian, had not received a valid ordination."³² According to the Donatists, any rite performed by "tainted" clergy, was invalid. For them, "rebaptism was the only solution."³³ On the other hand, their opponents "held that churches elsewhere only recognized one baptism and in any case the option of rebaptism for deceased Christians who had received last rites from compromised clergy."³⁴ Eventually, this became a full-fledged controversy. This is when Constantine got involved.

Ironically, it was the Donatists who first requested Constantine's intervention in this matter. This was "Constantine's first foray into ecclesiastical matters."³⁵ When the Donatists appealed to him, Constantine was reluctant to get involved, and turned the case over to the bishop of Rome, who handed a defeat to the Donatists.³⁶ Rejecting the verdict of Rome,

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 222.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 213–214.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

³⁵ Ehrman, *Triumph of Christianity*, 221.

³⁶ The case involved bishop Caecilian in North Africa. Drake narrates the incident briefly: "At least initially, personality conflict fed the flames. Caecilian had been a deacon at Carthage during the persecution, and in that capacity he had taken steps that his opponents interpreted as interfering with attempts by members of his congregation to bring food to other Christians imprisoned by the authorities. He had also offended a wealthy parishioner by forbidding her from fondling relics of her favorite martyr in the church. Many reasonable explanations can be given for Caecilian's actions, but all would miss the point. In the North African church, martyrs

the Donatists, again, appealed to Constantine. However, as Lenski notes, Constantine showed remarkable patience, “famously claiming, ‘They demand my judgement when I myself await the judgement of Christ.’”³⁷ Indeed, according to Lenski, there were a number of letters in which Constantine refused to allow the Catholic Church to be harsh towards the Donatists, arguing that they should leave revenge to God. Lenski, however, adds the caveat that “these statements of tolerance [on the part of Constantine], for all they display disgust and exasperation toward the Donatists, are based on the theological principles advocated by Lactantius that counseled the truly just ruler—that is, the Christian emperor—to remand the punishment of religious dissenters to divine judgment.”³⁸ This was the attitude adopted by Constantine even as the controversy dragged on.

With his patience finally waning, Constantine, for a time, “unleashed the coercive machinery of the state against a group that he now characterized as false teachers, agents of the devil, stubborn militants.”³⁹ He even angrily “sought to close off Donatists from the reward of martyrdom, as if he, as emperor, had the right to decide what was true and was false martyrdom.”⁴⁰ But this approach was neither consistent nor far-reaching. As Lenski observes, during this his first involvement in ecclesial matters, “Constantine was more commonly willing to tolerate the ongoing existence of pagans in the hope that God would do his part—spurred on by Constantine’s example—to bring all to right

had always been revered even more than elsewhere, and even one of these charges by itself was enough to ruin a cleric’s career. When Caecilian became bishop of Carthage, around 311, with a hasty consecration that prevented bishops from neighboring Numidia (modern Algeria), where Donatist sentiment was strongest, from exercising their traditional rights to participate, his enemies exploded. Instead of taking steps to diffuse the situation, Caecilian coolly informed the furious Numidians that they could exercise their rights by confirming his appointment after the fact” (Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 214).

³⁷ Lenski, *Constantine*, 80.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 81.

³⁹ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 221.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

worship.”⁴¹ That is, while some scholars have reached different conclusions concerning this first involvement in church matters, Drake is correct in observing that, in this case, “it remains significant that the face he chose was that of Christian love and endurance [amidst the pressure of the Catholic bishops], that the principle he chose was one compatible with the Edict of Milan.”⁴² Therefore, as noted earlier, the onus was on the church (both the Donatists and the Catholic Church) to rightly appropriate the spirit and terms of the Edict. How did they fare in this incident, one may ask?

Two key observations can be made in response to this question. First, as part of the church the Donatists’ initial appeal to Constantine on doctrinal matters was, at the very least, theologically problematic. This is because it opened the door for a theologically unqualified person to make key theological decisions, setting the precedence for future political leaders to be at the helms of theological decisions. To his credit, however, Constantine, it seems, “failed to attain to the *Pontifex Maximus* [high priest] role as had been the scenario with preceding significant emperors such as Augustus Caesar (27 BCE–14 CE),”⁴³ a title that continued until it was dropped by Gratian, who

⁴¹ Lenski, *Constantine*, 81.

⁴² Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 221.

⁴³ Rugare Rukuni and Erna Oliver, “Nicaea as Political Prthodoxy: Imperial Christianity Versus Episcopal Polities,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 2. It has to be noted that scholarship is divided on this question (whether or not Constantine saw himself as *Maximus Pontfex* of the church. Most of the information concerning Constantine viewing himself in this capacity, comes from such early Constantinian apologists as Eusebius. As Alan Cameron observes, “From as early as Constantine, many a Christian emperor tried to impose his will on the church. Constantine once jokingly referred to himself as ‘bishop of those outside the church,’ and Eusebius ... adds that the emperor did indeed ‘exercise a bishop’s supervision (ἐπισκόπει) over his subjects.’ In another passage he compared Constantine to a ‘universal bishop appointed by God.’ It is also worthy observing that, when quoting in his own Greek translation, the edict of Galerius and Constantine ending persecution of Christians, Eusebius gives the full titlature of both emperors (running fifteen lines) rendering *pontifex maximus* as ἀρχιερεύς

was emperor from AD 375 to AD 383. This seems consistent with the observations that have already been made concerning his seeming hesitancy to get involved in ecclesial matters. But once the Donatists appealed to him and he got involved, a problematic precedence was set whereby non-theological politicians would be making far-reaching theological decisions such as to determine orthodoxy and heresy.

This leads to the second observation, which pertains to the handling of the matter by the Catholic Church. During their second attempt to resolve it, as a result of Constantine's order that the Catholic bishops convene the Council of Arles in AD 314 to resolve the matter, they were willing to accept a lot more favors from the state from that point onwards. Drake summarizes concerning the provisions for this meeting at Arles:

The council that opened in Arles on August 1, 314, was a major departure [from previous councils]. Not only did Constantine take the initiative in summoning the council himself, but he also gave the bishops to the public post—a highly prized perquisite because of the relative comfort and efficiency of this service compared with the normal means of travel; it signaled the elevated status of Christian leaders in the new regime, as well as the benefits that could flow from imperial favor.⁴⁴

Indeed, when the Council convened at Arles on August 1, 314, it did so “with Constantine sitting as a layman in the

μέγιστος without comment. In this, as in many others, Constantine cast a long shadow” (Alan Cameron, “The Imperial Pontifex,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 103 [2007]: 360). Cameron sees this tradition of ascribing the *pontifex maximus* title to the emperor in the writings of Ambrosiaster (ibid., 361). However, others like Pope Galesius (492–496), argued that “only pagan emperors, inspired by the Devil, had taken the title *pontifex maximus*” (ibid., 362). For a helpful discussion on the meaning of the phrase “those outside the church” (τῶν ἔκτος), see William Seston, “Constantine as a ‘Bishop.’” *The Journal of Roman Studies* 37 (1947): 127–31.

⁴⁴ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 219.

audience.”⁴⁵ Again, while there is nothing wrong with accepting such favors from the emperor, the incident opened the path for more state favors, which, eventually, led to bishops becoming “central power brokers in the late antiquity city.”⁴⁶ As Lenski further notes, “At the same time that Constantine was redirecting landed and movable property from cities and temples to Christian churches and building Christian architecture into the urban infrastructure of cities, he was also working to transfer power from traditional *civic magistrates* to the officers of the church.”⁴⁷ Again, this would prove detrimental to the church down the road.

A final comment needs to be made particularly concerning the granting of the power to render civil judgment to the bishops by Constantine. Specifically, Constantine did this through these two laws: *Theodosian Code* 1.27.1 of June 23, 318, and the *Sirmondian Constitution* 1 of May 5, 333. The first law states that “the decisions of the bishops should be considered “as sacred” (*pro sanctis*).”⁴⁸ This meant that, “like the decisions of the emperor and those entitled to issue judgments in his stead (*vice sacra*)—the bishop’s decision was not subject to appeal.”⁴⁹ This is an extremely high standard, given that although “some bishops had a background in Roman law, most did not, leaving them ill equipped to adjudicate imperial law on the bewildering variety of questions they now faced.”⁵⁰ Similarly, the second law, which pertained to the question of whether or not, the bishop’s decision can be appealed “if it had been issued in a case involving minors, whose appeals were normally governed by special rules.”⁵¹ Again, in line with the first law, “Constantine’s answer affirms the inviolability of the bishop’s decision, which—once again—is to be considered ‘as sacred’ (*pro sanctis*) even in this instance.”⁵² In so doing, therefore, the privileges and favors

⁴⁵ David Potter, *Constantine the Emperor* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2013), 200.

⁴⁶ Lenski, *Constantine*, 21.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

provided by Constantine to the bishops in the Council of Arles in AD 314, provided the gateway for many other favors and privileges to the bishops and the church at large.

In summary, therefore, as a consequence of the appropriation of the Edict of Milan to Christianity, both the Donatists' and the Catholics' allowance of Constantine to be involved in the Donatist controversy opened the door for the emperor and his successors to be involved in theological questions of the church, most of which they were unqualified to deal with. And, of course, as demonstrated above, this involvement and granting of favors and privileges to the church, did not stop there. Looking back, one sees how the church would have (but didn't) choose to refrain herself in the involvement of political power and limited Constantine's involvement to that of an emperor who happens to be a Christian. As Lenski further notes, "The first Christian emperor thus set a bold new course that, although it had to be corrected significantly, made a lasting impact on the bishop's rise to dominance."⁵³ The same approach is seen in the second major theological issue that Constantine was involved in during those years immediately following the enactment of the Edict of Milan, viz, the Arian controversy, which is treated here briefly.

⁵³ Ibid., 200. Concerning the other favors to the church by Constantine, Lenski lists Constantine's privileges and favors to the church as he assesses them: "grant to bishops of the right to adjudicate civil cases with full reliance on imperial authorities for the enforcement of their decisions (*episcopale iudicium*); his institution of a new manumission process whereby Christian clergy could offer full and formal freedom to slaves in their places of worship; his opening of the use of the public posting system (*cursus publicus*) to Christian clergy; and his grant of curial immunity to Christian clerics," adding that "each of these new privileges represented a significant departure from earlier precedent, and they quickly began to be overused and abused by individuals eager to seize on these new opportunities for personal gain" (ibid., 197). And, while some of these privileges were repealed by later emperors like Julian, "with this redistribution of power at the local level from civic aristocrats and members of the old curial elite to a new class of civic grandee, the bishop, Constantine was initiating a trend that would eventually result in the radical transformation of power structures at the local level in all ancient cities" (ibid).

The Arian Controversy

About a decade after the Council of Arles, the church was faced with another theological issue: the Arian controversy. Indeed, the Arian controversy was about an issue that is theologically far more central than the Donatist one: the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son especially after Jesus' incarnation. The controversy revolved around the North African presbyter, Arius, who, although some have dismissed as picayune,⁵⁴ was one of the most significant theological controversies to engulf the early church.

In a nutshell, Arius argued before his bishop, Alexander, that the Son is secondary to the Father because "there cannot be two beings who are both almighty, since then neither of them is 'all' mighty."⁵⁵ As Drake explains, of course this teaching goes against the central teaching of Christianity that "Jesus Christ is fully god and fully human [otherwise] in no other way could he have performed the redemptive act that brought the 'good news' of eternal life and freedom from death."⁵⁶ Even at a more practical level, this belief "was also the most effective way to distinguish Jesus from the galaxy of dying and resurrected gods who populated ancient mythology, as well as from the sons of philandering gods in the heroic pantheon."⁵⁷ How and in what

⁵⁴ Ehrman, *Triumph of Christianity*, 224. Kelley summarizes the views of Arius this way: Arius taught that, *first*, the son must be a creature, a κτίσμα, or ποίημα, whom the Father has made by fiat in order to use as an agent of creation. *Second*, as a creature of God, the Son must have had a beginning, for there was a time when he was not. Arius is known to have composed into songs the phrase "ἦν πότε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν 'there was a time he was not.'" *Third*, the son has no communion with the Father, he argued. That is, the son is alien and dissimilar to the Father in terms of his essence because he is a creature. *Fourth*, the son is liable to change and even sin, just as the Devil was. For Arius, therefore, although the son was transcended above all the other creatures, he was, nevertheless, a creature, a demigod, so to speak (John Norman Davidson Kelley, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. [New York: HarperCollins, 1978], 227–230).

⁵⁵ Ehrman, *Triumph of Christianity*, 225.

⁵⁶ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 238.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

way did Constantine get involved? How did his involvement relate to the Edict of Milan?

Drake notes that this controversy, which had been brewing since at least 318 CE, could not have peaked at a worse time for Constantine. This is because, at this time, Constantine had “suffered—and inflicted—severe personal tragedy.”⁵⁸ For some unknown reasons, Constantine ordered the execution of his eldest son, Crispus, as well as his wife, Fausta, who “fell victim to the emperor’s wrath in a particularly grisly way, locked into a steam room and poached to death.”⁵⁹ Whether or not these tragedies had

⁵⁸ Ibid., 237.

⁵⁹ Ibid. Information about these tragic executions is missing in the main Constantinian biographers (panegyrist), Eusebius and Lactantius. However, in Zosimus’ *Historia nova*, the executions are reported in an unflattering (exaggerated?) manner. He writes in II. 29, for example: “When all the power was in Constantine’s hands alone, he no longer concealed his natural wickedness, but took the liberty of acting exactly as he pleased in every respect; he still celebrated the ancestral rites, not through respect, but out of advantage; it is why he also obeyed soothsayers, his experience of whom being that they had foretold the truth about all his successes; when he arrived in Rome full of conceit, he thought it necessary to instil [*sic*] his impiety into his own household. In fact his son Crispus, who, as I have already said, had been considered worthy of the rank of Caesar, and had been suspected of a liaison with his mother, Fausta, he put to death without any regard for the laws of nature. Since Helena, Constantine’s mother, was indignant at such violence and could not accept the young man’s murder, Constantine, as if to console her, brought her a cure for this evil which was worse than the evil itself; having ordered an extremely hot bath to be heated, he placed Fausta in it, only taking her out when she was dead. As he had these crimes on his conscience, and, moreover, had paid no attention to his promises, he went to find the priests and asked them for expiatory sacrifices for his misdeeds; the latter had replied that no method of expiation existed which was effective enough to cleanse such impieties, when an Egyptian, having arrived in Rome from Spain and made the acquaintance of the palace women, met Constantine and stated strongly that the Christian belief destroyed all sins and included the promise that unbelievers who were converted would immediately be purged of all crimes” (as quoted in Lieu, “Introduction,” 16–17). In a recent article, David Woods, after surveying different ancient medical practices, concludes that Fausta’s death was a result of her personal attempt to abort as she had become pregnant as a result of an incestuous

anything to do with Constantine's full-throttle involvement with the Arian controversy remains debated within scholarly circles. In this case, however, it seems Drake is correct in observing that because of amount of support each side of the issue enjoyed, Constantine "had little choice; indeed, he can be said to have acted in spite of, not because of, these misfortunes."⁶⁰ After the warring theological sides were unable to reach a settlement, Constantine felt compelled to intervene as the controversy was causing much disturbance. And, after writing letters to both Arius and Alexander, who both failed to resolve the matter, "Constantine decided to intervene in a major way by calling for the first worldwide, ecumenical, council of bishops to meet and resolve this issue."⁶¹ This is the Council of Nicea of AD 325, attended by 318 bishops, so named because it met in this Asia Minor city.

While space does not allow a full treatment of the Council, a few comments are in order. First, not only did Constantine attend, but he gave the opening address and participated in the debates. Because of his earlier involvement in determining matters of the church, Constantine may have been the one who called this meeting (this point is debated). As Drake elaborates, while the two controversies were theologically different, "politically, however, the two had one thing in common: they both presented Constantine with choices that, as much as his writings, can be used to reveal his own preferences and priorities."⁶² It seems that, in both cases, Constantine sided with "Christians who would be inclusive, who were 'team players,' who worked for consensus."⁶³ In the case of this council, he did this through his

relationship with her son, Crispus. "It is my argument," he writes, "therefore, that Fausta was pregnant by Crispus, and died in her bath when an attempt to induce abortion went fatally wrong" (David Woods, "On the Death of the Empress Fausta," *Greece & Rome* 45, no. 1 [1998]: 77). It is noteworthy that there is no record of the church ever taking any disciplinary actions towards Constantine for these developments in his personal life.

⁶⁰ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 237.

⁶¹ Ehrman, *Triumph of Christianity*, 226.

⁶² Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 250.

⁶³ Ibid.

letter to Arius and Alexander, which he had entrusted to bishop Ossius of Corduba.

Second, and most significant, owing to the place the church had given Constantine in past theological matters, not only did he participate (there are elaborate details of his elegant entry into the meeting contained in the *Vita*), but, during his speech, rendered in Latin and translated into Greek, he, “with remarkable economy...managed both to identify with his audience and to slip his own agenda onto the table.”⁶⁴ Seston summarizes Constantine’s approach to this and other religious councils: “Disturbances having occurred in various countries, he acted like a universal bishop appointed by God (οἷα τις κοινὸς ἐπίσκοπος ἐκ Θεοῦ καθεσταμένος), and he summoned councils of the ministers of God.”⁶⁵ Specifically, in Nicea, “He sat in the middle of them, as one among many; without armed men or soldiers, without guards of any kind, he wore the fear of God as a garment, and the most devoted of his faithful colleagues were a rampart about him.”⁶⁶ Thus, it is clear that Constantine, in these meetings, considered himself as a “bishop,” equal with the other bishops in terms of theological knowledge and ability to deliberate on these matters.

Finally, thanks to the church’s uninhibited involvement of Constantine in the theological matters of the church, the bishops went even further and held that Constantine was not just a bishop, but the “first among other” bishops. Again, Seston notes that “Constantine at Nicea is not placed over the Church by right divine, as it were—he is, and possibly through God’s will, *primus inter pares*.”⁶⁷ Therefore, this understanding of Constantine not just as a bishop but the “first among equals” (and combined with his view of himself as the bishop of those outside the church), “the ‘universal bishop’, the peer in dignity of the bishops sitting together in councils, Constantine seems to know only one type of action—the use of force in the service of the Church.”⁶⁸ It is on

⁶⁴ Ibid., 253.

⁶⁵ Seston, “Constantine as a ‘Bishop,’” 128.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 129.

this capacity that, when two bishops finally refused to sign the creed which held that the Father and the Son are of the same substance (*homoousios*), were, by *imperial decree*, “sent into exile, along with Arius (who, as a presbyter, did not participate in his own condemnation) and a miscellaneous group of priests and students loyal to his cause.”⁶⁹ Thus, Constantine’s involvement in Nicea was way beyond that of any normal bishop—he was willing to enact and execute an imperial decree against Arius and his supporters.

Although the bishops had every reason to rejoice at Constantine’s intervention in this theological matter, a problematic precedence was being set: the involvement of imperial authority in the determination of orthodoxy and, consequently, the punishment of heresy (in this case, by banishment). Although space does not allow full exploration of the ensuing details, sadly, the bishops learned almost immediately that the matter was far from over. In a very summarized manner, within a very short time after the enactment of the Nicene Creed, more bishops showed their sympathy with Arius—and—were also exiled. But they knew what to do—having learned their lesson from the orthodox ones—that is, to draw Constantine, again, into the matter. The climax came in AD 327 when Arius himself wrote to Constantine, signaling that he could sign the creed! Of course, this was a manipulative attempt by Arius, which worked beyond his wildest expectations.⁷⁰ As

⁶⁹ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 257.

⁷⁰ This letter, written by Arius and Euzoïus, is contained in Socrates’ *Ecclesiastical History* 1.26, reads in part: “This faith we have received from the holy gospels, the Lord therein saying to his disciples: ‘Go and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.’ If we do not so believe and truly receive the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as the whole Catholic Church and the holy Scriptures teach (in which we believe in every respect), God is our judge both now, and in the coming judgment. Wherefore we beseech your piety, most devout emperor, that we who are persons consecrated to the ministry, and holding the faith and sentiments of the church and of the holy Scriptures, may by your pacific and devoted piety be reunited to our mother, the Church, all superfluous questions and disputings [*sic*] being avoided: that so both we and the whole church being at peace, may in

Drake writes, “Arius had done his homework. In reminding Constantine of God’s ability to punish wrongs done himself, his confession picked up a refrain from a long tradition of pagan and Christian toleration which Constantine had himself learned to us.”⁷¹ And, as expected, Constantine was beside himself as he wrote particularly to Arius’ nemesis, bishop Alexander of Alexandria. However, throughout the rest of his life, Constantine vacillated between supporting the anti-Arian side and the Arian side, bequeathing his successors with a major problem. According to Ehrman, “Emperors after Constantine—including his own offspring—adopted the Arian view and exercised their authority to cement its stature in the church, even though ... it eventually lost.”⁷² In other words, by allowing the state (Constantine) to put its imprint on a theological position and defend it by exiling the position’s opponents, the bishops were establishing a precedent which would prove detrimental especially when the shoe moved to the other foot. This is essentially the point being argued here.

Conclusion

This author has argued that the church’s earliest reception of the Edict of Milan proved the edict to be both a blessing and a curse for posterity. While one must be careful not to reach the historically unsupported conclusion that Constantine prescribed early Catholicism (and some have reached that conclusion), still, from the earliest invitation and involvement of Constantine in participating in key theological and ecclesial discussions, and, both determining orthodox and heretical positions, would prove problematic in the ensuing years and centuries. Thus, while the Edict of Milan resulted in exponential growth of the church, thanks to the withdrawal of the anti-Christian edicts of Emperor Diocletian, it also, in exchange, enticed the church to involve

common offer our accustomed prayers for your tranquil reign, and on behalf of your whole family” (Soc. *HE* 1.26). For this, I am using Scholasticus Socrates, Andrew C. Zenos, and Chester D. Hartranft, *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

⁷¹ Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops*, 260.

⁷² Ehrman, *Triumph of Christianity*, 227.

non-theological political leaders in the theological matters of the church. And, as a result, it paved the way for the immense political power and wealth of the church in subsequent centuries (sometimes—like in the case of the forged document known as “the Donation of Constantine,”⁷³ this power would be a result of trickeries).

Therefore, as believers (and particularly as dispensationalists who hold onto a future millennial kingdom), we should be cautious about non-theological political leaders in the ecclesial and theological matters of the church. As it has been demonstrated, the onus is always on the side of the church as God can (and does) use any political leader for his own purposes. It is for the church to determine the nature and level of involvement and participation in these matters.

⁷³ This is a forged document that purported to have originated from Constantine, and allegedly bestowed the rule of all western Roman provinces to the bishop of Rome. For a recent study of this document, see Johannes Fried and Wolfram Brandes, *“Donation of Constantine” and “Constitutum Constantini”: The Misinterpretation of a Fiction and Its Original Meaning. With a Contribution by Wolfram Brandes: “The Satraps of Constantine,”* Millennium Studies 3 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007). Although it is in many forms, it basically reads like this: “King Constantine he gave so much As I wish to relate to you, To the See of Rome: spear, cross and crown. Outright the angel loudly cried ‘Woe, woe, thrice woe!’ Once Christendom stood in fair decorum: Into which a poisoned gift has fallen, Its honey has turned to gall. To the world this will yet cause much harm.”

Dispensationalism's Evolving Theory of Political Action: How *Roe v. Wade* and Jerry Falwell Brought Dispensationalism from Rejecting Political Action to Embracing It

Bruce A. Baker

Key Words: Jerry Falwell, Roe vs. Wade, Moral Majority, political ethics, kingdom ethics

Since the 1960s, when Carl McIntire² railed against theological and political liberalism,³ few well-known

Bruce A. Baker, Ph.D., is the former pastor of Washington County Bible Church in Brenham, Texas. He is the author of *For Thou Art with Me: Biblical Help for the Terminally Ill and Those Who Love Them*.

² Carl McIntire (1906-2002) was a “firebrand fundamentalist preacher whose radio show, *20th Century Reformation Hour*, was broadcast daily on more than 600 radio stations during the 1960s. The son of missionaries, McIntire helped found the Bible Presbyterian Church in 1937. Under his leadership the church grew into a multimillion-dollar ministry that owned radio stations and operated a publishing division. McIntire’s radio show gradually lost its audience; however, after the Federal Communications Commission ruled in 1971 that a station run by the church violated a ‘fairness doctrine’ by failing to provide free time for opposing viewpoints to be presented. The show went off the air in 1973” (Karen Sparks, “Carl Curtis McIntire: American Evangelist,” *Brittanica.com*, accessed August 5, 2020).

³ “No other figure in 20th-century fundamentalism so defined himself by identifying his enemies. His worldview, like that of other fundamentalists and not a few evangelicals, was unrelievedly dualistic—good versus evil, conservative versus liberal—making it impossible to countenance ambiguity, theological or otherwise, or to discern shades of gray” (Randal Balmer, “Fundamentalist With Flair,” *ChristianityToday.com*, May 21, 2002,

American evangelicals have been as overtly political as Jerry Falwell Jr. As president of Liberty University, Jerry Falwell Jr. has been an unabashed supporter of President Trump, praising Mr. Trump's conservative credentials at the Republican National Convention in 2016. In 2018 Liberty sent 300 students to Washington to support the nomination of Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh in order to "counter what the Yale students are doing."⁴ In 2017 President Trump delivered the commencement address at Liberty.⁵ In 2019 it was Vice President Pence,⁶ and this year it was Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.⁷

In an interview with the *Washington Post*, Rev. Falwell added a religious imperative to his political endorsement of President Trump by stating that "it may be immoral for [Christian conservatives] not to support him."⁸ In justification of this statement, Falwell cited economic advances in the African-American and Hispanic communities.⁹ When asked whether or

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/may21/7.52.html>. Just months before his death, when asked to identify his enemies, McIntire shot back, "'The liberals,' ... Then he sounded a note of defiance: 'But they can't stop me!'" (ibid.).

⁴ "Liberty to Send 300 Students to DC to Support Kavanaugh," *apnews.com*, September 27, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/90d054575b8341059b36a8311f70b05d>.

⁵ "President Donald J. Trump to deliver Commencement Keynote Address," *liberty.edu*, March 22, 2017, <https://www.liberty.edu/news/2017/03/21/president-donald-j-trump-to-deliver-commencement-keynote-address/>.

⁶ "Vice President Pence to Give Commencement Address at Liberty," *apnews.com*, March 2, 2019, <https://apnews.com/article/b94a10cc312b45d4804ab256554373d9>.

⁷ "Secretary of State to Address Liberty University Graduates," *apnews.com*, January 27, 2020, <https://apnews.com/article/0945268510182947886edc6b48216344>.

⁸ Joe Heim, "Jerry Falwell Jr. Can't Imagine Trump 'Doing Anything That's not Good for the Country,'" *WashingtonPost.com*, January 1, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/jerry-falwell-jr-cant-imagine-trump-doing-anything-thats-not-good-for-the-country/2018/12/21/6affc4c4-f19e-11e8-80d0-f7e1948d55f4_story.html.

⁹ "It may be immoral for them not to support him, because he's got African American employment to record highs, Hispanic employment to

not it was hypocritical for evangelical leaders to support someone “who has committed adultery and lies often,” Falwell responded with an argument that sounds similar, at least superficially, to Augustine’s understanding of the heavenly city and the earthly city.¹⁰

record highs. They need to look at what the president did for the poor” (ibid.).

¹⁰ Even though Falwell’s two cities sound similar to Augustine, in reality there is almost no overlap between Augustine and Falwell. Falwell sees his two kingdoms as having different realms of authority. Augustine defines his two cities as different citizenry and affections: “Accordingly, two cities have been formed by two loves: the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God, the witness of conscience” (Augustine of Hippo, “The City of God,” in *St. Augustine’s City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dods, vol. 2, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887], 14.28.1). Concerning the inhabitants of these two cities, unlike Falwell in his kingdoms, Augustine includes the angels: “And certainly this is the great difference which distinguishes the two cities of which we speak, the one being the society of the godly men, the other of the ungodly, each associated with the angels that adhere to their party, and the one guided and fashioned by love of self, the other by love of God” (ibid., 14.13.1). Augustine argues that the main motivation of the earthly city is peace, even if the attainment of that peace means the suppression of other peoples through war. Since a well-ordered society of peace is beneficial to those inhabitants of the city of God, the inhabitants of this latter city should “make no scruple” about how this is achieved. Put another way, the Christian should not be concerned about politics as long as the true worship of God is not affected. “The earthly city, which does not live by faith, seeks an earthly peace, and the end it proposes, in the well-ordered concord of civic obedience and rule, is the combination of men’s wills to attain the things which are helpful to this life. The heavenly city, or rather the part of it which sojourns on earth and lives by faith, makes use of this peace only because it must, until this mortal condition which necessitates it shall pass away. Consequently, so long as it lives like a captive and a stranger in the earthly city, though it has already received the promise of redemption, and the gift of the Spirit as the earnest of it, it makes no scruple to obey the laws of the earthly city, whereby the things necessary for the maintenance of this mortal

There's two kingdoms. There's the earthly kingdom and the heavenly kingdom. In the heavenly kingdom the responsibility is to treat others as you'd like to be treated. In the earthly kingdom, the responsibility is to choose leaders who will do what's best for your country. Think about it. Why have Americans been able to do more to help people in need around the world than any other country in history? It's because of free enterprise, freedom, ingenuity, entrepreneurism and wealth. A poor person never gave anyone a job. A poor person never gave anybody charity, not of any real volume. It's just common sense to me.¹¹

Likewise, when queried about his statement that "Christians should stop electing nice guys," Falwell responded with the same argument:

It's such a distortion of the teachings of Jesus to say that what he taught us to do personally—to love our neighbors as ourselves, help the poor—can somehow be imputed on a nation. Jesus never told Caesar how to run Rome.¹² He went out of his way to say that's the earthly kingdom, I'm about the heavenly kingdom and I'm here to teach you how to treat others, how to help others, but when it comes to serving your country, you render unto Caesar that which

life are administered; and thus, as this life is common to both cities, so there is a harmony between them in regard to what belongs to it ... This heavenly city, then, while it sojourns on earth, calls citizens out of all nations, and gathers together a society of pilgrims of all languages, not scrupling about diversities in the manners, laws, and institutions whereby earthly peace is secured and maintained, but recognizing that, however various these are, they all tend to one and the same end of earthly peace. It therefore is so far from rescinding and abolishing these diversities, that it even preserves and adopts them, so long only as no hindrance to the worship of the one supreme and true God is thus introduced. Even the heavenly city, therefore, while in its state of pilgrimage, avails itself of the peace of earth, and, so far as it can without injuring faith and godliness, desires and maintains a common agreement among men regarding the acquisition of the necessities of life, and makes this earthly peace bear upon the peace of heaven" (ibid., 19.17.1).

¹¹ Quoted in Heim, "Jerry Falwell Jr."

¹² This is an interesting comment for it appears that Falwell is arguing for the opposite, that is, exercising political power to force Caesar to run Rome in a particular way.

is Caesar's. It's a distortion of the teaching of Christ to say Jesus taught love and forgiveness and therefore the United States as a nation should be loving and forgiving, and just hand over everything we have to every other part of the world. That's not what Jesus taught. You almost have to believe that this is a theocracy to think that way, to think that public policy should be dictated by the teachings of Jesus.¹³

While it is not immediately obvious where Jerry Falwell Jr. learned his Augustinian dichotomy of two kingdoms,¹⁴ it is immediately evident where he acquired his understanding of political responsibility. He received it from his father, Jerry Falwell Sr.

Prior to 1973, there was nearly universal agreement among dispensationalists that political action was either outright forbidden or a choice left up to the individual believer. By all accounts, the believer's responsibility to the political system, if such a responsibility existed at all, was a (far) distant second to the believer's responsibility towards personal and global evangelism.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the sea-change in dispensational thought brought about by Jerry Falwell Sr. Both the actions and motivations of Jerry Falwell Sr.¹⁵ will be examined to determine if these modifications to dispensationalism are indeed a good thing.

Summary of Traditional Dispensationalism's Political Ethic Prior to 1973

While there are differences between dispensationalists from Darby to Ryrie, such as the extent of allowable political involvement for example, the areas of agreement far outweigh any divergence of opinion. This continuity of outlook allows one to draw a general description of the traditional dispensational (TD) political ethic.

¹³ Quoted in Heim, "Jerry Falwell Jr."

¹⁴ Although it seems likely he learned it from his father, see n. 23.

¹⁵ Hereafter simply Jerry Falwell. Jerry Falwell Jr. is not discussed beyond this point.

First, all agree that the Christian is not called upon to change the world or bring in “kingdom ethics.”¹⁶ There is a strong recognition of the futility of such effort. Lost people cannot be made better.¹⁷ This is an impossibility. Only when someone is born again is real moral change possible. What is true for the individual is also true for society.

This is not to say that TD does not believe in societal transformation. It is clear that society needs to be transformed and indeed will be transformed. The question is when does that transformation take place, and who does the transforming. It is only when Christ establishes his kingdom at the second coming that civilization will be made right.

Another major emphasis in TD is the sovereignty of God. No rebellion is authorized against any established authority, because every authority is established by God. Part of the sovereignty of God is displayed in the world's inexorable march toward apostasy and total corruption. As this wickedness is incorporated into God's plan for the future, it becomes impossible to know exactly what God is doing at any given moment on the global

¹⁶ The authors examined in order to draw these conclusions were J. N. Darby, H. A. Ironside, L. S. Chafer, Alva McClain, John Walvoord, and Charles Ryrie. For a more complete discussion, see Bruce A. Baker, “Closing a ‘Theological Loophole’: A Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism's View of Social and Political Action” (PhD diss., Baptist Bible Seminary, 2016). It should be noted that the majority of this paper is taken from this work.

¹⁷ This statement is true in the ultimate sense in that man cannot be made right with God or do works pleasing to God without the renewing work of God the Holy Spirit. That being said it is also true, as Augustine puts it, that men may be made “less base.” Referring to the early Romans, Augustine observes, “Glory they most ardently loved: for it they wished to live, for it they did not hesitate to die. Every other desire was repressed by the strength of their passion for that one thing.... That eagerness for praise and desire of glory, then, was that which accomplished those many wonderful things, laudable, doubtless, and glorious according to human judgment” (Augustine, “City of God,” 5.12.1). “Nevertheless, they who restrain baser lusts, not by the power of the Holy Spirit obtained by the faith of piety, or by the love of intelligible beauty, but by desire of human praise, or, at all events, restrain them better by the love of such praise, are not indeed yet holy, but only less base” (ibid., 5.13.1).

stage. As a result, TD advises a “hands off” approach to the evils of this world. While some would label this “pessimism” or “social disengagement,” TD would counter that this is biblical realism.

This being said, the believer is called to do good to all people. Therefore, if some act of love may ease the suffering of an individual or provide some benefit—particularly if this benefit aids evangelistic efforts—then one should be about it. But such good works are directed at individuals, not society as a whole.

What then is the church to be about? *The task of the church is evangelism*. While there is strong opposition to efforts intended to make the world better for its own sake, there is also general agreement that it is the preaching of the gospel that has the largest beneficial effects on this world. In fact, the favorable effects of the gospel are so great, one must be on guard against the temptation to make them an end in themselves.

So, at the end of the day what does TD teach? It teaches that evangelism is *the primary task* of the believer. All ethical considerations should be made with a view toward their effects on evangelism. Good works should be done to all, but particularly to those in the church. Good works outside the body should have a focus on the individual, not society as a whole, and again, with evangelism always in mind. Any attempt at societal reformation is futile, and a distraction from the real mission of the church. Only when Christ returns will society be put right. As Scofield pleads,

Dear friends, let us leave the government of the world till the King comes; let us leave the civilizing of the world to be the incidental effect of the presence there of the gospel of Christ, and let us give our time, our strength, our money, our days to the mission distinctively committed to the church, namely: to make Christ known “to every creature.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Scofield, *Prophecy Made Plain* (Glasgow: Pickering & Inglis, n.d.), 41.

Jerry Falwell Sr.

Without question, Jerry Falwell subscribed to TD, being both premillennial and pretribulational.¹⁹ Falwell's commitment to TD may be seen, at least in part, in his early understanding of social and political action. In practice and in ideology, Falwell maintained fidelity with the general TD social and political ethic described above.

Nowhere are we commissioned to reform the externals. We are not told to wage wars against bootleggers, liquor stores, gamblers, murderers, prostitutes, racketeers, prejudiced persons or institutions, or any other existing evil as such. Our ministry is not reformation but transformation. The gospel does not clean up the outside but rather regenerates the inside. ...

We pay our taxes, cast our votes as a responsibility of citizenship, obey the laws of the land, and other things demanded of us by the society in which we live. But, at the same time, we are cognizant that our only purpose on this earth is to know Christ and to make Him known. Believing the Bible as I do, I find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and begin doing anything else—including fighting communism, or participating in civil rights reforms. As a God-called preacher, I find there is no time left after I give the proper time and attention to winning people to Christ. Preachers are not called to be politicians but to be soul winners. ...²⁰

¹⁹ Jerry Falwell, *Falwell: An Autobiography* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty House, 1997), 374.

²⁰ Jerry Falwell, "Ministers and Marches: 1965," in *Jerry Falwell and the Rise of the Religious Right: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Matthew Avery Sutton, The Bedford Series in History and Culture (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2013), 58–59. Falwell also believed that evangelism is the only cure to the social ills against which people were marching: "If the many thousands of churches and pastors of America were suddenly to begin preaching the old-fashioned gospel of Jesus Christ and the power that is in His atoning blood, a revival would grip our land such as we have never known before. If as much effort could be put into winning people to Jesus Christ across the land as is being exerted in the present civil rights movement, America will be turned upside down for God. Hate and prejudice

***Roe v. Wade* and Political Action**

This conviction against political action changed with the landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision of 1973. Horrified at the sinfulness of abortion and its threat to the traditional family,²¹ Falwell began “to teach and preach against it,” shocking his congregation in the process.²²

would certainly be a great measure overcome. Churches would be filled with sincere souls seeking God. Good relations between the races would soon be evidenced. God is Love, and when He is put first in the individual life and in the church, God’s people become messengers of love” (ibid., 59). “As Christians, we detest discrimination. But we do need to see that we can never stop it through any other means than that weapon which we given the church 2,000 years ago—the preaching of the gospel of Christ” (ibid., 60).

²¹ It is interesting to note that not all evangelicals were immediately opposed to abortion on demand. As Brown comments, “Unfortunately for those who consider abortion a moral evil, indeed, under most circumstances a crime, the evangelical community was very slow to react to *Roe*. Prominent Christian leaders such as W. A. Criswell greeted *Roe v. Wade* with favor, in some cases apparently by what seemed a reflex anti-Catholicism. Questioned on his stand by this writer, Dr. Criswell responded with the strange rhetorical question, ‘Who can say what and when is murder?’ This lack of clarity was of course fostered and promoted by the pro-abortionists, who always alleged that they did not favor abortion, but only freedom. This has culminated in the slogan, which became so effective after *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* (a mildly restrictive Supreme Court decision of 1989), of ‘freedom of choice.’

Evangelicals did not generally awaken to the problem until stimulated by the late Francis A. Schaeffer, whose film cycle, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (produced together with Dr. Koop), began to play nationwide in 1979. Earlier, Dr. Billy Graham had helped Dr. Koop and this writer launch the Christian Action Council (1975) and initially indicated his interest in supporting the anti-abortion cause. His wife Ruth became one of the Council’s sponsors, and Graham himself indicated a willingness to address the National Right to Life Committee. Soon, however, warned off, it would seem, by the late Harriet Pilpel, his attorney at the time, and a prominent strategist of the abortion movement, Graham dropped all support, and his wife withdrew as a sponsor” (Harold O. J. Brown, “A Method in Which Killing Represents a Solution: The Soul of the Unborn and the Soul of America,” *Trinity Journal* 14, no. 2 [Fall 1993]: 176–177).

²² Falwell, *Autobiography*, 365. “People were shocked and surprised by the change in emphasis they heard in my preaching. Until the 1970s, I had

At the heart of his decision to become politically active was his new understanding of Jesus' interaction with the Pharisees concerning paying taxes to Caesar (Matt 22:15–22; Mark 12:13–17; Luke 20:20–26).²³ Moving beyond a more limited TD understanding of submission to government,²⁴ Falwell, as a result of *Roe v. Wade*, now understood in the phrase “render to Caesar,” a responsibility to “play our part in maintaining the world of humankind.”²⁵

On the plus side, Falwell understands that the believer lives in two separate worlds, and has a responsibility to both.²⁶ Unfortunately, Falwell fails to recognize the evil nature of the world system, or at least fails to recognize it fully. He maintains that the world of men operates with different rules. As a result, to get things done, one must operate within the rules of the world of men:

Each world works differently. What we do in God's world and with His people has different rules from what we do in the world of government, with elected officials and volunteers. America is not

been a typical Baptist pastor who was opposed to Christians, especially the clergy, getting involved in political action. Suddenly I was calling for all-out political involvement by the Christian community. I had read and reread the stories and the sermons of the Old Testament prophets and their call to justice. I had re-studied the life and teachings of Jesus, with His love for the little children and His command to see that no harm should come to them. I read the letters of Paul, Peter, and John, the books of Acts and Revelation. I felt a growing commitment to take my stand prophetically against the influence of Satan in our nation and through our nation to the world” (ibid.).

²³ Ibid., 366.

²⁴ “In these words Jesus definitely answered their question by showing that the people of God are responsible to Him in things spiritual, but must be obedient to the powers that be in things civil and national” (H. A. Ironside, *Matthew* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005], 187).

²⁵ Falwell, *Autobiography*, 366.

²⁶ “There was a second important reminder for me in that story. When Jesus said, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s,’ He was not just telling us to be responsible in both worlds. He was also reminding us that we live in two worlds simultaneously and that we need to keep the worlds apart” (ibid., 367).

a theocracy, a government with God as its Commander-in-Chief. America is a democratic republic with a man (perhaps one day a woman) as its chief executive officer. In God's world, we decided by God rules. In a democratic republic, we work together, governed by the will of the majority. In God's world, we submit to Him. In man's world we submit to God and to the law of man.²⁷

It is difficult to imagine that Falwell is actually suggesting that there are two sets of rules for the believer and that one set or the other determines the behavior of the believer, depending on the circumstances. Yet it appears he comes perilously close.

Still, if the world of men is governed by the will of the majority (a doubtful proposition), then political action by believers is necessary if the moral decay of the nation is to be halted. To be clear, Falwell does not see political action as joining with the evil world system. Instead, he sees political action by believers as bringing God's will into the world of men.²⁸ It follows, therefore, that mere voting is not sufficient. Grassroots political action by the church and in the church is required:

I began to urge my fellow Christians to get involved in the political process. I encouraged them to study the issues, to support qualified candidates who stood for the renewal of morality and good sense in the land, or to run for office themselves. I pushed for Christians to use their churches to register voters. I dared Christians to go door-to-door getting out the vote, making the issues known, campaigning precinct-by-precinct for the candidates of their choice and using their cars and buses to get voters to the polls.²⁹

As this movement into political action progressed, Falwell expanded his vision: "In 1975 the nation's bicentennial celebration was only a year away when we begin to dream about influencing the moral and ethical course of the nation in an even

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "When we feel the law of man is unjust or contrary to the law of God, we work to change man's law" (ibid.).

²⁹ Ibid., 368.

larger way.”³⁰ Don Wyrzten’s musical *I Love America* was chosen as “the first offense we launched to mobilize Christians across America for political action. ...”³¹ Seventy students were trained for a “musical ministry,”³² and “were given college credits”³³ to perform this musical in 141 cities.³⁴ As one might imagine, this production did not come cheap. The students traveled on “ministry-owned” busses which were followed by “two tractor-trailer trucks carrying the stage equipment and costumes, sound systems, and lights.”³⁵ Falwell was flown back and forth to these rallies on “purchase or leased private planes,” so that he could maintain the various ministries of Thomas Road Baptist Church.³⁶

Unfortunately, there is much to criticize in this initial offensive. First, it is, at the very least, questionable whether or not spiritual duties incumbent on the church should be motivated by American patriotic nationalism. God has promised to bless his word (Isa 55:10–11), which should therefore be the primary motivator of his people. Additionally, songs with titles like “I’m Just a Flag Waving American,” “The Red, White and Blue,” and “Johnny Bull,” do not a biblical appeal make.³⁷ To make matters

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 369.

³⁴ Ibid., 368.

³⁵ Ibid., 369.

³⁶ Ibid., 369–70.

³⁷ The song list for this musical is as follows: (1) “I Love America,” (2) “I’m Just A Flag-Waiving American,” (3) “Johnny Bull,” (4) “Historical Interlude,” (5) “In God We Trust,” (6) “My Home, America,” (7) “America the Beautiful,” (8) “God of Our Fathers,” (9) “The Red, White and Blue,” (10) “My Home, America (Reprise),” (11) “Praise the Lord and Give Thanks, America,” (12) “It’s Time to Pray,” (13) “If My People,” (14) “Jesus Is Calling America,” and (15) “Battle Hymn Of The Republic.” See “John W. Peterson, Don Wyrzten - I Love America: A Patriotic Musical (Vinyl, Lp),” *Discogs.com*, accessed March 26, 2016, <https://www.discogs.com/John-W-Peterson-Don-Wyrzten-I-Love-America-A-Patriotic-Musical/release/4761980>.

worse, the one song that references scripture (“If My People”) cannot be applied to the United States when taken in context.³⁸

Second, there seems to have been a fair degree of emotional manipulation involved in this appeal. Falwell would fly into town “just in time to have dinner with the pastors and lay leaders of the city.”³⁹ He would speak during and after dinner about his conclusions concerning political action and urge the pastors “to join us in taking a stand against the forces of evil at work in their towns and around the country.”⁴⁰ Falwell describes what would happen next.

The pastors were then escorted to reserved seats in the front rows of the city auditorium, where I honored them and their families. Then the lights dimmed. The snare drums and tympanies rolled. The trumpets played a fanfare and seventy wonderful young people sang their hearts out to an inspired crowd who usually responded with an enthusiastic standing ovation. Then I concluded the evening with a Biblical challenge to the Christians gathered in those large auditoriums or coliseums to unite with their brothers and sisters in Christ to save the nation.⁴¹

One cannot help but contrast this emotional appeal with Chafer’s early ministry with nationally known evangelistic teams.

³⁸ The use of 2 Chronicles 7:14 in this musical is particularly unfortunate as this promise is given specifically to Israel, echoing the stipulations of the land covenant. There is no exegetical evidence that this particular promise may be applied to any other nation. This is not to say that the general sentiment expressed cannot be found other places, such as Jeremiah 18:5–10, where the nations generally are in view. This does not excuse, however, the misuse of the previous passage. Unfortunately, this employment of 2 Chronicles 7:14 became a mainstay in Falwell’s basic appeal: “And though my words sounded ominous, I always concluded each patriotic rally on the steps of each state capitol building with God’s promise: [2 Chron 7:14]” (Falwell, *Autobiography*, 383).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 369.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Chafer had ample opportunity to watch the “methods” of the high-powered evangelists of those days. J. Wilbur Chapman was applying his “machinery” to gospel preaching, organizing his meetings to the point of spotting trained personal workers in every fifth row to converge on the audience during the invitation. He stormed the big cities with 25 evangelists holding simultaneous meetings. For a while, Chafer was one of the 25.⁴²

Chafer strongly disapproved of the high-pressure techniques that were used in these meetings to induce a decision for Christ. In fact, he disapproved so much that he later condemned altar calls, labeling them “a false issue,” and “a denial of the doctrine of grace.”⁴³

The Moral Majority

Perhaps Falwell's most enduring legacy in this effort was the creation of the Moral Majority, a “political lobbying organization.”⁴⁴ The Moral Majority had a fourfold platform: “pro-life, pro-traditional family, pro-moral, and pro-American (that included favoring a strong national defense and support for the state of Israel).”⁴⁵ The purpose of this organization was to organize the millions of Americans ignored by the media who agreed with these issues.⁴⁶

Just as Falwell's newfound commitment to political action required a re-thinking of his understanding of the mission of the church, so the birth of the Moral Majority required a re-thinking of his concept of theological separation. Falwell admits that “since becoming a Christian I had lived a rather separatist life. I believed that ‘being yoked with unbelievers’ for any cause was

⁴² John D. Hannah, “The Early Years of Lewis Sperry Chafer,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 144, no. 573 (1987): 15.

⁴³ Chafer, *True Evangelism* (New York: Gospel Publishing House, 1911), 26.

⁴⁴ Falwell, *Autobiography*, 387. The Moral Majority was incorporated in June 1979 (*ibid.*).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 388.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 384.

off limits.”⁴⁷ “Any cause” included marriage, “business partnerships, and deep-rooted involvements and relationships.”⁴⁸

The Moral Majority was “never intended to be an evangelistic enterprise,” nor was it “a religious movement.”⁴⁹ Falwell’s goal was to organize “Baptists and Catholics, Mormons and Jews, believers and unbelievers” to bring about political change.⁵⁰ Still, it is difficult to imagine the Moral Majority as anything less than a business partnership or deep-rooted involvement with others not of like faith. It is at this point that Falwell had to face his “own personal psychological barrier.”⁵¹

Despite his theological convictions, Falwell admits, “I determined to find the way it could be done.”⁵² The theological rationale necessary for him to set aside his separatist convictions was provided by Reformed theologian and apologist Francis Schaeffer.⁵³ Specifically, it was Schaeffer’s co-belligerency argument Falwell found persuasive.⁵⁴

Schaeffer argues that a co-belligerent is different than an ally. Schaeffer is opposed to alliances with groups that have a non-Christian base. But co-belligerency is “temporary and focused at specific points.”⁵⁵ Therefore he encourages co-belligerency and “criticized evangelicals for leaving the battle

⁴⁷ Ibid., 385.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 385-86.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 389.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 386. It is troubling to see how a deep-seated theological conviction so quickly changed to a “personal psychological barrier.”

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Schaeffer was a Presbyterian following in the Dutch Calvinist tradition (Mark Edwards, “‘How Should We Then Think?’ A Study of Francis Schaeffer’s Lordship Principle,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 60, no. 2 [1998]: 192).

⁵⁴ Falwell, *Autobiography*, 386.

⁵⁵ Don Sweeting, “Changing American Evangelical Attitudes Towards Roman Catholics: 1960-2000,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 7, no. 4 (2001): 26.

for human life to the Catholics.”⁵⁶ Falwell adopted this argument to justify his retreat from his previous separatist stance.

The Effects of Politics on Falwell's Ministry

Interestingly, Falwell was under no delusions about the effect the Moral Majority had on his gospel ministry: it interrupted it. While attending President Reagan's second inauguration, Falwell reflected on the previous six years of political activity: “As the President spoke I reviewed one more time why I had interrupted my own primary task of evangelism and church growth to take

⁵⁶ Ibid. This view of co-belligerence now seems so thoroughly ingrained in evangelicalism that those who oppose it are considered “extreme”: “Given the cultural disaster we face, and what is at stake, it simply makes sense for men and women who share basic worldview concerns to gather strength from each other, join hands and hearts, and enter the cultural fray. On this point, all but the most extreme separatists among us would agree” (R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Standing Together, Standing Apart: Cultural Co-Belligerence without Theological Compromise,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 7, no. 4 [2001]: 8–9).

Nevertheless, the dangers of co-belligerency are very real. Carson's observation is worth careful consideration. “Most evangelicals are entirely happy with what Francis Schaeffer used to call ‘co-belligerency’ on select issues: e.g., abortion, the importance of persons, the social importance of the family, and much more. We will disagree on some social/moral issues (e.g., gambling). But recent evangelical/Roman Catholic pronouncements in this area have, ironically, done more to set back co-belligerency than to advance it. Instead of focusing on the agreed social issues, some evangelical and Roman Catholic theologians have agreed to use ambiguous language to project an image of *theological* agreement where both sides mean quite different things. Those who think that the theological issues are of minor importance in comparison with the social issues, and who feel that theological differences should be buried in order to confront the common foe of secular humanism, are delighted. In my view, they are, at best, naive. Candor, integrity, and even the moral issues are not advanced by uses of language that mask profound differences. Substantial numbers of evangelicals quite frankly feel confused and betrayed by these agreements. They point out that no generation ever defends the truth on only one front, and if the price paid for common statements on, say, abortion, is sacrifice of the evangelical understanding of the gospel, the price is too high” (D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011], 418–419).

up my responsibility as a citizen.”⁵⁷ Having promised “five years of [his] life to political leaders in 1979,” he had actually given eight, before returning to his first calling.⁵⁸

Politics, however, is not so easily given up. Falwell’s sermon “America Must Return to the Faith of our Fathers,”⁵⁹ delivered six years⁶⁰ after his “return to his first calling” and four years after the dissolution of the Moral Majority,⁶¹ is a case in point. Falwell’s five-point outline is as follows.

First, “there can be no restoration for America unless we know who we are.”⁶² Consisting mostly of quotations,⁶³ Falwell attempts to show that the United States is a Christian nation. Second, “those persons who reject America’s Christian heritage are accountable to God.”⁶⁴ In this section Falwell levels (much

⁵⁷ Falwell, *Autobiography*, 405.

⁵⁸ Ibid. “Two years later, in 1987, I stepped aside from the presidency of the Moral Majority and returned to my first calling at Thomas Road Baptist Church and Liberty University. I had promised five years of my life to political leaders in 1979, as they urged me to step forward and mobilize religious conservatives in America. I actually gave eight years of my life to this cause. While I shall always be a voice for the moral and social issues, I have never been confused about God’s call on my life” (ibid.).

⁵⁹ Jerry Falwell, “America Must Return to the Faith of Our Fathers,” (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 1993). This message is a follow up to a previous message entitled, “Our Children Must Be Told: America is a Christian Nation” (ibid., 2).

⁶⁰ This sermon was delivered “on February 28, 1993 at the Thomas Road Baptist Church, Lynchburg, Virginia, and aired nationally on the Old Time Gospel Hour Television Network March 21, 1993” (ibid.).

⁶¹ “On 10 June 1989, Falwell announced that ‘our mission is accomplished’ and dissolved the Moral Majority, effective 31 August 1989” (Itai Sneh, “Moral Majority,” *Dictionary of American History, Encyclopedia.com*, 2003, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/united-states-and-canada/us-history/moral-majority>).

⁶² Falwell, “America Must Return,” 3.

⁶³ Falwell quotes Woodrow Wilson, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Horace Greeley, Daniel Webster, Patrick Henry, Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, Harry S. Truman, and Noah Webster.

⁶⁴ Falwell, “America Must Return,” 6. It is particularly unfortunate that Falwell ignores Paul’s admonition in Romans 13:7 to give honor to whom

deserved) criticism against President Clinton's policies concerning abortion and homosexuality. Third, "all American citizens will be punished for the ungodly actions of our leaders."⁶⁵ Fourth, "we must believe that national reform is possible."⁶⁶ Falwell lists three action items to accomplish this: (1) "we must aggressively resist the agenda of radical minorities"; (2) "we must reclaim our public schools"; and (3) "we must quickly build the largest and finest Christian school system in history."⁶⁷

What is notably absent from this sermon thus far is any reference to the gospel as a basic need of the sinner, society, or even as a means of social reform. Falwell's fifth point promises to address this, but sadly, does not. His final point is "we must evangelize America beyond any past efforts."⁶⁸ This is by far the shortest section of the sermon. As this section is so brief, the majority of what was said will be quoted below.

As the Pastor for the past 37 years of the 22,000-member Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, I have freshly committed myself to evangelizing our own Central Virginia population. With more than 200 television stations now carrying the Old Time Gospel Hour worldwide, I am recommitted to giving the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world. As I have stated earlier, we must renew our vows to provide Christian education for

honor is owed. Speaking of the sitting president and first lady, Falwell says, "And now, this 42nd President and his Mother Superior, Hillary Rodham Clinton, are outdistancing the Supreme Court in their anti-Christian programs and endeavors" (ibid., 7). This is one of the dangers of democracy, according to Darby: "Even popular religious preaching" will not be afraid to "[despise] government, says the apostle, presumptuous, self-willed, not afraid to speak evil of dignities" (J. N. Darby, *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, ed. William Kelly, 34 vols. [Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.], 32:334).

⁶⁵ Falwell, "America Must Return," 9.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 11.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 12–13. A major rationale for promoting Christian schools is that it would require children to read the Constitution and The Federalist Papers. (ibid., 14).

⁶⁸ Ibid.

our young people. New Testament evangelization of the five billion souls on this planet must be a renewed first priority for every believer and every local church. This commitment to world evangelization and political involvement is not a new doctrine in America. Action must be taken immediately by all who have a burden for this generation of young people.⁶⁹

Evaluating this section of the sermon is, frankly, heart-rending. Falwell speaks of the thousands in his church and the number of television stations world-wide that carry his program. He renews a vow to provide Christian education to young people. In all of this there are only four lines (in the entire sermon) that address evangelism or the gospel.⁷⁰ Of those four, one of them ties evangelism to politics.

While it is impossible to say whether or not this sermon is typical of Falwell's post-Moral-Majority preaching without a thorough review of all his sermons during this time, the fact that even one sermon exists with so little gospel emphasis is telling.⁷¹ That the sermon originates from an Independent Baptist Church with a program called "The Old Time Gospel Hour" is even more striking. One would find it difficult to believe that this is the same pastor who so eloquently preached against political action in 1965,⁷² if the evidence were not there.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 15. Following the section above, the sermon immediately concludes with a quote about politics by Charles Finney.

⁷⁰ They are, (1) "I have freshly committed myself to evangelizing our own Central Virginia population"; (2) "I am recommitted to giving the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ to a lost world"; (3) "New Testament evangelization of the five billion souls on this planet must be a renewed first priority for every believer and every local church"; and (4) "This commitment to world evangelization and political involvement is not a new doctrine in America."

⁷¹ At this point it should be remembered that this sermon is a follow up to a previous sermon entitled, "Our Children Must Be Told: America is a Christian Nation."

⁷² "Believing the Bible as I do, I find it impossible to stop preaching the pure saving gospel of Jesus Christ, and begin doing anything else. . . . As a God-called preacher, I find there is no time left after I give the proper time and attention to winning people to Christ. Preachers are not called to be

Evaluation

That Jerry Falwell firmly adhered to TD early in his ministry is beyond question. As has been shown, his initial view of political action in and by the church is completely compatible with the general TD social and political ethic as outlined previously.

While not abandoning TD in its entirety, Falwell's political ethic deviated completely from this received tradition after *Roe v. Wade*. It appears the specter of abortion drove his new theological positions. It is highly doubtful that Falwell would have made the pivot to political action had it not been for this Supreme Court decision. Put another way, one suspects his new understanding of "render unto Caesar," and his new conviction regarding ecclesiological separation were driven by current events, not fresh exegetical insights.

Falwell recognizes that his political activities interrupted his gospel ministry. Yet even when his overt political activities were complete (i.e., after the Moral Majority), there is evidence that political concerns still interfered with this ministry. The sermon mentioned above is almost completely devoid of any gospel content.

There is little evidence that Falwell's political activity had any lasting effect. While in the short-run there seems to have been electoral consequences as a result of registering and getting new voters to the polls, the long-term goal of "turning America back to God" did not happen. One might argue that sinful policies such as support for homosexuality were slowed and support for Israel was strengthened. But these short-term victories did not turn into long-term political advantages.

Conclusion

It is impossible, of course, to know what would have happened if Falwell had stayed true to his convictions of 1965. What seems clear, however, is that Falwell's pivot to politics changed evangelicalism, and particularly dispensationalism, in

politicians but to be soul winners... (Falwell, "Ministers and Marches: 1965," 59).

the United States. Largely due to his efforts, many American churches and believers began to see political action as a *necessary activity of the church*.

A Proposed Solution

To be clear, I am not advocating a full-bored return to Darby's political ethic. His understanding of voting as an entanglement with the world and, therefore, a forbidden activity, seems extreme.⁷³ There is only slight justification for the claim that the Christian may have only worldly principles when engaging in any and all political activity. A believer may still walk in the Spirit when appearing before the city council requesting a building permit, for example. Additionally, the NT is silent on the issue of voting, evidently leaving it to the individual's conscience.

What I am advocating, however, is a return to the realization of the completely evil nature of the world system. The fact that it is controlled by Satan has ramifications for political action. For one must remember the world's political structures have foundations embedded within this evil system. As a result, using the world system in general, and politics in particular, to remove injustice or improve morality logically implies a non-Christian truth: There is something in the world system that can make the world a better place.⁷⁴ As a result, working within the world system to make the world a better place is a failed strategy, as

⁷³ Speaking of voting, Darby writes, "It seems to me so simple that the Christian, not being at all of this world, but united to Him who died and rose again, has no business to mix himself up with the most declared activity of the world, by an act which affirms his existence as belonging to the world, and his identification with the entire system which the Lord is about to judge ..." (J. N. Darby, *Letters of J. N. Darby*, 3 vols. [Sunbury, PA: Believer's Bookshelf, 2007], 1:129–30).

⁷⁴ "If I am to set the world right I must join with the world, and cannot have any principles but theirs. Then I must give up Christianity: for they have none to be governed by.... If [the Christian] joins with an infidel he owns infidelity can set the world right" (Darby, *Collected Writings*, 1:129–130).

this study of Falwell indicates. There is no biblical (and almost no practical)⁷⁵ evidence that this will lead to success.

But more importantly, I am advocating that we change the object of our affections. Instead of living as flag-waving loyalists to these United States, I urge we take seriously the biblical injunction to live as aliens and strangers scattered in this present world (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 1:1, 17; 2:11). During our sojourn here we should refocus our patriotic love away from this temporal (and all too wicked) nation, move our nationalist fervor to our true kingdom, a better country which has been promised for which we sometimes must suffer (2 Thess 1:5). I suggest that if we remove the American flag from our hearts and replace it with the flag of the coming kingdom—our true home—we would not only be more obedient as individuals, but our churches would be more vibrant and God would be more glorified.

Facing Our Fears

When one remembers that Falwell's position changed, not because of new exegetical insights but rather because of the horrors of the world around him, it seems prudent to evaluate our own personal convictions as well. What is stopping us from returning to the dispensationalism before Falwell (or even a return to the Falwell of 1965), sound exegesis of relevant passages or the pressures of a fallen world always in crisis around us? Stated more bluntly, are the political practices of the church

⁷⁵ Falwell's efforts in electing Republicans in general and Reagan in particular did not pay the dividends hoped for, at least in the area of abortion: "As a result of the opportunity granted President Reagan—and later, his successor, President Bush—to appoint presumably pro-life justices to the United States Supreme Court, anti-abortion interest centered on bringing to the Supreme Court cases that might be expected to overturn the unlimited abortion liberty granted by Roe. The most promising opportunity seemed to arise in the 1992 case, *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*, involving moderately restrictive anti-abortion regulations in Pennsylvania. To the surprise and shock of anti-abortionists, President Reagan's first Supreme Court appointee, Sandra Day O'Connor, joined another Reagan appointee, David Kennedy, and the Bush appointee Donald Souter, in reaffirming Roe" (Brown, "Killing Represents a Solution," 177).

at large based upon faith in clear biblical teaching or fear of what will happen if we do nothing?

Rome fell, according to Augustine, because of the profound wickedness of the populace. Even so, the fall of Rome did not cause rejoicing in God's people because of the wickedness that had been punished. No, the sack of Rome caused enormous grief and even weeping within the Christian community.⁷⁶ Yet it was all according to the plan of God. Perhaps the rapid descent into wickedness we see in this nation around us is merely the prelude to another great working in the plan of God. How are we to know? Understanding this limitation of our knowledge, it seems best to be about the explicit commands in God's word about the great responsibility of the believer, namely, to know Christ and to make him known.

While I am loath to take our theology from our hymnody, perhaps, just this once, we might do well to remember a hymn we used to sing: "This is my Father's world, O let me ne'er forget, That though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet."⁷⁷

⁷⁶ "After more than eleven hundred years of steady and triumphant progress, Rome had been taken and sacked. It is difficult for us to appreciate, impossible to overestimate, the shock which was thus communicated from centre to circumference of the whole known world. It was generally believed, not only by the heathen, but also by many of the most liberal-minded of the Christians, that the destruction of Rome would be the prelude to the destruction of the world. Even Jerome, who might have been supposed to be embittered against the proud mistress of the world by her inhospitality to himself, cannot conceal his profound emotion on hearing of her fall. 'A terrible rumor,' he says, 'reaches me from the West telling of Rome besieged, bought for gold, besieged again, life and property perishing together. My voice falters, sobs stifle the words I dictate; for she is a captive, that city which enthralled the world.'" (Marcus Dods, "The City of God: Translator's Preface," in *St. Augustine's City of God and Christian Doctrine*, ed. Philip Schaff, vol. 2, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887], xii).

⁷⁷ Maltbie Davenport Babcock and Franklin L. Sheppard, "This Is My Father's World," in *Hymns for the Family of God* (Nashville: Paragon Associates, 1976), 6.

Keeping it Classical: A Christian Response to LGBTQ+ Ideology

Mike Dellaperute

Key Words: LGBTQ+, GLAAD, IRBPN+, WPATH, gender dysphoria

Introduction

In a 2011 Barna research article entitled “Six Reasons Young Christians Leave the Church,”² the authors identify reason three as, “Churches come across as antagonistic to science.”³ Four years later, Sarah Kropp Brown, writing on behalf of the National Association of Evangelicals, confirmed these findings when she observed, “Evangelicals are more than twice as likely as the general public (29 percent vs. 14 percent) to say that science and religion are in conflict and that they are on the side of religion.”⁴ The anti-science bias of evangelical Christians when addressing cultural issues coincides with the rise in popularity of presuppositional apologetics,⁵ defined by Boa and Bowman as grounding “reason and fact on the truth of the Christian faith, rather than trying to prove or defend the faith on

Mike Dellaperute, is a Ph.D. candidate at Baptist Bible Seminary and author of the book *The Danger of Puberty Suppression*. He is the Lead Pastor at Calvary Baptist Church in Little Egg Harbor, NJ. Mike can be reached at colossians1@comcast.net.

² “Six Reasons Young Christians Leave Church,” *Barna Group*, September 27, 2011, <https://www.barna.com/research/six-reasons-young-christians-leave-church/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sarah Kropp Brown, “Are Evangelicals Anti-Science?” *National Association of Evangelicals*, July 14, 2016, <https://www.nae.net/evangelicals-anti-science/>.

⁵ Kenneth Boa and Robert M. Bowman Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 221.

the basis of reason or fact.”⁶ The tendency to dismiss evidence from science or reason when it appears to conflict with Scripture or personal experience has resulted in a clichéd response to cultural issues, summarized by retired American Baptist minister and *USA Today* columnist Oliver Thomas, “The Bible says it ... that settles it.”⁷ However, like many of his contemporaries, with regard to LGBTQ+ ideology Thomas is quick to add, “The church got it wrong.”⁸ To substantiate his support of LGBTQ+ behavior, Thomas attempts to demonstrate how both science and reason “contradict Scripture.”⁹ If dispensationalists discount science and reason when addressing Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) issues in the culture, the result will be a loss of credibility both with the next generation of believers who already look to the church with skepticism and with the remainder of the culture who embraces LGBTQ+ ideology.

The purpose of this article is to illustrate the value of a classical approach to apologetics when addressing SOGI issues in the culture. Boa and Bowman define classical apologetics as “logically coherent and supportable by sound arguments.”¹⁰ This two-step method for defending the faith begins with science, reason, philosophy, or facts in step one and leads to a literal understanding of Scripture in step two.¹¹ Due to the prevalence of SOGI issues in the culture, this article will interact with a wide range of media sources, both popular and scholarly, in order to expose, analyze, and respond to the conflicting assertions of

⁶ Ibid., 35. It is not the intent of this author to cast a presuppositional approach to apologetics as a whole in a negative light, but rather to demonstrate that, when addressing SOGI issues in the culture at large, a classical approach is beneficial.

⁷ Oliver Thomas, “American Churches Must Reject Literalism and Admit We Got It Wrong on Gay People,” *USA Today*, April 29, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/04/29/american-church-admit-wrong-gays-lesbians-lgbtq-column/3559756002/>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Boa and Bowman, *Faith*, 49. Here a presuppositional epistemology should be distinguished from presuppositional apologetics.

¹¹ Ibid., 34. A literal approach to Scripture being one of Ryrie’s three sine qua nons of dispensationalism.

LGBTQ+ advocates. The intent of this article is not to attack individuals, but rather to challenge the ideas used to justify LGBTQ+ ideology through the evaluation of seven case studies. Although this paper will primarily focus on contradictions produced by transgender ideology,¹² due to the phenomenon of intersectionality, the entire LGBTQ+ spectrum will be examined in order to demonstrate the scientific, logical, and philosophical inconsistencies within a comprehensive LGBTQ+ system. Rather than pitting biblical teachings on marriage and human sexuality against LGBTQ+ ideology, this paper will set the contradictory and incoherent assertions of LGBTQ+ advocates against one another in a manner similar to the Paul's appeal to the Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 23:6–7). Only then will these inconsistencies be contrasted with the consistent and coherent nature of a biblical worldview in order to illustrate the reasonableness of the Christian faith.

In conclusion, this article will demonstrate how dispensationalists who intend to address SOGI issues in the culture will realize four distinct benefits by initially appealing to general revelation and common grace in order to expose the fallacies of LGBTQ+ ideology. First, a classical approach will encourage believers to remain informed and active in the culture. Second, a classical approach will help Christians gain confidence when defending a biblical position. Third, this approach will enable evangelicals to gain a hearing in a culture that is growing increasingly hostile toward Christianity. Finally, a classical approach will address the anti-science concerns of young believers. Sole reliance on a presuppositional apologetic when interacting with SOGI issues will likely lead to the fulfillment of the prophetic words of *Time Magazine's* Mary Eberstadt:

¹² “GLAAD Media Reference Guide--Transgender,” *GLAAD*, December 7, 2019, <https://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>. The acronym GLAAD stands for Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation. This organization embraces and promotes LGBTQ+ ideology in the culture. Every effort has been made to follow the preferred terminology listed in GLAAD's media reference guide except when said terminology conflicts with science or Scripture, as in the term biology.

“Regular Christians are no longer welcome in American culture.”¹³

Case 1: The Intersection of Transgender Ideology and Biology

In 2015, an NBC News headline read, “Malisa’s Story: Growing up Transgender and a Grandfather’s Pride.”¹⁴ The story begins by explaining how a prenatal ultrasound revealed that Malisa Philips was as a biological male. However, from a young age, Malisa chose to identify as female. Malisa’s tendency to embrace feminine stereotypes, such as dressing and acting like a princess, is the primary evidence used to substantiate Malisa’s gender-nonconformity. Next, Malisa’s parents point to a transformative moment of self-realization that occurred at the age of six when Malisa donned a wig for the first time. Malisa’s parents were then advised to affirm their child’s gender identity by allowing Malisa to begin to transition from male to transgender female. Finally, by the age of eight, and with the support of family, teachers, therapists, and pediatric endocrinologists, Malisa formally began gender transition.

The gender transition process for children like Malisa can be classified into three stages. Stage one involves social transition. In this stage, the child is encouraged to dress and act in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity. The World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) *Standards of Care*, 7th ed., defines gender identity as “a person’s

¹³ Mary Eberstadt, “Regular Christians Are No Longer Welcome In American Culture,” *Time*, June 29, 2016, <https://time.com/4385755/faith-in-america/>.

¹⁴ “Malisa’s Story: Growing up Transgender and a Grandfather’s Pride,” NBCNews.com, *NBCUniversal News Group*, May 2, 2019, <http://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/malisa-s-story--growing-up-transgender-and-a-grandfather-s-pride-432490051892>. The grandfather referenced in this news article is Representative Mike Honda, a former congressman from California and DNC vice chair. Honda became the subject of an ethics investigation that questioned his use of taxpayer funds in 2015. Honda subsequently lost his seat in 2016 after eight terms in office. The article, dated April 2015, coincides with the investigation conducted by the US House Ethics Committee.

intrinsic sense of being male (a boy or a man), female (a girl or woman), or an alternate gender (e.g., boygirl, girlboy, transgender, genderqueer, eunuch).”¹⁵ The behaviors associated with social transition include name change, participation in cross-sex activities, and preferred restroom access. After an indeterminate time in stage one,¹⁶ children pursuing gender transition proceed to the chemical stage. This second stage of transition consists of two distinct phases for children like Malisa. Phase one of chemical transition involves the administration of puberty suppressors in order to prevent the undesired physical changes associated with adolescence. Phase two involves cross-sex hormone therapy in order to produce the desired physical characteristics that are surgically enhanced in stage three. Both chemical phases in stage two of gender transition yield permanent results coupled with an array of side effects. Stage three entails surgical transition. Surgical transition involves a myriad of procedures that are also considered irreversible.¹⁷ Due to the graphic, costly, painful, and largely ineffective nature of these surgeries, GLAAD’s Media Reference Guide advises,

¹⁵ World Professional Association for Transgender Health, *Standards of Care for the Health of Transsexual, Transgender, and Gender Non-conforming People*, Version 7 (2011), 96, <https://www.wpath.org/media/cms/Documents/SOC%20v7/Standards%20of%20Care%20V7%20-%202011%20WPATH.pdf?t=1605186324>. On their website, WPATH.org, WPATH self-identifies as an “Interdisciplinary professional and educational organization devoted to transgender health.” The claims of evidence-based medicine by an organization that embraces LGBTQ+ ideology has resulted in WPATH becoming the industry standard for gender affirmation treatment of transgender children and adults. Many of the WPATH contributors stand to gain financially from the growing number of gender transitions.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 18. WPATH maintains that children must remain in stage one of gender transition for an extended period of time in order to receive counseling and resolve all comorbid factors. In practice, however, due to the rise of a new condition referred to as, “Rapid Onset Gender Dysphoria” (ROGD), children as young as Malisa are now proceeding to stage two after a single visit to a gender clinic.

¹⁷ For a more detailed account of social, chemical, and surgical transition, see my article “The Church and the Transgender Issue,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 20, no.1 (Spring 2016): 76–122.

“Journalists should avoid overemphasizing the role of surgeries in the transition process.”¹⁸

When NBC News first posted Malisa’s story, Malisa was about to enter puberty. Due to inherent biological factors, if Malisa’s parents did not intervene, then Malisa would begin to develop undesired masculine features. However, Malisa’s family learned that they could provide their child with puberty suppressors. This initial phase of chemical intervention allows children like Malisa to remain as androgynous as possible until estrogen therapy and a series of complicated surgeries can provide a more convincing visible transition from male to transgender female. Malisa’s story illustrates the dominance of the ethical principle of autonomy in contemporary culture.¹⁹ By appealing to autonomy at a young age, children like Malisa are permitted both to self-diagnose and to dictate their preferred course of treatment. Under LGBTQ+ gender affirmation guidelines, the role of medical and psychological experts is primarily to guide children like Malisa through gender transition. Due to the uncontested supremacy of autonomy in contemporary culture, LGBTQ+ advocates deem it unethical to deny a childlike Malisa full access to gender transition.

The primary rationale used to support Malisa’s transition from male to transgender female is derived from the prevailing presupposition that gender is assigned at birth. This is the premise behind the burgeoning term “natal gender.” Implicit in the term natal gender is the belief that gender is a social construct. Some proponents of LGBTQ+ ideology, such as GLAAD, promote the concept of a fluid and artificial gender spectrum by making a sharp distinction between sex and gender. Sex, according to GLAAD, is, “The classification of a person as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex, usually based on the appearance of their external anatomy.”²⁰ Gender, on the

¹⁸ GLAAD Media Reference Guide.

¹⁹ Tom Beauchamp and James Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 7th ed. (New York: Oxford U P, 2013), 101. Beauchamp and Childress define autonomy as “self-rule that is free from both controlling interference by others and limitations that prevent meaningful choice.”

²⁰ GLAAD Media Reference Guide.

other hand, is understood as a “deeply held sense”²¹ of being male, female, both, or neither.

Not all LGBTQ+ advocates are willing to exclude biology from the gender conversation. Homosexual apologist and NY Magazine author Andrew Sullivan represents an element within the LGBTQ+ system who is challenging the prevailing transgender narrative on the basis of biology. In his article, “The Nature of Sex.”²² Sullivan observes, “Abolishing clear biological distinctions between men and women is actually a threat to lesbian identity and even existence because it calls into question who is actually a woman.”²³ Sullivan further argues that approaching gender as a social construct, “Undermines the fundamental legal groundwork for recognizing and combating sex-based oppression and sex discrimination against women and girls.”²⁴ Sullivan insightfully warns of the brewing internal conflict within the LGBTQ+ system:

If you abandon biology in the matter of sex and gender altogether, you may help trans people live fuller, less conflicted lives; but you also undermine the very meaning of homosexuality. If you follow the current ideology of gender as entirely fluid, you actually subvert and undermine core arguments in defense of gay rights ... Contemporary transgender ideology is not a complement to gay rights; in some ways it is in active opposition to them.²⁵

Sullivan’s appeal to biology is borrowed from a biblical understanding of a fixed gender binary of male and female (Gen 1:27). This appeal to a naturally occurring and observable gender binary exposes what Sullivan later admits to be “internal tensions and even outright contradictions”²⁶ in LGBTQ+ ideology. For if LGBTQ+ advocates continue to exclude biology from the gender

²¹ Ibid.

²² Andrew Sullivan, “The Nature of Sex,” *Intelligencer*, February 1, 2019, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2019/02/andrew-sullivan-the-nature-of-sex.html>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

conversation, then gender dysphoric children like Malisa will be granted additional autonomous rights. However, as Sullivan also notes, these rights will likely come at the expense of women and others who identify as LGBTQ+.

Evidence of Sullivan's unheeded warning concerning the danger of disregarding biology is presently reverberating throughout the culture. Michael Levenson and Neil Vigdor of the *NY Times* report on a lawsuit filed by three biological females who challenged the rights of transgender athletes to identify and compete as females.²⁷ Ryan Mayer of CBS News explains that by abandoning biology in matters of sex and gender, Connecticut's Interscholastic Athletic Conference permitted transgender athletes to participate as females, resulting in two male-to-female transgender teens "dominating the competition at Connecticut's girls track and field state competitions."²⁸ The dominance of these transgender athletes came, as Sullivan predicted, at the expense of biological female competitors. If, as GLAAD insists, LGBTQ+ ideology is permitted to continue on its current trajectory, more female athletes, scholars, actresses, coaches, professors, and executives can expect to experience similar setbacks for the sake of transgender rights. However if, as Sullivan suggests, the LGBTQ+ community "abandons the faddish notion that sex is socially constructed or entirely in the brain, that sex and gender are unconnected, that biology is irrelevant,"²⁹ then children like Malisa and the Connecticut transgender athletes will be forced to sacrifice their rights for the sake of feminists, lesbians, and gays. This quandary poses a serious internal conflict with potentially devastating implications for LGBTQ+ advocates at the intersection of gender as either biology or social construct.

²⁷ Michael Levenson and Neil Vigdor, "Inclusion of Transgender Student Athletes Violates Title IX, Trump Administration Says," *The New York Times*, May 29, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/29/us/connecticut-transgender-student-athletes.html>.

²⁸ Ryan Mayer, "Transgender Track Athletes Win CT State Championship, Debate Ensues," *CBS New York*, June 13, 2018, <https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2018/06/13/transgender-track-athletes-win-connecticut-state-championship-debate-ensues/>.

²⁹ Sullivan, "Nature of Sex."

For many who embrace LGBTQ+ ideology like Levenson and Vigdor, denying the autonomous rights of transgender people like Malisa or the Connecticut athletes constitutes discrimination.³⁰ This accusation has produced a growing schism in the LGBTQ+ system. Valerie Richardson of the *Washington Times* explains how these internal inconsistencies have forced lesbian advocates to turn against transgender advocates, as in the case of former outspoken lesbian and tennis great Martina Navratilova. Navratilova was “stripped of her Athlete Ally Ambassador title ... for calling it ‘cheating’ to allow transgender females to participate in women’s sports.”³¹ As Sullivan observes, these two competing ideologies cannot coexist in the same comprehensive system without contradiction and, ultimately, conflict. This growing tension over the relationship between biology and gender within the LGBTQ+ community threatens to undermine the entire system, as evidenced in the case of J. K. Rowling.

Case 2: J. K. Rowling’s TERF

Although she is best known as the mastermind behind the Harry Potter series, J. K. Rowling is also a self-ascribed liberal feminist and social activist who attempted to gain approval from LGBTQ+ advocacy groups by retroactively labeling one of the central characters in her fictional series as gay in 2007.³² Recently, however, Rowling has garnered only angst from LGBTQ+ proponents for making Navratilova-esque comments that transgender journalist Grace Robertson of *Vanity Fair*

³⁰ Levenson and Vigdor, “Inclusion of Transgender Student Athletes.”

³¹ Valerie Richardson, “Martina Navratilova Slammed for Calling Out Transgender ‘Cheating’ in Women’s Sports,” *AP News*, February 20, 2019, <https://apnews.com/979971281249864b6ba3ed469e2fbb84>.

³² Kim Renfro, “Why Devoted ‘Harry Potter’ Fans Feel Betrayed by J. K. Rowling and the ‘Fantastic Beasts’ Franchise,” *Insider*, February 2, 2018, <https://www.insider.com/fantastic-beasts-jk-rowling-dumbledore-lgbt-backlash-2018-2>. Rowling’s decision to retroactively assign an LGBTQ+ identity to one of her characters reflects a growing trend in popular media. Other recent retroactive assignments include Lando Calrissian of the *Star Wars* series being labeled “Pansexual” in *Solo* and *Beauty and the Beast*’s LeFou being labeled gay in recent adaptations.

describes as “Feminist Transphobia.”³³ *USA Today*’s Charles Trepany reports that Rowling was criticized for coming to the aid of Maya Forstater, a cisgender female who was fired from a research facility for her controversial statement: “My belief ... is that sex is a biological fact and is immutable. There are two sexes. Men are male. Women are female. It is impossible to change sex. These were until very recently understood as basic facts of life.”³⁴ By defending Forstater’s appeal to biology, Rowling became the subject of a public-shaming and virtue-signaling campaign that further confirmed Sullivan’s suspicions by pitting LGBTQ+ advocate against LGBTQ+ advocate. In the wake of Rowling’s comments, GLAAD’s head of talent Anthony Ramos released the following statement: “J. K. Rowling, whose books gave kids hope that they could work together to create a better world, has now aligned herself with an anti-science ideology that denies the basic humanity of people who are transgender.”³⁵

In the process of defending fellow feminist Forstater and, by extension, the role of biology in determining sex and gender, Rowling had three derogatory labels affixed to her by the LGBTQ+ champions of gender as a social construct. First, like many of her Christian contemporaries, GLAAD designated Rowling as anti-science. This demonstrates how an appeal to biology provides common ground for Christians and some LGBTQ+ advocates. Therefore, when addressing SOGI issues in the culture, dispensationalists can begin by deferring to the arguments of Sullivan and Rowling in a manner similar to the way Paul deferred to the Pharisees in order to defend his belief in the resurrection (Acts 23:9). Second, GLAAD interpreted Rowling’s support of Forstater as an attack on the basic

³³ Grace Robertson, “Where J. K. Rowling’s Transphobia Comes From,” *Vanity Fair*, June 12, 2020, <https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2020/06/jk-rowling-transphobia/feminism>.

³⁴ Charles Trepany, “J. K. Rowling Sparks Controversy for Transgender Comments; GLAAD Responds,” *USA Today*, December 20, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/entertainment/celebrities/2019/12/19/j-k-rowling-transgender-comments-maya-forstater-glaad-response/2701579001/>.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

humanity of transgender people. With regard to this accusation, Christian apologists who address SOGI issues in the culture must carefully maintain the distinction between ideas and individuals by consistently seasoning their response with gentleness and respect (1 Pet 3:15). Finally, Rowling's opponents from within the LGBTQ+ community proceeded to brand her as a "TERF." Sullivan explains that this defamatory acronym stands for, "Trans-Exclusive Radical Feminist ... one minority that is actively not tolerated by the LGBTQ establishment, and often demonized by the gay community."³⁶ According to Trepany, "The hashtag '#JKRowlingIsATerf' was a top trending topic that day."³⁷ Sullivan further reveals that radical feminists, including many lesbians, are labeled TERFs if they hold the position that sex is "fundamentally biological, and not socially constructed, and that there is a difference between women and trans women that needs to be respected."³⁸ The angst from the LGBTQ+ community expressed in ad hominem toward one of their own illustrates how Christians who engage SOGI issues must be prepared to face repercussions (1 Pet 3:16–17). The internal inconsistencies in LGBTQ+ ideology over biology, feminism, and gender is evident in its selective appeals to biology. The tension created through interactions within the LGBTQ+ spectrum as a whole is further demonstrated in the following relationship scenarios.

Case 3: "B" is for Bisexual and Other Alphabetical Inconsistencies in the LGBTQ+ Relationship Soup

Within the inclusive and affirming LGBTQ+ continuum that is often playfully referred to as "Alphabet Soup,"³⁹ the letter "B" stands for bisexual. In her historical presentation of the bisexual movement, GLAAD's Miranda Rosenblum explains that bisexual persons have frequently endured oppression at the hands of both

³⁶ Sullivan, "Nature of Sex."

³⁷ Trepany, "J. K. Rowling Sparks Controversy."

³⁸ Sullivan, "Nature of Sex."

³⁹ See, for example, California's San Mateo county commission LGBTQ glossary: "LGBPTTQQIIAA+ (Alphabet Soup)," accessed December 31, 2020, <https://lgbtq.smcgov.org/lgbtq-glossary>.

the culture at large and an LGBTQ+ subculture that is dominated by exclusively lesbian women and gay men.⁴⁰ According to Garden State Equality (GSE), a bisexual is “a person who is romantically, emotionally, physically, and/or sexually attracted to both men and women.”⁴¹ While a cursory reading of this definition may appear innocuous, the inherent problem that “B” poses to the remainder of the LGTQ+ system concerns the fact that “Bi,” as carefully defined by Rolling Stone’s Zachary Zane, “means two.”⁴² The existence of the “B” in LGBTQ+ ideology implicitly affirms an innate gender binary with a biological and biblical basis, something that members of the “T” community vehemently deny.

Ironically, the intrinsic acknowledgement of a gender binary that forms the foundation for both bisexuality and a biblical understanding of gender is confirmed explicitly by the GSE definition that restricts the sexual attraction of bisexuals to the two genders of male and female. Therefore, in order to identify as a bisexual in a community where labels matter, an individual who includes males and females in their list of sexual attractions must do so to the exclusion of all other genders on the socially constructed LGBTQ+ spectrum, including transgender persons. For if a bisexual, defined as a person who is attracted to both males and females, is also attracted to someone who claims to be either another gender or transgender, then are they still able to identify as bisexual? While the answer derived from GLAAD’s definition and Zane’s article is a simple “No;” the problems

⁴⁰ Miranda Rosenblum, “The U.S. Bisexual+ Movement: a #BiWeek History Lesson,” *GLAAD*, April 10, 2019, <https://www.glaad.org/blog/us-bisexual-movement-biweek-history-lesson>.

⁴¹ “About,” *Garden State Equality*, accessed July 18, 2020, <https://www.gardenstateequality.org/about>. According to their self-description, the Garden State Equality is New Jersey’s statewide advocacy and education organization for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. As of this writing, GSE has successfully lobbied for 222 laws that support or promote LGBTQ+ ideology.

⁴² Zachary Zane, “What’s the Real Difference between Bi- and Pansexual?” *Rolling Stone*, October 4, 2019, <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/whats-the-real-difference-between-bi-and-pansexual-667087/>.

resulting from that answer trigger complicated inconsistencies to ripple throughout the LGBTQ+ community. Zane reports that many LGBTQ+ individuals are reluctant to surrender their hard-earned titles of “L” or “G” or “B”.⁴³ As a result, the self-proclaimed “inclusive” LGBTQ+ community is now forced to answer the question: Is it necessary for an individual to exclude transgender persons from romantic relationships and sexual attractions in order to maintain the title bisexual, gay, or lesbian?

Psychology Today’s Dr. Karen Blair observes that transgender people are in fact being excluded from the dating scene in practice, if not in theory, both in the LGBTQ+ community and among cisgender heterosexuals.⁴⁴ This marginalization, according to Tatyana Bellamy-Walker of NBC News, results in emotional trauma for transgender people, including an increase in anxiety and depression.⁴⁵ Some, like transgender activist Brynn Tannehill, even suggest that refusing to date a transgender person is transphobia, a form of prejudice and discrimination akin to denying a transgender person access to gender transition or excluding transgender persons from sports competitions.⁴⁶ Tannehill even questions whether or not it should be illegal to refuse to date a transgender person.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, others within the LGBTQ+ movement disagree with Tannehill. Sullivan insists, “It is not transphobic for a gay man not to be attracted to a trans man.”⁴⁸ However, when one considers the long

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Karen Blair, “Are Trans People Excluded from the World of Dating?” *Psychology Today*, June 16, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/inclusive-insight/201906/are-trans-people-excluded-the-world-dating>.

⁴⁵ Tatyana Bellamy-Walker, “For Nonbinary People, Struggle for Recognition Extends to Romantic Relationships,” *NBCUniversal News Group*, August 3, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/nonbinary-people-struggle-recognition-extends-romantic-relationships-n1038876>.

⁴⁶ Brynn Tannehill, “Is Refusing to Date Trans People Transphobic?” *Advocate.com*, December 14, 2019, <https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2019/12/14/refusing-date-trans-people-transphobic>.

⁴⁷ Ibid

⁴⁸ Sullivan, “Nature of Sex.”

and hard battle that lesbians, gays, and bisexuals fought for identity, recognition and most notably pride in the culture, the question now arises within the LGBTQ+ community: Who would be willing to relinquish their title of lesbian, gay, or bisexual by dating transgender people?

While the preceding question may appear puerile on the surface, a deeper analysis actually creates a great deal of tension within LGBTQ+ ideology. As GLAAD explains, a lesbian is by definition “a woman whose enduring physical, romantic, and/or emotional attraction is to other women.”⁴⁹ In a similar manner, Sullivan insists, “Gay men are defined by our attraction to our own biological sex. We are men attracted to other men.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, according to Live Science’s managing editor Tia Ghose, lesbian, gay, and bisexual attractions are inherent and immutable, meaning the individual did not choose and cannot change the object of their sexual attraction.⁵¹ Evelyn Schlatter and Robert Steinback of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) support the enduring assertions of Ghose and GLAAD by identifying two of the top ten anti-gay myths as, “No one is born gay ... (and) ... Gay people can choose to leave homosexuality.”⁵² LGBTQ+ apologists like Schlatter and Steinback often cite biological evidence in order to substantiate the claims that sexual attraction is both innate and immutable.⁵³ However, this supposition raises yet another question concerning internal inconsistencies: Is it appropriate for LGBTQ+ philosophy to appeal to biology in order to validate sexual

⁴⁹ “GLAAD Media Reference Guide - Lesbian / Gay / Bisexual Glossary of Terms,” *GLAAD*, October 26, 2016, <https://www.glaad.org/reference/lgbtq>.

⁵⁰ Sullivan, “Nature of Sex.”

⁵¹ Tia Ghose, “Being Gay Not a Choice: Science Contradicts Ben Carson,” *Livescience*, March 6, 2015, <https://www.livescience.com/50058-being-gay-not-a-choice.html>.

⁵² Evelyn Schlatter and Robert Steinback, “10 Anti-Gay Myths Debunked,” *Southern Poverty Law Center*, February 27, 2011, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2011/10-anti-gay-myths-debunked>.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

attraction while simultaneously rejecting biology in matters of gender? Is all biology anti-science?

Concerning biological evidence to support LGBTQ+ ideology, Ghose reluctantly acknowledges, “No studies have found specific gay genes.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, some LGBTQ+ scientists, like transgender evolutionary biologist Joan Roughgarden, vehemently oppose the notion of gay or transgender genes. Roughgarden fears that the potential discovery of said genes would likely initiate a cisgender-heterosexual-led genocide of LGBTQ+ persons through “the selective abortion of gay babies.”⁵⁵ However, lack of biological evidence does not prevent Schlatter and Steinback from asserting, “Modern science cannot state conclusively what causes sexual orientation, but a great many studies suggest that it is the result of both biological and environmental forces, not a personal choice.”⁵⁶ Nonetheless, LGBTQ+ advocates who appeal to biology for support like Ghose and Roughgarden must rely on actual or perceived LGBTQ+ activity in the animal kingdom in order to provide biological validation for its presence in humanity. Appealing to lesbian, gay, or bisexual activity between animals provides LGBTQ+ advocates with a scientific basis for same-sex and bisexual attractions among humans. However, before examining the validity of this claim, it must be acknowledged that this biological assertion still fails to answer the question: If a lesbian is sexually attracted to a transgender person, then is she still a lesbian?

Technically, according to most LGBTQ+ advocates, the answer to the above question is another “No.” As Sullivan explains, “Transgender ideology—including postmodern conceptions of sex and gender—is a threat to homosexuality, because it is a threat to biological sex as a concept.”⁵⁷ For, if a woman who was at one time sexually attracted to other women becomes romantically involved with a transgender person, then

⁵⁴ Ghose, “Being Gay Not a Choice.”

⁵⁵ Joan Roughgarden, *Evolution’s Rainbow* (Berkeley: University of CA Press, 2009), 294.

⁵⁶ Schlatter and Steinback, “10 Anti-Gay Myths Debunked.”

⁵⁷ Sullivan, “The Nature of Sex.”

she can no longer claim to be a lesbian. In this scenario, her sexual fluidity has caused her to transition from lesbian to a non-traditional expression of bisexual. Zane explains this conflicting view of fluid sexual attraction in LGBTQ+ ideology as follows: “Fluid, in this case, meaning that sexual attractions have the capacity to change over time and can be dependent on different situations.”⁵⁸ The implications of Zane’s appeal to sexual fluidity in order to defend bisexual activity threaten to undermine the entire LGBTQ+ system by lending support to the much-maligned arguments over reparative/conversion therapy⁵⁹ or spiritual transformation (Rom 12:1–2). For, on the one hand, some LGBTQ+ proponents like Zane and *Psychology Today*’s Karen Blair argue in support of sexual fluidity.⁶⁰ On the other hand, organizations like the SPLC and GLAAD insist that sexual attraction cannot be changed or controlled.⁶¹ So the question remains: Can someone’s sexual attractions ever change? The coherent answer from a biblical worldview is yes (1 Cor 6:9–11), and Christians who defend this position would be wise to begin by appealing to sexual fluidity. However, the conflicting answer from within the LGBTQ+ community is hotly contested.

Not only does LGBTQ+ ideology conflict over whether or not gender and sexual attractions are either socially constructed and fluid or biological and fixed, but internal contradictions also prevent a coherent system from developing. Zane, a self-professed bisexual, admits,

The truth is, however, there’s confusion even among members of the LGBTQ community as to what these words mean, particularly when it comes to bisexuality. In fact, the bisexual community doesn’t even agree on what it means to be bisexual. The term

⁵⁸ Zane, “What’s the Real Difference?”

⁵⁹ “Conversion Therapy,” *GLADD*, accessed July 18, 2020, https://www.glaad.org/conversiontherapy?response_type=embed. GLAAD defines conversion therapy, “Conversion therapy is any attempt to change a person’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.”

⁶⁰ Karen Blair, “4 Ways That Sexuality Can Be Fluid,” *Psychology Today*, December 29, 2019, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/inclusive-insight/201912/4-ways-sexuality-can-be-fluid>.

⁶¹ “Conversion Therapy.”

pansexual was birthed out of the confusion, and to create a definitive and more inclusive label. This has led to in-fighting between members of the community, who are upset that their bisexual identity is being replaced by another label.⁶²

As a result of internal inconsistencies surrounding the concept of sexual fluidity, the LGBTQ+ community remains at an impasse over the simple question: If a lesbian is attracted to a transgender person, does that make her bisexual, pansexual, queer, sexually fluid, still a lesbian, or something else? Furthermore, if she is reassigned another title like bisexual, pansexual, or queer, then does this imply that she is a former lesbian? More importantly, can a lesbian ever stop being a lesbian? These are the questions that LGBTQ+ ideology fails to resolve satisfactorily. For if, on the one hand, sexual attraction is fluid, as a segment within the LGBTQ+ system clearly maintains, then who can rightly insist that said (former) lesbian who found herself attracted to a transgender person will not someday be attracted to a natal male and live out the rest of her days as a heterosexual female? Philosophically, LGBTQ+ advocates who promote gender and sexual fluidity like Tannehill, Blair, and Zane cannot allow for the possibility of a lesbian sexually transitioning to heterosexual without undermining the entire system. On the other hand, if a lesbian's attraction to other females is inherent and immutable, then back to the initial question: Should lesbians be permitted to date males or transgender people once they identify as lesbian? The implicit solution in the arguments of Sullivan, GLAAD, and the SPLC is that exclusion is necessary in order to maintain internal consistency. Lesbians need to pursue romantic relationships exclusively with biological women, and gays need to pursue romantic relationships exclusively with biological men while the rest need to adopt the inclusive and comprehensive title of "pansexual" in order to avoid any further inconsistencies. However, not only would this practice force lesbians and gays to discriminate against transgender people, but even the term "pansexual" has its coherent limitations.

⁶² Zane, "What's the Real Difference?"

Case 4: Out of the Frying Pansexual

As Zane reports, the term pansexual was conceived by LGBTQ+ advocates in an attempt to create a classification that would resolve the internal conflict surrounding the various sexual identities and attractions highlighted in the preceding section. According to the GSE, a pansexual is “a person who experiences sexual, romantic, physical, and/or spiritual attraction to members of all genders, identities and/ or expressions.”⁶³ Like “queer,” this umbrella term was originally intended to be broad enough to encompass any past, present, or future addition to the LGBTQ+ spectrum. However, the tensions created by appealing to the all-inclusive claims of pansexuality produce two additional internal inconsistencies for LGBTQ+ advocates, beginning with the law of noncontradiction.

Sproul et al. define the law of noncontradiction as “‘A’ cannot be ‘A’ and ‘non-A’ at the same time and in the same relationship.”⁶⁴ This philosophical axiom mandates that pansexuality cannot claim to be inclusive of all sexual attractions, genders, identities, and expressions while simultaneously excluding or condemning some sexual attractions, genders, identities or expressions. The inconsistencies exposed by the law of noncontradiction stem from the fact that, according to LGBTQ+ advocates, there are some sexual attractions, identities, and expressions that no individual or society should ever tolerate. These attractions and behaviors include incest, rape, bestiality, pedophilia, and necrophilia, among others (IRBPN+). With regard to these immoral behaviors, Schlatter and Steinback confirm that the majority of the LGBTQ+ community condemns necrophilia and pedophilia,⁶⁵ and the Advocate’s Trudy Ring describes any attempt to link bestiality to the LGBTQ+ movement as “simply

⁶³ Garden State Equality, “About.”

⁶⁴ R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 72.

⁶⁵ Schlatter and Steinback, “10 Anti-Gay Myths Debunked.”

absurd and deeply offensive.”⁶⁶ However, in the process of deeming some sexual attractions, identities, or expressions on the IRBPN+ spectrum as morally unacceptable or offensive, LGBTQ+ ideology undermines any potential for comprehensive application of the term pansexual. Pansexual must encompass every sexual attraction, identity, and expression if it is to mean anything.

Philosophy is not the only obstacle that the pansexual solution fails to hurdle. A second inconsistency arises when scientists like Ghose and Roughgarden appeal to the animal kingdom in order to find biological support for LGBTQ+ behavior in human beings. The problem, consistently ignored in LGBTQ+ scientific research and reporting, is that the spectrum of IRBPN+ behaviors frequently occur in nature. In a study focused on non-reproductive sexual behavior in animals, Ina Jane Wundram reports, “A male dolphin carried a dead female for about five hours, copulating with her several times.”⁶⁷ Greg Palmer documents a myriad of species of insects, birds, fish, reptiles, and primates that engage in forced copulation, evolutionary biology’s contemporary euphemism for rape.⁶⁸ For some animals like the elephant seal, a creature Roughgarden celebrates in support of LGBTQ+ ideology as “exceedingly active in same sex genital behavior,”⁶⁹ the fact that forced copulations are so common that they actually constitute normative breeding habits is selectively omitted. Palmer affirms, with regard to the elephant seal’s sexual activity, “Rape is by far the most common type of copulation in this species.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, rape is not the only aberrant sexual behavior

⁶⁶ Trudy Ring, “Right-Wing Pundit Says 'B' in 'LGBTQ' Stands for 'Bestiality',” *Advocate.com*, July 18, 2018, <https://www.advocate.com/media/2018/7/18/right-wing-pundit-says-b-lgbtq-stands-bestiality>.

⁶⁷ Ina Jane Wundram, “Nonreproductive Sexual Behavior: Ethological and Cultural Considerations,” *American Anthropologist* 81, no. 1 (March 1979): 101.

⁶⁸ Greg Palmer, “Rape in Nonhuman Animal Species: Definitions, Evidence, and Implications,” *The Journal of Sex Research* 26, no. 3 (August 1989): 364.

⁶⁹ Roughgarden, *Evolution’s Rainbow*, 141.

⁷⁰ Palmer, “Rape in Nonhuman Animal Species,” 366.

witnessed in seals. In several instances, seals have been observed participating in inter-species sexual activity. De Bruyn et al. document instances of forced copulation by fur seals upon king penguins.⁷¹ A final act of IRBPN+ sexual activity in nature that is excluded from LGBTQ+ scientific presentations involve the behavior of animals with their own offspring or juveniles of the same species, a form of incest and pedophilia referred to as inbreeding. Among primates, David Lester reports that incest has been documented between mother and son.⁷²

LGBTQ+ advocates who selectively appeal to animal behavior as scientific justification for related activities or pansexuality in human beings are confronted with a very complicated epistemological problem. Sexual activity in the animal kingdom, the same biological criteria used to justify LGBTQ+ activity in human beings, can also be used to validate IRBPN+ activity among human beings. Therefore, aside from an appeal to Cyrenaic hedonism, proponents of LGBTQ+ ideology fail to provide any epistemological justification for deferring to some sexual behaviors in the animal kingdom in order to substantiate human sexual behavior while simultaneously disregarding or condemning other sexual behaviors in the animal kingdom as immoral for human beings. By comparison, few Christians would argue with the conclusion that sexual behaviors such as incest (Lev 18:6), rape (Deut 22:25), and bestiality (Exod 22:19) are sinful and immoral. In addition, the principles established from the biblical definition of marriage as one man and one woman (Matt 19:5) coupled with the clear prohibition of sexual activity outside of marriage (Heb 13:4), the grave warning for those who would harm children (Mark 9:42), and the biblical ban on necromancy (Lev 20:27) allow Christians to confidently and consistently defer to Scripture in order to identify pedophilia, necrophilia, and a host of other sexual behaviors as sinful and immoral. LGBTQ+ ideology, on the other hand, must selectively

⁷¹ P. de Bruyn, Cheryl Tosh, and Marthán Bester, "Sexual Harassment of a King Penguin by an Antarctic Fur Seal." *Journal of Ethology* 26, no. 2 (May 2008): 295.

⁷² David Lester, "Incest," *The Journal of Sex Research* 8, no. 4 (November 1972): 270.

appeal to nature to justify some behaviors while ignoring or condemning others. Furthermore, this inconsistent double standard does not just exist in LGBTQ+ theory, but also in practice, as evidenced in the case of James Younger.

Case 5: Inconsistency in 3-D... Desistence, Dead-naming, and Double Standards

James Younger was a typical 7-year-old boy who loved superheroes and pretend sword fights.⁷³ However, like many children in contemporary culture, James was raised in a broken and dysfunctional home. After his parents divorced, James became the subject of a very bitter, very public custody battle. James's mother, convinced that her son was a female trapped in a male body, began to lead James through the process of social transition. Along with subjecting James to intensive gender-affirmation counseling, James's mother also changed her son's name to Luna. James's situation came to a head in a Dallas courtroom during the summer of 2019 when his mother sued for sole custody so she could begin stage two of gender transition by administering puberty-suppressing hormones to James. A shocked nation watched as a judge initially ruled in her favor. James's father immediately appealed the decision and won. As a result, James was permitted to choose his own gender identity and, as Aaron Feis of the *NY Post* reports on November 7, 2019, James declared to the world, "I am a boy."⁷⁴

In spite of the fact that James chose to accept and identify as his natal gender, not all LGBTQ+ advocates were as quick to acknowledge his right to autonomy as they were to defend Malisa Philips or the Connecticut transgender athletes. Some, like *Vox*'s openly transgender reporter Katelyn Burns, decried the court's decision to permit James to embrace a cisgender existence in the

⁷³ For in-depth commentary on James Younger and gender dysphoria, see my article "Saving James: Casualties in the War on Gender," *The Baptist Bulletin*, March/April 2020.

⁷⁴ Aaron Feis, "Texas Child in Gender-Transition Court Battle Attends School as Boy," *New York Post*, November 7, 2019, <https://nypost.com/2019/11/07/texas-child-in-gender-transition-court-battle-attends-school-as-boy/>.

article, “What the Battle Over a 7-year-old Trans Girl Could Mean for Families Nationwide.”⁷⁵ Throughout the commentary, published November 11, 2019, four full days after the *NY Post* disclosure, Burns insisted on referring to James either as a female named Luna, or with the feminine pronoun “she.” Burns’ reluctance to affirm James’s autonomous gender identity due to its conflict with LGBTQ+ ideology demonstrates that the contradictions within the LGBTQ+ system are not just in theory, but also in practice.

In a 2015 *Vox* article, senior correspondent German Lopez addressed, “4 Common Mistakes Made about Caitlyn Jenner and Transgender People.”⁷⁶ First, since the concept of a pronoun transcends simple etiquette and encompasses affirmation, Lopez warned, “Don’t use a pronoun someone doesn’t want you to use.”⁷⁷ Lopez, writing in defense of Jenner’s male-to-female transition, rebuked what he identified as the micro-aggressive tendencies of an element within contemporary culture that either unintentionally or intentionally misgendered Jenner as a “he.” Next, Lopez advised, “Avoid using a trans person’s deadname.”⁷⁸ The act of dead-naming, according to Lopez, “could be taken as an attempt to undermine (their) identity.”⁷⁹ Therefore, according to the rules of conduct established and practiced by *Vox*, a person’s autonomous rights concerning their individual gender identity should be respected, so long as their beliefs align with LGBTQ+ ideology. However, if a child like James Younger experiences a period of gender dysphoria followed by desistence, then, as Burns demonstrates, inconsistent application of these rules by LGBTQ+ proponents is permissible without accusation of micro-aggression, anti-science, denying the basic human

⁷⁵ Katelyn Burns, “What the Battle Over a 7-Year-Old Trans Girl Could Mean for Families Nationwide,” *Vox*, November 11, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2019/11/11/20955059/luna-younger-transgender-child-custody>.

⁷⁶ German Lopez, “4 Common Mistakes Made about Caitlyn Jenner and Transgender People,” *Vox*, June 2, 2015, <https://www.vox.com/2015/6/2/8706745/transgender-issues-mistakes>.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

rights of the child, or other forms of defamation. The tensions created by the double standard LGBTQ+ advocates apply to dead-naming and pronoun use appear more difficult to resolve than the actual condition of gender dysphoria.⁸⁰

Gender dysphoria, as defined by WPATH, is “distress that is caused by the discrepancy between a person’s gender identity and that person’s assigned sex at birth.”⁸¹ This condition is not uncommon in children. Furthermore, by WPATH’s own standards, the fact that a child questions biological gender or even prefers to dress as the opposite gender is not sufficient criteria for a gender dysphoria diagnosis.⁸² However, even in cases of actual gender dysphoria, the overwhelming majority of children who experience a period of distress over their biological gender, like Malisa Philips and James Younger, will ultimately desist. Dr. Kenneth Zucker, in his article, “The Myth of Persistence,” explains that children who continue to exhibit distress over their natal gender are labeled persisters, while those whose distress resolves are considered desisters.⁸³ Although the statistical data on persistence and desistance varies, all parties inside and outside the LGBTQ+ system agree, if gender dysphoric children are not subjected to gender affirmation, then the majority will desist. WPATH recognizes a persistence rate of 6 to 23 percent, indicating an admission by a leading LGBTQ+ science-based organization that gender dysphoric children like Malisa and James will desist as often as 94 percent of the time.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Mary Jackson, “Fighting to Let a Boy Be a Boy,” *World Magazine*, August 21, 2020, https://world.wng.org/content/fighting_to_let_a_boy_be_a_boy. After this article was initially submitted to the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics for a September 2020 reading deadline, James’s mother took additional legal steps to secure custody of James and reintroduce gender-affirmation treatment with the intent to transition.

⁸¹ WPATH, *Standards of Care*, 96.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Kenneth Zucker, “The Myth of Persistence: Response to ‘A Critical Commentary on Follow-up Studies and ‘Desistance’ Theories About Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Children” by Temple Newhook et al.,” *International Journal of Transgenderism* 19, no. 2 (April/June 2018): 232.

⁸⁴ WPATH, *Standards of Care*, 11.

Only one contemporary study by radical transgender advocates Temple-Newhook et al. suggests that the desistance rate is consistently lower than 80 percent.⁸⁵ This controversial report, which has been challenged by LGBTQ+ advocates and adversaries alike, suggests a desistance rate of 59 percent, which still represents a majority of cases.

Case 6: The Curious Case of Kenneth Zucker

Dr. Kenneth Zucker is a renowned psychologist and transgender activist who has been in the business of transitioning females into transgender males and males into transgender females for decades.⁸⁶ According to Jesse Singal, Zucker's accomplishments include holding a leadership position at Toronto's prestigious gender clinic, serving as editor of the *Journal Archives of Sexual Behavior*, developing the DSM-5 guidelines for gender dysphoria, and contributing to WPATH's *Standards of Care*.⁸⁷ However, when Zucker was asked to comment on Temple-Newhook et al.'s desistance data, he deferred to science and reason in order to conclude, "The 59 percent figure could be interpreted as implying that as many as 41 percent of the potential participants could have been persisters, which is an absurd inference with no empirical basis."⁸⁸ Zucker's challenge to the gender affirmation model has caused him to incur the wrath of LGBTQ+ advocates. Singal explains, "Some trans activists ... believe that desistance is a transphobic myth."⁸⁹ With regard to the presupposition that

⁸⁵ Temple Newhook, Julia, Jake Pyne, Kelley Winters, Stephen Feder, Cindy Holmes, Jemma Tosh, Mari-Lynne Sinnott, Ally Jamieson, and Sarah Pickett, "A Critical Commentary on Follow-up Studies and 'Desistance' Theories about Transgender and Gender-Nonconforming Children," *International Journal of Transgenderism* 19, no. 2 (April/June 2018): 212.

⁸⁶ Jesse Singal, "How the Fight over Transgender Kids Got a Leading Sex Researcher Fired," *The Cut*, February 8, 2016, <https://www.thecut.com/2016/02/fight-over-trans-kids-got-a-researcher-fired.html?mid=twitter-share-scienceofus>.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Zucker, "Myth of Persistence," 233.

⁸⁹ Singal, "Fight Over Transgender Kids Got a Leading Sex Researcher Fired."

desistence rarely or never occurs, Singal rightly observes, “While these activists ... have tried to poke holes in the consistent findings about gender dysphoria desistance, they just haven’t come up with scientifically convincing explanations.”⁹⁰ Nevertheless, due to the fact that he deferred to empirical data that supported desistence at the expense of the gender affirmation model, Zucker was fired from his position at Toronto’s gender clinic. The curious case of Kenneth Zucker demonstrates that the inconsistencies within the LGBTQ+ system do not just set LGB against T, but also run deep enough to create a schism between fellow transgender activists like Zucker and Temple-Newhook. Although LGBTQ+ advocates are quick to label dissenters anti-science, the irony of Zucker’s double standard is that, like Rowling and Navratilova, he was ostracized by a movement he helped build based on his appeal to science and reason.

Case 7: To Science We Shall Go

A scientific evaluation of puberty suppression reveals the dangerous and damaging consequences of LGBTQ+ ideology on children. When gender dysphoric children like Malisa Philips and James Younger reach the age of puberty, the administration of synthetic puberty-suppressing hormones can repress undesired biological side-effects that naturally accompany adolescence.⁹¹ From a biochemical perspective, Hruz et al. explain how puberty is a three-step process.⁹² Step one involves adrenal maturation. Between the ages of six to ten, the adrenal glands begin to secrete androgens in healthy human children. These hormones cause oily skin, acne, body odor, and hair growth, all of which indicates an early stage of puberty. Step two involves gonadal maturation. This phase normally begins between the ages of eight and fourteen with the release of gonadotropin-releasing hormone (GnRH). The third and final chemical process of puberty

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ For a detailed ethical evaluation of puberty suppression, see my book, *The Danger of Puberty Suppression* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019).

⁹² Paul Hruz, Lawrence Mayer, and Paul McHugh, “Growing Pains: Problems with Puberty Suppression in Treating Gender Dysphoria,” *New Atlantis: A Journal of Technology & Society* 52 (Spring 2017): 8–9.

involves the secretion of human growth hormone (HGH). This hormone interacts with the hormones present in phases one and two to produce a growth spurt resulting in physical and sexual maturity.⁹³ Puberty suppressing hormones inhibit the body's natural release of hormones in phase two of puberty.

Gonadal maturation begins in the brain with the hypothalamus and the pituitary gland.⁹⁴ When a child begins gonadal maturation, the hypothalamus releases bursts of GnRH. These fluctuating blood levels of GnRH trigger the pituitary gland to release follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH) and luteinizing hormone (LH) respectively.⁹⁵ FSH and LH are trophic hormones. They work together with GnRH and androgens to turn on the gonads. Gonadal maturation ultimately leads to sexual maturity, which results in the masculinization of males and the feminization of females in healthy human beings.⁹⁶ However, not everyone experiences normative puberty in three successive and complementary stages.

A rare but serious condition known as precocious puberty occurs when children experience premature gonadal maturation.⁹⁷ The long-term effects of premature gonadal maturation include stunted growth, infertility, and shorter lifespans. Puberty suppressors were developed in order to treat precocious puberty. When children are diagnosed with precocious puberty, they are treated with regular doses of synthetic GnRH agonists. These puberty suppressors mask the bursts of GnRH from the hypothalamus by keeping blood levels at a constant high. The constant blood levels of GnRH trick the pituitary gland into shutting down production of FSH and LH, which in turn causes gonadal maturation to slow or cease. Then, when the child reaches normal age for puberty and adrenal maturation begins, administration of synthetic hormones ceases

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Fredric H. Martini, William C. Ober, Judi L. Nath, Edwin F. Bartholomew, and Kevin Petti, *Visual Anatomy and Physiology*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2015), 594.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Hruz et al., "Growing Pains," 10.

and puberty resumes, thereby enabling children with precocious puberty to lead relatively normal lives.⁹⁸

The problem with puberty suppressors does not lie in their treatment of precocious puberty, but rather in their use for treatment of gender dysphoria. As Dr. Michelle Cretella explains, any study that claims puberty suppressors are safe, reversible, medically necessary, have no known side effects, or are tested and approved is only referring to their use for the treatment of precocious puberty, not gender dysphoria.⁹⁹ The appeal to precocious puberty in order to substantiate the use of puberty suppressors for gender dysphoric children amounts to ethical sleight of hand akin to appealing to some sexual behaviors in animals in order to justify similar behavior in humans. Administering puberty suppressors to gender dysphoric children constitutes an experimental treatment with irreversible results, as the contributors to WPATH readily admit: “There are concerns about negative physical side effects of GnRH analogue use.”¹⁰⁰ Therefore, it is neither medically necessary, nor evidenced-based, nor ethically defensible to treat gender dysphoric children like Malisa Philips or James Younger with puberty suppressors, even on the grounds of autonomy. Not only is this conclusion founded in scientific evidence, but also in ethical principles, such as the Hippocratic Oath.

For nearly three thousand years, nonmaleficence, also known as the Hippocratic Oath, has been the governing principle of medical ethics.¹⁰¹ Beauchamp and Childress summarize the principle of nonmaleficence as, “First do no harm.”¹⁰² The origin of this oath, as Nigel de S. Cameron explains, is not from Judeo-Christian values, but rather from Greek pagans.¹⁰³ These ancient

⁹⁸ Ibid., 8–9.

⁹⁹ Michelle Cretella, “Gender Dysphoria in Children and Suppression of Debate,” *Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons* 21, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 52.

¹⁰⁰ WPATH, *Standards of Care*, 20.

¹⁰¹ Beauchamp and Childress, *Principles of Biomedical Ethics*, 13.

¹⁰² Ibid., 150.

¹⁰³ Nigel M. de S. Cameron, “Bioethics: The Twilight of Christian Hippocratism.” In *God and Culture*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 324.

physicians, imbued with common grace, were able to recognize the intrinsic value of human life and vowed not to injure their patients in the course of medical treatment. Christians can readily adopt the concept of nonmaleficence due to biblical teachings that prohibit harming other human beings (Rom 13:10). The administration of puberty suppressors to gender dysphoric children when as many as 94 percent would desist is a clear violation of the most ancient governing ethic that LGBTQ+ advocates attempt to override by appealing to autonomy.

The Conclusion of the Matter

In January 2019, Governor Phil Murphy signed bill C.18A:35-4.35 into law, mandating that all NJ public school curriculum include the contributions of LGBT people beginning September 2020. This controversial decision was lauded by LGBTQ+ advocates, including GSE executive director Christian Fuscarino.¹⁰⁴ By the fall 2019, the GSE began to promote a comprehensive curriculum that would force schools to incorporate LGBTQ+ ideology into all subjects, bypassing any potential parental opt-out. This all-inclusive curriculum was piloted in twelve NJ schools during the spring of 2020. One of the school districts chosen to test the LGBTQ+ pilot curriculum was Pinelands Regional in Little Egg Harbor, NJ, the small Jersey Shore town where I have served as pastor at Calvary Baptist Church for the past twenty years. As Bill Spaeda of NJ101.5 explains, I was unexpectedly placed in a position where I was forced to challenge the intentional indoctrination of Pinelands students with LGBTQ+ ideology.¹⁰⁵ What began as reasoned and respectful opposition to the decision of a local Board of Education has led to opportunities to challenge SOGI issues on both the local and state level, sometimes as an

¹⁰⁴ Brooke Sopelsa, "N.J. Governor Signs LGBTQ-Inclusive Curriculum Bill into Law," *NBCUniversal News Group*, February 1, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/n-j-governor-signs-lgbtq-inclusive-curriculum-bill-law-n965806>. Brook Sopelsa is the editorial director of NBC Out, the LGBTQ digital destination of NBC News.

¹⁰⁵ Bill Spaeda, "NJ Pastor Fights Back against Forced LGBTQ Curriculum," *New Jersey 101.5*, February 7, 2020, <https://nj1015.com/nj-pastor-fights-back-against-forced-lgbtq-curriculum-opinion/>.

individual, and other times as part of a larger group. These interactions were only profitable when a classical approach was employed.

Christians who engage the culture over SOGI issues must adopt a classical approach in order to be effective. This involves interacting with culture, science, reason, and philosophy to defend the literal teaching of Scripture. Those who default to an apologetic model that begins with “The Bible says it” when interacting with LGBTQ+ ideology in the culture will find that their approach falls on deaf, or worse, combative ears. This article intended to demonstrate that it is both possible and productive to defend a biblical worldview by appealing to science, philosophy, and reason. Throughout this article, seven case studies were presented in order to expose the inconsistencies and internal conflicts within the LGBTQ+ system through an analysis of the culture. In the process, this article focused on evaluating the ideas used to support LGBTQ+ ideology, rather than vilifying the individuals who embrace this system. Furthermore, this article sought to demonstrate that believers who employ a classical approach will benefit by staying informed, increasing confidence, gaining a hearing in the culture, and addressing the concerns of young Christians. In conclusion, it is the hope of this author that this article will encourage other dispensationalists to challenge the dominant but inconsistent and incoherent LGBTQ+ system in the culture with gentleness and respect, beginning with science and reason.

J. C. Ryle's Views on Dispensationalism, Politics, and Culture

Sung Cho

Key Words: J. C. Ryle, dispensationalism, premillennialism, church, Israel, politics

In recent times, admiration and respect are rightly paid to J. C. Ryle (1816–1900), whom J. I. Packer describes as a great man, Victorian, sufferer, evangelical, Puritan, Anglican, Bishop, and Preacher, among other titles.² According to Packer, “If, from an evangelical standpoint, Charles Haddon Spurgeon was the greatest Victorian preacher, John Charles Ryle was certainly the greatest Victorian tract writer.”³ His works, including the popular work *Holiness*, are characterized by lasting achievement, impact, and universality, and recognized by major publishers such as Banner of Trust, though he is not without detractors for his conservative stances.⁴

Sung Cho, Ph.D., is the pastor of Faith Bible Church of Elkridge, Maryland.

² J. I. Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness: The Witness of J. C. Ryle* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 1–88.

³ Ibid., 61–62; According to Alan F. Munden, Ryle wrote about 200 tracts and estimated twelve million copies of them were distributed. Some are available in more than ten different languages, as book chapters, and/or on the internet. See *Travel with Bishop J C Ryle: Prince of Tract Writers* (Leominster, UK: Day One, 2012), 81–82.

⁴ Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 15. Eric Russell remarked in his biography: “Today some of the issues he regarded as important, such as Sabbath Observance, Worldliness, and Election and Predestination, are regarded as dated and irrelevant.” See *That Man of Granite with a Heart of a Child* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2001), 210–211. Ian D. Farley, in contrast, writes at the end of the nineteenth century: “The church today faces essentially the same problems as those of a hundred years ago. We could learn much from Ryle” (*J. C. Ryle, First Bishop of Liverpool: A Study of Mission Amongst the Masses* [Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000], 239).

Miska Wilhelmsson believes, however, that the said publisher has overlooked Ryle's work that clearly promotes his premillennialism and at least some agreement with modern dispensationalism: *Coming Events and Present Duties: Being Plain Papers on Prophecy*.⁵ The exact reason for the oversight cannot be verified, though Wilhelmsson suspects that a publishing house in the reformed tradition would not be eager to promote views unpopular among their readers.⁶ Such hesitation is in line with the general scorn for dispensationalism in academic circles.⁷

Ryle describes this book as a compact manual on his views of prophecy.⁸ In this collection of sermons and his other works, however, modern readers can detect recurring ideas in essential agreement with premillennial dispensationalism, with some caveats. In highlighting these ideas, this article will move from general to specific, beginning with his basic beliefs relating to the topic of dispensationalism, politics, and culture, before moving forward to more specific and relevant doctrines of ecclesiology, eschatology, and hermeneutics. Finally, some attention will be given to Ryle's approaches to politics and culture.

⁵ There are two editions of this book, the first from 1867 and the second from 1879. He writes in the preface of the latter: "I see nothing in the state of the Church or the world to make me alter the opinions on prophecy which I expressed twelve years ago" (J. C. Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties: Being Plain Papers on Prophecy*, 2nd ed. [London: William Hunt and Company, 1879], v). The second edition will be cited throughout this work.

⁶ Miska Wilhelmsson, "J. C. Ryle and the Essentials of Dispensationalism," last modified January 15, 2018, <https://miskawilhelmsson.com/jc-ryle-dispensationalism/>.

⁷ Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths*, rev. and updated ed. (Los Angeles: Theological Studies P, 2017), 102.

⁸ Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, vii.

Basic Beliefs Relating to Dispensationalism, Politics, and Culture

Two prophetic truths, understood to have literal fulfillment, yet to be fulfilled, are clear to Ryle himself as “a sunbeam”: “One of these points is the second personal advent of our Lord Jesus Christ before the Millennium—the other of these points is the future literal gathering of the Jewish nation, and their restoration to their own land.”⁹ With regards to the first point, Ryle can be readily called a premillennialist. There is, however, much to be said about this label in the context of Church of England.¹⁰ Bennett W. Rogers argues,

His premillennialism, coupled with his pessimism about the future, place Ryle in the “Recordite” or “extreme” faction within Anglican Evangelicalism according to Boyd Hilton’s taxonomy. ... Hilton argues that a division emerged in Anglican Evangelicalism in the 1820’s between two groups: the Claphamites and Recordites. The Claphamite Evangelicals were respectable, enlightened, rationalist, post-millennial, and moderate, but the Recordites were Pentecostal, pre-millenarian, Adventist, revivalists, and extreme. J. C. Ryle, like John Bird Sumner and Edward Bickersteth, were premillennialists, but hardly extremists and were closer to the moderate strand of Claphamite Evangelicalism than Hilton’s taxonomy allows.¹¹

As a moderate, Ryle disavowed fringe movements even if they agreed on key eschatological points. On the other hand, he bemoaned how his contemporaries neglected the doctrine of Jesus’s second coming, often motivated by the commonplace

⁹ Ibid., 133.

¹⁰ Steven L. McAvoy, “Ryle, John Charles,” in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 383–85; Bennett W. Rogers, “John Charles Ryle: An Intellectual Biography” (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 23–24.

¹¹ Rogers, “John Charles Ryle,” 24, n68; Boyd Hilton, *A Mad, Bad, and Dangerous People? England 1783–1846* (Oxford: Oxford U P, 2006), 174–184, 401–405.

fear of guilt by association. He complains, "... where is the fairness of telling us that we ought to reject the second advent of Christ, because there are Irvingites and Millerites in our own time"?¹² Though these groups were catalysts of popular prophetic studies, their views were judged to be extreme and divisive to both American and English Christians.¹³

Ryle carefully stayed the moderate course in his associations. He eschewed "all fixing of dates and naming of years."¹⁴ He cultivated a long-lasting friendship with fellow clergyman William Marsh, nicknamed "Millennium Marsh." In 1847, however, Ryle was harshly critical of Marsh's Sunday morning sermons of "seals, vials, and trumpets" from Revelation to a congregation with various invalids.¹⁵ Ryle found others who shared his views, as evidenced by his references to more substantial works by well-known premillennialists: Horatius Bonar, Andrew Bonar, George Ogilvy, Hugh McNeile, and others.¹⁶ By the mid-1850s, the majority of evangelical

¹² Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, 16–17.

¹³ Ibid., 85–86; Rowland S. Ward writes: "[Lewis] Way and [Edward] Irving were among the twenty or so guests at the first of a number of conferences on prophecy hosted by [Henry] Drummond [became vice president of the London Jewish Society in 1823] at his estate in Surrey. Out of these came a negative view of the future for the church. The glorious promises of the Old Testament could only be fulfilled by the return of Christ and the re-establishment of Israel. ..." In addition, William Miller, who predicted 1843–1844 as Jesus's second advent and "the Millerite excitement" which followed, "tended to polarise opinion and discredit futurism and historicism among the mainstream, leaving its advocacy to the fringe" ("Christian Mission to the Jews: 1550-1850," in *The Gospel and Israel: The Edersheim Lectures*, ed. Paul Morris [Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2014], 121–122).

¹⁴ Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, 20.

¹⁵ Ian H. Murray, *J. C. Ryle: Prepared to Stand Alone* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2016), 77–78, 135–136.

¹⁶ The specific works listed by Alan Munden are Horatius Bonar, *Prophetical Landmarks, Containing Data for Helping to Determine the Question of Christ's Pre-millennial Advent* (1847); Andrew Bonar, *Redemption Drawing Nigh: A Defence of the Premillennial Advent* (1847); George Ogilvy, *Popular Objections to the Pre-millennial Advent and to the Study of the Prophetical Scriptures Considered* (1842); Hugh McNeile's

clergy held to some form of premillennialism and the number continued to climb into the latter half of the century.¹⁷ Yet, in his sermon “The Reading Which Is Blessed,” based on Rev 1:1–3, he stressed “the things essential to salvation,” without which a soul remains lost, though he appears to be familiar with eschatological teachings of Joseph Mede, Thomas Brightman, Drue Cressener, Charles Daubuz, James Durham, Walter Garrett, and others.¹⁸

While evidentially a premillennialist, it is not readily clear whether Ryle should be called a dispensationalist. He distanced himself from dispensationalists of his day who held that the Sermon on the Mount was irrelevant in the present church age of grace.¹⁹ This disagreement, however, does not disqualify Ryle from the label.²⁰ Steven L. McAvoy calls Ryle “something of a dispensationalist” while Wilhelmsson deems his “hermeneutics, eschatology and ecclesiology as being in essential agreement with modern dispensationalism, even though he cannot be strictly described as a dispensationalist.”²¹

sermons on The Second Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ (1835) and his book *The Jews and Judaism* (1854); and Edward Bickersteth, *A Practical Guide to the Prophecies with Reference to Their Interpretation and Fulfilment* (1835) (Alan Munden, “The ‘Prophetical Opinions’ of J. C. Ryle,” *Churchman* 125 [2011]: 258).

¹⁷ David W. Bebbington, “The Advent Hope in British Evangelicalism since 1800,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 9:2 (1988): 105.

¹⁸ Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, 174–175. Besides his own reading of Scriptures, there is enough affinity with the eschatological ideas of these commentators to suggest that Ryle was influenced by them. For a fuller discussion, see William C. Watson, *Dispensationalism Before Darby: Seventeenth-Century and Eighteenth-Century English Apocalypticism* (Silverton, OR: Lampion, 2015).

¹⁹ “Are You Holy?” *Home Truths*, first series (Ipswich: Hunt, 1860) 148. See discussion in Murray, *J. C. Ryle*, 136–137.

²⁰ Vlach, *Dispensationalism*, 71; John A. Martin, “Christ, the Fulfillment of the Law in the Sermon on the Mount,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel, and the Church*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 248–253.

²¹ McAvoy, “Ryle, John Charles,” 383; see also Miska Wilhelmsson, “Ryle and the Essentials of Dispensationalism.”

Timothy A. Williams, however, presents Ryle as at least partially a covenant theologian who agreed with many contemporary historic premillennialists that Israel would be restored as a territorial nation.²² R. Scott Clark also cites Ryle in order to clarify the essential distinction between the law and the gospel, a vital tenet of classical covenant theology.²³ Elsewhere, Ryle clearly expressed belief in the covenant of redemption from eternity past.²⁴ Yet, as Michael J. Vlach observes, a dispensationalist can affirm one or all three of the covenants in covenant theology.²⁵ Therefore, Ryle is definitely a premillennialist and maybe a dispensationalist.

Ryle often avoids delving into eschatological details, but he does helpfully outline his beliefs in the preface to his collection of works entitled *Coming Events and Present Duties*.²⁶ He lists eleven “chief articles” of his “prophetical creed”:

- (1) I believe that the world will never be completely converted to Christianity by any existing agency, before the end comes.

²² Timothy A. Williams, *The True Seed of Abraham: An Historic Premillennialist's Examination of Dispensationalism's Radical Distinction Between Israel and the Church* (Berwyn Heights, MD: Heritage Books, 2010), 20, 23. Thus at least at one time, historical premillennialists differed between the two camps: (1) general restoration of Israel and (2) unique restoration of Israel. Vlach observes, “Even some historic premillennialists who agree with dispensationalists on the issues of a national salvation of Israel and a future millennial kingdom disagree concerning whether Israel will be restored with a unique identity and function that is distinct from the church” (Vlach, *Dispensationalism*, 47).

²³ R. Scott Clark, “Classical Covenant Theology” last modified September 1, 2012, <https://rscottclark.org/2012/09/classical-covenant-theology/>. The specific passage cited is as follows: “To be unable to see any difference between law and gospel, truth an error, Protestantism and Popery, the doctrine of Christ and the doctrine of man, is a sure proof that we are yet dead in heart, and need conversion” (Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. John*, 3 vols. [New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1865-73], 2:198-199).

²⁴ Ryle, *St. John*, 2:198, 381.

²⁵ Vlach, *Dispensationalism*, 86.

²⁶ Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, vii-xiv.

- (2) I believe that the wide-spread unbelief, indifference, formalism, and wickedness, which are to be seen throughout Christendom, are only what we are taught to expect in God's Word.
- (3) I believe that the grand purpose of the present dispensation is to gather out of the world an elect people, and not to convert all mankind.
- (4) I believe that the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is the great event which will wind up the present dispensation, and for which we ought daily to long and pray.
- (5) I believe that the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ will be a real, literal, personal, bodily coming; and that as He went away in the clouds of heaven with His body, before the eyes of men, so in like manner He will return. (Acts 1:11)
- (6) I believe that after our Lord Jesus Christ comes again, the earth shall be renewed, and the curse removed; the devil shall be bound, the godly shall be rewarded, the wicked shall be punished; and that before He comes there shall neither resurrection, judgment, nor millennium, and that not till after He comes shall the earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. (Acts 3:21; Isa 25:6–9; 1 Thess 4:14–18; Rev 20:1, etc.)
- (7) I believe that the Jews shall ultimately be gathered again as a separate nation, restored to their own land, and converted to the faith of Christ, after going through great tribulation. (Jer 30:10,11; 31:10; Rom 11:25, 26; Dan 7:1; Zech 13:8, 9)
- (8) I believe that the literal sense of Old Testament prophecies has been far too much neglected by the Churches, and is far too much neglected at the present day, and that under the mistaken system of *spiritualizing and accommodating* Bible language, Christians have too often completely missed its meaning. (Luke 24:25, 26)

- (9) I do not believe that the preterist scheme of interpreting the Apocalypse, which regards the book as almost entirely *fulfilled*, or the futurist scheme, which regards it as almost entirely *unfulfilled*, are either of them to be implicitly followed. The truth, I expect, will be found to lie between the two.
- (10) I believe that the Roman Catholic Church is the great predicted apostasy from the faith, and is Babylon and antichrist, although I think it highly probable that a more complete development of antichrist will yet be exhibited to the world. (2 Thess 2.3–11; 1 Tim 4:1–3)
- (11) Finally, I believe that it is for the safety, happiness, and comfort of all true Christians to expect as little as possible from the Churches or Governments under the present dispensation, --to hold themselves ready for tremendous convulsions and changes of all things established, --and to expect their good things only from Christ's second advent.²⁷

The eleven articles can be grouped into two parts for our discussion. Articles 4–10 are most helpful in understanding the doctrinal framework of Ryle's ecclesiology, eschatology, and hermeneutics. These branches are the most foundational areas of theology for useful comparison to modern dispensationalism. Articles 1–3 and 11 are most helpful for understanding how Ryle approaches politics and culture.

Doctrines Relating to Dispensationalism: Ecclesiology, Eschatology, and Hermeneutics

Articles four and five affirm Ryle's standard orthodox expectation of Jesus's second coming. The other five articles are more pertinent to the discussion at hand. Ryle's usages of the words "church" and "dispensation" indicate that epochally speaking, there is no unique church age that begins at Pentecost and ends with the rapture. "Church" is simply an assembly of

²⁷ Ibid., viii–xi.

saints whether they exist in the Old Testament or the New Testament. Thus, he is not reticent to describe Israel as the “Old Testament Church” or the “Jewish church.”²⁸ Since Ryle does not clearly differentiate church from Israel, his system does not align perfectly with recent dispensationalism which posits an essential distinction between the terms.²⁹

Less essential to dispensationalism is the number of dispensations.³⁰ While Ryle does not specify a number, three are discernible from his writings.³¹ There is “the old Jewish dispensation” (Old Testament era), “the dispensation of the crucifixion” (first advent), and “the dispensation of the kingdom” (second advent).³² The visible and bodily return of Jesus ends this dispensation and inaugurates the millennium (articles 4–6). Before then, the church must contend with the great apostasy, Babylon, and the antichrist, to be equated with the Roman Catholic Church (article ten).

The present church does not escape but endures the persecution described in the Apocalypse. Article ten helps in understanding article nine: Ryle identifies the church struggling against Romanist tendencies as the tribulation saints resisting the regime of Babylon the Great (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 9–10, 21). Ryle does not speak of “rapture” and even if he held to some form of it, it would be post-tribulational at best. He indiscriminately cites as proof passages 1 Thessalonians 4:14–18 alongside Acts 3:21, Isaiah 25:6–9, and Revelation 20:1 while discussing Jesus’s second coming in article six. Pre-tribulational rapture, however, while traditionally paired with

²⁸ Ibid., 103; Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. Matthew* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1860), 137, 269–270; *St. John*, 3:55, 98, 100, 129, 134, 249.

²⁹ Vlach, *Dispensationalism*, 79–80.

³⁰ As John S. Feinberg observes, “The number of dispensations is not at the heart of the system” of dispensationalism (“Systems of Discontinuity,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and the New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg [Wheaton: Crossway, 1988], 70).

³¹ McAvoy, “Ryle, John Charles,” 385.

³² Ryle, *St. Matthew*, 203–204, 317.

dispensationalism, is not universally perceived as a *sine qua non* of the system.³³

While Ryle's understanding of "church" and "dispensation" is general and mainstream, he clearly believes in the distinct national restoration of Israel in the millennium. According to article seven, the Jews endure the great tribulation and must be converted before their establishment as a separate nation in their own land. In the sermon "And So All Israel Shall Be Saved," based on Romans 11:26, he leaves no doubt about his position: "I can only say, that to my eyes, the future *salvation* of Israel as a people, their *return* to Palestine, and their national *conversion* to God, appear as clearly and plainly revealed as any prophecy in God's Word."³⁴

In another sermon, "Scattered Israel to Gathered," Ryle supports the thesis encapsulated in the title, with a string of passages from ten OT prophets (Isa 11:11–12; Ezek 37:21; Hos 1:11; 3:4–5; Joel 3:20; Amos 9:14–15; Obad 1:17; Mic 4:6–7; Zeph 3:14–20; Zech 10:6–10; Jer 30:3, 11).³⁵ This partial sample of unfulfilled prophecies is sufficient to advance his point. Proceeding further, he concludes that nothing is "contrary to this gathering in the New Testament ... impossible ... inconsistent with God's former dealings ... improbable ... fanatical or enthusiastic in this expectation that Israel shall be gathered."³⁶

Until that regathering, Israel's maintains its distinct status as His special people. While commenting on the parable of the vineyard workers (Matt 20:1–16), Ryle warns: "Let us beware of supposing, from this parable that the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is entirely done away by the Gospel. To suppose this is to contradict many plain prophecies, both of the Old Testament and New. In the matter of justification, there is no distinction between the believing Jew and the Greek. Yet Israel is still a special people, and not 'numbered among the

³³ Vlach, *Dispensationalism*, 99.

³⁴ Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, 189.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 132–41.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 138–39.

nations.”³⁷ Though the ten tribes did not return from captivity, all twelve tribes exist as distinct and separate people in the current epoch (Matt 19:28; Acts 26:7; Jas 1:1).³⁸

Since the destruction of the temple in AD 70, Jerusalem has been “given over into the hands of Gentile rulers” and “the times of the Gentiles” are still running their course (Luke 21:24). Gentiles currently occupy the place of prominence in place of Israel.³⁹ Jesus spoke of another yet future distress of the Jerusalem temple and Judea with Israelites once again occupying the region (Matt 24:15–28). There must be, then, a “second siege of Jerusalem” and “second tribulation” among the inhabitants, shortened only by Jesus’s Second Advent.⁴⁰

Finally, the Israelites in Judea and scattered everywhere, along with the Gentile nations, will look upon the light and glory of Christ whom they have pierced, repent, and be converted in accordance with prophecies of old (Isa 45:25, Daniel 12; Zech 12:10; Luke 1:32; 2:25–35).⁴¹ Ryle believes “Christ shall yet be King in Zion and reign over the gathered and restored tribes of Israel at His second coming.”⁴² He will reign in Jerusalem with the twelve apostles seated in “a preeminent place in the government of Israel” (Luke 22:30).⁴³ So then, Ryle would disagree with the progressive dispensationalists who hold that Jesus’s heavenly session is on the Davidic throne.⁴⁴ He would also disagree with the spiritual vision model of eschatology, as his views would be closer to the new creation model.⁴⁵

³⁷ Ryle, *St. Matthew*, 249.

³⁸ Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on the Gospels: St. Luke*, 2 vols. (London: Wertheim, MacIntosh & Hunt, 1858) 2:409.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:370–71.

⁴⁰ Ryle, *St. Matthew*, 317.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*; Ryle, *St. Luke*, 1:24, 69.

⁴² Ryle, *St. John*, 1:84.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2:408–409.

⁴⁴ Vlach, *Dispensationalism*, 22.

⁴⁵ Based on select biblical themes of the afterlife, the spiritual vision model presents heaven as a spiritual realm in which spiritual beings engage in spiritual activities that relate to the mind or the intellect. According to Howard A. Snyder, this model “has often been tainted with a sort of

Ryle arrives at these exegetical conclusions based on his devotion to “the literal sense of Old Testament prophecies” (article eight).⁴⁶ The churches of his time have neglected the straightforward interpretations of relevant passages in favor of “the mistaken system of *spiritualizing and accommodating* Bible language.” In “Occupy Until I Come,” Ryle expositis Luke 19:11–13 and concludes that with respect to Bible interpretation, Gentile followers of Christ have made errors parallel to their Jewish counterparts, albeit not as grave:

If the Jew thought too exclusively of Christ *reigning*, has not the Gentile thought too exclusively of Christ *suffering*? If the Jew could see nothing in Old Testament prophecy but Christ's exaltation and final power, has not the Gentile often seen nothing but Christ's humiliation and the preaching of the Gospel? If the Jew dwelt too much on Christ's *Second Advent*, has not the Gentile dwelt too exclusively on the *first*? If the Jew ignored the *cross*, has not the Gentile ignored the *crown*? I believe there can be but one answer to these questions. I believe that we Gentiles till lately have been very guilty concerning a large portion of God's truth. I believe that we have cherished an arbitrary, reckless habit of interpreting first advent texts *literally*, and Second Advent texts *spiritually*. I believe we have not rightly understood “all that the prophets have spoken” about the second personal advent of Christ, any more than the Jews did about the first.⁴⁷

Ryle credits this “pernicious habit of ‘spiritualizing’” to specific influential interpreters, ranging from early church

Platonic disdain for things material, perhaps seeing the body or matter as evil or at least imperfect and imperfectible. It is thus dualistic, viewing the ‘higher’ spiritual world as essentially separate from the material world” (*Models of the Kingdom* [Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991], 52–54). In contrast, according to Craig A. Blaising, “The new creation model expects that the ontological order and scope of eternal life is essentially continuous with that of present earthly life except for the absence of sin and death” (“Premillennialism,” in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999], 161–162).

⁴⁶ Munden, “‘Prophetical Opinions’ of J. C. Ryle,” 260.

⁴⁷ Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, 45–46.

fathers such as Jerome and Origen to more recent expositors like Matthew Henry and Adam Clarke who imitated them.⁴⁸ Yet if the curses, the scattering, the fall of Zion, and the rejection of Israel were all literal, so also will be the blessings, the gathering, the rebuilding of Zion, and the restoration of Israel.⁴⁹ In short, the New does not supersede the Old Testament as God progressively reveals his will in history. In making such assertions, Ryle anticipates the thoughts of Charles C. Ryrie: “New revelation cannot mean contradictory revelation. Later revelation on a subject does not make the earlier revelation mean something different.”⁵⁰

Approaches to Politics and Culture

As for current events relating to politics and culture, four of Ryle’s “chief articles” of “prophetical creed” (1–3 and 11), and his writings elsewhere reveal the futility of efforts to attain to universal conversion, due to the ubiquity of sin which even affects Christendom. As the wheat and the tares grow together (Matt 13:30), “perfect churches, perfect congregations, perfect bodies of communicants, are all unattainable in this world of confusion and sin.”⁵¹ Yet, he is confident that the elect will be gathered during this dispensation. Meanwhile, Christians ought to put as little confidence as possible in political and religious establishments as they wait for good things that accompany Christ’s second coming.

But Ryle was no separatist and he believed Christians can positively impact the culture. Packer illustrates Ryle’s “social conscience” by pointing to his different and nuanced approaches to labor unions in rural Suffolk and urban Liverpool.⁵² Ian D. Farley highlights Ryle’s activism in the latter by narrating his efforts to bring “a sweeping canvas of social issues to tackle,” including unemployment, role of

⁴⁸ Ibid., 49, 128.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 84.

⁵¹ Ryle, *Practical Religion: Being Plain Papers on the Daily Duties, Experience, Dangers, and Privileges of Professing Christians* (London: National Protestant Church Union, 1900), 158–159.

⁵² Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 247.

women, education, alcoholism, Sunday observance, and disestablishmentarianism.⁵³ Gospel-preaching, however, always took priority and evangelicals who practice it would be most beneficial to the nation.⁵⁴

For models, he looked no further than Puritans.⁵⁵ Though maligned as unlearned and ignorant men and threats to the monarchy and the Church of England, they were actually ideal Englishmen, whether they occupied secular or religious positions, and undoubtedly Protestant and Evangelical.⁵⁶ Like them, he warned the political powers of judgment to come and the ruinous dangers of irreligion in society:

While the nations of Europe are absorbed in political conflicts and worldly business, the sands in their hour-glass are ebbing away. While Governments are disputing about secular things, and Parliaments can hardly condescend to find a place for religion in their discussions, their days are numbered in the sight of God. Yet a few years, and 'the times of the Gentiles will be fulfilled.'⁵⁷

Ryle was also loyal to the Church of England, though he grew more pessimistic towards it in his last twenty years.⁵⁸ He exhorted his fellow clergymen: "We must have public feelings, and do our duty, and take our part against the common foes by which the Church of England is in danger of being assailed."⁵⁹

⁵³ Farley, *J. C. Ryle, First Bishop of Liverpool*, 123–164.

⁵⁴ Murray, *J. C. Ryle*, 207.

⁵⁵ J. I. Packer considered Ryle alongside Charles Spurgeon as "giants who knew, valued, and fed on the Puritan tradition as the benchmark of mainstream Christianity and the vitamin supply for their own souls" (*Faithfulness and Holiness*, 82).

⁵⁶ See various quotations from "Introduction" to *Light from Old Times*, xviii–xxi, cited in Murray, *J. C. Ryle*, 103–106.

⁵⁷ Ryle, *St. Luke*, 2:371–372; See also *Principles for Churchmen: A Manual of Positive Statements on Doubtful or Disputed Points*, 2nd ed. (London: William Hunt, 1884), 315–342.

⁵⁸ W. F. Machray, *The First Bishop of Liverpool: John Charles Ryle, D.D.* (London: Charles J. Thynne, 1900), 24; Murray, *J. C. Ryle*, 179–193.

⁵⁹ From "What is Our Position?" an address to clergy in 1858, *Home Truths*, seventh series (1859), 266–267; cited in Murray, *J. C. Ryle*, 89.

Ryle was a devotee of the church to the end with all its internal inconsistencies, such as the confusing use of the word “regenerate” in the Prayer Book that allow for the doctrine of baptismal regeneration.⁶⁰ In spite of ecclesiastical decline around him, he was faithful in his preaching and writing ministry, which found acceptance all over the world in its English-speaking parts and even beyond to wherever his works were translated.⁶¹

Ryle knew, however, that he had to move beyond his desk and pulpit. In his time, the national church, not the government was the source of help for the unemployed, the poor, the sick, the orphans, and the handicapped.⁶² He was actively attending many conferences, especially during his fruitful years in Stradbroke.⁶³ He asked his fellow churchmen to tolerate diocesan conferences and church congresses for the sake of unity.⁶⁴ He was supportive of any ministries that promote the gospel, such as the lay movements led by Henry Varley in Stradbroke and D. L. Moody in Liverpool.⁶⁵ After reflecting on Jesus’s Passover pilgrimage to Jerusalem that led to his encounter with Nicodemus, Ryle encouraged believers to go to places where they would be among the few and the minority, for the sake of the gospel:

In large assemblies of men convened to consider ecclesiastical and religious questions, we may confidently assume that there are always some present whose hearts are right, and who are willing to

⁶⁰ See discussion in Murray, *J. C. Ryle*, 146–153. Ryle was convinced a Catholic sacramental understanding of “regenerate” could not even be allowed by the Thirty-Nine Articles.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 90. Machray recounts the story of how Ryle’s tract *Are You Free?* translated into Spanish, impacted an anti-Protestant Dominican friar named Manuel Aguas in Mexico: “The scales fell from his eyes while reading it, and, like St Paul, though sent to persecute, he began to build up the Church” (W. F. Machray, *The First Bishop of Liverpool: John Charles Ryle, D.D.* [London: Charles J. Thynne, 1900], 44).

⁶² *Ibid.*, 158.

⁶³ Murray, *J. C. Ryle*, 114–121.

⁶⁴ Ryle, *Principles for Churchmen*, 62.

⁶⁵ Murray, *J. C. Ryle*, 134.

support the truth, even though they sit in bad company, and are for the present silent and overawed. There is no warrant for staying away from assemblies and councils merely because we happen to be in a minority.⁶⁶

In relation to end time views, clergy and laity of Ryle's time had ample opportunities to attend evangelical gatherings where millennialists promoted teachings of unfulfilled prophecy and future restoration of Israel. Most famous were the Albury Conferences in Surrey (1826–1830); annual gatherings that began in 1829, associated with his aforementioned friend William “Millennial” Marsh, later known as the Beddington Prophetic Conferences, held annually; and the Powerscourt Conferences in County Wicklow from 1831 onward, attended in the following year by J. N. Darby as one of the speakers.⁶⁷ Henry Montagu Villiers invited leading Anglican Evangelicals of the day to deliver the annual Lent sermons at St. George's Bloomsbury. Ryle spoke there in 1851, 1853, and 1855. The first and last addresses, “Idolatry to be Destroyed at Christ's Coming” and the aforementioned “The Reading which is Blessed,” based on Isaiah 2:18 and Revelation 1:1–3, respectively, are preserved in *Coming Events and Present Duties*.⁶⁸

Ryle was a lifelong supporter of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Amongst the Jews (now named Church's Ministry Among Jewish People [CMJ]), speaking at five annual meetings, preaching at two anniversary sermons, and becoming an honorary life governor in 1875.⁶⁹ Again, two of them are preserved in *Coming Events and Present Duties*: “Scattered Israel to be Gathered” (1858) and “And So All Israel will be Saved” (1879).⁷⁰ Practical exhortations from the 1858 sermon

⁶⁶ Ryle, *St. John*, 2:173; *Shall We Go? Being Thoughts About Church Congresses, and Our Duty with Regard to Them, From the Stand-Point of an Evangelical Churchman* (London: William Hunt and Son, 1878).

⁶⁷ Munden, “‘Prophetic Opinions’ of J. C. Ryle,” 259.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 260; Munden, *Travel with Bishop J C Ryle*, 98–99.

⁷⁰ Munden, “‘Prophetic Opinions’ of J. C. Ryle,” 251.

include praying for Jewish souls, removing stumbling blocks such as unholiness in Christendom and idolatrous influence of Catholicism, and “promoting special efforts to promote the conversion of Jews.”⁷¹ In the 1879 sermon, Ryle reveals the influence of Charles Simeon (one of the founders of CMJ in 1809) and Robert Murray M’Cheyne who “loved the cause of the Jews.”⁷²

Unfortunately, Ryle did not always practice what he taught. Despite Liverpool’s prime position to receive immigrants, he was passive and hesitant to speak against Russian persecution of the Jews in 1881 in stark contrast to his Manchester counterpart, Bishop James Fraser.⁷³ Farley attributes this inactivity to Ryle’s patriotism, vehement opposition to disestablishment, and his acceptance of Christian militarism in mid-Victorian Britain.⁷⁴ Though Ryle was not a typical churchman of England, he was very much an Englishman and at times this identification conflicted with his stated beliefs about Jews.

So then, Ryle was not without his faults but his commitment to the gospel, orthodoxy, and his deep-rootedness in the Scriptures would tether his bold engagement through the Church of England into the broader cultural milieu. Along with fellow Victorian Spurgeon, Ryle “fought to the last to keep the pure biblical gospel clear and central, in the face of doctrinal and devotional decline which they were almost lone voices in challenging.”⁷⁵ Like D. A. Carson, Ryle would not face such

⁷¹ Ryle, *Coming Events and Present Duties*, 141–147.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 197. M’Cheyne wanted to secure blessings for the world, the Church of Scotland, and individuals by means of a biblical recognition of God’s special love for the Jews, prayers for their salvation, and missionary efforts directed towards them. See Robert Murray McCheyne and Andrew A. Bonar, *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray McCheyne* (Dundee: William Middleton, 1845), 88.

⁷³ Farley, *J. C. Ryle, First Bishop of Liverpool*, 161.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 161–164.

⁷⁵ Packer, *Faithfulness and Holiness*, 82.

challenges of his day without his “non-negotiables of biblical theology.”⁷⁶

⁷⁶ D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 44–59.

Tracing Matthew 1:21 throughout the Gospel of Matthew

James Buchanan

Key Words: Gospel of Matthew, Messiah, kingdom of God, church, promise

Introduction

The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus as the Savior of the world. Jesus himself makes this clear in his final command to make disciples of all nations, not just those who are the physical descendants of Abraham (Matt 28:19–20). However, when Matthew records the first declaration that Jesus would be a Savior, the message is not as clear as it seems. The angel sent to Joseph gave the first hint that Jesus would be a Savior when he said, “She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (1:21).² While this verse seems straightforward to 21st century Christians, it can be difficult to understand how revolutionary this statement truly was for a first-century Jewish audience.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty interpreting Scripture is discovering the original context and authorial intent. It is far too easy to simply read current cultural and theological context into the Scriptures rather than discovering the author’s cultural and theological context. This consideration has tremendous

James Buchanan is the pastor of Berean Church, where he has served since 2002. He is an adjunct professor at Clarks Summit University in both the Bible/Theology and Counseling programs. He graduated from Baptist Bible Seminary in 2008 and is nearing completion of his doctoral degree. He and his wife Lynelle also serve as resident directors at CSU. James and Lynelle recently celebrated 25 years of marriage and have three wonderful children. In his spare time, James loves to play volleyball, to read, and to play board games with his family.

² All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version.

implication for both our interpretation and application of the Word of God. When we do not spend the time rightly studying the Scriptures (2 Tim 2:15), it becomes far too easy to misapply Jesus' work and teaching. This is especially true when studying the Gospels.

As such, this article seeks to interpret Matthew 1:21 in its original context and discover how this verse is fully developed throughout Matthew's Gospel. This study will be addressed systematically, focusing on several important aspects along the way. First, a proper interpretation of Matthew will be presented. Second, the original recipients of this Gospel will be discovered, as well as the original intent of Matthew's work. Third, the statement that Jesus "will save his people from their sins" will be separated into two distinct aspects: 1) Jesus as a Savior from sin; and 2) Identifying who his people are. Finally, all of these components will be synthesized to develop an expanded statement of the angel's original message to Joseph.

Interpreting Matthew

Each Gospel is meant to be read on its own merit. Each human author was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16) with a separate agenda for his writing. As Toussaint writes, "They wrote their Gospels with the intention of setting forth an argument."³ To best discover that argument and to prevent a wrong understanding of that argument, the Gospels should be read and interpreted within their own books. Strauss agrees, stressing that the Gospels should be read "vertically, following the story from top to bottom—that is, from beginning to end."⁴ Certainly, there are things to learn when one harmonizes the Gospels, but each author gave enough context within his own writings to properly understand and interpret his intent correctly. In other words, one should not attempt to discern Matthew's argument from Luke's perspective.

³ Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980), 13.

⁴ Mark L. Strauss, *Four Portraits, One Jesus: A Survey of Jesus and the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 33.

One must establish the purpose of Matthew's Gospel through careful exegesis, determining the major emphasis that are established at the beginning while also growing in depth and understanding throughout the Gospel. When examining the Gospel, one can see Matthew emphasizes three important points. The first is that Jesus is the *Jewish* Messiah.

There are 61 specific quotations from the OT in the Gospel of Matthew.⁵ All told, there are over 120 unique references to the OT Scriptures.⁶ Matthew makes clear as he uses these OT Scriptures that he is demonstrating Jesus fulfilled the prophecies written about him (Matt 1:22). Although the many references to the OT could have been faith-affirming for Gentiles, it is much more likely that Matthew was writing his Gospel to those familiar with and rooted in the Jewish Scriptures, especially for those looking for the promised King who would come and rule on David's throne forever (2 Sam 7:14–16). This is one of the reasons that Matthew links the lineage of Jesus immediately to both Abraham and David (Matt 1:1): The covenantal promises God gave to both of these men would ultimately be fulfilled in Jesus.

The second major point of emphasis in Matthew's Gospel is that of the kingdom of God. It is mostly referred to as the "kingdom of heaven" (a phrase unique to Matthew), but is used in the same way as "kingdom of God," referring to the earthly rule of God's kingdom on earth.⁷ Jewish disciples would have wondered what happened to this kingdom, since the Messiah was supposed to bring in this kingdom to rule and was preached by both John the Baptist and Jesus as being near (3:2; 4:17). In other words, if Jesus is the King, then where is his kingdom? Matthew, more than any other Gospel writer, addresses the nature of the

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 3.

⁶ W. G. Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1948; repr. Kregel Classics, 2010), 270.

⁷ Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on Matthew," *Plano Bible Chapel*, 2019, <https://www.planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/html/nt/matthew/matthew.htm>, 77.

kingdom and its postponement, waiting until Israel is ready to receive her King.⁸

The third point of emphasis is on this new body of believers called the church. Israel would be familiar with Gentiles who converted to Judaism, but the church is something entirely different and distinct from Israel as a nation or as a religion. In this new body of believers, the unity is centered around the person, work, and teachings of Christ, not the law (28:19). The church (16:18) is a group of called-out people who will be united around Christ. In this new body, it did not matter if one was Jewish or not; it was a completely new group of people separate from the kingdom of God, while still remaining a part of it (21:43).

Note that the church has not replaced Israel, nor has it replaced the kingdom. It is a separate entity, a mystery uniquely revealed first to those living in first-century Palestine (Eph 3:4–6). To properly understand Jesus' ministry, one must differentiate between the kingdom of God which Jesus preached (Matt 4:17), and the church that Christ would build (16:18). If at any point these two programs are confused to be one single program, then Jesus' original message of good news to the nation of Israel is lost, replaced by a self-centered approach to interpretation which re-interprets Jesus' message to the current context.

These are the three major focal points of Matthew's Gospel, and one can find supporting evidences for each throughout his work. However, to best understand Matthew 1:21 and the Gospel as a whole, one must discover Matthew's original audience.

Matthew's Intended Audience

As stated above, if one of Matthew's focal points is to show Jesus as the Jewish Messiah, it would make sense that Matthew wrote to Jews who needed to be assured that Jesus fulfilled the Messianic prophecies. Since these prophecies would have been written in the OT and not in the general literature of the day, the

⁸ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God as Set Forth in the Scriptures* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 274–276.

frequent references and quotations would not have benefited those unfamiliar with the OT.

Matthew wrote not only to strengthen the faith of Jewish believers, but also to persuade those who may not have believed in Jesus before his death and resurrection. In fact, this is clear even within the Gospel itself, as there were those who witnessed Christ post-resurrection who still doubted (28:17). Thus, one can conclude that there is at least a portion of Matthew's Gospel that is meant to persuade those of the nation of Israel who were still not sure about Jesus and his mission.

This may seem redundant, but it is important to recognize the Jewishness of Jesus' ministry and message. It is tempting to interpret Jesus' words as speaking directly to the church, but one must remember that Jesus ministered to Israel before his death, and only commissioned the building of his church *after* his resurrection (28:19).

Those who misinterpret the Gospels as "church" literature generally begin with the assumption that the NT is written for Christians, while the OT is written for Israel.⁹ This oversimplification of the Scriptures misses the uniqueness of the writing of God's word, fails to recognize the progressive revelation of Scripture, and removes the importance of the OT Scriptures. It is more appropriate to see the Gospels (and Acts) as a bridge between God's program with Israel in the Old Testament and the building of Christ's church in the New Testament.

This leads to the first clear declaration of Jesus' mission as confirmed by the angel in Matthew 1:21. Joseph, described as a righteous man, was betrothed to Mary, a woman who also feared God. It was reported to him that Mary was found to be pregnant before their consummation, and rather than exposing her sin publicly, he was going to send her away quietly and privately. Before he can act on his plan, though, an angel of the Lord comes to assure him that Mary has been faithful. Instead, the Holy Spirit

⁹ This is a broad, general statement, not meant to label any one individual, but to assert that many simply do not understand the distinction between the Old and New Testaments, and the unique fit of the Gospels as a bridge between the two.

conceived within her a son. The angel reveals that Joseph is, “to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” This birth of the Savior is meant to ultimately fulfill the words of Jeremiah 7:14, declaring that “God (is) with us.”

This declaration identifies two specific issues that are referred to and expanded upon throughout Matthew’s Gospel. The first deals with the work of Jesus—what does it mean that he will save from sins? How will he accomplish this mission? Does the concept that Jesus would save from sins differ from the expectation that the coming Messiah was supposed to be? The second issue revolves around the people of the Messiah—who are “his people”? Are his people referring to the nation of Israel? Are his people those who would believe? Or is this a reference to the church, the new body of believers that Jesus will call out in his ministry? We will address these issues in the order presented here, first dealing with Jesus as a Savior from sins.

The Messiah as a Savior from Sins

Jesus is introduced as the “Christ” immediately in Matthew 1:1. The word refers to the “fulfiller of Israelite expectation of a deliverer, *the Anointed One, the Messiah, the Christ*.”¹⁰ To truly understand who Jesus is and the fullness of his mission, one must understand his connection to the OT promises regarding him.

The very first verse of Matthew’s work reveals that Jesus is the embodiment of all the promises given to the nation of Israel: “A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham ... (Matt 1:1).” Tying Jesus to David and Abraham would automatically bring to mind the covenant promises given to these individuals, both of which have national implications.

Beginning in Genesis 12, Moses wrote that God called a man named Abram out of the land he was living in to go to a strange land and walk through it. In the process, God gives Abram three

¹⁰ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1091.

unique promises,¹¹ unconditional in their nature, which would be for him and his descendants. The first promise is that God would give him the land that he roamed (Gen 12:7). The distinct boundaries of the land would be explained and expounded upon throughout the OT, including another covenant given later, but ultimately this land was gifted to Abraham and his descendants. It is important to note that this promise is given with no conditions; God will keep his promise simply because he promised.

The second promise was that of descendants. Abram had no children of his own, yet God promised that his descendants would be as uncountable as the numerous stars of the sky (15:5). This would ultimately lead to the birth of Isaac, who would have twins, one of whom (Jacob) would become the father of the twelve tribes of Israel.

These first two promises are easily identifiable and traceable throughout the Scriptures. One can determine if the land has been given (to this day not completely as defined in the OT), or whether Abram was blessed with innumerable descendants (a reasonable assumption at this point). This third promise, however, is more abstract than the first two. It contains several aspects of blessing and cursing, and a global promise of blessing. God revealed the beginnings of this promise in Genesis 12:2–3:

I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.

In giving this promise, God reveals several times that it is his intention to bless Abram. That blessing will be accomplished in several ways. First, Abram's name will be made great. God

¹¹ When God is initially described to have given the promises to Abraham, they are not seen as a cohesive whole. Rather, they are presented at different times and places, beginning in Genesis 12:1–3, and continuing on throughout the account of his life. For the purpose of this paper, Genesis 12:1–3 will be foundational for the beginning of what is called the Abrahamic covenant.

declares that Abram will be a blessing to others. God also states that the response to Abram will result in a similar response from God. It is the last one that has significant ramifications on the birth of the Messiah: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

As one traces the story of Abram and his descendants, the ramifications of this third promise are immediately on full display. Those who blessed Abram and his family would be blessed (such as the nation of Egypt when Joseph was dispersing the food and grain), and those who cursed Abram and his family would be cursed (as when Sarai was taken by Pharaoh in Genesis 12). These ramifications occurred locally with potentially expanded regional or national impact, but for the most part, these particular blessings and cursings would not encompass all peoples on earth.¹²

However, one must look also at the second individual Jesus is related to according to Matthew 1:1, and that is David. David was the second king of the nation of Israel, and early on in his reign, he decided to build a house for God (2 Sam 7:2–3), a temple that would ultimately be built by his son Solomon. Because of David’s pure intention to honor God, God chose to honor David with a promise that would further clarify the blessing that would come to the entire world. David would give birth to a son who would build the temple, but beyond that, God also promised a lineage. “The emphasis on an offspring/seed who would come from David’s body links this covenant with the Abrahamic covenant.”¹³ Beyond his son Solomon would be born into David’s lineage who would establish a kingdom that would reign forever (v. 16). “The kingdom and its throne would be permanent, a realm over which the Son of David would reign

¹² One can argue that a great portion of the world was blessed through Joseph, but even this does not rise to the ultimate level of “all peoples” being blessed through Abram.

¹³ Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, New America Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 340.

forever.”¹⁴ This promise is referred to as the Davidic covenant. Both the Abrahamic covenant and the Davidic covenant find their ultimate fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus, which is why Matthew’s Gospel references both of these OT individuals and by extension the promises given to them.

If a descendant of Abraham were going to bless the whole world and David were going to give birth to a son who would establish an eternal kingdom, then it would be reasonable to assume that Israel was looking for a political savior. While there would be no doubt that the Messiah would save, the thinking would have been more that he would save people from their enemies, not primarily from their spiritually poor condition.

Jeremiah 23:5–6 reveals how this king would deliver Israel from her enemies:

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.”

It is important to note the emphasis on physical safety from enemies and peace in the land. As Jeremiah spoke to the nation just before and during the exile to Babylon, everyone who read this prophecy would understand the national ramifications of a king who would save the people. Peace, wisdom, and righteousness would come from the rule of this king, but a people in exile and distress and oppression would long for safety in the land. This Branch of David would be a king who delivered the entire nation from her enemies.

This is what makes the angel’s declaration in Matthew 1:21 so significant. Israel needed spiritual purification from sin, but this was something that is usually attributed to the work of God

¹⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, “2 Samuel,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 1:464.

alone.¹⁵ When Jeremiah prophesied about the new covenant that God would establish with his people, God said, “For I will forgive their wickedness and remember their sins no more” (Jer 31:34b). Yet the angel declares this would be the work of the Messiah. Jesus will save from sins, indicating his divine nature and work, hinting at the primacy of his mission—providing redemption to his people. This introduces one of the major works of the coming king: He was not just going to provide physical or political salvation,¹⁶ but spiritual salvation as well. Barclay argues, “Jesus was not so much The Man born to be King, as He was The Man born to be Saviour.”¹⁷ He is both, and to miss the saving nature of the king is to miss what the king came to do. As Osborne says, “It is clear that Jesus has come to bring spiritual salvation rather than political deliverance.”¹⁸

The emphasis on Jesus’ ministry of spiritual salvation is apparent from the beginning, even in the ministry of John the Baptist. The one who was to prepare the way for the Messiah began his mission by calling the nation of Israel to repentance (Matt 3:2). Those who believed in John’s message repented and were baptized to signify their turning from sin (v. 6). When John was arrested, Jesus took up the mantle of preaching repentance to the people of Israel, calling his people to turn from sin (4:17). In fact, Jesus’ first sermon recorded in Matthew’s Gospel contains the call to holiness for his people (5:48).

Beyond just calling for spiritual purity and holiness, Jesus displayed his ability to forgive sins. In Matthew 9, Jesus forgives

¹⁵ John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 99.

¹⁶ Wayne S. Baxter, “Missing Matthew’s Political Messiah: A Closer Look at His Birth and Infancy Narratives,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 27, no. 3 (2017): 341.

¹⁷ William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 2 vol. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew P, 1958), 1:23.

¹⁸ Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, edited by Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 77.

the sins of a paralytic, demonstrating Jesus' power and authority to deliver people from their sins (9:2–8). Throughout the rest of chapter 9, Jesus' concern for the spiritual condition of his people is apparent. Jesus makes clear his focus is on calling sinners (9:13). He would even be accused of being a friend of sinners (11:19). This focus completely perplexed the religious leaders and crowds of Jesus' day who believed that the Messiah was to be focused on restoring and rescuing Israel physically.

To be fair, Jesus' own disciples did not fully understand the mission of the Messiah. When Jesus began to explain the need to go to Jerusalem to suffer and die at the hands of the religious leaders, Peter rebuked Jesus (16:21–22). It would be only as they drew close to Jerusalem that Jesus revealed the reason for heading to Jerusalem was to “give His life as a ransom for many” (20:28). That Jesus would be the ransom indicates that he is substituting his life for others. This would call to reference the sacrifice described in Isaiah 53, one who would bear the sins of the people (Isa 53:6).¹⁹ In this sense, Jesus would be saving others' lives through his death. Carson writes, “The implication of the cumulative evidence is that Jesus explicitly referred to himself as Isaiah's Suffering Servant . . . and interpreted his own death in that light.”²⁰

Even in this moment, the connection between His death and the forgiveness of sins is not clearly drawn. It would be the night before Jesus would die that He expands on how His death will provide salvation from sin. In the midst of the Passover meal, Jesus paused to instruct His followers about a new observance. Taking and breaking the bread, Jesus acknowledged that the bread would now represent His body and instructed his disciples to eat it (26:26). Then, taking the cup of wine, He taught, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (v. 28).

Under the Old Testament law, the blood of animals was used to cover sins. However, Scripture made it clear that sins could

¹⁹ Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 824.

²⁰ Donald A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, vol. 8, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin and J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 484.

not fully be taken away by the blood of animals (Heb 10:4). Now, with Jesus' sacrifice, a complete and final offering can be made for sin. "It would no longer be an animal's blood that would cover sins, but his blood—the blood of the Messiah-King."²¹ Jesus' blood would seal the covenant that God was making with his people, completely forgiving them of their sins. This was to call to mind the promise of a new covenant that would be established by God as revealed in Jeremiah 31:31. As Morris notes, "When Jesus spoke of his blood as blood 'of the covenant,' he was surely claiming that, at the cost of his death, he was about to inaugurate the new covenant of which the prophet had spoken."²² Morris continues, "It would be the establishing of the covenant that was based not on people's keeping it (Exod 24:3, 7), but on God's forgiveness (Jer 31:34)."²³ Toussaint writes that Matthew 26:28 "looks back at the words spoken by the King in Matthew 20:28 and anticipates the command of Christ to His disciples to make disciples of every nation."²⁴

While Jesus certainly came as the King, he also came as the Savior, and he offered his own life to cover the sins of many people. These "many people" are should be identified as "his people." This brings us to the second aspect of the angel's message, the people that Jesus came to save. We now turn our attention to answering the question: who exactly are Jesus' people that he came to save from sin?

The People of the Messiah

A quick glance at the Gospel would immediately provide an answer: It must be referring to the nation of Israel. This is an easy assumption to make, especially since Jesus is connected with the covenant promises to Abraham and David, and his blood sealing the new covenant that God would establish is the nation of Israel. Yet, when taking a longer look at the progression of Jesus'

²¹ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 439.

²² Morris, *Gospel According to Matthew*, 661.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Toussaint, *Behold*, 300.

ministry, one will come to the conclusion that his people should not be limited to the nation of Israel.

This expanded understanding of who Jesus' people are would not have been clear to Joseph, who would have connected the birth of a Savior to be specifically linked to Israel.²⁵ His identification as Immanuel, God with us, in Matthew 1:22 indicates a further connection with Israel, linking back to Isaiah 7:14. Even the Magi from the east identified Jesus as the "King of the Jews" (Matt 2:2), further solidifying an initial impression that Jesus' people would be the nation of Israel. Repschinski agrees, stating that, "For the reader, ὁ λαός αὐτοῦ is, at this point, the people from whom Jesus comes. The phrase suggests that in his saving activity Jesus will be taking possession of his people, and this people is Israel."²⁶ Piotrowski goes so far to suggest that the entirety of Matthew 1:21 is informed by Ezekiel 36 and 37, that what is being hinted at here is that Jesus will restore Israel from the exile by forgiving their sins.²⁷

However, when one looks at the entirety of Matthew 1, there are hints that Jesus' people would extend far beyond the nation of Israel. Blomberg writes, "Matthew's names for Jesus present him as the fulfillment of the hopes and prophecies of Israel but also as one who will extend God's blessings to Gentiles."²⁸ Even before the names of Jesus are provided, one can see from the genealogy listed in verses 2–16 that there are several Gentiles included. Matthew does not detail every individual in Jesus' family tree, so the names listed must have significance.²⁹ In fact, five women (this would include Mary, the mother of Jesus) are listed in Jesus' family tree, a unique approach in listing

²⁵ Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 99.

²⁶ Boris Repschinski, "For He will Save His People from Their Sins' (Matthew 1:21): A Christology for Christian Jews," *Catholic Bible Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (April 2006): 256.

²⁷ Nicholas G. Piotrowski, "I Will Save My People from Their Sins': The Influence of Ezekiel 36:28b–29a; 37:23b on Matthew 1:21," *Tyndale Bulletin* 64, no. 1 (2013): 54.

²⁸ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 53.

²⁹ Ibid.

genealogies in Jewish literature.³⁰ Some have suggested that the incidents surrounding the inclusion of these women were to indicate the potential illegitimacy of their children. “The only factor that clearly applies to all four is that suspicions of illegitimacy surrounded their sexual activity and childbearing.”³¹ There may be some truth to this, but it is also important to note that three of these five women were people outside the nation of Israel. To be certain, Tamar was introduced into this lineage before the actual formation of Israel as a nation, but this is the first indication that the blessing of Abraham is stretching beyond just the physical descendants of Abraham. Both Rahab and Ruth were Gentiles, but sufficient evidence suggests that they converted to Judaism. Still, the inclusion of these women, and their heritage, would suggest that there is more to being the people of Jesus than being a physical descendant of Abraham.

When one reads Matthew 3, it is apparent that John’s message of repentance was directed toward the nation, calling them to repentance in preparation for God’s kingdom (3:2). His ministry was to a primarily Jewish audience, reaching into Jerusalem, Judea and specifically the Jordan region (3:5). Yet in a confrontation with the Pharisees and Sadducees, John makes some very powerful claims about the people of God. John says to them, “And do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham” (3:9). While John is not directly stating that Gentiles will be a part of the people of Abraham, what is clear that the presumption that nationality is good enough is wrong. Bloomberg takes it further, suggesting, “Matthew’s two-pronged emphasis, introduced in chaps. 1–2, thus continues: the messianic age brings new people into God’s kingdom and excludes others who thought themselves secure.”³² No matter the original emphasis, it is important to note that John is presenting the concept that God’s people can stretch beyond just the physical descendants of Abraham.

³⁰ Weber, *Matthew*, 17.

³¹ Bloomberg, *Matthew*, 55–56.

³² *Ibid.*, 78.

When John is arrested, Jesus begins his personal ministry in Galilee, identified as belonging to the Gentiles (Matt 4:15), fulfilling prophesy from Isaiah 9. While Jesus focused on the synagogues of the region, places of Jewish gatherings for worship and discourse, he received crowds from the region, some of whom would have been Gentiles. But the first real introduction of an individual introduced as a Gentile into the story of Matthew's Gospel is that of the Roman centurion in Matthew 8:5–13. While Luke's Gospel focuses on different aspects related to this incident, it is important to note that both Gospels detail the tremendous faith he had in Jesus, and Jesus' response to his faith. The centurion would not have recognized that Jesus was the seed of Abraham who would bring blessing to the world, but he did recognize that Jesus had authority over sickness and disease. This centurion approached Jesus in humility, acknowledging Jesus' authority—that Jesus could just say a word and disease would respond. Through this public declaration, the centurion demonstrated his faith in the person and work of Jesus (though not necessarily the full identity and mission of Jesus). As a response, Jesus recognized this centurion for his faith and used his example to provide insight on who his people are. "I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven" (8:11).

This description of those coming from the east and west refers to those who are outside the nationality of Israel, not just limiting those who literally live to the east and west of Capernaum.³³ Jesus also communicates that there will be those removed from the kingdom who thought they belonged because of national heritage. "Many from within Judaism ('subjects of the kingdom'), who by ancestry believe themselves still part of God's covenant, will discover that they are not in the kingdom at all but painfully and eternally excluded from God's presence."³⁴ Jesus is making clear that natural descendants of Abraham are not guaranteed entrance into the kingdom. "The phrase **subjects of the kingdom** in 8:12 refers to the Jews, who had been given

³³ Ibid., 142.

³⁴ Ibid.

all the covenants and promises, and who should have known how to be heirs of the kingdom.”³⁵ A careful examination of the passage identifies that Jesus is looking for people who respond with faith. In praising the centurion, he contrasts this man’s faith with the nation of Israel, identifying the centurion’s faith as unheard of among even His own people.

This contrast would continue throughout Jesus’ ministry. Those who were of the nation of Israel, who received the covenants and promises of God ever since God chose Abraham, generally did not respond in faith. They responded in amazement and awe (7:28), but never took the additional step of believing in Jesus as their Messiah as they should have. They certainly pursued his healing power and his ability to cast out demons, but never personally submitted to his authority. This ultimately resulted in Jesus’ rejection of the crowds (11:16–19), the cities of Israel (11:20–24), and their religious leaders (the entirety of chapter 12). As a result, Jesus’ mission shifted from the nation of Israel as a whole (as presented completely in chapter 10, especially verses 5–6) to those who would respond appropriately to Jesus and come to him (11:28–30). This transition is solidified in Matthew 13 when Jesus begins to teach in parables, talking about the mystery of kingdom rather than its nearness.

It is then important to realize that the account of the Roman centurion (a Gentile) coming to Jesus occurs while Jesus is focused on the national ministry to Israel. Jesus recognized and praised this man’s faith (though certainly not complete in the understanding that Jesus would die for his sins), and acknowledged that there would be many who will come from outside the nation to gain acceptance into God’s kingdom. Matthew is not concerned with answering the question as to whether the centurion was credited with saving faith, but it seems entirely reasonable to believe that he was credited with righteousness, just as Abraham was credited with righteousness for believing in the revealed promise of God (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3). His understanding of Jesus and who he was and what he was to do may not have been complete (and certainly not even his disciples knew the full extent of his mission at this point, either),

³⁵ Weber, *Matthew*, 117.

but the centurion's complete confidence in Jesus and his authority to act was. This may not be the first instance of faith as presented in the Gospel of Matthew (one can argue John, the disciples, or even the leper of Matt 8:2), but it is the first instance where an individual is recognized by Jesus as having great faith. In giving clarity to Matthew 1:21, it seems as though Jesus' people would extend beyond just the nation of Israel, and perhaps not even including the entirety of the nation, but rather any who would come to him in faith.

The next individual whom Jesus praises for her faith is the Canaanite woman of Matthew 15:21–28. In an often misunderstood and misapplied section of Scripture, Jesus is approached by a foreign woman to help her demon-possessed daughter. In Mark's account, she is identified as a Greek (Mark 7:26), but the emphasis of her heritage is meant to "evoke scriptural images of the original inhabitants of Palestine as objects of scorn and enemies of Israel."³⁶ This isn't just a regular Gentile, but a descendent of a nation that was judged as an enemy, a previous inhabitant of the land of Israel that was to be destroyed (Deut 20:17). Like the Samaritan of Luke 10:33, her nationality would have prompted revulsion by the original Jewish audience, and an affront (potentially) to Jesus and his disciples. Unlike the Roman, who was in authority over Israel, this foreigner had no real standing when it came to the people Israel. Yet she confidently approaches Jesus, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession" (Matt 15:22).

That she addresses Jesus as the "Son of David" is telling. This is a Messianic term, not just identifying Jesus' nationality. What makes this even more interesting is that she was no descendant of Abraham, thus she had no national right to call out to Jesus using a national Messianic term. "She was of a cursed family who had no right to Messianic blessings, yet she approaches the Lord on the basis of His Messiahship."³⁷ Jesus refuses to acknowledge her claim, but she continues to cry out, frustrating the disciples. Note that they aren't concerned about

³⁶ Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 631–32.

³⁷ Toussaint, *Behold*, 195.

her or her daughter; they are simply being inconvenienced and disturbed by her repeated request (v. 23). As the disciples ask Jesus to send her away, Jesus finally responds to the pleas of this foreign mother: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel” (v. 24). Hearing this, she falls on her knees before Jesus, crying for help; he replies, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs” (v. 26). This is not meant to be a slight to her sex or race, but rather an illustration meant to show why he was not going to help her. The nation of Israel is his focus, and it would be improper to supply what was meant for Israel to others. This is despite the fact that he has already helped Gentiles in other cases (like the centurion of chapter 8). Yet Jesus is firm—he will not help because he was sent to the nation of Israel. As Toussaint writes, “It is clear that Christ came to offer Himself to His people, and in grace He is prolonging the exclusiveness of His ministry in the hope that Israel will repent.”³⁸

However, she refuses to give in, arguing that even dogs benefit from the crumbs left behind by the children. “The woman accepts that she has no claim to be put on a par with the Jewish people in benefiting from God’s present intervention for the sake of his people, but even the dogs get scraps, and that is all she asks for.”³⁹ At this, Jesus praises her faith and rescues her daughter. In the same way that he delivers the centurion’s servant, he delivers this mother’s daughter.

This encounter leads Jesus to do for the Gentiles what he has done for Israelites—miraculously heal and feed them. In much the same way as he ministered to a primarily Jewish audience until this point, he now ministers to a primarily Gentile audience in Matthew 15. “Matthew apparently intends us to see Jesus as still in Gentile territory here.”⁴⁰

The most striking difference here is the response of the crowds. The Jewish crowds have not responded appropriately to Jesus, but this Gentile crowd does, fully appreciating and acknowledging Jesus as one sent from God. “The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 635.

⁴⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 245.

well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel” (v. 31).

As has been seen, Jesus responded to those who came to him in faith. Those who would be thought of as his people (Israel) did not respond, yet those who were outside the nation did respond. As a result, Jesus always acknowledged the faith of the individual who responded. As Jesus’ ministry changed from national Israel to individual respondents, Jesus clarifies who his people really are in Matthew 12:48–50: “‘Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?’ Pointing to his disciples, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.’” Chapter 12 represents the full transition of the call to national Israel and the nearness of the kingdom to the individual call to whoever will believe (presented as “whoever does the will of my Father”) and the mystery of the kingdom. Jesus makes clear that “human kinship does not take priority over spiritual kinship, and Jesus is busy ministering to crowds that include his spiritual family.”⁴¹

Matthew 12:48–50 gives greater clarity into the response by both Jesus and the Gentile crowds in chapter 15. As these Gentiles respond properly to Jesus, Jesus begins to treat them as the mission. As Blomberg says, “The ‘will of God,’ as throughout Matthew, means obedience to God’s commands by following Jesus.”⁴² These Gentiles are proving themselves to be Jesus’ people by responding in faith and worship.

This ultimately comes to a head when Jesus enters Jerusalem to offer himself as the Savior from sin. As Jesus is challenged by the chief priests and elders, he points out their refusal to listen to John the Baptist. Comparing their behavior to tax collectors and prostitutes, Jesus states that these “sinners” will enter the kingdom of heaven, not the chief priests (21:31–32). Again, Jesus is not identifying with the entirety of the nation of Israel, only those who respond appropriately. Jesus continues to instruct the religious leaders, teaching a parable about a landowner who is not respected by the servant hired to tend the field. These servants ultimately kill the landowner’s son. As a result, these

⁴¹ Ibid., 208.

⁴² Ibid.

servants would be removed, and new ones would be hired. Jesus applies the message this way: “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (v. 43). In other words, those who believed they were worthy of the kingdom were never to receive it. Others who respond appropriately to Jesus will be given this kingdom. This declaration, combined with what has transpired previously, makes clear that only those who produce fruit (repentance and faith) worthy of kingdom will be able to enter it.

CONCLUSION

We now have enough of an understanding of these two themes to develop a substantive understanding as to the nature of the statement made by the angel in Matthew 1:21. As the coming King and Messiah, Jesus’ primary mission was to offer himself as the sacrifice for sins, addressing the spiritual need of the people. As such, he is the one who saves from sin. Combined with the phrase, “his people,” what is ultimately being prophesied as his people does not include the entirety of the nation of Israel, but only those who would respond in faith to him. This would include many from the nation, but *also* those outside the nation (as demonstrated in this article).

This is not to deny that Jesus’ death is sufficient to cover the sins of the world; on the contrary, anyone who believes is covered by his death (John 3:16). But Jesus’ death would only be effective for those who respond by faith. Matthew 1:21 does not deny that Jesus cannot save everyone, but it does suggest that his death will save his people fully.

As such, I offer the following explanation for the statement in Matthew 1:21: The angel tells Joseph that this child is to be named Jesus, because he will offer himself as the sacrifice for the sins of those who will receive him by faith, and they shall be called his people.

This expanded statement fits well with Jesus’ final command recorded in the Gospel of Matthew: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (28:19–20a). The command

is to make disciples of *all nations*, not just from Israel. That is because his people is a new people, a new gathering of those who would respond by faith. Jesus declared that he would build his called-out group of believers, the church (16:18). They are his people, gathered from all nations, whom Jesus came to save from their sins.

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Galatians: Freedom through God's Grace. By Phillip J. Long.
Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019. 156 pp. Softcover \$22.

Philip J. Long (Ph.D.) currently serves as Dean at Grace Christian University in addition to editor of the *Journal of Grace Theology*. Long has written extensively on the Synoptic Gospels, most notably *Jesus the Bridegroom* (Pickwick, 2013). He has also contributed several scholarly essays on Paul such as his recent “The Potter and the Clay” presented at the 2019 SBL Midwest Regional Conference. Long regularly contributes to Reading Acts (readingacts.com), a blog dedicated to NT studies.

Paul’s letter to the Galatians represents a tension between freedom and law. Exposing and balancing this duality is the goal to which Long has committed in *Galatians: Freedom Through God’s Grace*. The broad theme that is woven throughout the book is the subtitle: “freedom through God’s grace.” More specifically, Long details three reasons to study the book of Galatians that serve as a catalyst for the study of the book and its themes: since it is the earliest NT writing, it allows us to understand Acts (and in particular chapter 15) in a “behind the scenes” fashion; second, it deals with the first major problem of the adolescent church; and finally, it addresses the question of freedom in Christ. This reasoning coalesces into a description of the main themes, which Long sees as central to the main “story” of Galatians. The first is the question of the Gentile believers into the Jewish community. He states, “The main problem Paul addresses in the book of Galatians is the status of Gentiles in the church” (4). Building off this is a second theme: Paul’s authority; specifically, Paul’s authority “to declare Gentiles free from the law” (5). A third theme is the status of the law in the new age (e.g., the question of circumcision in chapter 3). And finally, the relationship between law-keeping and ethics (i.e., how can one not keep the law and still be moral?). Many of these subthemes can be subsumed under the grand heading of “Freedom Through God’s Grace.”

Long makes clear that his contribution is not meant to be a technical or exegetical commentary, but rather for lay people, pastors, and Bible teachers who “need an overview of the main issues in the book of Galatians” (ii) without being bogged down in the mud of scholarly opinion.

The book could be broken down in the following way: chapters 1–3 (1–26): one gospel and the tension of law; chapters 4–6 (27–59): establishing Paul’s apostleship and being crucified with Christ apart from the law of works; chapters 7–8 (60–83): the purpose of the law in a new age; chapters 9–11 (84–109): slavery and the promise of freedom; chapters 12–15 (110–154): law-free Gospel. Long writes each chapter in a predicable but effective manner: an introduction, exegesis, and conclusion. Additionally, these chapters are broken down into mini-themes of the selected passage reflected in the title (e.g., Galatians 2:15–21 under the sub theme of “Crucified with Christ”). The exegesis is backed up by mostly current research, word studies, and various interpretive methodologies and why they may be insufficient.

The obvious interpretative framework in which Long sees Galatians is dispensational. This is clear, for instance, in the rejection of replacement theology in chapter 8, which discusses the interpretive decisions in Galatians 3:15–22. Long tends to the discussion in a way that does not alienate his intended audience. In other words, he is not mired down by technical explanations of covenant theology versus dispensationalism. Rather, he meekly explains what a covenant is and how his interpretive framework best supports the view of the writer, i.e., Paul. To these ends, Long presents many satisfying answers that will please fellow dispensationalists without alienating others with a reformed view of these passages. Rarely does Long dwell much on the verbiage of this system, nor does he engage in combat with other views contrary to his own.

There is much to enjoy about Long’s treatment of Galatians. One decisive element that other commentaries tend to lack is the addition of Second Temple culture, literature, and worldview within the context of the NT. By contrast, Long’s work leaves the impression that it is hardly possible to understand Paul without placing him in a proper, thoroughly Jewish context. This place setting occurs consistently throughout the book and is helpful in the finer points of his argument. Furthermore, Long presents the information in an unassuming way that laypeople, pastors, and scholars can approach and appreciate. Particularly helpful are the discussion questions at the end of each chapter so that this book can be read on its own or in a group setting. Overall, Long’s volume on Galatians accomplishes the

goal of presenting the information in a highly condensed fashion (with the “busy pastor” in mind) that is neither overtly technical nor too amateur. The three themes listed at the beginning mostly shine through throughout the book, presenting a cohesive front on which build his analysis. He frequently returns to these ideas in the first three chapters. Furthermore, the consistency with which Long weaves these themes throughout has to be commended as it provides a logical flow from one point to the next. Although this book was written to appeal to laypeople, it can still be useful for those who need a quick summation of the scholarly work on the epistle without stumbling through every controversy. Without a doubt, this work seems to be suited for Bible studies through the book of Galatians; the bite-sized chapters could span nearly 16 weeks and would not represent an overly taxing addition to busy lives.

Despite these praises, there are a few critiques as well. For one, the theme “freedom through God’s grace” sometimes leaves the reader wanting. It seems as if there are peaks and valleys where this theme shines through clearly at times and at other points is obscured (cf. chapters 2 and 14). Additionally, the first several chapters incorporate an abundance of extracurricular information that walk along Long’s tertiary purpose: how Galatians resonates with Acts. As the book reads down the stretch, this, too, becomes an afterthought (this may be because the epistle moves from a more narrative form with many allusions to contemporary events of Acts to didactic. In this case, it seems that the thematic material should be altered in order to showcase the narrative and the didacticism instead of attempting to unionize what was meant to be separate).

Finally, while the volume’s targeted audience seems to be mostly laypeople, some arguments could have benefitted from additional explanations. This is particularly true of chapters 11 and 12 where an extended scholarly analysis would have clarified Long’s own interpretive approach and why it is superior to other interpretations. With Long’s own teaching pedigree and careful analysis, this seems like it could have been done without alienating his lay audience, but also provide answers to wondering parishioners.

Nevertheless, Long has written an approachable and extremely valuable addition to Galatians commentaries. Questions remain if this commentary will be useful for those who hold perspectives opposing

Long and to what extent the work will benefit the academy. However, there can be little doubt that this treatment has a multiplicity of reminders, tools, and hermeneutical answers for those engaged in church ministry, lay ministry, and for pastors and Bible teachers. And because of that, one is sure to find valuable insights from Long's commentary that will help shed light on Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Justin Daniel, Th.M. (in progress)
Southern California Seminary
El Cajon, CA

The Last Things (Contours of Christian Theology). By David A. Höhne. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 344 pp. Softcover \$30.00.

David Höhne, from Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, presents an erudite work in *The Last Things* where he attempts to present a theological interpretation of eschatology using primarily biblical categories and touchpoints. The viewpoint is amillennial and demonstrates an acceptance of NT priority for textual interpretation. In contrast to the outline of most general eschatologies, Höhne adopts the Lord's Prayer as the starting point for integrating his discussion of many biblical texts pertaining to a discussion of last things (xv). By doing this, the author hopes to develop eschatology using theological themes that are not "alien to the Scriptures themselves" and to provide a discussion of the topics in a way that growth in the Lord and responsive prayer emerge in Christian life (xv–xvi).

In addition, Höhne explains that use of the Lord's prayer grounds his system in apostolic reflection. Unfortunately, he believes this to harmonize with "rereading the Old Testament in the light of the person and work of Jesus Christ." While Jesus is the fulfillment of many OT predictions and promises, it is not at all certain that the word *rereading* is the best term to describe what is essentially NT use of the OT. Often this refers to an interpretation of the OT that has diminished connection to the OT text itself as it changes or removes the literal meaning. This approach jeopardizes the autonomy of the OT text for itself so that eschatological texts in the Old Testament do

not stand on their own and are not always brought over appropriately into eschatological themes.

In spite of potential problems in the overall approach, the work is refreshing in many respects. The presentation does not come across like most eschatology books because of its creative use of the Lord's Prayer for much of the book's outline. After an introductory chapter, chapter one entitled "Life in the Middle?" sets out the primary practical agenda of the book. "Life in the middle" refers to the time between the resurrection and ascension of Christ and the second coming (the time of the millennium to most amillennialists). The individual Christian living during this timeframe must learn to live in light of the proper understanding of the Bible's teaching about eschatology. Thus, eschatology is not just pie in the sky but matters to everyday life at the present time. All interpreters should agree with this aspect of eschatology regardless of overall position. In chapter three ("The Name Above All Names"), the opening words of the Lord's Prayer—"Our Father, hallowed be your name"—are integrated with a biblical theology of the name of God including both OT and NT texts. This pushes forward to Jesus as the one who has been exalted with the name above all names. The volume of information in this category is exemplary and helpful for biblical integration. However, the next chapters—on God's kingdom and God's will following the Lord's Prayer—while continuing a creative presentation of the material, are less helpful (see below). The last three chapters follow the prayer for God to preserve, forgive, and deliver us. The main takeaway here is the conservative affirmation of the physical resurrection of Jesus.

Naturally, a traditional dispensationalist like this author will have some specific issues with *The Last Things* since it comes from a different tradition. First, Höhne follows the popular evangelical view of inaugurated eschatology relative to the Messianic kingdom (172–73). Second, while the work gives proper place to the nation of Israel in past history, it has no place for the future of Israel as a nation in its land. Höhne, to his credit, does address OT texts that deal with Israel. For example, in chapter five ("The Father's Will for One and All"), he uses much OT Scripture and deals with the history and promises to David, Israel, Abraham, Noah, and Adam (in that order). While the order does not follow the progress of revelation, it is a somewhat

positive retracing of God's intentions throughout OT history. In fact, the prediction of Daniel 7:10–14 is viewed correctly as related to the end times even if the details of Israel's future based on the context are not considered (177). The promises appear to be viewed only in a spiritual sense. One particular example is the handling of Ezekiel 36:27 & 37:14—"I will place my Spirit within you"—as a fulfillment beginning on the Day of Pentecost (10). The context of Ezekiel's promises to the nation of Israel are overlooked, especially in chapter 37. The text actually reads "I will put My Spirit within you and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land." Contextually, the prediction is about Israel becoming a nation again through the power of the Spirit. None of this makes it into Höhne's analysis. This absence of national aspects for Israel's place in God's coming kingdom on earth with specific land allotments in fulfillment of OT pledges from God is consistent with Höhne's amillennial position.

Third, *The Last Things* does not present a robust exegetical analysis of the standard millennial positions. There is no major discussion of the various passages that are marshalled by proponents of each view. A brief review is presented (242–244), although the understanding of dispensational premillennialism contains some outdated information. In particular, Höhne follows the well-worn view that John Nelson Darby invented the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture in the early nineteenth century. He appears to be unaware that historical studies in the last thirty years have shown that such an understanding can no longer be credibly maintained.¹ The quick review of millennial positions is followed by a theological discussion that centers mostly on Moltmann's label of historical millenarianism which includes both premillennialism and postmillennialism (244–251). Höhne interacts mostly with Moltmann's criticism of amillennialism. Exegetical considerations do not play a major role in this interaction. The author can be granted a measure of grace on this point since the series preface states, "The series [Contours of Christian Theology] offers a systematic presentation of most of the major doctrines in a way which

¹Especially in view here is William Watson's study *Dispensationalism Before Darby*.

complements the traditional textbooks but does not copy them” (ix). Nonetheless, substantive interaction with Scripture at this point would have been more helpful considering its significance.

Fourth, there are a couple of questions that arise concerning Höhne’s approach to the book of Revelation, one general and one specific. First, he adopts the view that Revelation is an example of apocalyptic genre. This conclusion is an overstatement. Most exegetical commentaries on the Apocalypse suggest that it is prophetic literature given in an epistolary framework while containing within it some elements of apocalyptic genre. The difference is not a nuance of minor importance. Second, and more specifically, Höhne, while acknowledging that millennial positions depend upon many different texts, teaches (like most amillennialists do) that Revelation 20:1–10 is the most important text for understanding the millennium. Dispensationalists view this differently. The basis for understanding the outline of God’s coming kingdom is established in the OT well before one comes to any of the NT. The teaching of the prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, etc.) leads to the conclusion that Messiah is coming to the earth in the end time days to establish his earthly kingdom over Israel and the entire world. Revelation 20 adds the additional information that there is a one-thousand-year inauguration of that kingdom with the framing of certain events like the binding of Satan and the Great White Throne judgment. The information from the Apocalypse is not necessary to establish the basic outline of what is called premillennialism.

In conclusion, this scholarly work by Höhne is not a work to be recommended for the average person in a local church. It is best to be used by seminary students, pastors, and scholars. In fact, it provides a refreshing approach to an amillennial view of the end times that complements my collection of works by other amillennial scholars. However, it is not a convincing defense of that position although it reminds us of the importance of Christian living in the here and now.

Mike Stallard, Ph.D.
 Director of International Ministry
 The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry
 Bellmawr, New Jersey

Sanctification: God's Passion for His People. By John MacArthur. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 80 pp. Softcover \$11.99.

As a boy, I was reminded more than once that often big things come in small packages. John MacArthur's, book, *Sanctification: God's Passion for His People*, is small, but big. It's a short book that is long on content. In less than sixty pages, MacArthur effectively and concisely addresses God's passion for his people and their sanctification, suggesting that God's passion ought to be a pastor's passion for those he shepherds. MacArthur writes, "Despite the diversity of so many responsibilities, all those pastoral duties ultimately point to one clear and singular goal: the sanctification of God's people.... It is a fine summation of every pastor's ministry purpose: to see that Christ is formed in his people" (14). Selah!

The seven chapter titles telegraph the priority MacArthur places on sanctification as the primary goal of a pastor for those entrusted to his shepherding care. They are "The Prize of the Upward Call"; "In Defense of the Gospel"; "The Heart of a True Shepherd"; "Christ, the Embodiment of True Sanctification"; "The Missing Note"; "Authenticity and Antinomianism"; and "What Grace Teaches." MacArthur features the role of the pastor as the shepherd of God's sheep, who like real sheep need and require personal, pastoral care. He contends that the pastor should follow the example of Paul whose task was "to participate in leading believers to Christlikeness," which "is what he was most passionate about" (33). MacArthur asserts that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of true sanctification who personally disciplined Paul (Gal 1:12). According to MacArthur, "Jesus is the one who taught Paul to pursue sanctification in the power of the Spirit in order that he might be an example and an instrument for the sanctification of the people given to his care" (42). MacArthur proposes that Christ's passion for his people's sanctification sets the compass for sound, biblical philosophy of ministry (43). This passion was caught by Paul and must be the passion of pastors today who must neither be indifferent about holiness nor ignore to instruct their people in a whole-hearted pursuit of sanctification or Christlikeness.

According to MacArthur, Jesus' passion for the sanctification of his people was evident in his prayers and preaching. Jesus desired to

see his followers not simply appear to be holy, but to be Christlike. Likewise, the goal of sanctification is that Christ be formed in those shepherded by local church pastors who preach the Word and pray for God's people under their care. MacArthur asserts that too much preaching today is designed to make people feel good while practically nothing is said about sanctification (54). Thus, he stresses that Christlike, Spirit-empowered sanctification is needed. Bottom line? A godly pastor must not be satisfied with anything less than the sanctification of God's people.

Sanctification: God's Passion for His People is a primer for every pastor on the priority of teaching, preaching, modeling, and praying for personal, practical sanctification in his own life as well as in those he shepherds. In the last chapter, "What Grace Teaches," MacArthur clearly articulates that grace teaches discipline, correction, and power. In his own words, MacArthur states, "Can I say it simply? Sanctification is a process of fighting for full joy and not selling out for a cheap substitute along the way" (68). Amen!

David R. Culver, D.Min
Associate Pastor
Shawnee Hill Baptist Church
Jamestown, OH

The Lord's Prayer: A Guide to Praying to Our Father. By Wesley Hill. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 144 pp. Hardcover \$15.99.

Wesley Hill skillfully unpacks the Lord's Prayer, one statement at a time. He begins with the invocation, "Our Father in heaven," followed by the seven specific petitions, and concludes with the doxology, "For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen." Using the New Revised Standard Version as his English translation, Hill methodically and effectively moves through this familiar prayer that is the prayer primer for followers or disciples of Jesus Christ. But in the introduction, Hill clearly asserts his purpose for writing this book: "Above all, I want to show that the Lord's Prayer is first and foremost about Jesus Himself ... each petition is a window into Jesus' own life of prayer.... The Lord's Prayer is a portrait of Jesus Christ.... Jesus is 'the invisible

background of every one of [the Lord's Prayer] petitions'—all of them are arrows that point toward Him..." (4–5). Thus, what often is called, "the disciples' prayer"—because Jesus spoke it in response to the disciples' plea to be taught how to pray—is in fact, the Lord's Prayer. It is for us, but about him.

In the invocation, Hill marks the strong contrast between the fifteen references to God as Father in the OT and the 170 times Jesus refers to God as Father by the end of the Gospel of John. Addressing God as "Our Father in heaven" launches the child of God into prayer as "we are invited to address God in the same way Jesus does" (13). The distinction between heavenly and earthly Father cannot be missed as through prayer we acknowledge "God's nearness and availability without pinning Him down to a specific geographical address" (15).

In the next seven chapters, Hill addresses each of the specific requests in the prayer, detailing the significance of each one. The first three petitions focus on the Father and the last four on his children. The "always and already holy" name of God is to be acknowledged, though it is holy whether or not we acknowledge it. His view of the kingdom on earth is more mystical than literal as he equates it with God's rule and the person of Jesus Christ reigning in the hearts of men. There's no mention of this petition being fulfilled ultimately when Jesus returns to establish his millennial kingdom on earth. Furthermore, Hill states that to pray, "Your will be done," is to "adopt an appropriate distress over the world as it exists now and to hold on to the conviction that God will even now begin to change the world" (42).

Hill espouses that the next four petitions model the posture of dependence on God of Jesus himself that he commands to his followers. Or as Hill put it, "Each petition of the Lord's Prayer is a window onto Jesus's character and actions before it is instruction to us" (52). For example, Hill states that Jesus sees himself as the daily bread he encourages us to pray for (54). He develops this theme throughout the rest of the book portraying Jesus as the sinless forgiver of sins, the one who was saved from the greatest of all trials, and the one who was delivered from the evil (one). Hill then states, "There is coming a time when we will have no more need to ask God for bread, for absolution, or for rescue.... Petitions will not be necessary in

God's future. We will cease asking God to supply our needs, since we will be entirely satisfied" (94). Amen!

Although Wesley Hill has not written a comprehensive commentary on the Lord's Prayer, his perspective that it is a portrait of Jesus Christ and each petition points us toward him is insightful and makes this book a value-add to one's study of this prayer and library.

David R. Culver, D.Min.
Associate Pastor
Shawnee Hill Baptist Church
Jamestown, OH

Redemptive Reversals and the Ironic Overturning of Human Wisdom (Short Studies in Biblical Theology). By G. K. Beale. Edited by Miles Van Pelt and Dane Ortlund. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019. 202 pp. Softcover \$14.99.

Redemptive Reversals and the Ironic Overturning of Human Wisdom by G. K. Beale is the latest in the Short Studies in Biblical Theology series edited by Dane Ortlund and Miles Van Pelt. The goal of the series is to "connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers" (19). These short books take a biblical theme and demonstrate how that theme pervades Scripture, ultimately for the sake of glorifying Christ and building up his church (20).

G. K. Beale, a celebrated and fascinating NT scholar, writes to show the reader that the theme of irony pervades the Scriptures as God interacts with man. He writes, "This book is about the notion that God deals with humans in primarily ironic ways" (21). In his introduction, Beale distinguishes between *retributive irony* and *redemptive irony*. Retributive irony (chapters 1–2) occurs when "God punishes people by the very means of their own sin" (21), while redemptive irony (chapters 3–6) occurs when the faithful are actually blessed through what appears at first to be a curse. Beale also intends to demonstrate that retributive irony is ultimately seen through Satan and redemptive irony is ultimately seen through Christ.

Chapter one, “God Judges People by their Own Sin,” focuses on retributive irony in the OT. Beale uses examples such as Hamman being judged by what he intended for Mordecai, David being punished for his sin against Uriah, and the Egyptian Pharaoh’s claim to be a god turned against him through the plagues, to show that God often uses the very sin that one chooses in judgment against that person. After many historical examples and demonstrating that the same theme pervades the Psalms and Proverbs, Beale points out that this manner of God’s dealing is not the exception, but the rule, and concludes with some practical suggestions to avoid ironic judgment.

Chapter two, “People Resemble the Idols they Worship,” builds on some of Beale’s earlier work and argues that Scripture teaches that we become like what we worship—an example of retributive irony.

Chapter three moves to redemptive irony by considering “The Irony of Salvation.” Beale shows that, though Christians often experience hardship now, the tears will be turned to joy because the Christian will receive eternal salvation. This irony is seen in the gospel when the judgment a person was to receive is overturned by Christ’s work on the cross and a blessing is received in its place. Furthermore, Christ was the supreme example of this irony, taking the punishment on himself for the sake of a future reward.

Chapter four, “The Christian Life: Power is Perfected in the Powerless,” examines the truth found in Romans 8:28, “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God” (115). Beale points to the example of Joseph in the OT, whom God blessed through the evil choices of his brothers and points again to Christ—who suffered but received a reward. The Christian who is struggling through suffering can find hope only in the word of God.

Chapter five, “Faith in Unseen Realities Contradicts Trust in Superficial Appearances,” focuses on the many examples of Hebrews chapter eleven. All the faithful saints in that chapter experienced suffering and hardship and yet had faith in the unseen blessing to come—had faith in the redemptive reversal.

The final chapter is entitled “The Irony of Eschatology.” Beale points out that Christ ironically began to fulfill the prophecy in Daniel chapter 7 and how Christ ironically has begun to reign invisibly now, with a full physical reign to come. Jesus’ reign will ironically be one

of both mercy and grace (to those who believe) and judgment (to those who reject him).

Beale's book has many strengths. First, the book is faithful to the series goal of connecting academic biblical theology with the everyday believer. The book is short (202 pages) and very readable with many contemporary examples that most people will be able to relate to. At the same time, Beale seriously deals with the theme in an academically reputable way that while not comprehensive, is certainly thorough.

Second, *Redemptive Reversals* is immensely practical. Beale includes practical suggestions in most of his chapters (see 48–50 or 132–134 for example). These suggestions are meaningful and demonstrate how serious theology can impact life.

Finally, Beale does a fantastic job at demonstrating one of the many ways that a particular theme ties Scripture together. He accomplishes his goal of demonstrating that irony is a pervading theme in a way that is meaningful for every Christian.

I heartily recommend this book for Christians who want to better understand their Bible. It is accessible for all Christians and will deepen their knowledge of Scripture while also deepening their walk with Christ. Beale's book is also beneficial for seminarians as a launching pad into greater study.

Joseph Bouchoc
Pastor of Discipleship Connections
Merrimack Valley Baptist Church
Merrimack, NH

Against the Darkness: The Doctrine of Angels, Satan, and Demons. By Graham A. Cole. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019. 270 pp. Hardcover \$40.00.

Graham Cole, Dean and Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, contributes the latest work in the highly esteemed Foundations of Evangelical Theology series titled *Against the Darkness: The Doctrine of Angels, Satan, and Demons*. In writing this work, Cole desires to present a biblical and historical study of the doctrine of the supernatural world

while addressing contemporary concerns and sound application (21) while also placing the doctrine within the broader framework of a complete systematic theology (28). Following an introduction (chapter 1), Cole addresses the nature and activity of angels (chapters 2–3). He then moves to address the nature of Satan and his demons (chapters 4–5). This follows with a series on the defeat of these evil powers, beginning with Christ’s victory over demonic powers at the cross (chapter 6), the believer’s spiritual warfare over these powers (chapter 7), and the final destiny of these powers (chapter 8). Cole ends *Against the Darkness* with a conclusion explaining the relationship of angelology to other categories of systematic theology (chapter 9) and three short appendixes addressing topics as the metaphysical relationship between angels and humans (appendix 1), angels in Islamic thought (appendix 2), and angels in important articles of faith (appendix 3).

Against the Darkness does a solid job presenting the major biblical texts and topics in angelology to help the student understand the doctrine. Cole engages some unique theological topics in angelology, including the validity of the substantive view of the image of God in light of the rational nature of angels (42, 228), the Barthian thesis that Satan and demons are not fallen angels (101–102), the various models of spiritual warfare (172–187), the doctrine of testing the spirits (197–201), and Michael as the possible restrainer of 2 Thessalonians 2:6–8 (223–226). One issue I would have like to have seen discussed is the development of Satan in the biblical text, as this is a common target of anti-apologists who contest that Satan was developed late in Israel’s history as a theodicy. This aside, the array of topics will keep the interest of the seasoned theologian. However, perhaps the greatest strength of *Against the Darkness* is Cole’s address of important contemporary issues. Some of these issues include the praying for angelic assistance (70–71), the validity of angel stories (75–76), exorcisms (131–133), and the relationship of the demonic to mental illness (135–137). The addressing of these issues shows the breadth of *Against the Darkness*, which makes the text a handy reference work, and especially for the church, which is Cole’s primary audience (13).

On the other hand, there are some areas of *Against the Darkness* that could benefit from a more robust discussion. This might be best

seen in Cole's discussion of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 and their relationship to the fall of Satan. Cole defends the "double reference" view, which understands that these passages describe both the fall of the historic kings of Babylon and Tyre and the fall of Satan simultaneously (90–94). Cole explains the major views on the passages well and clearly contrasts them with the major evidence for the "double reference" view, which includes the exaggerated language of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, Satan's fall as described in 1 Timothy 3:6, and the testimony of the church fathers (93). However, a more complete exegesis on both passage in the original languages would have been helpful to show how these texts defend the "double reference" view, and especially in how the "exaggerated language" refers to Satan rather than irony against boastful historic kings. Another area that some readers might find disappointing is Cole's interaction with Second Temple literature. This interaction is noticeably limited in *Against the Darkness* per Cole's methodology (cf. 258), as he adheres to a more cautious approach to these uninspired texts (118–120), concluding that the systematic theologian should only "draw on background studies insofar as the biblical text is illuminated by them" (119). His interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4 becomes a case study of this methodology (138–140), as he understands the sons of God as "godly Sethites" rather than angels based upon "comparative difficulties," meaning that Cole finds the angels view more difficult to accept (139–140) even though it is the historic view per Second Temple literature (118–119). However, even if Cole is skeptical of the value of Second Temple literature (a view which is not entirely unreasonable considering the fanciful content of some of these works), it would have been helpful to include a fuller discussion of these texts and their merits or faults, as this literature contains important historical positions and is a significant area of biblical studies. There is also no interaction with ANE literature, an extrabiblical area of study that has become increasing important in the discussion of the supernatural world (for example, see Michael Heiser's recent works). Again, while Cole might find these extrabiblical sources suspect (and again, not without merit), it would be helpful to include a discussion of them and how they relate to Scripture, and especially in regard to the so-called "Divine Counsel" view, which has grown in popularity in OT studies. As a

final point of critique, Cole makes much of the fact that the Western world has ignored angelology due to its secular trending and that the majority world should be consulted more on the issue (22), and yet there is little citation of sources from the majority world, save a reference to demonic deception from an African perspective (201n159). Some development in this area would have enhanced the text.

These issues aside, *Against the Darkness* is a solid theological text on angels. While the text could have included fuller discussions on certain issues and extrabiblical literature, it presents the key passages and positions on the various subtopics within angelology with clarity and graciousness. Its discussion of important current issues makes the text even more valuable. I highly recommend it for pastors, students, and teachers as an important reference work.

Daniel Wiley, Ph.D. (ABD)
Adjunct Professor
Grand Canyon University
Phoenix, AZ

Church Leadership and Strategy for the Care of Souls. By Harold L. Senkbeil and Lucas V. Woodford. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 84 pp. Softcover \$9.99. Digital (Logos edition) \$6.99.

The two authors of this slim volume, Harold L. Senkbeil and Lucas V. Woodford, write from a combined ministry experience of more than seven decades, all within the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) context. Both men served as parish overseers prior to their current ministries, with Woodford serving nearly 20 years and Senkbeil more than 30 years. Currently, Woodford is the President of the Minnesota South District branch of the Lutheran Church, while Senkbeil serves as Executive Director of Spiritual Care at Doxology: The Lutheran Center for Spiritual Care and Counsel. He also serves as adjunct professor at Columbia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

This little book is attractive in many ways. The first is its size. It is a trim 5x8 and consists of only 84 pages proper (with 18 pages of

Front matter). The reason this is attractive, in my opinion, is because of the crisis among pastoral leadership where men in ministry are dropping out at a rate of 50% within five years and 80% within 10 years (xiii). The ministry demands on these men undoubtedly seem overwhelming such that any hope of seeking help from a hefty tome might simply be too discouraging. But a trim volume like this is inviting in and of itself. But its tone and approach are also attractive. The authors are seasoned in ministry and are frank about their own mistakes and share freely and humbly about that. In fact, the first two chapters by Woodford are entitled “Learning from Experience: Leadership Woes” (chapter 1) and “The Good, the Necessary, and the Ugly Sides of Leadership—How It Nearly Ended My Ministry” (chapter 2). The authors also repeatedly underscore that pastoral leadership is subservient to the care of souls. Whatever pastoral leadership is, true biblical leadership will enhance the ministry of the Word from the pastor to the people and not detract from it.

The last two chapters (from a total of four chapters) are by Senkbeil: Chapter 3, “Leading Your Sheep—Administration and Strategic Planning”; and Chapter 4, “Pastoral Depletion Syndrome.” In the third chapter, Senkbeil teases out a difference between limited power and unlimited authority. The former is a cumulative commodity of the whole church, making it a finite resource, but the latter is resourced in God and is thus unlimited. Thus, he encourages pastors to lead and minister on the basis of Christ’s authority and not their own power. In a similar fashion, Senkbeil observes the distinction between *administration* and *ministry*. The former is essential to efficient ministry, but it is subservient to ministry. Thus, he both encourages and cautions pastors to strike the right balance without becoming dismissive of administration as something bothersome and burdensome, nor at the other extreme of seeing it as something preeminent. In a similar vein, he discusses the importance of adapting to the times (“Then and Now”), managing in such a way that pastors keep the central thing central and being thoughtful enough to plan ahead to provide sufficient time for people to adjust to the leadership direction the pastor hopes to take the church. Senkbeil concludes the chapter with an eight-fold strategic planning session that offers very helpful and pragmatic ideas.

On the last chapter by Senkbeil (“Pastoral Depletion Syndrome”), most directly addresses the hurting hearts of pastors who may be on the verge of throwing in the towel. He observes three downward steps for pastors that are rapidly approaching burnout: (1) *confusion*, (2) *desperation*, (3) *capitulation/hyperactivity*. That third step down he sees as having two possible manifestation. When some men reach this third step, they throw in the towel and capitulate to the pressures. Others, however, go into a hyperactivity mode. Both, he argues, lead to ineffectiveness and burnout. But he ends the chapter on the high note that there is help and hope for anyone at any point along the way.

I do heartily recommend this book as a valuable resource for the topic it addresses. Those readers who are not of Lutheran persuasion will note occasional references to “sacraments” and even “a Real Presence” in observing the Lord’s table. But these are incidental references that, in my opinion, do not detract from the larger topic of pastoral leadership. For its minimal price and potentially helpful and pragmatic content, this is a worthy addition to one’s library.

Roger DePriest, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Grace Biblical Counseling Ministry
Virginia Beach, Virginia
Faculty Associate, Virginia Beach Theological Seminary
Virginia Beach, Virginia

The Lost Discipline of Conversation: Surprising Lessons in Spiritual Formation Drawn from the English Puritans. By Joanne J. Jung. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018. 224 pp. Softcover \$16.99.

The author of *The Lost Discipline of Conversation* is Joanne J. Jung. She is an Associate Professor at Biola University, holding a Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary (2007). Her credentials suggest she is well-qualified for the topic of spiritual formation in general and with regard to the English Puritans in particular.

The book itself is laid out in three main parts. In Part 1, Jung presents what she calls *Rediscovering of a Lost Means of Grace*. This section is subdivided into five chapters wherein she makes the case that it is innate within God’s image bearers that they all crave

intimacy both with God and with each other (chapter 1: “Our Viral Hunger for Sacred Community”). In chapter 2 (“What the Means of Grace Means”) she explains the “means of grace” as a variety of ways of *conferencing* with others as exemplified among the English Puritans. She implies that this discipline was “lost” because one cannot find it in any contemporary list of spiritual disciplines, but 450 years ago was fairly common. In chapter 3 (“The Word Heard, Read, and Remembered”), Jung observes that Puritan parishioners regularly took notes on sermons and purposely set out to engage in “godly conversations” over these notes with others throughout the week. The purpose behind this intentional activity was to use it as a means of grace to deepen spiritual knowledge and “to confer over the spiritual state of their souls.” In chapter four (““A Kind of Paradise’: When Souls Were Refreshed”), she seeks to show the biblical basis of Puritan *conferencing*. She appeals to Malachi 3:16, which says, “At that time those who feared the LORD spoke to one another.” She also appeals to Psalm 66:16, “Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will tell what he has done for my soul.” A ready-made time to do this is mealtime where one can eat and drink to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). In the final chapter of Part 1 (chapter 5: “Peek to Pique: Features of Conference”), she outlines what she sees as the primary aspects of *conferencing* as practiced by the Puritans. She identifies seven such features, all which are aimed a “soul care,” which then become the structure of Part 2.

The title of Part 2 is *Conference in Various Life Contexts* and essentially comprises the core of the book. It consists of six chapters. Each chapter has the same sevenfold structure as Jung outlines on page 49:

- Soul-to-Soul Purpose—Conference in context
- Soul-to-Soul Perspective—Updating conference for today
- Soul-to-Soul Participants—Conference participants
- Soul-to-Soul Perks—Advantages of exercising conference
- Soul-to-Soul Paucity—Losses by the absence of conference

- Soul-to-Soul Preparation—Alerts to consider when conferencing
- Soul-to-Soul Prompts—Tiered questions, prompts, and considerations that stimulate conference at these levels:
 - Informational
 - Transitional
 - Transformational

Chapter 6 (“Small [and Deeper] Group Conferences”) makes the case that small group community is a “nonnegotiable” with regard to effecting spiritual change and properly attending to the soul-care of oneself and another. She recognizes the innate weaknesses of small groups (viz., biblical and theological illiteracy) if they are not carefully managed. But these weaknesses must not prevent the small group conferences for the sake of soul care. She offers helpful practical suggestions that one can apply to today’s small groups.

Chapters 7 and 8 focus on conferencing in the family. First, she addresses the family unit as a whole (chapter 7: “Family Conferences of the Conversational Kind”), where she observes that the head of the household’s primary responsibility for the care of all the souls under his stewardship. In chapter 8 (“Marriage Conferences of the Conversational Kind”) she focuses on the importance of husband-and-wife conferencing together involving intimate and spiritual conversation by husband and wife—the kind of conversation that references each other’s identity in Christ with the aim of advancing each other’s growth in grace. These two chapters are rich with insight and suggestion, which, if carefully and prayerfully followed, could profoundly improve marriage intimacy.

Chapters 9 and 10 concentrate on the importance of conferencing from a perspective of the church organizationally. In chapter 9 (“From Pastor to Pew and Back Again”), Jung underscores the importance of preaching, but then immediately emphasizes that all preaching must be followed up with personal engagement to discuss issues of the soul so as to gently lead the individual into God’s abundant blessings designed for that believer. In chapter 10 (“Not Your Typical Pastor’s Conference”), Jung underscores the importance of the pastor’s own soul care. She observes that often

pastors stay “on guard” around their people, lest their own weaknesses become exposed. But the wise pastor will cultivate a few relationships with “a trusted spiritual friend, peer mentor, or older mentor” so as to engage in the spiritual grace of conferencing for the benefit of his own soul.

Chapter 11 (“Distance Conferencing: From Signed Letters to Streaming Sunday Services”) is the last chapter in this section. The title is fairly descriptive of its content. Even the English Puritans back in the 1600s engaged in “distance learning” and “distance mentoring,” which Jung refers to as *conferencing*. Jung provides ample application for today’s electronic world that today’s church broadcaster would be wise to consider.

The final section of the book, Part 3 (*Soul-to-Soul Bible Studies: Conferencing through God’s Word*), consists of one chapter, and basically serves as a model or “How to” manual. She provides detailed suggestions for seven different passages of Scripture: (1) Matthew 1:1–16; (2) 12:29–32 and 13:22–32; (3) Matthew 13:1–23; (4) John 15:1–12; (5) Philippians 4:1–3; (6) Colossians 3:1–17; and (7) Hebrews 12:1–3. Each “Bible Conferencing” section is comprised of “Ground Rules” (dealing with the genre of the text); “Background” (highlighting the historical context); the “Ground Work” (the first application of the text to the heart of the hearer); and “Holy Ground” (a deeper penetration of God’s word into one’s life and ministry context).

The frontmatter and backmatter of the book should not go unacknowledged. There is a Foreword, a Word from the Author, Acknowledgments, and an Introduction. All helpfully angle the reader toward the following content. As for the backmatter, there are seven practical appendices (technically six, but the second appendix is subdivided into 2A and 2B) that help direct the reader and practitioner into hands-on application of biblical conferencing.

This was a delight to read, both from its historical perspective, but also from its timely relevance for the need for community in a day when community relationships have been challenged to a degree unseen in probably all of our lifetimes—though written prior to the COVID-19. The only constructive criticism I might make is perhaps in a future edition, Jung could add an example of Bible conferencing from a few of the Psalms, since these are ready-made for soul-care

application. As a biblical counselor, I plan to access this book and possibly even assign portions of it as homework assignments.

Roger DePriest, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Grace Biblical Counseling Ministry
Virginia Beach, Virginia
Faculty Associate, Virginia Beach Theological Seminary
Virginia Beach, Virginia

Assessment for Counseling in Christian Perspective. By
Stephen Greggo. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019.
345 pp. Hardcover \$40.00.

From the very first paragraph of the book *Assessment for Counseling in Christian Perspective*, the author catches readers' attention on why helping people is both challenging and satisfying all at the same time. We assess as we listen to the cry of a person's heart and then let assessment guide our journey alongside of them. Those who are in the people-helping professions must process an enormous amount of information in providing services if they are to be genuinely competent. As each person and circumstance is faced, four key questions ought to be asked: (1) Where is this person at? (2) Where does this person want/need to be? (3) How am I going to help this person get there? and (4) How will I know whether my helping has been effective (reached the goal)?

Assessment for Counseling in Christian Perspective is a timely and valuable addition to the library of a professional Christian counselor or pastor who wants to answer those four questions. Assessment is the daily routine of a counselor as the ethical delivery of appropriate services cannot begin to occur until one is fully aware of the concerns or issues that need attention. But assessment should also be a high priority for the pastor as well, even if counseling services are not generally a frequent activity. Those that come to counselors and pastors for assistance should have the confidence that we are persons who are aware of the nuances of humanity's biological, psychological, social, and spiritual landscape. Not everyone is qualified to navigate the deep waters of all those five domains effectively. But a healthy respect for the limitations that all

people-helpers have and making the appropriate referrals or treatment decisions is serving the person in need with respect and godliness.

In *Assessment for Counseling in Christian Perspective*, Stephen Greggo's command of theology as well as clinical psychology is refreshing as he takes into careful consideration how assessment ought to be significantly guided by God's word. As both an ordained minister and a licensed psychologist, Greggo weaves into the pages of this book the joy that is ours as believers to see through a lens that has greater clarity than a secular approach alone. The assistance that we can provide as we counsel in Christian perspective is rooted in biblical wisdom and honors the discoveries of general revelation.

Although a brief review of *Assessment for Counseling in Christian Perspective* cannot give justice to the benefits of each chapter, the fourth chapter on "Forming a Theological Foundation" is indeed refreshing. Greggo notes that wisdom cannot be easily defined and should be discerned in layers. He shares that these five layers of a wisdom search that we would benefit contemplating are Posture: submissive to triune God; Product: recognition of Scripture as authoritative; Process: dialogue with Christian community and doctrine; Person: reflecting Jesus Christ as wisdom incarnate; and Potential: eschatological purpose, a restored human soul. Although these layers are explicitly explained in this fourth chapter, they are also five threads that together form the cord that laces the entire book together. The challenge for Christians in the people-helping professions is to bravely and lovingly embrace this opportunity to seek God's wisdom through these five layers as we utilize assessment to serve him in this life-changing work.

Rev. Keith E. Marlett, Ph.D., LMHC
 Professor of Counseling
 Clarks Summit University
 Clarks Summit, PA

A Multitude of All Peoples: Engaging Ancient Christianity's Global Identity. By Vince L. Bantu. Missiological Engagements. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 239 pp. Softcover \$35.00.

Dr. Vince Bantu has served as Assistant Professor of Church History and Black Church studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is also the Ohene (Chief) at the Meacham School of Haymanot (theology) in Saint Louis, Missouri.

This addition to the Missiological Engagements series reveals both the exceptional capability of Bantu as a church historian and his burden for indigenous leaders to serve their people within the contexts of their cultures. The book is a carefully developed description of the global growth of the church through the ages. Ultimately, this project demonstrates that the concept of the arrival of Christianity through Christian missions in the Middle East, Africa, India, Central Asia, and Asia from the sixteenth century on is inaccurate.

The growth of the church of Jesus Christ has often been viewed primarily as the growth of the Hellenistic and Roman influences in the known world and Europe. The history of the development of the various branches of the Eastern church has also been generally discussed, especially up to the time of the East-West schism. What is often lacking is a detailed description of how churches were established in countries outside of the Roman Empire.

These churches were started in Africa (Egypt, Ethiopia, Nubia), Syria, Arabia, Armenia, Persia, India, Central Asia, Mongolia, Western China, and in other places along the way, over the space of seven centuries. Often these churches were started by people who strongly believed that the unity of Christ's divinity and humanity was betrayed by Chalcedonians. During the early centuries after Christ, Christians often persecuted those whose doctrinal beliefs were different than their own. After the rise of Islam, believers were in gradually expanding areas where they had to maintain and proclaim their faith under the control of Islamic leaders, often well-treated because of their care in presenting the doctrine of the Trinity and because they were not directly related to the church of Rome.

Bantu is not the first church historian to provide these insights. It has been the burden of late 20th and early 21st century scholars (Irvin and Sunquist, Adrian Hastings, et. al.) along with many historians of missions, to broaden the picture of the expansion of the early church to include countries, places, and people groups where Christianity took root much earlier than the periods of Catholic and Protestant world missionary movements.

The thing that makes Bantu's account unique is that he deftly moves from great, meticulous detail to broader strokes as he traces the doctrinal and ecclesiastical complexities of the first four centuries to the more rarified air of the movements along the Silk Road, using a great number of lesser-known sources along the way and weaving helpful illustrations through the text.

Bantu occasionally pauses to make a connection between historical problems and contemporary issues in missions and the church. For example, on page 170 he points out the implications for "contemporary matters of race, ethnicity, and Christian identity" of the identity politics that resulted for Persian Christians from the Christianization of Rome." The problem is that Christianity is viewed as a "white/Western" religion by non-Western and non-white people. Bantu's book is useful to help to dispel that fallacious point of view. Before the timeline, image credits, and indices of the book, the author includes a conclusion. In that chapter, Bantu warns that "if it is the desire of the church to exist deeply rooted for the long term among all nations, tribes, and tongues, it is necessary for the gospel to be stripped of any geocultural association and contextualized to particular milieu" (255).

In that a recurring theme in the book is that missionaries and local believers contextualized their beliefs in order to disciple and live peaceably, the question of how much compromise was necessary over time will come to mind, with its companion question, "were they still Christians?" As a historian, the author usually does not, cannot, answer that question. In truth, only God knows. The final chapter will cause some readers to struggle in that Bantu makes a plea that is vital for missionaries, regardless of their home country, to understand, but one that requires some thought.

The last section of the concluding chapter, "Missions as Cultural Sanctification," will probably be the most troubling in that it

encourages a discipling of “ethnic identities and value systems.” The concept is difficult in that it joins gospel, discipling, and sanctification to cultural transformation in a way that changes the usual theological use of the words. In reading this, it will be helpful to remember that a culture will be changed by the presence of those who have believed the gospel, been disciplined, and as members of the culture accept, resist, or change aspects of the culture according to their walk with Christ and truth.

This book would be an excellent text for church history or history of missions courses. It will also be a good but challenging read for any thinking Christian who wants to have a deeper understanding of how, and how far, the church grew in the first few centuries of its existence.

Jim Ruff, D.Min.
CEIM Associate, ABWE
Adjunct Professor, Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, PA

Questions of Context: Reading a Century of German Mission Theology. By John G. Flett and Henning Wrogemann. Missiological Engagements. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020. 233 pp. Softcover \$40.00.

The compilers and editors of this volume are John G. Flett, lecturer in intercultural theology and mission studies at Pilgrim Theological College, part of the University of Divinity in Melbourne, Australia; and Henning Wrogemann, who holds the chair for mission studies, comparative religion, and ecumenics at the Protestant University Wuppertal/Bethel in Germany. Wrogemann is also head of the Institute for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies. Both authors have published extensively in these fields. Karl E. Böhmer is credited with having translated most of the texts.

This academic work surveys the modern history of the study of missiology in Germany through presenting a series of texts written from 1897 (Gustav Warneck) to 2015 (editor Henning Wrogemann). Many of these texts are presented in English for the first time, and the

editors should be congratulated for making these writings available to those who do not read German fluently and who would otherwise not have access to them. IVP's *Missiological Engagements* series continues to provide academically rich volumes on sometimes difficult, but necessary, subjects.

Through the introduction of the book, the introductory portions of each of the six chapters of the book, and the analyses at the ends of the chapters, the authors assist the reader in understanding the contexts of the readings, and the arguments of the authors of the readings. In the final chapter, the authors of the book reflect on the "proper" complexities of the concept of context as reflected in German missiology.

Since context is used in the title, this reviewer will describe three issues of context that will be helpful to a reader of this interesting but difficult book. First, the book is written to illustrate diachronically the changes in perspective on cultural issues within German missiological schools of thought. The fact that the emphasis is on Germany should alert the reader to the fact that missiologists were always accepting or countering the various developments during Germany's history over the century-plus period mentioned above. Second, some of the essays were written by missiologists who were active on the world stage through their involvement with such organizations as the World Council of Churches (WCC). As a result, the evangelical reader who has had little or no background in issues of interest and concern to members of the WCC will find these essays to be difficult and theologically challenging. More than once "the end of Christian missions" (not the end of Christian mission, *per se*, but the end of "Western Christian mission") is explained or countered. Third, such issues as the establishment of churches, the forms of churches, the relationship of church to culture, and mission to church, are generally discussed within the context of the church in Germany.

Redefinition is the struggle for most of the authors of the quoted articles. What is the church? What are missions, and what is mission? What is culture? What is religion? What is the gospel? What is mission-Dei? What is dialog? What is the significance of hermeneutics? What is intercultural theology? Because many of the

articles reproduced reference writers of the other articles, there is provided for the reader a conversation about these issues.

Let me emphasize that the introduction and analysis portions of each chapter and its set of writings are necessary to help the reader to understand the drift and language of the writers of the always interesting but sometimes obscure quotations.

This book will be useful for courses on the history of “Western” mission/missiology, theology of missions, intercultural theology, and cultural analysis. It will, of course, be useful for any course on the history of modern German missiological thought. Although many students (and teachers!) will disagree with the conclusions of various authors, lively discussion should result from its use.

Jim Ruff, D.Min.
CEIM Associate, ABWE
Adjunct Professor, Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, PA

Dissertations in Progress at Baptist Bible Seminary

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John Vo — *Paul's Ethics of Ethnic Reconciliation: Reading Ephesians 4-6 In Light of Ephesians 2:11-22*

— *Systematic Theology* —

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