



JOURNAL of Ministry & Theology

Spring 2022 | Volume 26 | Number 1

CONTENTS

The Royal Psalms: Their Unique Contribution to a Christian Understanding of Political Science	3
<i>Bruce A. Baker</i>	
A Biblical Methodology for Theology and Philosophy and Its Dispensational Outcomes.....	31
<i>Christopher Cone</i>	
Why Didn't the Mosaic Law Prohibit Slavery?	51
<i>Dave Fredrickson</i>	
Genesis 1–11 and the Worldview of the Bible.....	85
<i>Elliot E. Johnson</i>	
Dispensational Kingdom Postponement Theology as a Safeguard for the Edenic Divine Institutions	94
<i>Paul Miles</i>	
The Biblical Roots of the Hermeneutic in Revelation	133
<i>John Oglesby</i>	
Book Reviews	151
Dissertation Defenses.....	201

The Journal of Ministry & Theology

*Published semiannually by Baptist Bible Seminary,
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania*

Jim Lytle
President

Wayne Slusser
Seminary Dean

Mark McGinniss
Lead Editor

Daniel Wiley
Book Review Editor

Melissa Slusser
Editorial Assistant

Teresa Ingalls
Editorial Assistant

Editorial Content Team: Bill Higley, Wayne Slusser,
Jared August, Ken Gardoski, Ken Davis, Ken Pyne,
Mike Dellaperute, and Mark McGinniss.

The Journal of Ministry & Theology (ISSN: 1092-9525) is published semiannually by Clarks Summit University, 538 Venard Road, Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania 18411. Address changes may be sent to *The Journal of Ministry & Theology* at the address above or emailed to JMAT@ClarksSummitU.edu.

Subscription Rates: Individual subscriptions for one year are \$20.00 (\$25.00 outside of the United States). Institutional subscriptions for one year are \$30.00. Single issues available at \$10.00 each. Subscription requests should be sent to *The Journal of Ministry & Theology* at the address above or JMAT@ClarksSummitU.edu. You can subscribe at this link: <https://www.clarkssummitu.edu/seminary/resources/>. All subscriptions are in US currency, with credit card or a check payable to Baptist Bible Seminary – *The Journal of Ministry & Theology*.

Submission guidelines for potential manuscripts may be requested from JMAT@ClarksSummitU.edu. Manuscripts to be considered for publication may be submitted to JMATeditor@ClarksSummitU.edu.

The *JMAT* is indexed in the ATLA Religion Database, the EBSCO Academic Search Premier database, and appears in full text in the Theological Journal Library.

The opinions represented herein are endorsed by the individual authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit University, its administration, or its faculty.

Copyright ©2021 by Baptist Bible Seminary. *The Journal of Ministry & Theology* hereby grants permission for articles to be made available in print or electronic form for a church ministry or classroom provided no more than 100 copies are distributed (in print or electronically) **and** no fee is charged **and** if the distributed or posted article or review includes “Copyright (year). Reprinted by permission. *The Journal of Ministry & Theology*.” Permission for any other use, including posting on the Internet, must be sought in advance from *The Journal of Ministry & Theology* and the individual author.

From the Editor's Desk

Dear Reader,

This issue I am pleased to present a sampling of papers from the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics Annual Meeting. The conference held its annual meeting in September 2021. The topic was “Developing a Dispensational Worldview” (The Council website is here: <https://dispensationalcouncil.org/>). It was an exciting time grappling with this important topic.

On a sadder note, for those of us who knew and loved Dr. Bruce Baker—God called Bruce into his presence on February 13, 2022. See his obituary here: <https://www.tributearchive.com/obituaries/24016952/dr-bruce-arthur-baker>. Bruce suffered long and well with ALS. While the disease stole his body, it did not diminish his love or service for his savior. This is evident in his being a regular contributor to the *JMAT*. His last article leads this issue’s Table of Contents.

Bruce and I were in the PhD program together at Baptist Bible Seminary in Clarks Summit, PA a number of years ago. Trying times have a way of forging friendships, and ours was formed in the classrooms, dining hall and dorm rooms when we came to campus. Bruce had a sharp mind and maybe a sharper wit. In the classroom he was quick to share his theological insights, pastoral heart, and Texas humor. His fellow students and professors were a beneficiary of all three. And all will be missed.

I am grateful to God for blessing me with Bruce’s friendship and scholarship. While as readers you may have missed out on his friendship, I am pleased to present a piece of Bruce’s scholarship for your edification.

Like Bruce, 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*.



Mark McGinniss, Ph.D.
Lead Editor

The Royal Psalms: Their Unique Contribution to a Christian Understanding of Political Science

Bruce A. Baker

Key Words: Royal Psalm, Political Science, David, King, Citizen

Introduction

Recently I received an appeal email that included the following:

Of course, America was not born as a perfect nation. And it's not a perfect nation now. But Americans like you understand that our nation was founded on important and unique principles:

All men are created equal.

We are endowed by our Creator with inalienable rights.

Just governments are based on the consent of the governed.

These principles are worth living up to. And they are worth protecting. (Alliance Defending Freedom, June 30, 2021)

Within this appeal there are at least two foundational questions that deserve examination before one writes their check.

Asking the Right Questions

First, is it true that the United States was founded upon these principles? This is an historical question. Answering this question requires a search of the relevant historical documents from the period of the founding fathers. This paper will not

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*.

quibble with the truthfulness of this assertion, for I am ill-equipped to examine this question properly.

The second question, in contrast, is not historical but theological. Specifically, are these enumerated principles themselves true? These three statements are theological in that they ponder the nature of creation, whether God has given rights to the individual, and the proper foundation of righteous government. Determining the accuracy of these statements requires an entirely different approach. In this case, answers must be sought from divine revelation.

Unfortunately, honest biblical examinations of these types of questions are difficult to find. Ever since the rise of the Moral Majority and the Christian Right,² most white evangelicals reflexively accept the theology expressed above without a second thought.³ But this should not be. As Christians we must be quick

² For more information on the beginnings of this movement, see Bruce A. Baker, "Dispensationalism's Evolving Theory of Political Action: How *Roe v. Wade* and Jerry Falwell Brought Dispensationalism from Rejecting Political Action to Embracing It," *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 25, no. 1 (2021): 30–52.

³ In an interesting study conducted by Harvard University, evidence suggests that attending an Independence Day celebration as a child increases the likelihood that this child will vote Republican later in life. The researchers admitted they did not know why this trend exists, but stated, "the celebration of Fourth of July embodies certain ideas or values that are closer to the Republican Party" (Laura Riparbelli, "Fourth of July Celebrators More Likely to Become Republicans," *ABC News*, July 1, 2011, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/fourth-july-makes-republicans-study/story?id=13979855>). These "ideas or values" are what is being expressed in the three statements under question. Additionally, in modern politics there has arisen what has been called the "God gap." "Those who frequently attend religious services (regardless of faith background) are more likely to vote for Republicans, while those who rarely or never attend tend to vote for Democrats" (Amy Black, "Evangelicals and Politics: Where We've Been and Where We're Headed," *National Association of Evangelicals*, Fall 2016, <https://www.nae.net/evangelicals-and-politics/>). Therefore, it should not be surprising that those "ideas or values that are closer to the Republican Party" are widely accepted by conservative Christians since conservative Christians are most likely Republican. Even the federal government recognizes the relationship between Christianity

to recognize that any philosophy eagerly accepted by the world in general must be thoroughly examined in light of God's word. For those things that so often "sound right," regularly run afoul of divine revelation. Statement three, listed above, is a textbook example, for if the only just government is one founded on the consent of the governed, then our coming King will rule a patently unjust kingdom as he governs the world with an iron scepter and dashes the rebellious to pieces like pottery (Ps 2:9).⁴

Political Science and Theology

One of the challenges in examining the three enumerated principles above is that they are rarely recognized as theological questions. Instead, these statements (and others like them) are normally assigned to the area of political science. Political science is commonly defined as "the study of the state and its organs and institutions."⁵ In particular, political science is concerned with power, "defined as the ability of one political actor to get another actor to do what it wants—at the international, national, and local levels."⁶

Even though political science is not regularly considered an area of theology, few would deny that the Bible has a great deal to say concerning government. In the OT, we read how government itself was established by God (Gen 9:6). The history of the Jewish people from Moses forward is viewed through the

and the Republican Party. The IRS initially refused to give tax exempt status to Christians Engaged, a Texas religious group that encouraged prayer for the nation and application of biblical values to public affairs. The IRS had "initially cited a claim that prayer and Bible study favor Republicans as the reason for Christians Engaged's denial of tax-exempt status." The IRS has since reversed its position and granted tax exempt status to Christians Engaged (see Mark Tapscott, "IRS Reverses Course, Grants Tax-Exemption to Texas Religious Group," *The Epoch Times*, July 8, 2021, <https://reader.epoch.cloud?selDate=20210708&goTo=A01&artid=8>).

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citation are taken from the New American Standard Bible, © 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.

⁵ Michael G. Roskin, "Political Science," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 29 October 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/political-science>.

⁶ Ibid.

lens of the state.⁷ The second half of the book of Daniel and nearly the entirety of the book of Revelation is concerned with the rise and fall of political kingdoms. Indeed, both the first and second advents of our Lord—from the baby Jesus (“the King of the Jews,” Matt 2:2) to the returning Christ (“King of kings and Lord of lords,” Rev 19:16)—are described in terms reserved for the governance of a state. Not only so, but the apostles Peter and Paul deliver precise instructions on how church-age believers should respond to government.⁸ This being said, there is one segment of Scripture that is regularly overlooked during discussions of the Bible and political science: the royal psalms.

The Royal Psalms

Ever since Gunkel’s influential *Introduction to the Psalms* in 1933,⁹ most commentators have followed his general classification of the Psalter. In addition to other types of psalms,¹⁰ Gunkel listed ten psalms (with the possible addition of Psalm 89) as royal psalms: 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 89 (possible),

⁷ Specifically, this history of the Jewish people is concerned with their kings, their kings’ relationship with the Lord their God, and the specific consequences—whether good or ill—upon the nation. This author in no way wishes to suggest that the Bible is primarily a political book. Making politics the center of the Bible’s message is a gross distortion of the sacred text. Still, one must admit that God deals with nations as well as people. The OT prophets proclaimed their oracles primarily against nations instead of individuals. In fact, the culmination of God’s plan for this world is expressed in the transfer of ultimate political power. “... then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power” (1 Cor 15:24).

⁸ 1 Peter 2:13–17; Romans 13:1–7; 1 Timothy 2:1–4; Titus 3:1.

⁹ Hermann Gunkel and Joachim Begrich, *Einleitung in die Psalmen*, 2nd ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1966).

¹⁰ “As Gunkel sees it, there are seven classes to be observed. They are 1) hymns, 2) enthronement of Yahweh psalms, 3) national laments, 4) royal psalms, 5) laments of the individual, 6) psalms of individual thanksgiving, 7) lesser categories. In this last class are to be found six subheads: a) words of blessing and cursing, b) pilgrimage songs, c) hymns of victory, d) hymns of thanksgiving, e) the legend, f) the law” (H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* [Columbus, OH: Wartburg P, 1959], 10).

101, 110, 132, and 144.¹¹ Bullock observes that this list has become “rather standard”¹² while Futato notes that “a fairly strong consensus” affirms Gunkel’s list.¹³

Even though Gunkel’s conclusions are the result of his adherence to form criticism, a careful examination using objective criteria shows that this list of eleven psalms is not without merit. Put another way, one does not have to accept the tenants of form criticism to accept the results of Gunkel’s work, at least in this area. This is because a more exacting and objective criteria for identifying the royal psalms may be found in the Psalter itself.

The activity in every royal psalm¹⁴ revolves around three major actors and a chorus.¹⁵ The first major actor is the LORD (יהוה) or God (אֱלֹהִים).¹⁶

The second major actor is the “Anointed One”¹⁷ (מָשִׁיחַ), sometimes called the “Son” or the “King.” It should be noted that all three of these titles are sometimes used for the same person, as in Psalm 2. This person is the Lord’s Anointed (מָשִׁיחַ) in verse two, “My King” (מֶלֶכִּי) in verse six, and “My Son” (בְּנִי) in verse

¹¹ C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction*, Encountering Biblical Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 178.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Mark David Futato and David M. Howard, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 181.

¹⁴ For more information regarding the identification and structure of the royal psalms, see Bruce A. Baker, “A Biblical Theology of the Royal Psalms,” *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 16, no. 49 (Dec 2012): 7–34.

¹⁵ This use of the word “chorus” harkens back to ancient Greek tragedies where a group of performers commented on the main action, typically speaking and moving together.

¹⁶ Used in only one royal psalm: Psalm 45.

¹⁷ As the titles “King” and “Son” may refer to either David, one of his offspring, or to the Lord Jesus in his role as the coming messianic King, the issue of when to capitalize these titles can become somewhat confusing. For the sake of clarity, throughout this paper these titles will be capitalized when they are clearly referring to the Lord Jesus and left lowercase in all other instances. In those cases when I may inadvertently get it wrong, my request of the reader is that he or she will be merciful to me, a sinner.

seven. While these three titles (Anointed One, King, and Son) appear to be synonymous in Psalm 2, the king and the son have more than one referent elsewhere. For example, Psalm 18:50 equates these three terms—the “king,” the Lord’s “anointed One,” and “David and his seed forever”—as synonymous. It is the mention of David’s offspring that shows a dual referent. On the one hand, the “anointed one” is David.¹⁸ On the other hand, this “anointing” extends to the royal line of David forever. As a result, these three titles may refer to either the coming Messiah, King David himself, or one of David’s offspring.

The third major actor in the royal psalms is the enemies. These foes are described by several different terms, such as the nations, the peoples, and the wicked among others. Psalm 2:1 speaks of the nations as a primary actor. This actor, however, is also described as the people (v. 1), the kings of the earth (v. 2), and the ones who rule (v. 2). What is important is not how they are described but the fact that they are in active rebellion against the Lord and his Anointed One.

In addition to these three major actors there is a chorus supporting the actions of the Lord and his king. They are described as either being the beneficiaries of the king’s goodness and protection, or as praising the king for what he has done. Their actual activity is limited and often merely implied with the first-person plural pronoun. The function of this chorus seems to be limited to highlighting the uprightness and strength of the king. Therefore, while they are present in each psalm under investigation, they are usually found to be the recipient of the actions of others, rather than initiators of actions themselves. In Psalm 2, this character group is described in the last verse as “all who take refuge in him” (v. 12).

When Gunkel’s list is examined with this criterion in mind—that is, the presence of these three major actors along with the minor character group, regardless of the specific vocabulary—one finds his list remarkably accurate. The following is an examination of these psalms to see what contribution they may make to a biblical understanding of modern political science.

¹⁸ It should be noted that at his death, David is specifically called the “anointed of the God of Jacob” (2 Sam 23:1).

Methodology

At the outset of this investigation, one must recognize the dispensational challenge that is intrinsic to the study of these psalms. As discussed previously, an essential character in each psalm is an anointed ruler with whom God has established a covenant. The church does not participate in this covenant. It is true that the church will be a recipient of its blessings when the ultimate Davidic king rules the world and the church rules with him (Rev 5:9–10). Still, that time is not now. As a result, the blessings and curses that flow from the Davidic covenant cannot be directly applied to the church today. So where is one to look within these psalms for guidance on how to behave in the present?

As has been stated, there are four actors who comprise each psalm. Of these four, the church-age saint would do well to identify and mimic those loyal to the King. This is true not only because the righteous in Scripture are worthy of emulation regardless of the dispensation in which they appear, but also because we share a common position, namely, citizenship within the kingdom. Church age saints have been given a passport to the coming kingdom. Although it is true that we do not reside in this kingdom presently, it is equally true that our citizenship has been transferred into this kingdom (Col 1:13).

We should also notice that finding examples on how to behave is not the only benefit of studying the royal psalms. As citizens of the kingdom described in these songs, subjects of the Anointed King may learn a great deal about the world around them, particularly the political structures to which they must submit (Rom 13:1–2). The fact that the “nations” and “the kings of the earth” are often referred to with synonyms such as “my enemies,” “the wicked,” “the violent,” and so forth, removes any pitiable delusions about the virtuousness of this world that the believer may still possess.

The Disposition of Worldly Governments

The Bible clearly paints two different pictures of human government. On the one hand, human government is portrayed as a necessary gift from God, designed to act as a restraint upon the sinfulness of man (Gen 9:5–6; Rom 13:2–4). On the other hand,

the Bible describes human governments as evil entities standing shoulder to shoulder in their defiance of God's Anointed King (Ps 2:2–3).

As a church-age believer, how is one to reconcile these two opposing perspectives of government? Those of us who hold an exalted view of the Bible, especially believing in plenary inspiration, cannot simply grasp hold of the view we prefer and exalt it above the opposing view, in essence making a canon within a canon. Each viewpoint must be held as tenaciously as the other.

Two Vantage Points

One way to reconcile these seemingly opposing views is to recognize two possible vantage points from which we may view human government. For example, if one examines government from the viewpoint of the governed, then the restraining function of government is, without question, a blessing. From the biblical perspective, even bad government is better than no government at all. After all, government was instituted by God to bridle the excesses that arise from anarchy.¹⁹ The apostle Paul is quite clear that human governments are ministers of God for our good (Rom 13:4). As a result, every government must be viewed, at least in some measure, as a gift from God for the general good of mankind.

This being said, there is another vantage point from which one may investigate human government: the throne room of the thrice-holy God (Isa 6:3). It is this perspective that is presented in the royal psalms.

As has been stated, each royal psalm speaks of the wicked, using a variety of terms. They are “violent” (Ps 18:48) and have “haughty eyes” (v. 27). They have “perverse” and “arrogant hearts” (101:4–5) and “secretly slander their neighbors” (v. 5).

¹⁹ God's assessment of mankind without government is clearly stated in Genesis 6: “Now the earth was corrupt in the sight of God, and the earth was filled with violence. God looked on the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth. Then God said to Noah, ‘The end of all flesh has come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth’” (Gen 6:11–13).

They are the “enemies” of God who hate him (21:8) and plot evil against him (v. 11), practicing deceit and speaking falsehood (101:7). None of this comes as a surprise to those who understand the biblical teaching of the depravity of man.

What might come as a surprise, however, is how often these enemies are associated with human government. The royal psalms describe the populace of this world and their leaders exclusively in negative terms. There is no mention of the “simple”²⁰ in the royal psalms. Those described in the royal psalms are either loyal to the King or are his enemies, but there is no neutral ground.

The royal psalms teach that the governments of this world, without exception, are in active rebellion against the Lord and his Anointed King. While in practice we know that not all governments show the same level of intensity in their hatred of God, at the most fundamental level each government rebels against the Lord Jesus as King. Even though we may observe a varying degree of bitterness and hostility directed at the Lord Jesus in the nations around us, no such distinction is made in the royal psalms. The nations of this world are completely given over to unmixed hatred of God’s King. There is no measure of neutrality that may be found. Interestingly, there are few reasons given within the royal psalms for this hatred of God and his King. In most cases, no reason is given. It is merely stated as fact.

For example, in Psalm 110:1 the psalm begins with the mention of “your enemies” without any mention as to why they are enemies. In verse 2, the Lord commands his King to rule in the midst of his enemies, while in verse 5 we read that the Lord’s

²⁰ In the wisdom literature, the word “simple” refers to someone who needs instruction. The simple are neither wise nor foolish, but are instead naïve, lacking good sense (Prov 7:7). The simple become wise by hearing the law of the Lord (Ps 19:7; 119:130). Because the Lord is gracious, righteous, and compassionate, he preserves the simple (116:5–6). The expectation is that the simple one will not remain as he is but will become either wise or foolish. The wise, the foolish, and the simple are often contrasted within the wisdom literature. “When the scoffer is punished, the [simple] becomes wise; But when the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge” (Prov 21:11).

chosen King will “shatter kings in the day of his wrath,” without bothering to mention why he is angry with them in the first place.

Additionally, the royal psalms make no distinction between the populace of a nation and its leadership. Whether we speak of the nations and the peoples, or the kings of the earth and its rulers (Ps 2:2–3), they all take their stand together against the Lord and his Anointed One (v. 2). The unstated assumption is that the two are of the same mind. This is why we see no neutral leaders or rulers in the royal psalms. Just as there is no neutrality in the peoples of this world, so the kings of the earth are always portrayed negatively.²¹

An Historical Complication

At this point, it seems prudent to pause and consider why the kings of the earth are always portrayed as enemies, for when we examine the history of the united kingdom of Israel (i.e., the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon), we find several instances where this pattern is broken. When David was fleeing from Saul, Achish, king of Gath, gave David the city of Ziklag (1 Sam 27:5–6) and took him into his service. When military necessity forced Achish to send David away, Achish was fulsome in his praise of David (29:6, 9). This relationship might not be the best example as David was undoubtedly deceiving Achish regarding his loyalty. Still, other instances are plentiful. Some unspecified kindness was given to David by Nahash, king of the Ammonites (2 Sam 10:1–2). Friendly trading relations existed between Hiram king of Tyre and David (5:11). This amicable relationship continued with David’s son Solomon because “Hiram had always been a friend of David” (1 Kgs 5:1). King Solomon, like his father David, also had friendly relations with pagan nations

²¹ While it is true that the kings of the earth are universally portrayed as enemies of the Anointed One, hope is held out that they may become wise and do homage to the Son (Ps 2:10–12). This submission to the Son is presented purely in terms of self-preservation. If the kings show discernment and heed the warning of the psalmist, they may come to the place where they “rejoice with trembling,” and be among the blessed “who take refuge in him.” Still, this hope is presented in hypothetical terms and no evidence is given that the kings of this earth will partake of this blessing prior to the millennial kingdom.

around him. Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter (3:1).²² The Queen of Sheba also was on favorable terms with Solomon, so that they traded gifts with one another (10:1–10). Each of these case studies points to the fact that the universal hostility shown to the king in the royal psalms was not acted out in the history of the kingdom.

At this point some might be tempted to resolve this apparent disparity by appealing to the distinction between genre and praxis. After all, the wisdom literature tends to state things in absolute terms which, in practice, are not always true.²³ This collection of psalms, it may be argued, is following that pattern. But this interpretation simply won't do. The animosity between the rulers of this world and the Lord and his Anointed One in the royal psalms (Ps 2:2) is acted out in stark relief in the Gospels (John 15:18–25). As in the royal psalms, the NT also teaches there is no common ground between the world system and the believer (1 John 2:15–17). Thus, dismissing this absolute, total rebellion as merely a literary emphasis is missing the mark. Something else is at work here.

An Attack on National Sovereignty

When two or more nations interact on friendly terms, the unspoken assumption is that there is a joint recognition of each nation's sovereignty. When the sovereignty of a nation is threatened by another power, there are no longer friendly terms

²² Interestingly, this marriage is not condemned. In fact, immediately after Scripture states this marriage, we read that Solomon walked in the statutes of his father David (1 Kgs 3:3).

²³ An example of this tendency may be found in Prov 22:6: "Train up a child in the way he should go, even when he is old he will not depart from it." This proverb states what normally happens but cannot be made absolute for there are simply too many examples where this simply isn't the case. The unfortunate case of Joash is a prime example. From the time he is seven years old, "Joash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all the days of Jehoiada the priest" (2 Chr 24:2). After Jehoiada's death, however, the officials of Judah came to Joash and persuaded him to abandon the worship of the Lord and to begin the worship the Asherim (vv. 17–19). As a child he was trained correctly, but it did not last when he turned old.

between those powers. Indeed, a threat to another nation's sovereignty guarantees a state of enmity will ensue.

It is this threat to sovereignty that explains the universal hostility of the nations towards the Lord and his Anointed One. God has installed his King (Ps 2:6) and this King demands universal allegiance. The response of the nations to this threat upon their sovereignty is to plot an organized rebellion designed to remove the bonds of this foreign administration (v. 3). The ridiculousness of this puny insurrection is not lost upon God, so that his response is to laugh and scoff (v. 4). To enforce his claim of absolute hegemony, the King judges among the nations and fills them with the dead bodies of the rebellious (110:6). As a result of his overwhelming military superiority, the King enforces his rule from "sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth" (72:8). While it is the duty of "all kings" to "bow down before him" and for "all nations" to serve him (v. 11), the nations of this world universally refuse this duty. It is only through the application of deadly force that this coming King enforces his rightful authority over the whole world.

Application

According to the royal psalms, all the nations of the world are active in their hatred of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. As has been pointed out, there are no nations that are an exception to this rule. As a result, it is incumbent upon every believer to recognize that his or her nation falls under this indictment. There is no nation that is different from the rest.²⁴

²⁴ Those who claim an American exceptionalism must do so in the same spirit as Persian exceptionalism during the time of Cyrus the great (Ezra 1:1–11). It is true that the Lord chose Cyrus to be "His anointed" (Isa 45:1) and that he called Cyrus by name (v. 3). Indeed, he made great promises to Cyrus giving him honor and wealth (vv. 3–4). Yet in all of this, Cyrus remained the enemy of God. While God reveals himself to Cyrus and makes it known that he is the cause of all these blessings (vv. 3, 5), Cyrus did not worship or glorify God as the one true God (v. 5). The reason the Lord blessed Cyrus was for the sake of Israel (v. 4), and so that his name would be made known (vv. 3, 6–7). One should also notice that when Cyrus fulfilled the tasks set before him by the Lord, the Lord's

This is not to say that the governments of this world hate everything that could be considered good or virtuous. This is clearly not the case. Nor is it the case that all governments are equally wicked or are wicked in the same way.²⁵ But it does mean that in every nation there will be sticking points where the will of the populace and the will of God collide. It is in the government's best interest to allow the populace to do as they please as long as these interests do not endanger the existence of the ruling establishment. As a result, every nation will, at some point, bring the force of law down on the side of unrighteousness to appease either the nation at large, the entrenched power structure, or both. God's commands will be considered chains and fetters that must be cast off. Therefore, every government, to one degree or another, becomes an enemy of God and thus, by extension, an enemy of the believer.

One must also realize that the mutinous insurrection by the governments of this world is not a periodic rebellion but a continuous one. All people currently are called to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as their rightful sovereign.²⁶ Because the King's claim to sovereignty is ongoing, it follows that the civic rebellion against God's Anointed One is an ongoing rebellion. The enmity of the nations does not only appear during times of crises or according to the current mood of the populace but is the

blessing upon the Medo-Persian Empire was withdrawn so that they were moved from the world stage and replaced by the Greeks.

²⁵ It is not accurate, for example, to unfavorably compare the Biden administration with the brutality of Stalin's Russia or the horrors of Hitler's Germany. Even when one takes into consideration the atrocity of abortion, the United States still allows Christians to worship without fear, something that the other two governments would not allow. Although it is true that all three governments may be condemned as wicked, they are not all wicked in the same way or to the same extent.

²⁶ This is not to suggest that Christ is reigning on the throne of David now in some respect. He is currently a King in waiting (Ps 110:1). Nevertheless, it is now possible to be rescued "from the domain of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col 1:13). Even though this kingdom is still future, our loyalty to the King brings about suffering because of this world's hostility to our Sovereign (2 Thess 1:5).

default state of the governments of this world, a permanent condition into which they have settled.

As a result, those that currently claim loyalty to the King suffer for the crime of being associated with his kingdom. In fact, the reproach leveled against God's people is identical in tone and substance to the scorn directed at the King himself (Ps 89:50).²⁷ The only variable in this equation is the intensity this disdain takes. The more fervently the believer identifies with the King, the more out of step one will be with those around him and the more contempt will be directed his way.²⁸

Understanding the true attitude of worldly regimes toward the Lord and his Anointed One should also cause one to view with suspicion any benevolence offered by the powers that be. This is not to say that the believer should not exercise whatever legal protections are available to him.²⁹ What it does mean, however, is that the governments of this world will never love righteousness for its own sake. Whatever steps the government may take in the assisting of the Christian church will always come with the ulterior motive of satisfying some existing

²⁷ "Remember, O Lord, the reproach of Your servants; How I bear in my bosom the reproach of all the many peoples, with which Your enemies have reproached, O LORD, with which they have reproached the footsteps of Your anointed" (Ps 89:50–51). Such persecution should not take those who believe the words of Jesus by surprise: "If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; ..." (John 15:18–20).

²⁸ On the other hand, the one who keeps his true citizenship secret will largely escape the derision of this world. This means, of course, that there will always be contention within the true church between those who are steadfast in their loyalty to the King and compromisers who desire to escape the pangs of persecution. This may be seen in contemporary Christianity by the number of "Christian celebrities" who have softened their view of women in ministry, homosexuality, or any of a dozen other viewpoints that the current culture finds distasteful.

²⁹ The example of Paul and Silas in Acts 16:22–40 is a case in point.

political actor or actors.³⁰ These political actors may be as varied as an entrenched monarchical family, a voting block of unionized laborers, or an organized movement of conservative Christians. Regardless of the nature of these political actors, it remains true that these are the ones that human governments seek to appease rather than God himself.³¹ As a result, any assistance the government offers the church will inevitably include pressure upon the church to subtly change her message.³²

³⁰ “We must remember that politicians have no idea of principles, but only of existing influences to which they must be subject” (J. N. Darby, “Progress of Democratic Power, and its Effects on the Moral State of England,” in *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, ed. William Kelly, 34 vols. [Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, n.d.], 32:333).

³¹ This principle is true not only of governments but of all people generally within this world system. As Darby has observed, this world is a “system in which men seek honor one of another, and not the honor which cometh from God only” (Darby, “What is the World, and What is its End?” in *Collected Writings*, 34:111).

³² When the government gives benefits, it is almost inevitable that the recipient of those benefits becomes dependent upon them. Once that dependency is established, pressure may be placed upon the Christian individual or institution to change their convictions to mollify the demands of other political actors. This principle holds true across the vast spectrum of government largesse but is most easily seen in education. For example, access to federal funding for student loans as well as school eligibility for federal grants and loans requires accreditation (see “About Accreditation,” Council for Higher Education Accreditation, accessed August 15, 2021, <https://www.chea.org/about-accreditation>). Higher education is beyond the reach of most students without such financial assistance. This is one reason why most Christian schools offering higher education seek accredited status. In doing so the school is required to conform to standards set by the Department of Education: educational, financial, logistical, organizational, and so forth. But these standards are often open to interpretation. Recently the Human Rights Campaign (a gay advocacy group) published a wish list for the Biden/Harris administration entitled *Blueprint for Positive Change 2020*. Among its numerous suggestions is a demand that the Department of Education change its accreditation standards. “Language regarding accreditation of religious institutions of higher education in the Higher Education Opportunity Act could be interpreted to require accrediting bodies to accredit religious institutions that discriminate or that do not meet science based curricula standards. The Department of Education

The Duties of Kingdom Citizens

As is true of every nation, citizenship in the United States brings with it certain duties. Obligations stemming from US citizenship include supporting and defending the Constitution against enemies foreign and domestic, paying taxes honestly and on time, serving on a jury, and bearing arms on behalf of the United States when required by law.³³ The United States is not

should issue a regulation clarifying that this provision, which requires accreditation agencies to ‘respect the stated mission’ of religious institutions, does not require the accreditation of religious institutions that do not meet neutral accreditation standards including nondiscrimination policies and scientific curriculum requirements” (“Blueprint for Positive Change 2020,” *The Human Rights Campaign*, accessed August 16, 2021, <https://hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/Blueprint-2020.pdf?mtime=20201110185320&focal=none>). To be clear, what the Human Rights Campaign is demanding is that accreditation be denied to religious organizations that do not conform their views on sexual orientation and gender identity to align with those of the LGBTQIA+ community. Albert Mohler calls this “an open threat to the ability of Christian colleges and schools to operate by Christian conviction.... This is an undisguised attempt to shut down any semblance of a Christian college or university that would possess the audacity to operate from a Christian worldview” (“A Direct Threat to Christian Education—The Human Rights Campaign Demands that the Biden Administration Deny Accreditation to Christian Colleges and Schools,” *Albert Mohler*, November 18, 2020, <https://albertmohler.com/2020/11/18/a-direct-threat-to-christian-education-the-human-rights-campaign-demands-that-the-biden-administration-deny-accreditation-to-christian-colleges-and-schools>). To be clear, at this writing it is an open question as to whether the Biden administration will institute the proposed reinterpretation of current regulations. But, for the sake of this argument, it makes no difference whether these proposed changes are instituted or not. The mere fact that they could be indicates the perils of entangling Christian ministry with government.

³³ “Naturalization Oath of Allegiance to the United States of America,” U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, last reviewed July 5, 2020, <https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learn-about-citizenship/the-naturalization-interview-and-test/naturalization-oath-of-allegiance-to-the-united-states-of-america>. The obligation to bear arms on behalf of the United States may be amended to perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces or to perform work of national importance under civilian direction.

alone in imposing obligations upon its citizens. Such responsibilities are the price of citizenship around the world.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that citizenship in the future kingdom brings with it obligations as well. Except for one requirement, what makes current citizens of the future kingdom unique is the marked difference between their duties and those duties imposed upon the citizens of the nations around them. Military duty, taxation, and other obligations common to earthly governments³⁴ have no exact equivalent for current citizens of the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.³⁵ This being said, the responsibilities of kingdom citizens, in one way at least, go far beyond what is expected of the citizens of this world.

Renounce and Abjure All Allegiance

As mentioned above, there is one demand placed on citizens of the future kingdom that is held in common with citizens of the earthly kingdoms around us. That is the obligation to have unmixed fidelity to the state of which we are citizens. The oath of allegiance required to become a naturalized citizen of the United States includes the following promise: “I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject

³⁴ By “earthly government” I mean those governments that originate from earth. Certainly, the future kingdom will be “earthly” in that it will be established on this earth. But it will be different in character than other governments because its origination is from heaven. See John 18:36.

³⁵ One could argue that the NT commands concerning giving is analogous to a tax upon the believer. But this would be a serious misreading of the NT. Taxes are compulsory. In contrast, Paul is quite clear that giving is a grace given by God (2 Cor 8:7). He expressly states that he is not commanding a tax but is instead testing the sincerity of the love expressed by the believers (v. 8). Indeed, the apostle Paul is clear that the believer should give, not in a predetermined way or amount, but instead as he has decided in his heart. The fact that NT giving should be “not grudgingly or under compulsion” (9:7) shows it to be the very opposite of a tax.

or citizen....”³⁶ This same obligation is placed upon those loyal to the King in Psalm 45: “Listen, O daughter, give attention and incline your ear: Forget your people and your father’s house” (v. 10).

Psalm 45 is a wedding psalm evidently meant to be sung at the nuptials of a Davidic king and his foreign bride. While there are numerous suggestions as to the identity of this Davidic king,³⁷

³⁶ U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.

³⁷ “The older and perhaps the more common interpretation refers it to Solomon’s nuptials with the daughter of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. Hupfeld thinks that the princess here celebrated was not an Egyptian, but a daughter of Hiram, king of Tyre; and accordingly, in ver 12 [13], he renders the words, ‘daughter of Tyre,’ in the vocative, as if the Poet were there addressing the new Queen. The history (1 Kgs 11:1, &c.), he observes, mentions Zidonian (= Tyrian, Is. 23:12) princesses among Solomon’s foreign wives. Hitzig refers the Psalm to the marriage of Ahab with Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, ‘King of the Zidonians’ (1 Kgs 16:31) and sees an allusion to Ahab’s ivory house (1 Kgs 22:39) in ver. 8 [9]. Delitzsch thinks Joram, ‘the son of Jehoshaphat, the second Solomon of the Jewish history,’ is the king mentioned in the Psalm, and Athaliah the queen. This accounts, he says, for the use of the word שֶׁגָּל (shégal), as applied to the queen-consort, which occurs elsewhere as a Chaldee (Dan. 5:2) or Persian (Neh 2:6) title; and which would be more of a North Palestine than a Jewish word. For Athaliah was of Tyrian origin, and of the royal family of Israel. Hence the peculiar significance of the exhortation to forget ‘her father’s house:’ and hence, too, the homage demanded especially of Tyre. Moreover, Jehoshaphat seems to have had something of Solomon’s passion for foreign trade (though he was unsuccessful in it), which explains, according to Delitzsch, the allusions to gold and ivory; or perhaps the ‘ivory palaces’ may refer to the ‘ivory house’ of Ahab, who was Athaliah’s father (1 Kgs 22:39, comp. Amos 3:15). Finally, some commentators have supposed the Psalm to have been written in honour of a Persian king’s bridal, because of the Persian title given to the queen, because the Tyrians bring tribute, and because the ‘princes in all lands’ (ver. 16 [17]) applies best to Persian satraps. But these reasons are of no weight at all, as may be gathered from what has been already observed; and, on the face of it, it is extremely improbable that such an ode as this should have been inspired by the harem of a Persian monarch” (J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms; A New Translation, with Introductions and Notes, Explanatory and Critical*, vol. 1, 5th ed. revised,

Ross is correct when he states, “There is no reason to speculate on the identity of the king....”³⁸ From early on this psalm has been considered messianic.³⁹ The NT applies this psalm to Christ.⁴⁰ Therefore, even though this song was not written to the church, applying the instruction of verse 10 to the body of Christ is not a tremendous hermeneutical leap.

The importance of this command is difficult to overstate. Three imperatives (hear, see, and stretch out the ear) are used to underscore the seriousness of this charge, solemnly given amid a joyful scene.⁴¹ The King already desires her beauty, but the implication is she will be more beautiful when she makes the King the sole object of her affections. To her outward beauty will be added an inward beauty that is appropriate for the bride of such a King.⁴²

[London; George Bell and Sons; Cambridge: Deighton Bell and Co., 1883], 380–81).

³⁸ Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms 1–89: Commentary*, vol. 2, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2011–2013), 62.

³⁹ “The Messianic interpretation of the Psalm is the most ancient. The Chaldee paraphrast on ver. 2 [3] writes: ‘Thy beauty, O King, Messiah, is greater than that of the sons of men.’ And even the later Jews take the same view. Ibn Ezra says: ‘This Psalm treats either of David or of his son Messiah, for that is His name, Ezekiel 34:24, ‘And David My servant shall be their prince for ever’” (Perowne, *Psalms*, 383).

⁴⁰ Quoting Psalm 45:6–7, the author of Hebrews writes, “But of the Son He says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Thy God, has anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions’” (Heb 1:8–9).

⁴¹ “Such repetition of verbs to get her attention underscores the urgency and importance of the instruction. The first imperative implores a hearing, but a hearing with obedience in mind. With the second imperative he directs her attention to the new relationship she is about to begin. And with the third he calls for her undivided attention to his words” (Ross, *Psalms 1–89*, 75).

⁴² Ibid.

From the beginning, leaving has been an intricate part of godly marriage.⁴³ The creation of God's ancient covenant people also involved the act of leaving.⁴⁴ Similarly, Jesus insists on a level of love and fidelity that makes other loves appear to be hatred in comparison.⁴⁵ With this in mind, it is of little surprise that the messianic King demands his bride to forget kindred and country so that she might give to him the entirety of her affections. While not often considered, this command is incumbent upon modern-day believers. To be sure, this is not a requirement for salvation (*Deo gratias*), but it ought to be the attitude every believer should endeavor to emulate.

The command to "forget" should be taken in the same way as the command to "remember." In Malachi 4:4 the people are told to "remember the law of Moses." Here the idea is not simply to remember, but to remember with the goal of obedience. In like manner, the command to forget does not have in mind the erasing of memory, but the attitude of not allowing these natural loves to compete with the bride's love for the King. In practical terms this means the forsaking of any love that would challenge love for the King.

It is important to notice that neither love for family nor love of country is evil in and of itself. But these loves are to be "forgotten" when placed in comparison to love for the King.⁴⁶ Of course, it is not only familial or patriotic loves which must be

⁴³ "For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24).

⁴⁴ "Now the LORD said to Abram, 'Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house to the land which I will show you'" (Gen 12:1).

⁴⁵ "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

⁴⁶ One wonders what changes in this world would occur if the believer took this command to heart and entirely renounced and abjured all allegiance and fidelity to his political party or even his country. What would happen if such "patriotic" activities as watching the news were replaced with Bible study and prayer? This seems, at least to me, as the most obvious application of the command to "forget your people and your father's house" for the North American church at large.

kept in check. Love for any worldly activity should be included within this command to “forget.”

Freewill Offerings

Within the royal psalms, the most exacting statement regarding the responsibilities of those loyal to the King (Ps 110:3) is also the most difficult.⁴⁷ Questions concerning the *Sitz im Leben* of this psalm abound.⁴⁸ Still, the testimony of our Lord Jesus regarding the authorship of the psalm (Matt 22:42–45) as well as the subject it concerns is “difficult to explain away.”⁴⁹ Therefore it seems best to take the psalm at face value,

⁴⁷ “The expressions in verse three have proved to be the most challenging to scribes and scholars down through the ages. There are textual problems in the ancient manuscripts and versions that need to be considered, and there are unusual expressions in the clauses themselves that must be explained.” See Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms (90–150): Commentary*, vol. 3, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 350–51.

⁴⁸ “According to the recent criticism, which calls itself ‘advanced,’ this psalm is the composition of an unknown prophet, addressed to his earthly sovereign, communicating to him certain Divine utterances, or oracles (vers. 1, 5), of great weight and strangeness, and promising him complete victory over all his enemies. The king is supposed by some to be David; by others, a Davidic monarch; by others, again, a Maccabee prince or king. According to its ‘title,’ it is ‘a Psalm of David;’ according to our Lord’s comment upon it (Matt. 22:43–45, Mark 12:35–37; Luke 20:41–44), it is an address of David to the Messiah; according to every Christian commentator for fifteen centuries, it is Messianic and Davidic. Even Professor Cheyne, who inclines so strongly to the sceptical [sic] school, grants that ‘it may perhaps refer to the ideal or Messianic King himself,’ though he thinks it ‘equally possible to explain it of some historical ruler.’ The style and language are generally allowed to be Davidic, and many, even of the ‘advanced’ critics, refer the composition to his time. Ewald suggested that Gad or Nathan might have been the author. Recently, Canon Gore has embraced the sceptical (sic) view, and has suggested that our Lord either did not know who was the author, or did not mean to touch the question of the authorship (‘Bampton Lectures,’ pp. 196–200)” (H. D. M. Spence-Jones, ed., *Psalms*, vol. 3, The Pulpit Commentary [London; New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1909]), 28).

⁴⁹ Ibid.

specifically, that it refers to the Anointed King establishing his worldwide kingdom.

On this mighty day, when the Lord Jesus is enthroned and he “rules in the midst of his enemies” (Ps 110:2), we read the following enigmatic description of those loyal to the King: “Your people will volunteer freely in the day of your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, your youth are to You as the dew” (v. 3). Even though the second line of this verse is extraordinarily difficult—as Ross observes, “The Hebrew is very cryptic....”⁵⁰—the first line provides a helpful description of kingdom loyalists.

The “your people” of verse three is placed in contrast to the “enemies” immediately previous. Again, one should note that there is no third category to describe the populace of this world. One is either an enemy of the King or one is loyal to the King, but it is not possible for one to simply remain neutral. One should also notice that the psalmist makes no mention as to how a person becomes one of the King’s people. There is no mention of tribe or nationality or any other distinguishing characteristic.

What may be said of these loyalists is that they have willingly joined the King’s cause. In fact, the extent of their willing self-sacrifice may be seen in the language used to describe it. Ross notes, “The actual word in the text is ‘freewill offerings’ (נָדָבָה), the plural amplifying the idea to mean willingness in all its aspects.”⁵¹ While some would take this language as merely figurative, the idea of people offering their lives in an act of worship is most appropriate when one considers the Melchizedekian priest described immediately after.⁵² It is also

⁵⁰ Ross, *Psalms (90–150)*, 352.

⁵¹ Ibid., 351.

⁵² “This interpretation harmonizes best with the priestly character assigned both to the warriors and to their leader. Otherwise the word often loses its sacrificial meaning; and so here many render, ‘Thy people are most willing,’ lit. “are willingnesses,” (plur. for sing. as more emphatic, comprising every possible aspect of the idea contained in the word, alacrity, readiness, devotion in every form). They are no hireling soldiery; they serve not of constraint nor for filthy lucre. ... The reflexive form of the verb from the same root is used in like manner in Jud. 5:2, 9, of the

appropriate when one remembers a similar command from the pen of the apostle Paul: “present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice” (Rom 12:1).

What is conspicuously absent from this psalm is what *exactly* these people are volunteering to do. The King in this psalm needs no troops to support him and there is no reference in the psalm of people fighting on his behalf.⁵³ We learn from other places those who hold kingdom citizenship now will reign with Christ when he establishes his kingdom (Rev 3:21; 20:4), although what type of administrative duties will be required is not stated. We do know that reigning with Christ will include pronouncing judgments in some form or another,⁵⁴ but what kind of cases will be heard and what sort of verdicts will be rendered is still a mystery. We also know that some sort of priestly function will be required.⁵⁵ While it is not clear, the “holy array” of Psalm 110:3 may point to this.⁵⁶

people ‘willingly offering themselves’ for the war against Jabin and Sisera” (Perowne, *Psalms*, 306–307).

⁵³ The NIV’s “your troops” in verse 3 is more interpretation than translation. The Hebrew עַם simply means people generally. Slight justification for translating “troops” may be found if one translates אֲרִיָּה at the end of the clause in the day of your “armies” (not “battle,” as the NIV). This would not be an unusual translation (see Exod 14:28, Deut 11:4, 2 Kgs 6:15), but the equally probable in the day of your “strength” (see Ps 18:32 [33], 39 [40]) makes better sense in the context (Perowne, *Psalms*, 307).

⁵⁴ See 1 Corinthians 6:3; Revelation 3:21; 20:4.

⁵⁵ See Revelation 1:6; 20:6.

⁵⁶ “The other prepositional phrase has been translated ‘in the beauty of holiness.’ The word ‘beauty’ (תְּהִלָּה), that is, ‘splendor, adornment,’ or ‘beauty’ (s.v. Ps. 96:6), describes something that inspires admiration and appreciation. The fact that it is in the plural may mean that it refers to beautiful garments such as those that the priests would wear (see 1 Chr 16:29; 2 Chr 20:21; Ps. 29:2; 96:9). The qualifying word ‘holiness’ (an attributive genitive) explains that these beautiful adornments are holy. This may be drawing on the beautiful, holy garments used by the priests in the holy place, indicating they are properly prepared for serving the Holy One.

“Thus, when the king appears to put down his enemies and establish his earthly reign, he will be accompanied by a myriad of willing servants who will be adorned in holy array, meaning that they have been set apart to

Regardless of the details, however, two important truths should be observed. First, those offering themselves as freewill offerings are eager to perform whatever tasks may please the King. The loyalists place no restrictions upon their service. Instead of *bringing* offerings to the king, they *are* the offerings being presented. Second, regardless of what other duties may be required, the volunteers in no way assist the King in establishing his kingdom. The Anointed King sits at the right hand of the Lord until the Lord makes his enemies a footstool for his feet. It is the Lord's work that is being chronicled. Even though the loyalists are at his complete disposal, he makes no use of them. Therefore, at least from a dispensational worldview, kingdom building should not be a task of the believer, not because the loyalist doesn't long to participate, but because the Lord has reserved this task for himself. It is the Lord who has sworn to establish David's line forever and to make his throne firm (Ps 89:3–4).

The Serious Obligation to Worship

The only activity specifically required of kingdom loyalists is to proclaim the perfections of the Lord and his Anointed One. This may be seen through direct commands to worship as well as the many examples of praise expressed in the royal psalms.

For example, Psalm 2 advises the rebellious nations who intend to “tear off their fetters” and “cast away their cords” to show discernment and take warning. Their current course of action ends only in disaster! Instead, they are to replace their rebelliousness with worshipful service.⁵⁷ This “worship,” however, like all worship, is not mere outward obedience, but is to be accompanied by a radical change of heart. As Ross correctly observes, “[t]his service was to be performed ‘with fear’ (הַיִּירָאָה), a term that includes fear, reverence, and adoration. One who fears God is drawn to him in love, adoration, and amazement because

his service and are characterized by holiness” (Ross, *Psalms* (90–150), 352–53).

⁵⁷ “The call for them to submit to the Lord is expressed in terms of serving. The verb ‘serve’... has the religious sense of worshipping God and obeying his commands” (ibid., 211).

of his power and glory, but because of his power and glory one also shrinks back in reverence and even fear.”⁵⁸

Interestingly, there is some question concerning whose wrath is kindled when homage to the Son is not rendered. Specifically, is the Son angry at this snub of his royal person, or is it the Lord who is angry because his Anointed King is not being worshiped?⁵⁹ While either option is feasible, the context seems to favor the idea that it is the Lord’s anger that is in view.⁶⁰ It is also worthy of note that this idea is expressed in Psalm 89. The Lord declares, “But I shall crush his adversaries before him, and strike those who hate him” (89:23).

Even though reading the psalm this way does little to change the message of the psalm, understanding that it is the Lord’s wrath that is kindled places an emphasis upon the one who establishes the kingdom. It is the Lord himself who places Christ upon the throne. The kingdom is given as a gift to his Son. In making this emphasis, the establishment of the kingdom is moved even further away from the actions of the citizens who long for it. Put another way, not only is this kingdom not established by kingdom loyalists, but it is also not established by the King of the kingdom. This kingdom is established due to the direct actions of the Lord, without the help of others.

Regardless of what option is chosen, it remains clear that worship is due the Lord and his Anointed One because they are who they are. As a result, the withholding of praise is a crime of

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ While the singular “him” does not allow the possibility of both being in view, that idea is presented in Scripture elsewhere. “[A]nd they said to the mountains and to the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’” (Rev 6:16–17).

⁶⁰ Earlier in the psalm we read of the Lord’s anger directed towards mankind. His wrath is against those who refuse to accept the King he has installed upon Zion (Ps 2:5–6). Also, the one the nations are commanded to worship is not the Anointed King, but the Lord himself in verse 11. Thus, the command to kiss the Son (v. 12) is best taken as part of this previous command to worship (v. 11).

the highest order. Therefore, worship in this psalm is commanded.

Even though worship is commanded in Psalm 2, a careful reading of the royal psalms suggests that the command to worship is only directed at those who *need* to be commanded to worship. The overwhelming evidence of the royal psalms is that praise springs naturally from the hearts of kingdom citizens. While it is true that the Lord and his Anointed King deserve praise for merely being who they are, most of the praise in the royal psalms is the consequence of experiencing the goodness of the Lord.

For example, in Psalm 132 the “godly ones will sing aloud for joy,” because God has satisfied the needy with bread (vv. 15–16). Likewise, in Psalm 144, there is no command to worship and/or praise. Nevertheless, praise springs naturally from the pen of the psalmist. “I will sing a new song to you, O God; Upon a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to you” (v. 9). The occasion of this praise is that God has rescued David from his enemies (v. 10). Salvation from one’s enemies is likewise cause for singing in Psalm 18.⁶¹ The Lord is worthy to be praised because of who he is as well as what he has done. He is “my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold” (18:2). Because he is who he is, he “gives great deliverance to his king, and shows lovingkindness to his anointed, To David and his descendants forever” (v. 50). In this case, his lovingkindness is seen in David’s triumph over his enemies and his escaping “the cords of death” (v. 4).

In Psalm 101 we find a different pattern, although the results are the same. The psalm begins with the Davidic king reciting a vow to sing praises to the Lord. While no reason for this vow is provided, it is implied that this is in response to the absolute holiness of the Lord. Clearly the king shares the love of

⁶¹ “For the choir director. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD, who spoke to the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And he said,” (Ps 18: title). Also, “Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, O LORD, And I will sing praises to Your name” (v. 49).

righteousness expressed by the Lord, for the king states that he hates those who fall away (101:3) and no one that has a haughty look or an arrogant heart will the king endure (v. 5). After all, the royal residence is in the “city of the LORD” (v. 8), and who knows when the Lord will come to visit him (v. 2)?

Other examples could be cited, but the pattern is clear. The wicked are commanded to praise the Lord. Kingdom loyalists are not commanded, not because their duty is any less, but because they willingly bring forth praise from a grateful heart.

Application

As might be expected, certain obligations are incumbent upon citizens of the future kingdom in the here and now. These requirements of citizenship should be no surprise to those who have read the NT and have taken its teachings to heart.

First, just as naturalized citizens of the United States, citizens of the future kingdom are called upon to renounce and abjure all allegiance to any people or nation that does not swear allegiance to the Anointed One of God. This does not mean that church-age believers should renounce their citizenship in whatever country in which they may live. What it does mean, however, is that kingdom loyalists should recognize that conflict between the kingdom in which they now live and the future kingdom is inevitable. When such conflict occurs, believers are called to act in such a way that it becomes obvious where their true allegiances lie.

Second, citizens of the coming kingdom are to present themselves as freewill offerings to the Lord’s Anointed King. When they present themselves as offerings, it automatically follows that whatever it is at their disposal is presented as well. The example of the Macedonian believers described in 2 Corinthians 8:1–5 should be the model for church-age believers.

Finally, the obligation to worship should be taken seriously by kingdom loyalists. While this obligation is always upon all people so that failure to do so is a serious crime (Rom 1:18–25), kingdom citizens who know God and acknowledge him as sovereign should have praise erupting spontaneously from their hearts because of who God is and what he has done. Worship

should never be considered optional but should be considered the joyful privilege that it is.

Conclusion

While nearly all of what may be learned from the royal psalms is taught in other Scriptures, this collection of songs is valuable to our study of political science in that they offer correction to long-held beliefs that deserve, but often lack, investigation. Specifically, their emphasis upon the conflict between the nations of this world and the Lord and his Anointed One is a valuable warning for the church-age saint. They show that political nationalism should place a distant second in the hearts of believers compared to their love for their current King and their longing for his coming kingdom. They help kingdom loyalists fashion realistic expectations concerning the governments of this world, cautioning believers about the potential problems of church/government cooperation. These songs provide hope to the oppressed by reminding them of a future day when the Lord overthrows the wicked governments of this world, establishes his King on his throne, and pours out his blessings on the earth. Understanding and applying the royal psalms' teachings enable those loyal to the King to live in a world hostile to him by remembering where their true citizenship lies.

A Biblical Methodology for Theology and Philosophy and Its Dispensational Outcomes

Christopher Cone

Key Words: Theology, Philosophy, Calvinism, Kuyper

Introduction

Theology and philosophy are sometimes considered to be separate disciplines with differing foundational axioms and disparate, often contradictory outcomes. Contrary to that separation of disciplines, this work proposes to show that both have their necessary place within the broader discipline of worldview—and more precisely, *biblical* worldview—and that the two (theology and philosophy) need not, nor should not be in tension with one another. Within a biblical worldview, the biblical philosophy (or the love of wisdom) according to Christ² provides methodology and building blocks resulting in a generally dispensational (at least) theological system, with many

Christopher Cone, Th.D., Ph.D., Ph.D., serves as President and CEO of AgathonEDU Educational Group and leads Vyrity and Colorado Biblical University. Dr. Cone has served as a President (Vyrity, Colorado Biblical University, Calvary University, Tyndale Theological Seminary), a Chief Academic Officer (Southern California Seminary), and as a Research Professor (Vyrity, Colorado Biblical University, Calvary University, Southern California Seminary). He has served in several pastoral roles and has also held teaching positions at the University of North Texas, North Central Texas College, and Southern Bible Institute. His articles are published at www.drcone.com, and he is the author and general editor of more than fifteen books.

This article is adapted from a book chapter titled “The Hermeneutic Roots of the Green Tree” in *The Green Tree and Hermeneutic Roots of Biblical Faith and Practice*, ed. Christopher Cone and John Oglesby (Independence, MO: Exegetica Publishing, 2021), 1–20.

² Colossians 2:8.

systematic theological propositions fitting within the descriptive philosophical category of metaphysics, and theological outcomes evident in the prescriptive categories of ethics and sociopolitical thought. A biblical methodology for handling philosophical and theological data guides the interlocutor toward a cogent system of worldview that integrates also other disciplines which otherwise might be seen as unrelated or even contradictory.

A Case Study in Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Competing "Life Systems"

Abraham Kuyper referred to the concept of worldview as *life system*, asserting that Calvinism itself provides the ultimate life system—the “manifestation of the Christian principle.”³ Kuyper supposed there to be three particular conditions necessary for a life system: or “three fundamental relations of all human life ... (1) our relation *to God*, (2) our relation *to man*, and (3) our relation *to the world*.”⁴ While Paganism, Islam, and Romanism all address the three conditions, Kuyper was particularly concerned that modernism was seemingly triumphing over Christianity:

Two *life systems* are wrestling with one another, in mortal combat. Modernism is bound to build a world of its own from the data of the natural man, and to construct man himself from the data of nature; while, on the other hand, all those who reverently bend the knee to Christ and worship Him as the Son of the living God, and God himself, are bent upon saving the ‘Christian Heritage.’⁵

Modernism isn't the only life system competing with Calvinism, according to Kuyper. Romanism and Islam both have thoroughgoing and recognizable systems. Kuyper observes that,

³ Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931), 12.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

In the Roman Catholic Church everybody knows what he lives for, because with clear consciousness he enjoys the fruits of Rome's unity of life-system. Even in Islam you find the same power of a conviction of life dominated by one principle. Protestantism alone wanders about in the wilderness without aim or direction, moving hither and thither, without making any progress.⁶

Within Protestantism, Kuyper suggests, Calvinism provides the preeminent explanatory device and the “manifestation of the Christian Principle.”⁷

Kuyper suggests that Calvinism offers major advantages over other systems, in that Calvinism

does not seek God in the creature, as Paganism; it does not *isolate* God *from* the creature, as Islamism; it posits no *mediate communion* between God and the creature, as does Romanism; but proclaims the exalted thought that, although standing in high majesty above the creature, God enters *into immediate fellowship with the creature*, as God the Holy Spirit.⁸

At the core of this uniqueness is the Calvinistic confession of predestination, and more specifically Calvinism's assertion of immediate fellowship with God, rather than fellowship as through intermediaries (such as the Romish priesthood).⁹ Thus, Kuyper finds in Calvinism the first condition of a life system—a comprehensive and plausible explanation of human relations with God.

Whereas according to Kuyper, Paganism celebrates the lowest and basest elements of humanity and modernism abolishes every difference between men and between men and women, Calvinism characterizes differences only in accordance with that described by the Creator. In the second condition—human relation to humanity—Kuyper observes that

⁶ Ibid., 18.

⁷ Ibid., 12.

⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁹ Ibid., 25.

Calvinism finds its fulness in the democratic interpretation of life; to proclaim the liberty of nations; and not to rest until both politically and socially every man, simply because he is man, should be recognized, respected and dealt with as a creature created after the Divine likeness.¹⁰

In the relationship of humanity to the world, Kuyper perceives Paganism to esteem the world too highly; Islam, too lowly; and Calvinism, to recognize that through common grace there is an easing of the curse allowing humanity to effectively exercise the original dominion mandate.¹¹ Kuyper recounts the three conditions and Calvinism's assertions of those conditions as follows:

For our relation *to God*: an immediate fellowship of man with the Eternal, independently of priest or church. For the relation of man *to man*: the recognition in each person of human worth, which is his by virtue of his creation after the Divine likeness, and therefore of the equality of all men before God and his magistrate. And for our relation *to the world*: the recognition that in the whole world the curse is restrained by grace, that the life of the world is to be honored in its independence, and that we must, in every domain, discover the treasures and develop the potencies hidden by God in nature and in human life.¹²

Addressing these three conditions, Kuyper suggests that Calvinism stands alongside Paganism, Islamism, Romanism, and modernism as thoroughgoing worldviews. He adds that, because of Calvinism's advantages, it alone possesses "a well-defined principle and an all-embracing life-system."¹³

In four "great problems of religion"¹⁴ Calvinism expresses critical explanatory dogmas. In the dogma of God's sovereignty, religion is recognized as for God's sake rather than human or

¹⁰ Ibid., 27.

¹¹ Ibid., 30.

¹² Ibid., 31.

¹³ Ibid., 32.

¹⁴ Ibid., 58.

other practical purposes. In the dogma of election, religion escapes intermediaries and establishes direct human connection with God. In the dogma of common and universal grace religion is seen as impartial. Finally, in the dogmas of regeneration and *sola scriptura*, religion is soteriological. In addressing these four great problems, Kuyper views Calvinism as a superior expression and worthy life system.¹⁵

While Kuyper says little of epistemology, it is clear that the metaphysical assertions of fact within Calvinism stem directly from a correctly informed faith, and one that informs every other area of inquiry:

A Calvinist who seeks God, does not for a moment think of limiting himself to theology and contemplation, leaving the other sciences, as of a lower character, in the hands of unbelievers; but on the contrary, looking upon it as his task to know God in *all* his works, he is conscious of having been called to fathom with all the energy of his intellect, things *terrestrial* as well as things *celestial*.¹⁶

For Kuyper, “every science in a certain degree starts *from faith*, and, on the contrary, faith, which does not lead to science, is mistaken faith or superstition, but real, genuine faith it is not.”¹⁷ Rooted in the tenets of Calvinism there is discernible a necessary unity of all inquiries. Kuyper recognizes that

Calvinists have never thought that the idea of the cosmos lay in God's foreordination as an aggregate of loosely conjoined decrees, but they have always maintained that the whole formed one organic programme of the entire creation and the entire history. And as a Calvinist looks upon God's decree as the foundation and origin of the natural laws, in the same manner also he finds in it the firm foundation and the origin of every moral and spiritual law; both these, the natural as well as the spiritual laws, forming together one high order.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., 59.

¹⁶ Ibid., 125.

¹⁷ Ibid., 131.

¹⁸ Ibid., 115.

Rooted in these metaphysic premises are key implications for ethics, namely that the law of Moses represents a timeless moral order.

Hence it is that, for the Calvinist, all ethical study is based on the Law of Sinai, not as though at that time the moral world-order began to be fixed, but to honor the Law of Sinai, as the divinely authentic summary of that original moral law which God wrote in the heart of man, at his creation, and which God is re-writing on the tables of every heart at its conversion.¹⁹

Because these principles are timeless and persisting ethical foundations, they also have sociopolitical implications.

...it is one and the same world which once exhibited all the glory of Paradise, which was afterwards smitten with the curse, and which, since the Fall, is upheld by common grace; which has now been redeemed and saved by Christ, in its center, and which shall pass through the horror of the judgment into the state of glory. For this very reason the Calvinist cannot shut himself up in his church and abandon the world to its fate.²⁰

Calvinism, according to Kuyper, presents great social responsibility to believers as participants in government as it should be.

A people therefore which abandons to State Supremacy the rights of the family, or a University which abandons to it the rights of science, is just as guilty before God as a nation which lays its hands upon the rights of the magistrates.²¹

In Kuyper's understanding of Calvinism, the grounding appeal to the metaphysical descriptive (of God's sovereign decree) leads to ethical applications (in contemporary expressions of Sinaitic law) and finally to socio political

¹⁹ Ibid., 72.

²⁰ Ibid., 73.

²¹ Ibid., 98.

responsibility. “In Calvinism lies the origin and guarantee of our constitutional liberties.”²² God’s sovereignty, as expressed in Calvinism, provides the necessary groundwork for Christian engagement in culture, as God intends to bless the world through that very Christian engagement:

But the Calvinistic confession of the Sovereignty of God holds good for *all* the world, is true for all nations, and is of force in all authority, which man exercises over man; even in the authority which parents possess over their children. It is therefore a political faith which may be summarily expressed in these three theses: 1. God only—and never any creature—is possessed of sovereign rights, in the destiny of the nations, because God alone created them, maintains them by His Almighty power, and rules them by His ordinances. 2. Sin has, in the realm of politics, broken down the direct government of God, and therefore the exercise of authority, for the purpose of government has subsequently been invested in men, as a mechanical remedy. And 3. In whatever form this authority may reveal itself, man never possesses power over his fellow-man in any other way than by an authority which descends upon him from the majesty of God.²³

The first tenet of Calvinism (God’s sovereignty expressed in decrees) is the metaphysical root system supporting the ethical and sociopolitical prescriptions. Kuyper adds that “the Calvinistic dogma of predestination [is] the strongest motive ... for the cultivation of science in a higher sense.”²⁴

Together, God’s sovereignty and his predestining work provide the impetus for further inquiry and discovery—all within the metaphysical descriptive. These two aspects of God’s character provide more than simply metaphysical description, grounding the entire Calvinistic life system on the epistemological certainty of reliance on God’s character as expressed in his sovereignty and predestining work. In this sense, Calvinism illustrates the necessary relationship of epistemology,

²² Ibid., 78.

²³ Ibid., 85.

²⁴ Ibid., 112.

metaphysics, ethics, and sociopolitical thought, and models the sequential progression from one to the other and then back again. Calvinism is not merely abstract nor conceptual, but rather, according to Kuyper, it has far-reaching personal impact as “belief in predestination is nothing but the penetration of God's decree into your own personal life.”²⁵ It is at this nexus that the life system that is Calvinism invites each person to engage and consistently apply the worldview in all aspects of life.

Kuyper perceives Calvinism to be the correct life system Calvinism, suggesting that Calvinism

*did not stop at a church-order, but expanded in a life-system, and did not exhaust its energy in a dogmatical construction, but created a life- and world-view, and such a one as was, and still is. able to fit itself to the needs of every stage of human development, in every department of life.*²⁶

Calvinism, because it provides the right answers, is in itself the right method for engaging other inquiries beyond the theological. Kuyper recommends that

... theology is only one of the many sciences that demand Calvinistic treatment. Philosophy, psychology, aesthetics, jurisprudence, the social sciences, literature, and even the medical and natural sciences, each and all of these, when philosophically conceived, go back to principles, and of necessity even the question must be put with much more penetrating seriousness than hitherto, whether the ontological and anthropological principles that reign supreme in the present method of these sciences are in agreement with the principles of Calvinism, or are at variance with their very essence.²⁷

This praise of Calvinism as *the* life system notwithstanding, after all this Kuyper acknowledges what this writer considers to be a fatal shortcoming, admitting that “not one Reformed

²⁵ Ibid., 113.

²⁶ Ibid., 171.

²⁷ Ibid., 194.

standard, not even the purest, is infallible as was the word of Paul.”²⁸ Kuyper indicates that while he remains immovably convicted of the value and correctness of Calvinism, the system does not offer the highest level of reliability, but is itself an application of principles. Kuyper notes,

As a matter of course, there is inherent in every conviction, in every confession, a motive for absolute and unconditional propagandism, and the word of Paul to Agrippa: “I would to God that with little or with much, not only you, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am,” must remain the heartfelt wish not only of every good Calvinist, but of every one who may glory in a firm immovable conviction. But so ideal a desire of the human heart can never be realized in this our dispensation.²⁹

Kuyper has wisely reckoned that faith is the basis for metaphysical assertions and descriptions of reality, both terrestrial and celestial, and he has asserted a consistency in drawing ethical principles from the metaphysical descriptions. Further, Kuyper acknowledges that sociopolitical descriptions and prescriptions stem also from the metaphysical realities that Calvinism espouses. In this sense, Kuyper argues well that Calvinism is a life system or worldview. However, in Kuyper’s recognition that Calvinism and its Reformed doctrines are not at a Pauline level of authority (and that the ideals will not see fulfillment in the present dispensation), lies a simple invitation to consider whether Calvinism is the irreducible principle of life, or if we can go straight to Paul and the other biblical writers, to find a worldview that actually *is infallible* and needs no further reduction. If the Reformed tenets are not as infallible as Paul, then let’s discard them as the mooring of the life system and go straight to the biblical writers.

²⁸ Ibid., 192.

²⁹ Ibid.

Hermeneutic Method as the Primary Worldview Driver

As Kuyper has shown, Calvinism offers significant advantages over Paganism, Islamism, Romanism, and modernism. The Calvinist system stands where these others fail. Calvinism seems a more consistent expression of its own core principles (especially rooted in the sovereignty and predestining work of God) and is thus worthy of respect as a worldview. However, Kuyper acknowledges that Calvinism and the Reformed principle is not rooted in the very highest authority and is not quite at the level of Pauline authority, for example. This admission of limitation is not surprising. If Kuyper were to assert that Calvin's words (and thus principles) were inspired, that would represent an internal incoherency, striking at the sovereignty of God in his revelation and undermining the metaphysic of inspiration and revelation. Kuyper (and Calvin) recognize well that the system is a philosophical extrapolation based on the theological assertions of God's sovereignty and predestining. In this we discover the relationship of philosophy and theology within Calvinism; the theological assertions come first and provide the epistemological bases for the entire philosophical system. In Kuyper's explanation of Calvinism there is no attention given to hermeneutic method or biblical interpretation (the concepts are not addressed even once in Kuyper's series of lectures). Rather Kuyper's interpretive focus is on the interpretation of life itself³⁰—of the observable phenomena, and the application of the theological tenets (sovereignty and predestination) to the phenomena.

Calvin does not himself comprehensively address hermeneutic method, but he is strongly commended by John Murray for setting "the pattern for the exercise of that sobriety which guards the science of exegesis against those distortions and perversions to which allegorizing methods are ever prone to subject the interpretation and application of Scripture."³¹ Calvin's method is illustrated in his addressing of the

³⁰ Kuyper, *Lectures*, 23–24, 27–36, 40, 140, 160–65, 170, 186.

³¹ John Murray, preface to *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, by John Calvin, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: CCEL, 2002), 3.

applications of the law, as he asserts that there is more to the author's intent than the letter of the law, though we should avoid taking excessive liberty with the text:

We must, therefore, if possible, discover some path which may conduct us with direct and firm step to the will of God. We must consider, I say, how far interpretation can be permitted to go beyond the literal meaning of the words, still making it apparent that no appending of human glosses is added to the Divine Law, but that the pure and genuine meaning of the Lawgiver is faithfully exhibited. It is true that, in almost all the commandments, there are elliptical expressions, and that, therefore, any man would make himself ridiculous by attempting to restrict the spirit of the Law to the strict letter of the words. It is plain that a sober interpretation of the Law must go beyond these, but how far is doubtful, unless some rule be adopted. The best rule, in my opinion, would be, to be guided by the principle of the commandment—viz. to consider in the case of each what the purpose is for which it was given.³²

Calvin advocates a case-by-case interpretive method with the author's motive as the guiding principle to determine *how far beyond the literal approach* one's hermeneutic may extend. The problem evident here is the subjective nature of seeking to assess the author's *motive* rather than in simply assessing the author's *words*. Calvin's interpretive principle is illustrated in his critique of Chiliasts as "triflers,"³³ arguing that

Those who assign only a thousand years to the children of God to enjoy the inheritance of future life, observe not how great an insult they offer to Christ and his kingdom. If they are not to be clothed with immortality, then Christ himself, into whose glory they shall be transformed, has not been received into immortal glory; if their blessedness is to have an end, the kingdom of Christ, on whose solid structure it rests, is temporary. In short, they are either most

³² John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: CCEL, 2002), 232.

³³ *Ibid.*, 612.

ignorant of all divine things or they maliciously aim at subverting the whole grace of God and power of Christ....³⁴

While Calvin seeks to elevate God and rebut any who would subvert God's proper authority, Calvin goes beyond Revelation 20:1–5's repeated assertion of a literal one-thousand-year kingdom of Christ based on theological grounds. This method confirms Murray's prefatory assertion that Calvin made great emphasis of the analogy of Scripture in his exegesis³⁵ and Calvin's own assertion that every interpretation of Scripture should be brought to the analogy of faith.³⁶ Because of the supposed theological implications of a literal millennium being incompatible with the author's character, the literal meaning is discarded as theologically abhorrent and untenable. No matter that the thousand years in a literal interpretation is referring to the *inaugural* period of the eternal kingdom—Calvin doesn't seem to even consider that possibility, instead rooting his interpretative method in a theological principle. Whereas Calvin lauded early interpreters (particularly councils up through the fifth century),³⁷ he also acknowledged that later interpreters “gradually degenerated from the purity of that golden age.”³⁸ Despite those later departures from reliability, Calvin still saw value in corporate interpretive dialogue and decision, admitting that “when any doctrine is brought under discussion, there is not a better or surer remedy than for a council of true bishops to meet and discuss the controverted point.”³⁹ Calvin adds that Paul prescribes such methodology

³⁴ Ibid., 611.

³⁵ Murray, preface, 3.

³⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 809, 852.

³⁷ Ibid., 716.

³⁸ Ibid., 716–17.

³⁹ Ibid., 719.

of determining doctrine. For when he gives the power of deciding to a single church, he shows what the course of procedure should be in more important cases—namely, that the churches together are to take common cognizance [sic].⁴⁰

The irony in Calvin's conclusion here is that he acknowledges severe failures in the methodology even as he espouses the methodology as Pauline (without citation of any such Biblical characterization). Calvin's analogy of faith extends beyond the Scripture to the democratic determinations of ecclesiastical bodies even though there is risk of error. Calvin supposes that if there is error, the truth (by God's preservation) will be restored at some point (seemingly) through further discussion and agreement.⁴¹ It is perhaps for the uncertain conclusions of such methodology that Kuyper recognizes Calvinism and other reformed principles to be less than of inspired authority.

A Biblical Life System Accounting for Philosophy and Theology Rooted in Greater Authority

Hermeneutic method is a critical and foundational agreement in a life system or worldview. Interpretive method provides the needed epistemological content for discerning metaphysical descriptions and deriving requisite ethic and sociopolitical prescriptions. In short, hermeneutic method is the critical pivot point once the source of authority undergirding the life system or worldview has been acknowledged. If the Calvinist life system stands upon God's sovereignty and predestining as core metaphysical principles, those principles are derived from nature itself and not only from the revealed text,⁴² yet nature provides no particular hermeneutic for our interpretation of nature. Consequently, metaphysical concepts and theological suppositions (such as God's sovereignty and predestining) are sometimes read back into epistemology and are employed at times as hermeneutic devices themselves. It is this kind of

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 44, 919.

hermeneutic spiral that often places traditional inquiries of theology in too lofty a role as being dispositive in the development of the life system or worldview. If on the other hand, we begin with a hermeneutic method derived exclusively from the pages of Scripture, then the subjectivity and uncertainty inherent in both the democratic method and the analogy of faith ought to be far less influential in the development of the worldview than is evident in Calvinism.

Determining whether or not, then, the Bible prescribes hermeneutic methodology is an important first step once the source of authority is acknowledged. Whereas, for example, Calvinism might assert that God is the source of authority, the hermeneutics of Calvinism are (at times) subjective and uncertain. In order to resolve the uncertainty, the interpreter must occasionally presume to understand the motive of the author. This maneuver inevitably includes the interpreter as determinative, and thus part of the source of authority. In this sense, Calvinism does not escape the Romish tendency that the Scripture should be interpreted according to the “living Tradition of the whole Church”⁴³ (though the degree of authority ascribed to the church is far less in Calvinism than in Catholicism). For Calvinism the hermeneutic spiral means that the interpreter plays a role as *part* of the source of authority. If on the other hand, there is a hermeneutic method that is *only* biblically derived, then the interpreter plays no role as source of authority, but is rather interpreting only that source of authority.

In the early historical accounts of Genesis and Job, spanning roughly two-thousand years, there is a clear hermeneutic method evident in the text. That method has been summarized by this writer as follows:

In examination of the ninety-four passages in Genesis and Job that record Divine speech acts, the evidence is overwhelming ... that God intended for His words to be taken at face value, using a plain-sense interpretive approach. The hermeneutic method that reflects this straightforward methodology has become known as the literal

⁴³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (The Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), 32, para. 113.

grammatical historical hermeneutic. This method recognizes that verbal expression has meaning rooted in and inseparable from the grammatical and historical context of the language used, and that these components require that readers be consistent in applying the interpretive method in their study of the Scriptures. Because of the two-thousand-year precedent evident in Genesis and Job, any departure from the simplicity of this method bears a strong exegetical burden of proof, requiring that there be explicit exegetical support for any change one might perceive as necessary in handling later Scriptures. Absent any such exegetical data, we can conclude that (1) hermeneutic methodology for understanding Scripture is not arbitrary but is instead plainly modeled, and that (2) later Scriptures should be understood in light of the hermeneutic precedent provided by Genesis and Job.⁴⁴

If this assessment is correct, and the Bible affirms the normality of the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic, then there ought to be no interpreter-infringement on the source of authority undergirding the worldview. In a biblical approach the source of authority is simply *God as revealed in Scripture*. There is no interpretive authority advocated in Scripture other than that. As in Calvinism, God's sovereignty and his predestining work are certainly in view (though perhaps defined differently), only not as overarching hermeneutic devices but rather simply as outcomes of God's direct revelation in Scripture. Thus, our understanding of metaphysical descriptions comes *not from ascribing motivation* to the divine author, but from the simple understanding of the words he has used to communicate. With this recognition of the source of authority (God as revealed in Scripture), and with the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic as the biblically prescribed method for determining authorial intent, we can move on to the fleshing out of the worldview's metaphysic. In engaging that discipline, we can have confidence that we need not rely on either the analogy of faith nor any consensus driven approach but can (more)

⁴⁴ Christopher Cone, *Priority in Biblical Hermeneutics and Theological Method* (Raymore, MO: Exegetica Publishing, 2018), 35.

objectively understand the life system or worldview that the text and its author verbally advocates.

It is in the metaphysics asserted by Scripture that we discover the placement of traditional categories of theology within worldview. The study of metaphysics includes at least ontology (the study of what actually exists), axiology (the study of what is of value), teleology (the study of design and purpose), and eschatology (the study of outcomes and the future). Whereas these categories are traditionally considered *philosophical* fields of study, in their most basic sense, they are ultimately both theological and philosophical. If philosophy is lexically the love of wisdom, and if wisdom is engaged properly through the fear of the Lord,⁴⁵ and if the fear of the Lord is properly revealed by the word of the Lord in Scripture,⁴⁶ then theology (the study of God) cannot be extricated from philosophical inquiry. If they are not entirely interchangeable disciplines, then at the very least there is significant overlap and interdisciplinarity between the two.

To illustrate the relationship and placement of theological topics in worldview, consider these eleven categories of theology:

- (1) Bibliology – the study of God’s communication to humanity
- (2–4) Theology Proper – the study of God
 - Paterology – the study of God the Father
 - Christology – the study of God the Son, the Christ
 - Pneumatology – the study of God the Spirit
- (5) Angelology – the study of Satan, demons, and other angelic beings
- (6) Anthropology – the study of humanity
- (7) Hamartiology – the study of sin
- (8) Soteriology – the study of salvation and redemption
- (9) Israelology – the study of God’s working with Israel
- (10) Ecclesiology – the study of God’s working with the church
- (11) Eschatology – the study of things to come

⁴⁵ Proverbs 1:7.

⁴⁶ Proverbs 2:6.

Each of these serves as a vital component within worldview. Kuyper asserts that a life system handles three major areas of inquiry: (1) our relation to God, (2) our relation to humanity, (3) and our relation to the cosmos. In that matrix, at least bibliology, the three theologies proper, anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, Israelology, ecclesiology, and eschatology inform as to our relationship to God. Elements of anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, Israelology, and ecclesiology explain our relationship with humanity. And (at least) anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology, and eschatology cover aspects of our relationship to the cosmos. It is worth noting that Kuyper's three questions are problematic at least for their egocentric emphasis; they are perspectival from the self's vantage point. Though that is somewhat understandable as the concept of worldview does demand a *viewer*, and so in fairness, Kuyper is simply using different terms to communicate the idea of worldview. Still, perhaps it would be better to simply view these necessary components in sequential order by how they are derived.

The epistemological principles need to be first established to derive reliable conclusions describing reality. For worldview then, epistemology comes first. Epistemological inquiry demands two important steps: (1) the acknowledgment of the source of authority—the basis for truth and knowledge upon which the entire worldview rests; and (2) the interpretation of that authority—the hermeneutic method for ensuring objectivity and certainty in the handling of the data provided by the source of authority.

Bibliology and aspects of the theologies proper would be included as necessary inquiries of study in epistemology, as we consider the source of authority, how he has communicated himself, and what are the methods for properly understanding what he has said. Once the epistemological questions are answered, we move to the metaphysical inquiry, which provides key assertions regarding what comprises reality. Ontology addresses what actually exists and would include several aspects of theological inquiry including (at least) the theologies proper, angelology, and anthropology. Axiology considers what is of value and would include theological inquiries such as hamartiology and soteriology. Teleology covers design and

purpose in reality and could include aspects of especially theologies proper, soteriology, Israelology, and ecclesiology. Finally, eschatology as a metaphysic category aligns well with the theological category of eschatology as both are concerned with what the future holds within the worldview. These theological categories in context provide much of the descriptive material of the metaphysics of the worldview. Epistemology and metaphysics together encompass the “is” or descriptive aspect of the worldview.

Moving beyond the “is” or the descriptive, ethics and sociopolitical thought comprise the “ought” or the prescriptive aspects of the worldview. It is evident there are two primary ethics contexts: ethics for those who do not hold to the worldview and ethics for adherents of the worldview. Hamartiology and soteriology especially consider ethics responsibilities for individuals in each category (unbelievers and believers). While ethics addresses the individual “ought,” sociopolitical thought considers collective responsibility for communities. From family units to community elements in society, extending even beyond nations in the church community, the Bible has much to say of the makeup and responsibilities of these various communities. Theological disciplines considered in sociopolitical thought would include (at least) anthropology, Israelology, and ecclesiology.

Conclusion

Even a cursory examination of these inquiries and disciplines uncover that there is a great deal of overlap between the theological inquiries and the philosophical categories of worldview. The scope of material within each of the theological disciplines covers often more than any one of the components of worldview (epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, sociopolitical thought). Any system of theology, including Calvinism, covenantalism, and dispensationalism, bears significant explanatory responsibility, and ultimately each is more than simply a theological system. Rather, they are worldviews, with their own unique narratives and propositional assertions of *is* and *ought*. The theologian, then, has the responsibility of a philosopher and must appreciate the theological task as

uncovering and deciphering *worldview*, seeing beyond elementary aspects of the theological system itself. Kuyper recognized this well as he appealed to many of these areas—even if unsystematically—in his assertions of Calvinistic superiority. Kuyper showed the relationship of the categories and ascribed value to Calvinism based on, in part, its efficacy in fleshing out each of these areas of inquiry. Kuyper’s observations provide a helpful illustration of how the theological categories interconnect and how a theological system must in fact constitute a thoroughgoing worldview.

Despite the limitations of Calvinism, including those Kuyper acknowledges, the Calvinist system allows us a helpful point of comparison and contrast for examining how a theological system derived *only biblically* would be valuable as a life system or worldview. If Calvinism excels the other life systems and yet it has undeniable deficiencies, then what if its deficiencies could be overcome? In particular, if the system can be derived exclusively and reliably from only biblical data, then it could appropriately be termed *the biblical worldview*, and would provide a model of the highest value because, as Kuyper would surely admit, the (exclusively) biblical model would uniquely possess the authority of Paul and the other biblical writers, and would thus be free from the inherent and most important deficiency of Calvinism and the other life systems: *human infringement on the source of authority and his right to operate as sovereign over all*.

A biblical methodological model consistently applied leads to conclusions that are derived biblically. To avoid infringement on the Communicator and his communication (the biblical data) is certainly *the* hermeneutic ideal and something to be pursued. Still, perhaps some, in seeking to be realistic, might consider the ideal an impossibility. Like Gadamer, one might perceive that communication and understanding fuses two horizons,⁴⁷ and that coming to an author’s horizon without bringing one’s own is impossible. This writer would direct those “realists” to Peter’s urging that, “like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourself

⁴⁷ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum, 2006), 390, 397.

in all your behavior” (1 Pet 1:15). Peter’s example of the ethical ideal seems an impossible one to attain in this life yet represents the undeniable standard after which we are to strive. Paul also advocated striving toward a standard which he had not yet achieved. He acknowledged that he was not yet perfected (or complete),⁴⁸ but he nonetheless was pressing on toward the goal.⁴⁹ Paul exhorts his readers to do the same.⁵⁰ No matter the level of difficulty in the task nor the depth of our (current) incapacity, we must continually strive to walk in a manner worthy of our calling—this includes how we handle the Bible. If we truly recognize that God as revealed in Scripture is the source of authority for our worldview, then we must maintain an ongoing, unwavering commitment to consistently applying biblically derived methodology. The root system of biblically derived hermeneutic method, if nurtured by consistent application, undergirds the most fertile green tree of faith and practice that is *the biblical worldview*.

⁴⁸ Philippians 3:12–13.

⁴⁹ Philippians 3:14.

⁵⁰ Philippians 3:16.

Why Didn't the Mosaic Law Prohibit Slavery?

Dave Fredrickson

Key Words: Slavery, Mosaic Law, Redemptive Movement
Hermeneutic, Anti-slavery, Gentiles

If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave's service. . . . As for your male and female slaves whom you may have—you may acquire male and female slaves from the pagan nations that are around you. Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners who live as aliens among you that you may gain acquisition, and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession. . . (Lev. 25:39, 44–45).²

Introduction: The Problem and Prior Approaches to Solutions

Christian apologists with a belief in both God's moral perfections and Scripture's veracity in reflecting those perfections would like to be able to defend the following syllogism:

P1: God's character is such that he is against human slavery.

P2: The law of Moses reflects God's character.

C: The law of Moses is against human slavery.

Crafting a robust apologetic for this syllogism would be a valuable undertaking because its success would fortify the claim that all Scripture infallibly reflects a perfectly moral, changeless God. There would be a recent, additional benefit to defending an

² Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard Bible, 1995 revision, unless noted otherwise.

anti-slavery ethic in particular, within Moses' law in particular: it would provide a direct rebuttal to the unstated but unavoidable conclusion from the Redemptive Movement Hermeneutic (hereafter RMH) that the earliest canonical Scriptures exhibit a fallible morality regarding the institution of slavery.³ This unspoken conclusion follows from the conclusion they will state, that the pro-slavery law of Moses (by their reading) provides some of the best evidence that Scripture, when chronologically read, reflects a flawed-but-improving trajectory in its morality regarding slavery. In their view this ever-improving slavery ethic trajectory across (chronological) Scripture finally intersects with God's perfect (anti-) slavery ethic only, unfortunately, beyond the latest pages of the New Testament.⁴ As William Webb has stated it, the New Testament's teaching on slavery or any topic:

³ William J. Webb offers the most complete statement of RMH in *Slaves, Women, & Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001).

⁴ Michael Stallard in his critique of RMH summarizes its view of the Christian Bible's stance on slavery as follows: "The Bible regulates behavior within the slavery system of Bible times while not directly telling the biblical audience to abandon slavery altogether. However, such regulative principles actually point ahead to a future time when slavery will be eliminated. Thus, biblical statements about slavery show a kind of preliminary movement relative to the culture of Bible times" ("The Implications of the Redemptive Movement Hermeneutic," *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 9, no. 1 [Spring 2005]: 4, cf. 7). In the parallel Jewish interpretation, an alleged acceptance of slavery by the Torah undergoes a steady ethical evolution hinted at within alleged earlier versus later Torah passages (which assumes a documentary hypothesis that envisions a span of hundreds of years for the completion of the original documents collected into the Torah), in writings beyond those of the Hebrew Bible: "The Bible already expresses ambivalence about Hebrew slavery, the rabbis expand upon it and Maimonides takes the next step, applying the negative evaluation of slavery even to non-Israelites" (James A. Diamond, "The Treatment of Non-Israelite Slaves From Moses to Moses," *The Torah—com*, accessed May 10, 2020, <https://www.thetorah.com/article/the-treatment-of-non-israelite-slaves-from-moses-to-moses>). Moses Maimonides (1138–1205) to whom Diamond referred in the above quotation did himself state, "It is permissible to have a Canaanite slave perform excruciating labor (*pharekh*). Although this is the law, the

. . . provides the direction toward the divine destination, but its literal, isolated words are not always the destination itself. Sometimes God's instructions are simply designed to get his flock moving. . . . From one direction [from the perspective of the original culture] the Bible looks redemptive (and is); from the other direction [from the direction of contemporary culture, one that is closer to God's ultimate ethic than is the Bible] it appears regressive (and is).⁵

Evidence suggests Christian and Jewish apologists who share a high view of the authority of the Hebrew canon have pursued something like the above syllogism's defense as their stated or unstated goal: the major strategies all strain in that same direction, and the apologists invariably claim either that they have succeeded or more commonly, specify the extent to which they have succeeded in reaching that goal. Thus, "The law restricts slavery," "The law undermines slavery guaranteeing its eventual demise as impractical," "The law prohibits slavery actually but indirectly through verbal prohibition of broader classes of mistreatment," and "The Decalogue directly prohibits slavery, regardless of what other Mosaic commands might suggest to the reader" represent the bulk of the conclusions reached.⁶

The History-Centric Defense of an Anti-Slavery Mosaic Law

Some apologists have sought to defend the reality of an anti-slavery stance throughout the Mosaic law by drawing upon American and European history to highlight the differences between the harsh character of nineteenth century, Western slavery that typically forms the mental picture of "slavery" among modern Western thinkers, versus the softer versions of

attribute of piety and the ways of wisdom is for a person to be compassionate and to pursue justice, not to excessively burden his slaves, not cause them distress" ("Sefer Kinyan ['Book of Acquisition']," *Mishneh Torah* Bk. 12, 'Avadim ["Slaves"], 9:8).

⁵ Webb, *Slaves, Women, & Homosexuals*, 31, 70.

⁶ Some have found it preferable to pursue a lesser goal than defending an anti-slavery Mosaic law. See the summary of the fifth apologetic approach in this introduction below.

unpaid Gentile servitude allowed and regulated by the law of Moses.⁷ There are valid reasons for beginning with this history-centric approach. First, most references to “slave” in English translations of the law are translating the Hebrew word that captures the full range of servitude beginning with the great, named “servants of YHWH” such as Moses and stretching down to those in a lifetime of forced servitude to humans (outside of Israel only, this article will argue). Thus, the word properly translates to “slave” only after interpreting the immediate context.⁸

A second valid reason for pursuing a history-centric apology is that the presence of a “soft” brand of forced and/or unpaid Gentile servitude in the law is relatively easy to construct from the law’s explicit restrictions regarding the daily treatment of those Gentiles. In addition to general admonitions to treat aliens with compassion,⁹ specific provisions required that Gentile forced laborers were to have the Sabbath free, experiencing the same six-day workweek as their masters (Exod 20:10), and to have Jewish holidays free (Deut 16:11–14, 12:18). Furthermore, their masters faced significant punishments up to execution for permanently harming one of these workers, just as with their treatment of freedmen servants (Exod 21:20–21, 26–27).

Unfortunately, this history-centric apologetic approach makes a limited contribution to the defense of a consistently anti-

⁷ For the reader not immediately able to differentiate between the species of Western-style “slavery” and its genus “unpaid labor,” it may be helpful to consider a second, modern species within the genus, the penalty of “hard labor” still used within the American military justice system: while involving hard and unpaid labor, that institution involves only unpaid labor for cause (i.e., as a punishment), prohibits physical injury to the prisoner, and requires humane treatment such as food, sleep, and the absence of physical harm—all elements foreign to the Western concept of “slavery.” See Major Joseph B. Berger III, “Making Little Rocks out of Big Rocks: Implementing Sentences to Hard Labor without Confinement,” in *The Army Lawyer*, Dept. of the Army Pamphlet 27-50-379 (December 2004): 5–10, https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/pdf/12-2004.pdf.

⁸ See footnote 20 for an extended summary of the lexical problems in translating OT “slavery” passages from Hebrew to English.

⁹ See the right column in the table below.

slavery Mosaic law reflective of a consistently anti-slavery God. First, the Mosaic restrictions upon Gentile unpaid labor, while significant, also highlight the reality that most or all direct mentions of unpaid labor in the law involve *restricting* unpaid Gentile servitude, not *prohibiting* it, which presumably could have required but a single statute, as with the law's direct prohibition of enslaving Jews (Lev 25:39).¹⁰ Second, it is simple enough unfortunately for apologetic opponents to more carefully define slavery so as to make moot any distinctions that typical apologies for an anti-slavery Old Testament seek to make between the abject slavery of Western history and the unpaid servitude of Gentiles promulgated by the Mosaic law, e.g., the definition "the possession of other humans for unpaid labor."

¹⁰ A recent, parallel apology argues that that the NT's non-prohibition of slavery can be attributed to a very soft slavery institution within the *Roman* world. Arthur Rupprecht concludes, "The silence of Christ and the Apostles in regard to the institution of slavery suggests that some explanation for their silence should be sought in the nature of the slave system itself. The Biblical attitude toward the master-slave relationship is based on the principle that 'the laborer is worthy of his hire.' As has been shown, a slave received recompense in food, clothing, shelter and spending money. His recompensation was as much or more than that of his free-born counterpart. When he was freed, his former owner loaned or gave him the money to establish himself in business. The evidence further suggests that hundreds of thousands of slaves were freed by the Romans. Therefore, it is concluded that the silence of the New Testament on the slavery question is to be explained by the essentially worthwhile character of slavery during this period. In our thinking we have too long superimposed the viciousness, perpetual bondage and race hatred of slavery in the American South on conditions in the Roman world" ("Christianity and the Slavery Question," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 6, no. 2 [Spr 1963]: 64). Note that Rupprecht comes close in his final sentence to making one argument this article seeks to make, which is that recognizing the narrow, historically informed meaning of the English word "slave," and the resulting limited usefulness of that word for translating many Bible passages is key to properly translating the Mosaic Law into English.

The Political Science-Centric Defense of an Anti-Slavery Mosaic Law

A second apologetic approach arguing for a consistently anti-slavery Bible reflective of a consistently anti-slavery God has sought to defend an anti-slavery stance throughout the Mosaic law by drawing upon political science. Here the argument is that the Mosaic law not only reforms Gentile slavery, but it does this in such an aggressive manner so as to undermine any long-term survival of Gentile slavery within Israel, and to thus indirectly prohibit Gentile slavery, by ensuring its demise via its growing, voluntary disuse by potential slaveholders. Thus, the argument goes, we will not find statements directly prohibiting Gentile slavery within the Mosaic law not because God and Moses are accepting of slavery, but because of their wise, multi-generational strategy for erasing Gentile slavery from Israel.¹¹ The Christian apologist Robert Bergen suggests in a reference work for popular readers that

the Bible does not condone slavery any more than it condones polygamy or divorce. Instead, it establishes humane limits for an existing, evil system. Slavery had long been a feature of human society. . . . The Law of Moses *laid the groundwork for the eventual demise* of one of the most demeaning institutions in human society.¹² (emphasis added)

Similarly, the Jewish apologist James A. Diamond suggests for his popular Jewish audience,

¹¹ This apologetic strategy remains the province of conservative apologists holding to Mosaic authorship for the Torah. Adherents to a documentary hypothesis regarding Torah authorship use a parallel strategy to argue that the Torah not only sets up the eventual demise of the slavery institution amongst later generations, but evidences within the Torah itself a gradual withdrawal of the slavery sanction as source documents are read in their alleged chronological order. See the James A. Diamond quotation below.

¹² Robert D. Bergen, "Exodus: Introduction and Notes," *The Apologetics Study Bible*, ed. Ted Cabal (Nashville: Holman, 2007), note on Exodus 21:20–26.

Although it sanctions the institution of slavery, biblical law begins the process toward abolition, a process still unresolved in various parts of the world, by regulating and restricting the absolute control a master could exercise over an Israelite slave. Though limited in scope, both the Covenant Collection (Exod 21-23) and the Deuteronomic Collection (Deut 12-26) conceptually transform the Hebrew slave from pure chattel owned by the master, to some form of independent personhood bearing legal rights. This process culminates in Leviticus 25, which avoids the locution "Hebrew slave" altogether, preferring "your brother."¹³

This political science-centric apologetic approach also makes a limited contribution to the defense of a consistently anti-slavery Bible that is infallibly reflective of a consistently anti-slavery God. First, in this stance the Mosaic law is not seen to reflect God's ethic or Moses' ethic regarding slavery—God's and Moses' slavery ethic can only be discerned by reading later Scriptures. These latter passages enable us to realize that restrictions in the law upon slavery were written as a bit of a ruse for the Israelites, in that while they purported to limit slavery, they were in fact written to make slavery unworkable altogether for prospective slaveholders. This claim is not dissimilar to the claim of RMH, which likewise holds that the Mosaic law does not reflect God's ethical stance regarding human slavery.¹⁴

A second problem for the political science-centric apology for an anti-slavery Mosaic law is that while the RMH view of an evolving biblical ethic is able to at least refer to latter Scriptures as part of their evidence for an ethical disjunction between God and what was written into the law, the politico-centric defense of an anti-slavery God and anti-slavery Moses in spite of the Mosaic

¹³ Diamond, "Treatment of Non-Israelite Slaves From Moses to Moses." He argues that there is a parallel softening of the institution of Gentile slavery in the law as well, though it is not as dramatic in the text. By the intertestamental period, Jewish thought regarding Hebrew slavery had evolved to the point that the Babylonian Talmud (Kiddushin, 20a) states that "he who buys a Hebrew slave is like one who buys a master for himself" (Elliot N. Dorff, *Mitzvah Means Commandment* [United Synagogue of America, 1989], 107n3).

¹⁴ Webb, *Slaves, Women, & Homosexuals*, 70.

law's seeming allowance of contemporaneous slavery rests upon an argument of silence—no explicit acknowledgement of this ruse exists in the Scriptures¹⁵ for slowly destroying slavery within Israel.

The third reason the above political science-centric apologetic approach makes a limited contribution to the defense of a consistently anti-slavery Bible is because according to the Mosaic law narratives themselves, the first person after the giving of the law who (by a casual reading of Numbers 31) creates Gentile slaves, and in great numbers, is Moses himself:

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers' households of the congregation take a count of the booty that was captured, both of man and of animal; and divide the booty between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation. Levy a tax for the LORD from the men of war who went out to battle, one in five hundred of the persons and of the cattle and of the donkeys and of the sheep; take it from their half and give it to Eleazar the priest, as an offering to the LORD. (Num 31:25–29)

One would think that if Moses was seeking to begin the dying-out process of Gentile slavery, he might at least refrain from the practice himself amidst the newly-emancipated Israelite people.

¹⁵ The law's handling of divorce may provide a weak parallel to the law's alleged handling of slavery when viewed by this apologetic approach: according to Jesus the law made space for divorce, but only as a concession to Israel's hard-heartedness. The foundational Genesis scriptures regarding marriage which preceded the law logically disallow divorce (Matt 19:3–10). The presentation by this apology of foundational, pre-law scriptures which logically disallow slavery, and the presentation by this apology of statements from Jesus or the apostles that declare that the law reluctantly made space for slavery due to Israel's hard-heartedness is what is required to make the parallel between the law's treatment of divorce and the law's treatment of slavery a true parallel.

The Decalogue-Centric Defense of an Anti-Slavery Mosaic Law

A third apologetic approach, perhaps the most attractive one in terms of first impressions, has sought to defend an anti-slavery stance throughout the law by showing that its commands actually do prohibit the practice of Gentile slavery for the law's adherents. Nineteenth century American abolitionist Theodore Weld wrote regarding the command "You shall not steal" in his influential 1837 book *The Bible Against Slavery*:

The eighth commandment forbids the taking of *any* part of that which belongs to another. Slavery takes the *whole*. Does the same Bible which prohibits the taking of *any* thing from him, sanction the taking of *every* thing? Does it thunder wrath against the man who robs his neighbor of a *cent*, yet commission him to rob his neighbor of *himself*? Slaveholding is the highest possible violation of the eighth commandment (10–11).¹⁶

However, this apologetic approach also makes a limited contribution to the defense of a consistently anti-slavery Bible inspired by an anti-slavery God. The Decalogue itself is not without its complexities regarding the topic of servitude: the Hebrew word עֶבֶד which represents all levels of servitude including employment appears three times there, the first clearly referring to abject slavery, and none of them used to supply a prohibition. Consequently, counterarguments such as this have since been offered:

God forges his covenant by a self-identification (Exod 20:2; Deut 5:6): "I am YHWH your God who took you out [sic.] the land of Egypt" ... Yet, what disturbingly hovers over this core liberating experience is the very real phenomenon of ongoing slavery, recognized by the Hebrew Bible as a legitimate institution. The very Decalogue, introduced by God as a supreme liberator, the one *who took you out of the land of Egypt*, tacitly endorses slavery as a sanctioned component of continuing Israelite life: slaves are

¹⁶ Theodore D. Weld, *The Bible Against Slavery* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1837), 20.

offered relief from their indentured lives on the Sabbath only, lapsing back into their oppressed condition the other days of the week.¹⁷

Thus, Christian writers and influential Jewish writers continue to argue from the Decalogue itself against an anti-slavery Mosaic law.

The Reframing Strategy for the Defense of an Anti-Slavery Mosaic Law

Apologists for an anti-slavery Mosaic Law often employ a fourth apologetic strategy to strengthen any of the above approaches, by reframing their success in aligning the Mosaic law against slavery via some standard short of slavery's prohibition. In this approach the key to success begins even before the apology proper, by strategically wording the apology title as "Does the Law of Moses *Condone* Slavery?"¹⁸ This approach employs a kind of "straw man argument" to defend the law's treatment of the institution of slavery—now the apologist only has to argue for *mixed enthusiasm* within the law for Gentle slavery, versus *explicit prohibition*.

As with the prior strategies, this "lesser standard" approach seems also to make a limited contribution to the apologetic effort

¹⁷ Diamond, "Treatment of Non-Israelite Slaves."

¹⁸ For an apology of this type for the Jewish Bible, see Benjamin Scolnic, "Slavery in the Bible," *My Jewish Learning*, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/does-the-bible-condone-slavery>. For the Torah proper see Shlomo Klapper, "How Can the Torah Sanction Slavery?", in "Kol Torah," *koltorah.org*, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.koltorah.org/articles/how-can-the-torah-sanction-slavery-by-shlomo-klapper>. This commentary on the Jewish "sixth reading" from Exodus closes its introductory paragraph with "How, then, *can the Torah condone* this morally troubling institution [emphasis mine]?" For samples of Christian apologies, see that heading over the first subsection within the initial section "Responding to Arguments of Racism" in H. C. Felder, "Racism And The Bible-Part 1," *Christian Apologetics Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring, 2014): 48; and Simon Edwards, "Does the Bible Condone Slavery?", in *Zacharias Trust*, accessed June 1, 2020, <https://www.zachariatrust.org/does-the-bible-condone-slavery>.

towards an anti-slavery Mosaic law. Lowering the standard for claiming the law to be ethical regarding slavery so as to craft a more successful defense may encourage readers already friendly to the Scriptures, but it seems not to have had the desired impact upon opponents—they have often willingly accepted what is therefore for them the higher apologetic standard, of arguing that the Bible not only *allows*, but *condones* Gentle slavery.¹⁹

An Initial Conundrum in Integrating the Mosaic Statutes Regarding Gentile Slavery

A fresh survey of the Mosaic statutes leads to a challenging outcome for those with a high view of Scripture: what the Leviticus 25 passage above appears to give, e.g., the option to enslave both domestic and foreign Gentiles, appears to then be taken away by other Mosaic statutes when taken in combination. This can explain somewhat why apologists for an anti-slavery Mosaic Law variously argue that the Law either restricts, or undermines, or prohibits slavery: the extent to which the Law is judged to discourage slavery depends upon which elements of the Law are taken into account.

¹⁹ Observing the frequent appearance of the “condoning” question above published and online articles within Christian apologetics and a matching proliferation of the term among opponents would seem to validate this: a June 1, 2020 Google search for that wording of the question yielded 4,950 sites, arguing both for and against.

Table: According to Mosaic Law, Which Gentiles Can Be Enslaved by Israel?

Any Gentiles...	...or No Gentiles?
As for your male [עֶבֶד; servant, male servant, slave, male slave] and female slaves [אִמָּה; maidservant, female slave] whom you may have—you may acquire [קָנָה; buy, acquire] male [עֶבֶד] and female slaves [אִמָּה] from the pagan nations that are around you (Lev 25:44).	<p>He who kidnaps a man, whether he sells him or he is found in his possession, shall surely be put to death (Exod 21:16).</p> <p>You shall not wrong a stranger [גֵּר; sojourning foreigner, alien] or oppress him, for you were strangers [גֵּר] in the land of Egypt (Exod 22:21).</p> <p>When a stranger [גֵּר] resides [גִּיר; reside as foreigner] with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong (Lev 19:33).</p> <p>The stranger [גֵּר] who resides [גִּיר] with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens [גֵּר] in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God (Lev 19:34).</p> <p>If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a</p>
Then, too, it is out of the sons of the sojourners [תּוֹשָׁב; sojourner, foreign resident] who live as aliens [גֵּר; reside as foreigner] among you that you may gain acquisition [קָנָה], and out of their families who are with you, whom they will have produced in your land; they also may become your possession [אִמְצָה; possession] (Lev 25:45).	

Any Gentiles...	...or No Gentiles?
<p>You may even bequeath them [the above-referenced foreigners] to your sons after you, to receive as a possession [אַחֲזֵהָ]; you can use them as permanent [עוֹלָם; long duration, eternity] slaves [אַחֲזֵהָ; possession]. But in respect to your countrymen, the sons of Israel, you shall not rule with severity over one another (Lev. 25:46).</p>	<p>slave's [עֶבֶד] service [עֲבֹדָה; service, work, forced labor]. He shall be with you <i>as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner</i> [תּוֹשָׁב; sojourner, foreign resident]; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee (Lev 25:39–40; emphasis added).</p>
<p>Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers’ households of the congregation take a count of the booty that was captured, both of man and of animal; and divide the booty between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation (Num 31:25–27).</p>	<p>He [YHWH] executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien [גֵּר] by giving him food and clothing (Deut 10:18).</p>
	<p>So show your love for the alien [גֵּר], for you were aliens in the land of Egypt (Deut 10:19).</p>
	<p>You shall not hand over to his master a slave [עֶבֶד] who has escaped from his master to you. He shall live with you in your midst, in the place which he shall choose in one of your towns where it pleases him; you shall not mistreat him (Deut 23:15, 16).</p> <p>You shall not oppress a hired servant [שָׂכִיר; hired worker, day-laborer] who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens [גֵּר] who is in your land in your towns (Deut 24:14).²⁰</p>

²⁰ Much of the apparent conflict between the left and right columns of the table resolves through a straightforward lexical study of the key words

“slave,” “property,” and “possession” in English as well as in Hebrew. Most significantly, the range of meaning for the primary Hebrew word labeling persons under servitude in the Mosaic law, עֶבֶד [servant, male servant, slave, male slave], barely overlaps with the range of meaning for the English word “slave.” The former range of meaning based on Mosaic usage is broad and encompasses all forms of servitude, ranging from prophets and national leaders under YHWH to employed household servants to those in indentured servitude to favored slaves to those under abject slavery. In contrast, the range of meaning for the English word “slave” derived from common usage in modern American and Western discourse captures only one extreme of the range of meaning for עֶבֶד, that being the one extreme of abject slavery. Usages of עֶבֶד in Mosaic law raise the question as to whether the English term “slave” ever properly translates it, save references to slavery practices foreign to (law-abiding) Israel, such as the abject slavery by Egypt of Israel (Exod 20:2) and that present in other pagan nations (see Deut 23:15, 16 in the table). Coincidentally, that brand of servitude was likewise experienced by Africans shipped to nineteenth century United States and Europe and continues to form the foundation for the modern Western conception of “slavery.”

The translation challenge presented for that same Hebrew label עֶבֶד is most acute in its three appearances within the Decalogue of Exodus: most English translations translate by “slave” its use in the verse “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exod 20:2) but by “servant” its uses in the verses “but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you” (Exod 20:10) and “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor” (Exod 20:17). Perhaps English translations are loathe to enshrine the institution of slavery within the Decalogue, in spite of the fact that the label may be describing the human property of one’s neighbor (Exod 20:17) and may have had its intended range of meaning for עֶבֶד established by the passage’s initial sentence (Exod 20:2). Exodus 20:17 was in fact used by Christian and Jewish scholars alike in the United States before and during the Civil War to argue for the abiding propriety of slavery—see the 1861 pro-slavery discourse and pamphlet from a prominent northern rabbi, Rabbi Dr. M. J. Raphall (“The Bible View of Slavery,” *Jewish-American History Foundation*, accessed June 1, 2020, [jewish-history.com](http://www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/raphall.html), <http://www.jewish-history.com/civilwar/raphall.html>).

However, the claim that the above table takes away the option of slavery after giving that option creates its own problems for those as desirous of defending the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture as of claiming that the Mosaic law and its God are anti-slavery. First, if the above conundrum stands, what then was the purpose for, and what is the meaning of, the Leviticus 25 passage above to begin with—why is it in Scripture? Commentators often simply state that Gentile slavery is allowed according to Leviticus 25, without attempting to integrate its intended meaning with the intended meanings of the “opposing” passages in the right column of the above table.²¹

There is a parallel disjuncture between the broad, moderate range of meanings for “possession,” “property,” and “acquiring” language in the Hebrew of the Mosaic law versus the narrow, extreme ranges of meaning for the popular translation words in modern English. This lack of overlap seems not to deter English translators: the NASB95 for example seems to always translate mentions in the Mosaic law of those in servitude as “slaves” when the context references the “possessing,” and “acquiring” of those in servitude. But this “possession” and “acquire” language appears in the law even when the context describes a status of servitude falling far short of slavery—Mosaic passages discuss Israelis who are “sold/acquired” to an Israeli debt-holder and become his “possession” (Exod 21:2), even though they initiate the servitude and serve a maximum of six years (Deut 15:12) versus a lifetime, and are required by statute to work no harder than an employed Gentile (Lev 25:40) versus hard or forced labor. This is made particularly clear in Leviticus 25:47, for which the NASB95 is forced to coin the ungainly phrase “sell himself” to describe an Israelite who has voluntarily initiated his “slavery” (NASB95 word choice) status under a Gentile master, with his temporary term bounded according to the context by at least the Year of Jubilee, if not by the earlier actions of a kinsman redeemer: “Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him as to *sell himself* to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger’s family, . . . (Lev 25:47, emphasis added). Arguably, the presence of “possession” language and “acquire” language in the law are not reliable markers for status descriptions that match the modern, Western conception of “slavery” contra the pattern established by the NASB95 translation.

²¹ These include F. Duane Lindsey, “Leviticus,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, ed. John F.

Secondly, if the two columns of this table cover precisely the same ground, has not a direct contradiction among the statutes within the Mosaic law been surfaced, impacting the plenary inerrancy of Scripture? Thirdly, if one chooses to give the second column preference and so declare that the law prohibits Gentile slavery, does not one's conclusion appear to stand in opposition to the one Moses apparently drew from these statutes, as reflected Moses' seeming creation of Gentile slaves in Numbers 31, referenced above?

The Solution: Two Forms of Uncompensated Gentile Subservience Could Have Existed Which Are Amenable to the Mosaic Law, Yet Are Outside the Range of Meaning of the English Term "Slavery"

The collection of passages in the above table makes room for at least two subclasses of heavy Gentile servitude, which, though being linked by the law to "possession" and "acquiring" language, do indeed fall short of the abject slavery of Western history. "Slavery" can be an inappropriate descriptor because of the way the heavy Gentile servitude arises. For example, the servitude might only arise for cause, such as for punishment, rather than because of simple oppression of the weak by the strong, or a kind of heavy Gentile servitude that the law allows for might be in place only for a limited time, or might be entered into voluntarily by the subservient in order to sidestep more astringent circumstances. In all cases, the heavy Gentile servitude has attached to it by the law protections or rights that are foreign to the modern Western conception of slavery.

The Mosaic law provides or allows for at least two discreet classes of variable-term, unpaid Gentile servitude²² that meet the conditions of *both* sides of the above table—that is, they are

Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 211; Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, Vol. 3b, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 309; C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, Vol. 1, Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 364–65.

²² A shift in terminology from "permanent" to "variable-term" begins with this section, to be explained and defended in the third subsection below.

practices which fall within the permissions of the left column above yet fall outside the multiple prohibitions of the right column. These two specialized practices of uncompensated Gentile labor are different in one significant way, and alike in one significant way. Regarding the difference: one practice is explicitly described in both Mosaic statute and narrative. The other practice is only implicitly suggested by statute and seems fully absent in Mosaic narrative. Regarding the similarity: both of these specialized practices of unpaid Gentile labor fall well outside the characteristics of the abject slavery of Western history and therefore deserve a different descriptive label than “slavery” among English speakers.

**The First Form of Lawful, Unpaid Gentile Servitude:
Variable-Term,²³ Forced Servitude for Gentile Settlements
beyond Canaan that Resist Israel's Expansion towards its
Abrahamic Borders**

Israel's management of Gentiles captured during violent or non-violent opposition to Israel's divine calling to gain and populate firstly the lands within the Mosaic boundaries that were assigned to each of the twelve tribes, and secondly the lands within the greater Abrahamic boundaries that were assigned to the twelve tribes corporately, was to include forced labor in certain cases as per the Mosaic law. “Captives” (שְׁבוּיִים; captives, captivity) are mentioned a number of times in both statute and narrative sections, as the law first directs and then models Israel's management of Gentile captives and their families both from battles and from non-violent Gentile resistance. The law appears to delineate three categories of battle captives according to their location relative to the boundaries of the Canaanite conquest and to the greater lands and boundaries promised to Abram's descendants.

The first category of captives mentioned in the law involves those inhabitants captured from the Canaanite areas to be apportioned among the twelve tribes. This group of captives, the combatants and their families, appears only in narrative sections

²³ The third subsection below will explain and defend the inclusion of the descriptor “variable-term.”

because by statute they shouldn't exist: by God's direction Canaan inhabitants fell "under the ban" and thus should always have been destroyed as a subset of "all living things" within the Canaanite towns:

Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes. But you shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the LORD your God has commanded you. (Deut 20:16–17)

The first example within Mosaic narrative of Canaanite battle captives kept alive over against the above statute appears in the Numbers 31 account of Israel's invasion of the Transjordan territory ruled by five Midianite kings, briefly acknowledged in the above table and presented more completely below. Israel failed to put the human inhabitants to death as per Deuteronomy 20 but instead brought them to Moses. Under God's direction, Moses resolved the problem as follows:

Moses was angry with the officers of the army, the captains of thousands and the captains of hundreds, who had come from service in the war. And Moses said to them, "Have you spared all the women? "Behold, these caused the sons of Israel, through the counsel of Balaam, to trespass against the LORD in the matter of Peor, so the plague was among the congregation of the LORD. "Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known man intimately. But all the girls who have not known man intimately, spare for yourselves.... Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "You and Eleazar the priest and the heads of the fathers' households of the congregation take a count of the booty that was captured, both of man and of animal; and divide the booty between the warriors who went out to battle and all the congregation. (Num 31:14–18, 25–27)

As the conquest moved into its latter stages, the reality of Canaanite battle survivors arose more and more often because Israel's tribes fell short of conquering some Canaanite towns

within their apportioned land. In the least-preferred scenario as per the Mosaic Law, an Israeli tribe would simply choose to live among the Canaanites, as did Asher (Judg 1:31–32). In the lawful scenario, the tribe would defeat and destroy the Canaanites, as in the case of Judah (vv. 4–10). In a median scenario, the tribe would put the Canaanites to forced labor, either immediately as in the case of Zebulun (v. 30) or some years later after the Israeli tribe had gained strength, as with Manasseh (vv. 27–28). It seems likely that the men, women, and children were all put to forced labor, following the early model of Joshua's resolution of his ill-advised covenant of peace with the Gibeonites (Josh 9).

The second group of Gentile war captives were to come from “distant towns” (Deut 20:15). Presumably, had Israel continued to live in obedience to the Mosaic covenant decade after decade, and had therefore continued to enjoy Mosaic blessings of prosperity, population growth, and national strength compounding upon one another, they would have naturally been expanding their nation's functional boundaries²⁴ beyond the land apportioned to the twelve tribes, into neighboring territory that yet fell within the outermost boundaries that God had delineated to Abraham centuries prior, the “River of Egypt” and Euphrates River (Gen 15:18–21; Num 34:5). Deuteronomy's “Manual of War” (Deut 20:1–20) directed Israel to first offer these Gentile towns nonnegotiable terms of peace which involved putting all the inhabitants to “forced labor” [עֲבָדָה; forced labor, forced laborers]. If Israel were rebuffed, they were to respond by capturing the town and killing all the men, with all the women, children, animals, and property treated as spoils of war:

²⁴ The label “functional boundaries” is meant to capture the ideal, but unrealized natural expansion of Israel's boundaries beyond Canaan due to ongoing population growth, economic prosperity, and military peace as per the promised Mosaic blessings (Lev 26; Deut 29); the label is meant to exclude Israel's historically-realized military control beyond Canaan absent Israeli population expansion, and to exclude the military subjugation of Gentile regions via collecting tribute without assimilating their lands, as practiced by Kings David, Solomon, and others.

When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall offer it terms of peace. If it agrees to make peace with you and opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall become your forced labor and shall serve you. However, if it does not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. When the LORD your God gives it into your hand, you shall strike all the men in it with the edge of the sword. Only the women and the children and the animals and all that is in the city, all its spoil, you shall take as booty for yourself; and you shall use the spoil of your enemies which the LORD your God has given you. Thus, you shall do to all the cities that are very far from you, which are not of the cities of these nations nearby. (Deut 20:10–15)

There would have been a way for the Gentile groups living within Israel's Abrahamic borders to avoid the harsh dilemma of fighting Israel or accepting forced servitude as Israel's population expanded in the direction of their settlement: they could have migrated out of this territory onto permanent Gentile land. Strategic migration for reasons other than convenience was of course something the nation of Israel had experienced multiple times at God's direction, and now God's implied direction regarding a parallel Gentile migration was clear for Gentiles living adjacent to Canaan, as per God's Mosaic covenant with Israel.²⁵ They would have been able to carry out their migrations at their own pace, since the Israel population would have been expanding in a gradual, organic manner. Even without the explicit guidance of the Torah, these adjacent Gentile towns would have been able to observe this continuous, visible expansion of the Israeli population closer and closer to their area. Thus, the choice for these nearby non-Canaanites to remain in their towns and attempt a military solution was theirs, and would likely be made in spite of years if not decades of forewarning by way of the multiple examples from all the prior Gentile towns

²⁵ Exceptions for this implied directive from God for Gentile towns within the Abrahamic boundaries would have been those of the nations from Lot (Moab, Ammon) and Esau (Edom): God gave specific instructions for Israel to refrain from harassing those nations to the point of war, given their common familial ties (Deut 2:3–6, 9).

which had likewise attempted a military solution to Israel's geographical expansion.

Presumably the Gentile women and children captured from these "distant towns" would have entered forced labor, in keeping with the Numbers 31 model initiated by Moses and consistently followed under the leadership of both Moses and Joshua for captives of war. Following that model for the distribution of captives (again, group incarceration of the Gentiles in Israel was not an option), the personal households of Israel's active soldiers would be gaining the largest allotment of forced laborers, followed by the tabernacle, followed by Israel at large. Humanitarian requirements from the Mosaic law towards all laborers, forced or otherwise, would of course apply to these laborers. None of the Mosaic passages, nor any OT narrative passage, specifies a minimum or maximum term of forced labor for the war captives from non-Canaanite towns, so presumably they could be held in this status beyond their own lifetimes to their progeny, as Leviticus 25 in the table above suggests.²⁶

This policy does seem to apply only to those Gentile towns and territories lying beyond the conquest of Canaan and therefore beyond the boundaries of the land originally apportioned by Moses and Joshua among the twelve tribes, since the same passage goes on to reiterate the policy of total annihilation for the Canaanite territories (Deut 20:16–18).²⁷ The policy appears to match God's and Moses' solution to the capture of versus annihilation of the very first Canaanite population invaded within the conquest, the Midianite, Transjordan

²⁶ Again, see however my defense of a variable time period below, in the third subsection.

²⁷ Among those who are agree are Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 285; Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 343; Jack S. Deere, "Deuteronomy," *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, Vol. 1, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1985), 299. Only the last reference acknowledges an outer boundary for the "distant cities" in view, that being the boundaries specified in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15:18–21).

population for the sake of the territory allotment to the Reuben tribe described in Numbers 31 (as discussed above).²⁸ Perhaps this early military action predated activation of the Holy War injunctions (Deut 20) possibly at the subsequent conquest of Jericho across the Jordan River.²⁹ In this conquest prior to the capture of Jericho all the males were (eventually) destroyed but all the virgins were retained alive.³⁰

A third category of battle captives would have involved the inhabitants of the most-distant Gentile towns which fell outside both the Mosaic and the Abrahamic boundaries. The discussion in Deuteronomy 28 regarding Israel's long-term foreign policies implies that Israel's warfare with lands beyond their divinely-assigned Abrahamic borders would have involved only defensive battles fought at Israel's boundaries, as opposed to capturing additional Gentile towns and territory:

The LORD shall cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you; they will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways. (Deut 28:7)

Thus, a godly Israel would have gradually expanded up to God's assigned Abrahamic boundaries and would not have attempted to expand further. Then the purpose for Israel's military would have been to repel successfully any incursions made by foreign invaders at those boundaries. Future battle

²⁸ R. Dennis Cole (*Numbers*, vol. 3b, New American Commentary [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000], 499) defends this view.

²⁹ Perhaps this particular conquest of Canaanites sidestepped annihilation because only one of the Midianite areas was being attacked, the city-group ruled by the five Midianite kings that was involved with Israel's idolatrous Peor catastrophe (Num 31:16).

³⁰ This account does enable the reader of Numbers to observe what was meant by the treatment of warfare captives as "booty" (Num 31:26–28): by God's direction the virgin women and girls of Midian were distributed among Israeli households for forced servitude, such that half were divided up among the Israeli fighters and half among the other Israelites at large, with a partial "tithe" from the former half going to the priests and a larger, partial "tithe" from the latter half going to the Levites (Num 31:26–30).

captives would only be those invading Gentile warriors captured at or within Israel's borders. Presumably these captives would either be managed as Moses managed the combatants of the prior two categories, that is, with execution, or otherwise with forced labor among the Israeli populace. No Gentile women and children would be captured, as Israel forces would not have been overrunning Gentile towns in this scenario.

It seems inappropriate to describe Israel's putting prisoners of war to forced labor, usually located at individual economic concerns such as farms, as "enslavement." First, as with all forms of unpaid servitude allowed by the law, the humane protections provided all those in Israel's forced labor make by themselves the English descriptor "slavery" a misleadingly harsh label. Second, the forcible control of captured military enemies who were violently opposed to Israel's survival is a police action common to all manner of "anti-slavery" nations, including those of the modern West: every nation has had to manage prisoners of war in some equally-forceful manner. Third, the inhabitants of captured towns outside Canaan had had options prior to Israeli invasion. As had been the case with the Jericho prostitute Rahab, it would have been known to them either from Israel's stated, ultimate boundaries within the Mosaic law itself or from Israel's history of overcoming seemingly-superior military enemies, that it was only a matter of time before their town would be standing in the path of Israel's divinely-assigned territorial expansion. These non-Canaanite towns had options for resolving the situation, whether by assimilating into Israel's beliefs and culture, as did Rahab, or alternatively by moving their population outside the written, final boundaries of Israel.

Criticism of the ethics of the law's choice against long-term incarceration of battle captives (i.e., "prisoner of war camps") in favor of forced labor also seems inappropriate. For Israel, the modern tool of incarceration of these people long-term was not a reasonable option: a genius of the Mosaic theocratic government was its absence of a prison system with the attendant buildings, personnel, and funding requirements. Instead, criminal and civil penalties meted out by a contrastingly large and developed judicial system were to be paid out generally in the form of victim restitution, and generally were to be enforced by a highly-

engaged, self-policing local citizenry; thus, the absence as well of a paid police force with all its complications and costs, in the Mosaic law. The moral and societal bonds within Israel's citizenry was anticipated by Moses' law to be strong enough to manage even perpetrators of violence and death within the population, as indicated by the expectation placed by the law upon the general citizenry to manage and enforce the "city of refuge" statutes for civil murders. Even if imprisonment had been an option for Israel's war captives, it does not seem clear that indefinite incarceration in prisoner-of-war camps, the current Western practice, is more humane than Israel's practice of distributing out individual prisoners of war to small farms and business as forced laborers with the Mosaic protections such as a six-day workweek and legal protection from violent masters.³¹

The coining of the phrase "battle captives put to moderated hard labor, acquired by the general populace in lieu of incarceration" for the status of the laborer in Numbers 31 quoted above does, in spite of the phrase's ungainliness, highlight that such status would fall outside typical definitions of "slavery" that opponents generally put forth in attempting to capture those forced labor practices as practices of slavery.³² These forced-Gentile laborers within Israel had earned their sentence to hard labor as prisoners-of-war from battles fought to violently oppose the will of God for Israel, rather than having been innocent victims of kidnapping or raids. In addition, the hardships of forced labor would have been moderated for them relative to typical enslavement.

³¹ Debates over the ethics of the Mosaic policies for assimilating and managing Gentile towns within the territory divinely bequeathed to the descendants of Jacob is really a debate over whether there should have been Gentile prisoners of war in the first place; that is a debate over the ethics of the Mosaic policy of expanding Israel's territory at all. That is a different debate: in this apology the debate over ethical treatment of prisoners of war, taken their existence as a given, is being joined.

³² The label "hard labor" seems appropriate—Deuteronomy 15:18 suggests that forced laborers in Israel, Jew and Gentile, were required to give double the effort of hired hands, while yet enjoying all the legal restrictions placed upon their masters.

**The Second Form of Lawful, Unpaid Gentile Servitude:
Variable-Term,³³ Voluntary Indentured Servitude to Satisfy
Intractable Indebtedness**

The Mosaic law mandated that poor, disadvantaged Gentile servants could not be pushed into slavery by unprincipled masters:

You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. You shall give him his wages on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you. (Deut 24:14–15)

Presumably this prohibition included all manner of employer schemes to force a poor hired worker, Israelite or Gentile, into unpaid, forced labor in addition to the itemized strategy above which involved slowing the timing of wage payments to victimize poor employees with no cash reserves.

However, should Israelites in particular fall into a position of severe financial debt to an Israelite, they could voluntarily choose to become bondservants, that is, to take on the role of indentured laborers under the master with the usual protections for all unpaid laborers. In fact, they are owed the additional benefit of being treated better than other unpaid laborers, as well-treated as the Gentile sojourners working for that master for hire, i.e., *as well-treated as hirelings*.³⁴ This was a significant benefit: the work of a hireling was viewed to be half as arduous as that of a forced laborer.³⁵ In addition, the Israelite bondservant under an Israelite master enjoyed the guarantee of release at the Sabbath Year or Jubilee:

³³ Again, the use of this term will be explained and defended in the third subsection below.

³⁴ Note that the normal station of Gentile workers under Israelite masters was *not* that of “slavery” (see table above, Lev 25:39–40).

³⁵ See the Leviticus quotation which immediately follows.

If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave's [עֶבֶד; "servant, slave"] service [עֲבָדָה; "service, work, enforced labor"]. He shall be with you as a hired man [שָׂכִיר; "hired man, hired servant"] as if he were a sojourner [תּוֹשָׁב; "sojourner, foreign resident"]; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee. He shall then go out from you, he and his sons with him, and shall go back to his family, that he may return to the property of his forefathers. (Lev 25:39–41)

If you buy a Hebrew slave [עֶבֶד; "servant, slave"], he shall serve for six years; but on the seventh he shall go out as a free man without payment. (Exod 21:2).

If your kinsman, a Hebrew man or woman, is sold to you, then he shall serve you six years, but in the seventh year you shall set him free. When you set him free, you shall not send him away empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally from your flock and from your threshing floor and from your wine vat; you shall give to him as the LORD your God has blessed you.... It shall not seem hard to you when you set him free, for he has given you six years with double the service of a hired man; so the LORD your God will bless you in whatever you do. (Deut 15:12–14, 18)³⁶

Likewise, Israelites in severe financial debt to sojourning Gentiles could voluntarily choose to become their unpaid bondservants, thus becoming temporary, forced laborers, so as to pay off their debt. Even when under Gentile masters, however, the Israelite bondsman's right to the softer work conditions normally reserved for hirelings, to the right of kinsman redemption, and to the right of guaranteed freedom for the bondsman's whole household at the Year of Jubilee, were to be

³⁶ The translation "double" is not without controversy: the NET Bible note opines, "The Hebrew term מִשְׁנֶה (mishneh, 'twice') could mean 'equivalent to' (cf. NRSV) or, more likely, 'double' (cf. NAB, NIV, NLT). The idea is that a hired worker would put in only so many hours per day whereas a bondslave was available around the clock" (The NET Bible First Edition Notes [Biblical Studies P, 2006], Deut 5:18 n36).

maintained under the oversight of fellow Israelites. There was perhaps also the expectation that a relative would, prior to Jubilee, step in as a kinsman redeemer, leaving the Gentile master financially whole:

Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him as to sell himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger's family, then he shall have redemption right after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him, or his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or if he prospers, he may redeem himself. He then with his purchaser shall calculate from the year when he sold himself to him up to the year of jubilee. (Lev 25:47–50a)

It seems appropriate to describe this class of Israeli bondservants as involved in “self-initiated, negotiated indentured servitude for financial cause.” They shared the same legal protections as did other Israeli bondservants, including the same legally-prescribed maximum term for indentured servitude, and enjoyed the identical protections day-to-day of all unpaid laborers.

There is not a parallel passage in the Mosaic law that offers a severely-indebted Gentile the same option of self-initiated, negotiated, temporary indentured servitude to the debt-holder in order to resolve debt. At the same time, there is no statute that withholds that option, and the option would seem to reflect the Mosaic commands towards love of the Gentile neighbor as itemized in the above table by way of providing a loving alternative to the more severe options like non-negotiated slavery or starvation.

Self-initiated, indentured servitude for a Gentile burdened by intractable debt to either an Israelite or Gentile debt-holder would have been an available option per the silence of the Mosaic Law. Since Israelites had the emergency option of voluntarily placing themselves into indentured servitude to a Gentile master as preferable to continuing under endlessly growing debt, it would seem likely that the path to voluntary, indentured

servitude for the same reasons would be available to Gentiles—surely the existence of a *Gentile* forced laborer acquired by a Gentile debt-holder for financial cause was no more unthinkable than the existence of a *Jewish* forced laborer acquired by a Gentile debt-holder for financial cause.

The left column of the above table stipulates that the hard-labor servitude of a Gentile initiated by becoming “acquired” as an unpaid laborer under a Jewish owner, a general status within which “self-initiated, pre-negotiated, temporary indentured servitude of a Gentile for financial cause” would be one subset, could extend beyond the lifetime of the debtor. The legally-stipulated maximum term for indentured servitude enjoyed by Jews by way of the Sabbath year and Jubilee would not be available to Gentile forced-laborers, even for self-initiating Gentile forced-laborers. Presumably, the indentured Gentile servant for financial cause would be negotiating the total years of indentured servitude required of him as well as of his progeny in order to satisfy the debt. The coining of the phrase “self-initiating, pre-negotiating, temporary indentured servitude” for the status of the laborer in Leviticus 25:47–50 quoted above does, in spite of the phrase’s ungainliness, highlight how far such a status would fall outside any definition of “slavery” that opponents of an anti-slavery Mosaic Law do commonly put forth.

A Probable, Additional Mitigating Factor upon the Severity of Both Mosaic Forms of Gentile, Unpaid Labor

There appears to be an additional element in the law regarding the treatment of all Gentile residents that further lessens the severity of any form of unpaid Gentile servitude. Any Gentile who converted to Judaism to the point of requesting circumcision and full participation in the Passover was henceforth to be treated as a fellow Jew:

But if a stranger sojourn with you, and celebrates the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near to celebrate it; and he shall be like a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person may eat of it. The same law shall apply to

the native as to the stranger who sojourns among you. (Exod 12:48–49)³⁷

³⁷ This Exodus passage seems to describe the means for the transformation from pagan to Israelite that is written of in Isaiah 14:1; 56:3–8; Ezekiel 47:22–23. See support in Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax, eds., *Christian Standard Bible Study Bible* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1122n“Isa 56:3”; David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua*, vol. 5, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 216–17; Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 323; G. W. Grogan, “The Old Testament Concept of Solidarity in Hebrews,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 49 (1998): 161; Edmund P. Clowney, “Toward a Biblical Doctrine of the Church,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 31, no. 1 (1968): 36; Elmer B. Smick, “Old Testament Cross-Culturalism: Paradigmatic Or Enigmatic?,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32, no. 1 (1989): 3.

A dissenting view is offered by *The Jewish Study Bible* regarding the same Exodus 12 passage: “48–49: Resident aliens, though they must abstain from leaven (v. 19), are not obligated to offer a *pesah* sacrifice but may do so voluntarily. They must first undergo circumcision. Then they may make the offering and become ‘as a citizen of the country,’ at least for purposes of this offering. This is not a full religious conversion—the stranger’s motivation is to make a *pesah* offering, not to become an Israelite—but since circumcision is a sign of the covenant, and the sacrifice celebrates the exodus, he must first become a quasi-Israelite in order to identify with Israel’s defining national experience. If so, this ceremony is unique in the Bible; there is no other reference to a formal procedure for converting foreigners to Israelites, even quasi-Israelites. Foreigners normally became Israelites only by marriage or the informal, generations-long process of ethnic assimilation that resulted from living in the land. By the rabbinic period, a procedure for religious conversion, including circumcision of males, was created and the Heb word for stranger, ‘ger,’ acquired the meaning ‘proselyte.’ *Since the idea of strangers joining Israel is explicitly mentioned in exilic or postexilic passages* (Isa. 14:1; 56:3–8; Ezek. 47:22–23), *it is possible that the present passage is also from that period* [emphasis added]. 49: ‘One law for the citizen and for the stranger,’ see also Lev. 24:22; Num. 9:14; 15:14–16, 29. In each of these instances strangers and Israelites follow the same specific procedure (cf. Lev. 7:7); it is not a general rule covering all cases. In later halakhic exegesis, when ‘ger’ (‘stranger’) is understood as ‘proselyte,’ this v. is understood as prescribing equality between proselytes and born Jews *with respect to all the laws of the Torah* [emphasis mine] (Mek. *Pisha* 14, end)” (Jeffrey H.

Since severely-indebted Jews who voluntarily entered into indentured servitude under a Gentile master were to be redeemed as quickly as possible by the efforts of fellow Jews, it follows that a Gentile under indentured servitude who genuinely converted should then have received that same response from his (now-)fellow Jews. The law offers nothing against this position, but also records neither examples nor counter-examples in the narrative sections. Early Jewish writings do in their discussions of proselytizing discuss the relationship between proselytizing and Gentile, unpaid servitude, and the majority view was that genuine conversion of Gentile forced laborers necessitated their release. The revered Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon (also known as Maimonides) of the 11th century argued that a master who encouraged his unpaid Gentile laborer toward an active Jewish faith would soon be compelled to free him, because active, public adherence to the Jewish faith was one of a few “matters in which a *freed* person is obligated” (emphasis added):

When a master marries his slave to a free woman, places phylacteries on his head, or tells him to read three verses from a Torah scroll in public, or the like - i.e., matters in which only a

Tigay, “Exodus,” in *The Jewish Study Bible*, ed. Adele Berlin, Marc Zvi Brettler, and Michael Fishbane [New York: Oxford U P, 2004], 131).

Note the use of circular reasoning to keep the possibility or likelihood of a path toward for conversion to Israelite status from being available to proselytes pre-exile via the Torah, within the majority view: because exilic and post-exilic biblical passages do reference the conversion of Gentiles into Israelites as admitted in the above quotation, the above argument suggests that this Exodus passage may in fact be late also, thus not available pre-exilic. But this argument is made after the above quotation had already argued that the ceremonies in the Exodus passage describe transfer to “quasi-Israelite” status for the purpose of limited scenarios, not to Israelite status.

For the purpose of the argument of this article, of course, it is not crucial that Exodus 12 describes the precise process for the transformation from pagan to Israelite. Rather, it is crucial only that such a transformation be possible, whether detailed in the Torah or not.

freed person is obligated - he is considered to be free. We compel his master to compose a bill of release for him.³⁸

Modern Jewish writings typically declare that during the OT age Israelites did not use proselytizing of Gentiles as a reason for releasing them from forced labor, but give no evidence, perhaps in reaction to the aforementioned silence regarding proselytizing forced laborers in the Hebrew Bible.

If the view is maintained that converted, forced laborers must according to the law be freed, then the status of forced labor for Gentile battle captives and their families should rightly be labeled as “indefinite” or “variable-termed” unpaid labor for cause, rather than “permanent” forced labor for cause. There are no significant practical downsides to a practice of freeing even prisoners of war, once converted: any genuinely-converted prisoner of war is no longer a security threat to Israel, since being pro-YHWH and pro-Mosaic law, two elements of conversion, are not separable from being pro-Israel.

Likewise, the status of indentured servitude entered into by Gentiles in severe debt should rightly be labeled as *indefinite* or *variable-termed* indentured servitude for cause, rather than *permanent* indentured servitude for cause. There are no complications not already dealt with by the Mosaic law that would arise from freeing recently-converted unpaid laborers under great indebtedness: at the laborer's conversion his Jewish master now has in his possession a Jew who had voluntarily entered indentured servitude, and who can now expect release with the arrival of the Year of Jubilee, should his financial debt keep him indentured that long:

If a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to you that he sells himself to you, you shall not subject him to a slave's service. He shall be with you as a hired man, as if he were a sojourner; he shall serve with you until the year of jubilee.... For they are My servants whom I brought out from the land of Egypt;

³⁸ Maimonides, 9:17 in ““Avadim - Chapter Nine,” *Chabad.org*, accessed July 20, 2020, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1363819/jewish/Avadim-Chapter-Nine.htm.

they are not to be sold in a slave sale. You shall not rule over him with severity, but are to revere your God. (Lev 25:39–40, 42–43)

In the case of the Gentile who genuinely converts while under indentured servitude to a Gentile master unresponsive to the Sabbath Year, he immediately falls into the category of indentured Jewish laborers who are to be treated as employees, rather than as indentured Gentile laborers (v. 43). As well, now-fellow Jews will be seeking to get the proselyte's debt forgiven or paid as quickly as possible while avoiding financial harm to the debt-holding Gentile master, so as to remove the indignity of a Jew in indentured servitude to a Gentile:

Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him as to sell himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger's family, then he shall have redemption right after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him, or his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or if he prospers, he may redeem himself. He then with his purchaser shall calculate from the year when he sold himself to him up to the year of jubilee; and the price of his sale shall correspond to the number of years. It is like the days of a hired man that he shall be with him.... Like a man hired year by year he shall be with him; he shall not rule over him with severity in your sight. (Lev 25:47–50, 53)

There appear to be no legal complications to treating an indentured Gentile laborer, once converted, as immediately an indentured Jewish laborer, with the expanded rights and privileges of that status.

Conclusion

Towards the complaint that the Mosaic law both clearly mentions and allows, if not condones, Gentile slavery, the response should be that a careful survey of the Mosaic law shows that in fact the law prohibits slavery. This reality is unfortunately masked within imprecise English Bible translations which insist

upon attaching the English words “slavery” and “slave” to even the institutions of variable-term, hard labor for Gentile war criminals and variable-term, indentured servitude for Gentile debt repayment. In both cases the servitude is for cause, so that the status of these Gentiles rightly falls short of “slavery” by the typical understanding of that word in the modern, English-speaking West. In fact, there were two causes behind all non-employee Gentile servitude in the Law: in the case of “judicial forced servitude,” one cause is military participation against Israel, and the second cause is the ongoing absence of genuine, individual conversion to Judaism. In the case of “voluntary indentured servitude” one cause is the willingness of the Gentile to enter indentured servitude in exchange for the remission of an intractable financial debt, and the second cause is the ongoing absence of genuine, individual conversion to Judaism.

An additional insight regarding slavery and the Mosaic law is accessible to those who read the Bible dispensationally. This article makes room for the claim that while the NT seeks to ameliorate the effects of ongoing slavery among its original audiences, the Mosaic law outright prohibited slavery for those living under the covenant of Moses, thus raising for some non-dispensationalists the ugly specter of a Bible that evinces a *devolution* in its slavery ethic across the Testaments. Dispensationalists, however, recognize that the role of God's people in managing the institution of slavery has been vastly different under the dispensations of law and the church because God's role in governing humanity has been vastly different during those dispensations. During the law dispensation God was theocratic head of the government under which God's people lived and prohibited slavery (in terms of the modern Western conception of slavery). God's people were to enact that prohibition from within the government. During the church age, however, God has been not the formal head of any human government but rather an informal influencer upon all human governments from outside their structures. In that role God seeks to minimize the effects of slavery allowed by human governments, and by way of the NT calls his people to do likewise.

There has been in fact neither evolution nor devolution in the Bible's slavery ethic from OT to NT—rather, God's differing relationship to human government in differing dispensations has dictated whether God's people have been aligned with God in actively prohibiting slavery from *within* their government, or have been with God in actively influencing against slavery from *outside* their government. Nor has the current age been the pinnacle of humanity's slavery ethic, as most non-dispensationalists assume: in the remaining two future dispensations, God will once again be the formal head of human government, again in a role for completely erasing the institution of slavery from within government.

Genesis 1–11 and the Worldview of the Bible

Elliott E. Johnson

Key Words: Genesis, Worldview, Dispensations, Evil

A biblical theology would naturally be the product of reading the Bible broadly, book by book. This would enable the student to recognize the progress of revelation from beginning to end. But is there any guide in the text of the Bible that would show an intended direction of the development of thought? Modern books include a title and a table of contents that summarizes the author's intended scope and pattern of thought arrangement. Does the Bible propose any such direction?

The proposal of this paper is that Genesis 1–11, as a prologue, is intended to be a presentation of the biblical worldview. As a worldview, it introduces the condition of the world within which history unfolds. Then each historical book advances the story until it reaches a fulfillment in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The worldview of Genesis 1–11 introduces the world as a good creation with unresolved issues of evil that God permitted, as creatures had rebelled. Then the canon of Scripture reveals God's intended resolution of mankind's conflict with sin and evil. The direction of resolution is introduced in the worldview in two roles for the human race.

Few would disagree that Genesis 1–11 provides a prologue to the book of Genesis. The literary style distinguishes it from the style of Genesis 12–50. But in my proposal, the content provides a plan in which God addresses evil. Rather than removing evil from human responsibility, God provides a plan that not only has a determined outcome but also invites mankind to freely participate in the responsibility assigned against evil. In

the resolution of this mystery, the glory of God is revealed. And within this plan are seven predetermined truths.

The philosophical background of covenant and dispensational theological reasoning rests ultimately on Plato or Aristotle. The theological interpretations sought a foundation for knowing on different grounds. Plato had sought a heavenly ideal to find what can be known. What Plato sought in heaven, Augustine found in the New Testament revelation. It was the ideal realization of the OT introductory revelation. So, interpretation of OT expectation was retrospective, allegorizing texts in the Old Testament based on terms of the ideal fulfillment, the covenant of grace. This covenant was not mentioned directly in the OT context but recognized in the new covenant.

Aristotle sought the foundation of knowledge in terms of a basic framework based on the first laws of reasoning present in what can be known: “All instruction given or received by way of argument proceeds from pre-existent knowledge” (*Posterior Analytics* 1.1). Aquinas found this foundation of knowledge in terms of *causae veritatis* (causes of truth).

If my proposal of the role of Genesis 1–11 as a worldview is correct, then it will provide principles to be found in revelation. These principles will guide our understanding of the progress of revelation that unfolds in the dispensations that follow. The promises of God and the obedience of man to the laws of the government will resolve the problem of evil.

What are the principles in Genesis 1–11?

The state of human existence is framed within the following eight truths:

1. God is the Creator and universal Ruler of the creation.
2. God permits the existence of evil within the good creation.

3. Adam was given responsibility to mediate God’s rule but lost that position of mediating rule to Satan when he obeyed Satan’s word (Gen 3:6, 7). As a result, the human race fell and would be ruled by Satan. Satan’s usurping of Adam’s role is

acknowledged in the NT: “the prince of the power of the air, who rules over the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2).

4. After the invasion of evil, God pronounced judgment on Satan, in which hope for the judgment was to be worked out in the seed promised to the woman (Gen 3:15). This promise began to be fulfilled immediately in a line of descendants which was introduced as an elect line, beginning with Seth, and followed by one in each generation (5:1–32; 11:10–32).

5. Based on this promise, by faith Adam named his wife Eve, mother of the living, even though they had died when they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In response God provided a skin covering for each one (3:20, 21). Now both could approach God by sacrifice, even though they would be cast out of the garden. So, Abel followed the sacrifice but Cain did not. Thus, God is Savior of those who believe in God and the promise of Eve’s seed.

6. The human race, male and female, was now fallen and depraved due to Adam’s sin, living with a sentence of death. As a result, sin progressed climaxing in the distortion of the race, which threatened the promise of the seed to Eve. Then God judged the race except for Noah and his family who were saved from the worldwide flood. Noah was appointed to occupy the cleansed earth. But rather than ruling, he was given the Noahic covenant.

7. Human government was delegated to the collective humanity in the Noahic covenant, responsible to protect human life. A death penalty was instituted to enable the nation to enforce the nation’s law (Gen 9:1–9). Government law opposed evil in the population, as a means of avoiding another worldwide flood.

8. God’s glory will be revealed in his rule through promise, involving Jesus Christ who rose from the dead in order to overcome and defeat evil in righteousness. Believing mankind will be delivered from judgment following this pattern. Following his first advent, believers will be enabled to overcome

evil as Christ had in resurrection. Evil will be defeated in Christ's second advent.

Thus, there are three issues that will be resolved in the progress of revelation:

- (1) The judgment of the enemy of God, Satan, through the seed of the woman,
- (2) The reconciliation of the world to himself, through the sacrifice of seed of the woman,
- (3) The re-establishment of God's mediated kingdom on earth, judging all nations through the revelation of the seed of the woman.

These issues will be realized in history.

Genesis 1–11 does not adequately represent three dispensations

1. The first three dispensations are defined by characteristics of a dispensation rather than by an economy in God's outworking of his purposes.² This interpretation involves a change in the criteria of definition from Scofield to Ryrie's own definition.

2. Ryrie questioned whether Conscience and Government are distinct dispensations. What were the distinguishing features to justify the two? I agree that the institution of government is new in holding mankind responsible for opposing evil by law, but it is not new in God's governance. When God sent the worldwide flood, was God not governing evil in the population?

3. Scripture provides direct evidence for four dispensations (administrations):

- Ephesians 1:10: the administration of the days of fulfillment—to bring everything together in Christ (kingdom).

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 33–35.

- John 1:17, “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (law and grace).
- Genesis 18:18–19, “Abraham is to become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of earth will be blessed through him. I have chosen Abraham so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. This is how He will fulfill to Abraham what he promised him” (promise).

These Scriptures identify four dispensations: promise, law, grace, and kingdom.

What is the Worldview?

The Adam Phase

Adam was created with the responsibility to populate the earth and to mediate God’s rule on earth (Gen 1:28). This realm of rule included the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The threat not to eat was to be enforced by the penalty of death: “in the day you eat from it, you shall surely die” (2:17). God’s intent was that Adam would rule by the knowledge of good and trust God to deal with evil.

When Adam ate from the tree, he lost the position of rule to Satan, whose words, Adam now had begun to obey. To obey Satan was to disobey God. So, if Satan was now ruling, mankind was now ruled by Satan in disobedience.

In God’s pronouncement of judgment on the fallen world, he began with a judgment of the evil one, Satan. God spoke without any questioning of the serpent, which implied that the serpent was already guilty. Further evil was to co-exist in conflict with God’s promised line:

Stage one: the woman in conflict with Satan

Stage two: the descendants of the woman; with the descendants of Satan,

Stage three: the seed of the woman; with Satan. (3:15)

These stages are the pronouncement of judgment on Satan. This appears in the third stage, a promise of the seed of the woman is introduced, which invites mankind to believe. That seed will strike the head of Satan. However, this is only after Satan strikes the heel of the seed. So, the first response to evil featured the promised seed of the woman. God does not disregard man; instead, he promises one to defeat evil from the human race. While the seed is human, he will defeat Satan by the promise from God and in that sense is uniquely enabled by God.

When Adam named his wife, he believed the promise that the woman would be the mother of the living, even though God had threatened death on the day they ate. Adam believed God would deal with the threat of death, while Eve would mother offspring. In response to faith, God provided skin coverings so fallen mankind could still approach him through sacrifice. Abel offered such a sacrifice that God introduced, while Cain did not. After Abel was murdered, God provided Seth, and this chosen one is the first in a line. So, an elect line began with Seth followed by Enosh who began to call on the name of the Lord (4:25–26).

The fallen population followed the sin of Cain as reflected in the pattern of sin that succeeded Cain's murdering Abel but pleading for God's protection.

Lamech killed two lads but celebrated it with his wives. Sons of God impregnated daughters of man to begin to pollute the human race with Nephilim.

This development represents an intensification of evil in the world. God's judgment responded to the intensifying presence of sin with a worldwide flood in which the whole population was judged, except for Noah and his family. As a result, God's response alone addressed evil using the promised descendant of Eve, Noah, who was righteous to be delivered and to deliver his family.

The Noah Stage

Noah in the line of the elect ones, was linked to the preflood world. Having been delivered in the ark from that judged world, so that after the flood, he stepped into a new world with a changed climate and growing season (8:22). He was also linked

to Adam by an altar, by which Noah approached God through sacrifice with thanksgiving (8:20).

Like Adam, Noah was appointed to populate the earth (Gen 9:1). But unlike Adam, he wasn't appointed to rule. That rulership had been lost to Satan. Rather Noah was given a covenant for the worldwide population. There were these conditions in the covenant:

- Animals are now fearful of mankind,
- Animal life was given to man to eat, but without the blood,
- Promise of no more worldwide floods, evidenced by a rainbow,
- Human government, encompassing responsibility for humanity, will address the evil which Cain introduced.
- A Law code protecting human life was instituted and enforced by the death penalty of the guilty one. That penalty would be applied to animals or mankind and administered by man. (Gen 9:1–17).

So, in the second response to evil, God included the responsibility for all of humanity, as included under human government prescribed in the Noahic covenant. It was by man that the guilty party was to be slain. God required the life of the guilty party, but mankind was to execute it.

The outworking of the covenant rested in the descendants of Noah. Although it was occasioned by Noah's own sin, which remained unresolved, yet Noah designated the order to follow in God's plan. The next generation was worked out in his sons: Shem is the elect, Japheth is blessed, and Ham is cursed in his offspring Canaan.

At this time the whole earth spoke the same language and vocabulary. Collectively they were building a tower to confront God. But God descended to confuse their language and thereby separate the peoples into nations, each with their own self-interests and law. This world of nations under the Noahic covenant was fashioned to replace Adam's responsibility on earth, not to rule over evil, but to govern the emergence of taking human life.

This responsibility to govern established nations each with a pattern of law in the history that followed (Gen 10). When God

established Israel as a nation, the centerpiece was the law code in a more complete form (Exod 20–24). However, early dispensationalists overlooked what Paul said about the giving of the law:

Why then was the law given? It was added alongside of promise, for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the Promise was given, would come.... Is the law contrary to God's promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of law. But Scripture imprisoned everything under sin's power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. (Gal 3:19–22)

The initial promise of the seed was in completed form the promise of Christ.

The Conclusion

The Noahic stage addressed evil in nations, but in spite of law, sin overcame the nations in evil. This narrative was completed in Daniel. Israel had just been deported into the Gentile world. Israel had been overcome by evil, even though the law code in Israel combined with the provision of sacrifice, revealed that human obedience alone would be insufficient. Rather that inability of fallen mankind will need the promised One to deal with evil efficaciously. This revelation was clarified at Jesus Christ's first advent when "Jesus who was chosen before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of times for you" died for mankind. What evil posed as a contradiction, God could control in a plan that included man with a responsible and free choice. God resolved the contradiction as the mystery unfolded. Jesus was chosen before the incarnation to have a role of death in redemption, a role which Jesus prayed could be removed. Yet he freely accepted the role, since he chose what was not decided by his will but God's will that would be accomplished (Luke 22:36–46). The mystery was resolved as the contradiction had been removed. The resurrection realized Jesus will. "So that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Pet 1:20–21).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ completed the narrative as God defeated evil and the evil one through Jesus Christ. The

resurrected One in God's plan returned to complete the story. This conquest will be followed by the millennial kingdom of heaven come to earth in the Son of Man and God's creation plan having been fulfilled despite evil having been permitted.

Thus Genesis 1–11 introduces a worldview consisting of the essential truths that frame the human existence that would follow. While the essential truths are introduced in the unresolved problem of evil, the development of God's purposes to overcome evil awaited history and the progress of revelation. Ryrie identified the one purpose of God to be the mediated rule of man, finally realized through the kingdom of God come to earth. But Genesis 3:15 also implies another purpose of deliverance from evil, as Satan strikes the promised One, yet this struck One is the agent of deliverance for fallen mankind. By his death, the sin of mankind will be redeemed. So, the promised One must be delivered. Daniel envisions the first advent of Messiah when he was cut off (Dan 9:25–26) and the second advent of the Stone, not cut out with hands (2:34–35, 44), or the Son of Man (7:13–14; 26–27), or Messiah the Prince (9:25–27), who will ultimately reign.

While the whole human race is responsible for evil, only the promised descendant of the woman will fulfill that responsibility. However, those who receive his redemptive provision will join him to rule for one thousand years (Dan 7:27; Rev 20:4–7).

Dispensational Kingdom Postponement Theology as a Safeguard for the Edenic Divine Institutions

Paul Miles

Key Words: Postponement Theology, Dispensationalism, Ecotheology, Critical Theory

The doctrine of kingdom postponement is a watershed for developing and defending a distinctly dispensational worldview. Postponement theology comes from a grammatical-historical approach to progressive revelation, so this article divides the doctrine of postponement into two phases: the kingdom as described in the Old Testament and the kingdom as offered, rejected, and postponed in the life of Christ. Both sections feature a non-dispensational trend in theology and a dispensational critique. Two trends have been selected due to the imminent threats that they pose to the divine institutions that were established in the garden of Eden: Christian ecojustice as a threat to responsible labor shall be handled in relation to OT kingdom descriptions; and Christian social justice, specifically relating to feminist and queer theology, as a threat to marriage and family shall be discussed in relation to the kingdom offer. But first, an overview of divine institutions and postponement theology is in order.

Divine Institutions and Postponement Theology

Divine Institutions

As one reads Genesis, certain divine institutions emerge that inform the dispensational worldview in light of a postponed kingdom. Charles Clough describes divine institutions as

Paul Miles, D.Min., is the executive director of Grace Abroad Ministries in Kyiv, Ukraine, and co-founder of The International Society for Biblical Hermeneutics. Paul can be reached at paul@themileses.com.

“absolute social structures instituted by God for the entire human race—believers and unbelievers alike.”² These institutions are designed for the protection and prosperity of mankind. Three divine institutions find their roots in the garden of Eden as the divine ideal and carry over to the post-fall world. These are responsible labor (Gen 1:26–30; 2:15–17; Ps 8:3–8), marriage (Gen 2:18–24), and, as a result of responsible labor and marriage, family. Sin has rendered each of these institutions dysfunctional.

God established more divine institutions in later chapters of Genesis, but the first three led to the global population and so it could be said that they lay the foundation for the subsequent institutions. After the flood and the Tower of Babel, two divine institutions emerged to restrain evil: these are civil government (9:5, 6) and national distinction (10–11). Sin has rendered these institutions necessary. The dispensationalist recognizes two more bodies, though not all dispensationalists would rank them as divine institutions;³ they are Israel (12:1–3) and the church (Acts 2:1–4).

This study will focus on the first three institutions (responsible labor, marriage, and family), which are evident the first three chapters of Genesis. Kingdom postponement has clear implications for government, national distinctions, Israel, and the church as well, but if Satan can confuse the church on these first three, then the church’s views on the rest of the divine institutions will crumble soon enough.

² Charles A. Clough, *A Biblical Framework for Worship and Obedience in an Age of Global Deception, Part II: Buried Truths of Origins* (1995), 39, https://www.bibleframework.org/images/bfm_documents/1995-BibleFramework-CourseNotes-02.pdf.

³ Thomas Ice and Charles Clough are excellent dispensationalist theologians who clearly recognize Israel as a blessing to the world, but do not list her as a “divine institution,” per se, while Robert Dean is a theologian with similar theology, who does recognize Israel as a divine institution. See Thomas Ice, “The Divine Institutions,” *Pre-trib Research Center*, accessed August 10, 2021, <https://www.pre-trib.org/articles/all-articles/message/the-divine-institutions>; Clough, *A Biblical Framework*, 39; Robert Dean, “18 - Divine Institution #6: Israel,” *Dean Bible Ministries*, September 10, 2020, <https://deanbibleministries.org/conferences/message/018-divine-institution-6-israel-b>.

Postponement Theology

Postponement theology contends that Jesus offered to Israel the literal, earthly, messianic kingdom, which is described in the Old Testament, but since Israel rejected this kingdom offer, Jesus postponed the literal kingdom to a future day. Among alternative views are those which say that Christ came and, in one way or the other, established the kingdom as a current spiritual reality. Such systems demand a non-literal understanding of the OT terms of the kingdom and an alteration of Christ's intentions while he was on earth.

It is entirely possible to defend exegetically the institutions of responsible labor, marriage, and family without appealing to postponement theology and the dispensationalist, like all conservatives, should be equipped to do so; however, there is an additional argument that is distinctly dispensational, as the errant doctrines that threaten the institutions are often inseparable from kingdom-now eschatology. The question at hand is how to develop a distinctly dispensational worldview, so this article will emphasize how a robust theology of kingdom postponement is beneficial to developing and defending a dispensational worldview in light of current Christian compromises on these three divine institutions.

OT Descriptions of the Kingdom and the Divine Institution of Responsible Labor

Trends in Ecotheology

Current trends in Christian ecojustice⁴ are posing threats to the divine institution of responsible labor by distorting the role

⁴ Ecojustice is an odd term. A NT word that the NKJV often translates as “justice” is κρίσις (Matt 12:18, 20; 23:23; Luke 11:42; Acts 8:33), which the KJV most frequently translates as “judgment” and occasionally even “damnation” (Matt 23:33; John 5:29). Another NKJV word for “justice” is δίκη (Acts 28:4), which the KJV renders as “vengeance.” These words have negative connotations in the Greek, likely being related to κρίνω, which deals with separating, judging, and condemning (Robert Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek* [Leiden: Brill, 2010], I.780–81, κρίνω). Are ecojustice advocates calling for eco-damnation, eco-judgment, or eco-vengeance? Not necessarily. It seems that ecojustice adopts the

that humans play in nature and ascribing guilt to Christianity for the industrial use of natural resources. This trend often comes as a direct attack against the Bible and such attacks are often grounded in misunderstandings. Mark Musser is a dispensationalist who served for several years as a bivocational pastor and farmer. He has done much research on the history of environmentalism and summarizes well that “Environmentalists think that latent within the Biblical commands to subdue and fill the Earth is the concept that people may exploit nature for selfish or even greedy purposes.”⁵ As conservatives make evident in the term “*responsible labor*,” the Bible does not advocate the *irresponsible* use of resources, but first let us consider what Christian ecojustice proponents are saying before providing a dispensationalist response.

Certain unsettling ecothological movements have generally stayed among Christian academia in recent decades, but they could be permeating Christian laity in years to come. For example, the Hodos Institute is an Evangelical academic institution with an agenda to promote its ecotheology among Eastern Orthodox and Evangelical⁶ Christians in Ukraine and Russia. Hodos has recently taken a survey and determined, “In general, Christians of both traditions fundamentally shared the belief that the main value of nature and animals was as a resource for satisfying the biological needs of humankind.”⁷ They clarify,

For example, one Evangelical interviewee said, “The role of animals is to be our transport (like donkeys, horses), be our ‘living

buzzword “justice,” which is stripped of its actual meaning, and ecotheologians simply follow the world.

⁵ R. Mark Musser, *Nazi Ecology: The Oak Sacrifice of the Judeo-Christian Worldview in the Holocaust* (Taos, NM: Dispensational Publishing House, 2018), 21.

⁶ “The term ‘Evangelicals’ is used to denote those who belong to various Russian and Ukrainian Baptist, Pentecostal, and charismatic congregations” (Alexander Negrov and Alexander Malov, “Eco-Theology and Environmental Leadership in Orthodox and Evangelical Perspectives in Russia and Ukraine,” *Religions* 12, no. 5 [2021]: 18).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

canned food,' be materials for experiments. But animals haven't been promised eternal life. They don't have the 'superstructure' of the human spirit." An Orthodox priest put it similarly, "Nature was created for humans. Sun, sea, water, air, the earth that feeds the whole population of the planet,—these are the exceptional providence of God for a human."⁸

This shows that Christians intuitively believe that man is above nature (with the obvious call for responsibility), which is in line with the plain reading of the biblical text,⁹ but the researchers rebuked the interviewees, saying "This utilitarian and anthropocentric view has little to do with the Bible and/or Christian tradition and rather is rooted in the modernistic worldview. It is also rooted in the anthropocentric view of the salvific work of Christ and in the anthropocentric eschatological perspectives."¹⁰ A closer look at the roots of this ecotheological movement will show that the opposite is true, that ecojustice is based on an anti-biblical worldview that is more akin to postmodernism with roots in anti-biblical atheism and anti-biblical Eastern philosophy.¹¹

Contemporary Christian ecotheologians borrow much from atheist perspectives on environmentalism. Much of the ecology debate with atheists boils down to the debate between the biblical worldview, which draws a clear distinction between the Creator

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ The researchers note, "It was noted that in expressing personal theological perspectives on ecology and ecological responsibility, Evangelical interviewees mainly concentrated on the biblical texts and used literal understanding of the Bible, while Orthodox respondents made references to the writings of the Church Fathers and used allegorical (figurative) understanding of biblical passages that they cited." While the Eastern Orthodox use a different hermeneutic, they still seem to arrive at a similar conclusion (Negrov and Maloy, "Eco-Theology and Environmental Leadership," 15–16).

¹⁰ Ibid., 16–17.

¹¹ On the eastern and western influences of postmodernism, see Philippa Berry, "Postmodernism and Post-religion," in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, ed. Steven Connor (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2006), 168–81.

and creation, as contrasted to the atheist worldview that sees a continuity of being between nature and a common source. Consider, for example, a quotation from the atheist Niel deGrasse Tyson:

We are all connected. To each other, biologically, to the earth, chemically, and to the rest of the universe, atomically. That's kinda cool! That makes me smile and I actually feel quite large at the end of that. It's not that we are better than the universe; we're part of the universe. We're in the universe and the universe is in us.¹²

Notice the continuity. To the atheist, all life shares a common origin in the primordial soup whence life evolved. Moreover, we share origins with all matter since we were together in the Big Bang. This concept has been labeled "Continuity of Being," and is similar to pagan myths and Eastern philosophy, as opposed to the biblical view of "Creator/Creation Distinction."

The Continuity of Being from evolutionary cosmogony has always been a driving force behind atheist ecology,¹³ but the merge with Christianity into modern ecotheology is typically traced to a lecture delivered by a medieval historian named Lynn White Jr. in 1966 at a meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. The text of the lecture was later published as an article entitled, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis."¹⁴ Although White identified as "a churchman,"¹⁵ he also accepted the narrative of evolution and concluded that man is not superior to nature. White shames Christianity for their attitudes that "despite Darwin, we are not, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to

¹² Neil deGrasse Tyson, "We Are Star Stuff--Cosmic Poetry," *YouTube*, May 30, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QADMMmU6ab8>.

¹³ A chilling aspect of environmentalist history is the role that Ernst Haeckel, the 19th century German zoologist who coined the term "ecology," played in the eventual development and rise of National Socialism. See Musser, *Nazi Ecology*, 128ff.

¹⁴ Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203–7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1206.

nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim.”¹⁶ White summarizes his conclusion:

We would seem to be headed toward conclusions unpalatable to many Christians. Since both science and technology are blessed words in our contemporary vocabulary, some may be happy at the notions, first, that, viewed historically, modern science is an extrapolation of natural theology and, second, that modern technology is at least partly to be explained as an Occidental, voluntarist realization of the Christian dogma of man's transcendence of, and rightful mastery over, nature. But, as we now recognize, somewhat over a century ago science and technology—hitherto quite separate activities—joined to give mankind powers which, to judge by many of the ecologic effects, are out of control. If so, Christianity bears a huge burden of guilt.¹⁷

White praised the beatniks of those days because they “show a sound instinct in their affinity for Zen Buddhism, which conceives of the man-nature relationship as very nearly the mirror image of the Christian view.”¹⁸ It seems that from the beginning of the movement, Christian ecojustice has had roots in atheism and eastern philosophy;¹⁹ indeed, Christian ecotheology has become dominated by panentheism (“God *in* all”),²⁰ which is

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The Eastern philosophy has emerged to resurface in a recent call for Asian Christians to participate in interfaith dialogue “for the development of contextual intersectional or liberationist ecotheologies which may redress this inequality” with practitioners of traditional religions, Buddhists, Confucians, and Daoists. See Anna Kirkpatrick-Jung and Tanya Riches, “Towards East Asian Ecotheologies of Climate Crisis,” *Religions* 11, no. 7 (2020): 3, 6. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel11070341>

²⁰ As a notable exception, the socio-ecologist Brian Snyder modifies some panentheistic ecotheologies for a novel ecotheological perspective from the Creator/creation distinction (which he calls dualism), not in opposition to the former, but as “an alternative means of arriving at the same place.” See Brian F. Snyder, “Christian Environmental Ethics and Economic Stasis,” *Worldviews* 23 (2019): 154–70.

softer than pantheism (“God *is* all”), but even non-dispensational Evangelicals²¹ have identified this as a problematic doctrine.²²

Ecojustice crosses several lines of demarcation that dispensational and non-dispensational conservatives alike should be willing to draw, but the dispensationalist has additional grounds for rejecting Christian ecojustice based on the kingdom programs that are prevalent in ecotheological trends. For example, Laura Ruth Yordy considers herself an ecotheology apologist who sees “Christianity as overgrown by weeds that obscure and choke its ecological guidance.”²³ Yordy proposes that the Christian life is a witness that demands ecojustice, which she clarifies:

By witness I mean a particular understanding of discipleship in which the communal lives of the disciples testify, through character, worship, and action, to the Kingdom of God as inaugurated, preached, demonstrated, and promised by Jesus Christ....

The Kingdom is not a generic ideal that Jesus happened to talk about during his ministry, but the realization of his redemption of the world. And redemption is another way of describing “bringing back to God.” So, Christians witness to Christ and his work of ultimately returning all of creation back to God; that return, or communion, is the Kingdom....

Nonetheless, the Kingdom has only been inaugurated, not fulfilled, so that disciples continue to run the risk of being taunted, threatened, persecuted, or killed. Only when God establishes the

²¹ See, for example, Oliver D. Crisp “Against Mereological Panentheism,” *European Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 11, no. 2 (2019): 23–41.

²² Some ecotheologians would disagree on the importance of an orthodox understanding of God. Laura Ruth Yordy makes the shocking statement, “The anxiety about pantheism, nature-worship, or other sorts of paganism overshadows the concern about creation. But why, in a culture as nature-despising as our own, should nature-worship be of such concern? It is almost as if we hesitate to feed the starving children in Afghanistan lest we make them fat” (Laura Ruth Yordy, *Green Witness: Ecology, Ethics, and the Kingdom of God* [Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008], 41).

²³ Yordy, *Green Witness*, 40.

Kingdom, when the Reign is fulfilled, will death be vanquished entirely.²⁴

In other words, Yordy recognizes that a fundamental aspect of her ecotheological system is that the Christian life is to declare the kingdom as an already/not yet reality that grows “already” as Christians restore creation, while still anticipating a future “not yet” establishment of the kingdom.

This treatment of the “already” kingdom is key to many forms of Christian ecojustice. The Red-Letter Christian Movement (to be discussed more thoroughly below) is a Christian movement with an ecojustice agenda. One of the founders of the movement has said:

Jesus said that this peaceable kingdom [of Isa 11:6] is already breaking loose in our midst. He said, “The kingdom of God is among you” (Luke 17:21 ISV). I see signs of the kingdom here and now, and I believe that his kingdom is increasing before our eyes. To be a kingdom people is to join God in what he’s doing, and to participate with God in rescuing nature from the mess we’ve made of it.²⁵

Notice that he begins with an inaugurated kingdom that is “breaking loose” today. The result is legalism, as instead of accepting God’s promises as guarantees that he will fulfill, the promises become mandates that men must fulfill instead. However, if indeed the kingdom is not “already,” then it is not currently “breaking loose in our midst.” In other words, the theological side of this form of ecojustice falls apart if indeed the kingdom has been postponed.

After starting the Christian ecotheology revolution, Lynn White once remarked that he was amazed at how quickly churches abandoned “the old scion of Man’s Dominion over

²⁴ Ibid., 85–86, 90.

²⁵ Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 103–4.

Nature,”²⁶ which includes what is referred to here as the divine institution of responsible labor. The issue is a matter of worldview; churches in the 1960s and 1970s simply were not prepared to defend the divine institutions. By no means must one be a dispensationalist to recognize the problems in the emergent trends in Christian environmentalism, but a proper understanding of the kingdom postponement and all that it entails is beneficial to developing a distinctly dispensational worldview that is safeguarded from current trends in ecotheology.

Dispensational Response

On the sixth day, God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth” (Gen 1:26). God has put man above the rest of creation to be a responsible laborer. Man is greater than the plants and animals and is free to use them for food (9:3; Ps 8:6–8). Even the sun, moon, and stars were created for man’s service to help him tell time (Gen 1:14). He is also free to use natural resources. Before the fall, gold, bdellium, and onyx stone were available in the land of Havilah (2:11–12). After the fall, there were craftsmen in bronze and iron (3:22); indeed, Jesus, God incarnate himself, was a craftsman on earth (Mark 6:3). Abraham was a chosen shepherd whose shepherd descendants served distinct roles in God’s plan (Gen 15:1–6). God chose Isaac the shepherd over the wilderness

²⁶ The full quotation is “As the inadvertent founder, it would seem, of the Theology of Ecology, I confess amusement at the speed with which the Churches have abandoned the old scion of Man’s Dominion over Nature for the equally Biblical position of Man’s Trusteeship of Nature. Since the Churches remain, despite some competition, the chief forges for hammering out values, this is important. I feel that before too long, however, they will find themselves going on to the third legitimately Biblical position, that Man is part of a democracy of all God’s creatures, organic and inorganic, each praising his Maker according to the law of its being” (Lynn White, quoted by Matthew T. Riley, “A Spiritual Democracy of All God’s Creatures: Ecotheology and the Animals of Lynn White Jr.,” in *Divinanimality: Animal Theory, Creaturely Theology*, ed. Stephen D. Moore [New York: Fordham U P, 2014], 241).

wanderer Ishmael (21), God chose Jacob the shepherd over Esau the hunter (25–27), and God chose David, who had killed a lion and a bear in defense of his sheep (1 Sam 17). The Lord is described as being a shepherd (Ps 23) and Jesus himself is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29), which is reminiscent of all of the animals that were sacrificed for man’s benefit. The Bible presents responsible labor that uses natural resources as being good and holy.

The sufficiency of Scripture is a basic presupposition to the grammatical-historical hermeneutics of postponement theology, but ecotheologians frequently go beyond the Scriptures and appeal to the voice of nature as a source of revelation. One ecotheologian proposes the “plausibility of reading contemporary environmental concern as a response to the prophetic voices of nonhuman nature, and in that sense as a movement of the Holy Spirit.”²⁷ Another ecotheologian writes in a similar vein, “Reading the Bible ecologically involves reading with suspicion of this bias in order to identify with creation and retrieve its voice, leading to engagement in action on behalf of creation.”²⁸ In his appeal for ecotheologians to get out of this “hermeneutical wilderness,” Peet van Dyke, a non-dispensationalist theologian, summarizes the problem:

... many eco-theologians (in their over-eagerness to discover something positive in the Bible about nature) have resorted to some serious cherry-picking, wishful-thinking and to what natural scientists would call story-telling. In extreme cases, some eco-theologians have even reverted to a kind of neo-paganist imagery in their desperate attempts to give the earth and its inhabitants a voice. Speaking about “Earth” or “mother earth” in a metaphorical sense, as if she were a conscious being, is not necessarily a problem. However, in some cases the usage of these metaphors

²⁷ Rachel Muers, “The Holy Spirit, The Voices of Nature and Environmental Prophecy,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67, no. 3 (2014): 323–39.

²⁸ Jeffrey S. Lamp, “Ecotheology: A People of the Spirit for Earth,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 359.

borders on a revival of animistic beliefs, where elements of nature (both animate and inanimate) are believed to have indwelling spirits that can “speak” to us or can be addressed by humans.²⁹

Christians should recognize that such ecojustice advocates have been taken captive “through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8).

The dispensational worldview argues for responsible labor, which includes responsibly subduing the land for human productivity. If a Christian is, as White accuses, “contemptuous” of nature, then he is irresponsible, which is a violation of the divine institution. Ecotheologians seem to miss this point when they write such things as, “Within millennialism it is believed that the faithful would very soon be swept away from earth and the ‘obvious correlation is that present earth does not matter, is to be used and even destroyed with impunity.’”³⁰ Since dispensationalism is based on a holistic understanding of Scripture, responses to this accusation, and current trends in ecotheology as a whole, can come from the Old Testament, which is silent on the issue of the rapture.

Isaiah 11:6–10 is particularly relevant to the discussion, as it is a passage to which ecotheologians of a kingdom-now perspective frequently appeal:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;
And a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze;
Their young ones shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

²⁹ Peet van Dyk, “Eco-Theology: In and Out of the Wilderness,” *Old Testament Essays* 30, no. 3 (2017): 836. Dyk cites N. H. Creegan, “Theological Foundations of the Ecological Crisis,” *Stimulus* 12, no. 4 (2004): 31–33.

³⁰ Peet van Dyk “Challenges in the Search for an Ecotheology,” *Old Testament Essays* 22, no. 1 (January 2009): 200. He cites N. H. Creegan, “Theological Foundations of the Ecological Crisis,” 33.

The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,
 And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.
 They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,
 For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD
 As the waters cover the sea.
 And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,
 Who shall stand as a banner to the people;
 For the Gentiles shall seek Him,
 And His resting place shall be glorious.

Isaiah 11:6–9 describes a renewed environment, followed by verse 10, which attaches that environment to the day when the Root of Jesse “shall stand as a banner to the people.” Since dispensationalists see that day as yet future, they see the redacted curse as yet future. Christian ecojustice advocates see the kingdom as already, so they see the redacted curse as already, but with the caveat that the responsibility falls on the church to redact said curse.

A noticeable problem with non-literal approaches is that since Isaiah 11:6–9 is not fulfilled in a plain sense, inaugurated interpreters are left to guess in what sense it is fulfilled. Dwight Pentecost stated a fundamental concept of dispensational interpretation when he wrote, “Inasmuch as God gave the Word of God as a revelation to men, it would be expected that His revelation would be given in such exact and specific terms that His thoughts would be accurately conveyed and understood when interpreted according to the laws of grammar and speech.”³¹ Among kingdom-now advocates, there is not and cannot be a consensus of Isaiah's meaning, since God cannot be interpreted according to the regular conventions of communication. Eusebius of Caesarea supposed that Isaiah 11:6 is fulfilled by “the church of God, where noble people who have been decorated with worldly honors and awards are gathered together with the poor and the commoners,”³² while others “understand the wild

³¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Dunham Publishing, 1958), 10.

³² Eusebius, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. Jonathan J. Armstrong, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2014), 64.

beasts as referring to the barbarians and Greeks (Eusebius) or Jews (Cyril) transformed by the teachings of Christ.”³³ Other commentators have proposed that “a little child shall lead them” is a reference “to Christ, already mentioned in Isaiah 9:6 (Jerome) and frequently described as a shepherd (Henry), but Calvin thinks instead of communities so obedient that their leaders will not need force or violence to restrain them (Calvin: cf. Cyril).”³⁴ Verse 9 refers to the holy mountain, but this is often spiritualized as well so that the interpretation of “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD” is left to the mercy of the interpreter. One historian notes,

Christian commentators from all ages relate it to New Testament texts about the disciples going forth to all nations (Matt 28:19; cf. John 6:45) (Athanasius, *Against the Arians* 1.13.8) and predictions that ‘at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow’ (Phil 2:10) (Cyril). John Wesley’s sermon entitled ‘The General Spread of the Gospel’ (1783) is an exposition of this verse (*Sermons* 2.481–499).³⁵

Several ecotheologians propose that the ecological crisis began in the West with the Industrial Revolution that was founded on Christian ideals. There are scientific and historic problems with this assumption,³⁶ but regardless, pre-industrial Christian interpreters could not have understood a post-industrial ecological crisis in the text, much less could Isaiah’s original audience.

While dispensationalists do not always agree on every detail of Scripture, certain concepts are readily apparent and will certainly surface from a grammatical-historical perspective. The OT description of the coming kingdom as a time when the Edenic curse will be partially restrained is one such concept. Donald

³³ John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah Through the Centuries* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018), 84.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

³⁶ See, for example, S. Fred Singer and Dennis T. Avery, *Unstoppable Global Warming Every 1,500 Years*, updated and expanded ed. (Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 29–59.

Cameron has collected statements from various dispensationalists on the restored animal kingdom:

Dr Ironside comments: “[Isaiah 11] Verses 6 to 9 are not to be taken as symbolic. The actual fulfilment of the conditions of the animal world will be the natural outcome of the presence and authority of Christ.” There is a shorter prophecy in Isaiah 65:25–26 about restored animal life. Dr Scroggie writes in a similar vein: “In that period, the blessings are material as well as spiritual; the lower creation and nature also participate in the new order of things, which certainly is not true of the Christian Age”. William Kelly puts these matters into perspective: “Indeed the mighty and blessed transformation which the Lord will cause for the lower creation is but part of the still grander prospect which the reconciliation of all things opens (Col 1:20); when the things in the heavens and the things on the earth, even the universe, shall be headed up in the Christ, the heir of all things” (Eph 1:10). Evolution will play no part—were there to be evolution—a purely hypothetical situation. To be consistent, this would make the carnivorous even more efficient raptors rather than peace loving! Only He who imposed the curse can and will remove it.³⁷

Such statements align with a plain reading of the text that accepts the kingdom as a literal reality that was postponed until a future date, but it is also noteworthy that even non-dispensationalists recognize the plain meaning of the text, even if they disagree with dispensationalism.

A glaring example would be the bulk of Jewish commentators who see Isaiah 11:6–9 as a reference to the future messianic kingdom while rejecting the legitimacy of Jesus Christ

³⁷ Donald C. B. Cameron, *The Millennium: Restoration after Retribution* (Kilmarnock, Scotland: John Ritchie Ltd., 2014), 156–57. He cites H. A. Ironside, *The Prophet Isaiah* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1952), 50; W. Graham Scroggie, *Prophecy and History* (London & Edinburgh: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, n.d.), 98–99; and William Kelly, *An Exposition of the Book of Isaiah*, reprint (Oak Park, IL: Bible Truth Publishers, 1975), 274.

altogether.³⁸ J. M. M. Roberts has written a commentary on Isaiah from a theologically liberal perspective, wherein he rightly notes a connection to the pre-fallen world, but unfortunately writes off the Genesis account as a myth, such that the reliability of Isaiah and other biblical authors³⁹ is diminished. This is in clear contradiction to the grammatical-historicist's insistence on biblical inerrancy,⁴⁰ but then Roberts recognizes that from the original audience's perspective, "the expectation of a return to that mythological golden age of peace and security between humans and animals under the messianic rule of God's ideal king is not surprising."⁴¹ A key disagreement between the dispensationalist's and Roberts's perspectives is that while they agree with what the author meant, the dispensationalist *agrees with the biblical author* while Roberts diminishes it to a similar status as other Ancient Near Eastern texts.⁴²

A more condemning quotation comes from within the Christian ecojustice movement itself. Gene Tucker, who generally agrees with Lynn White,⁴³ brings out some natural

³⁸ See Andor Kelenhegyi, "The Beast Between Us: The Construction of Identity and Alterity through Animal Symbolism in Late Antique Jewish and Christian Tradition" (PhD diss., Central European University, Budapest, 2017), 219–20; cf. Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael Pisha 12:1; Sifra Hukkotai 1. Interestingly, Samuel White's commentary from 1709, which claims to approach Isaiah literally, mockingly contains, "The *Jews* are so simple as to ground their Hopes of their Imaginary Messiah, still to come, upon this and other such like Expressions, the literal Completion of which they still expect." See Samuel White, *A Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah, Wherein the Literal Sense of His Prophecy's Is Briefly Explain'd* (London: Arthur Collins, 1709), 89.

³⁹ Roberts mentions Leviticus. 26:6; Ezekiel 34:25–26; and Hosea 2:18. See J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, ed. Peter Machinist (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2015), 180. doi:10.2307/j.ctvgs0919.21.

⁴⁰ Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Dallas: Bible Communications, Inc., 2010), 275–77.

⁴¹ J. J. M. Roberts, *First Isaiah*, 180.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 180–82.

⁴³ Gene M. Tucker, "Rain on a Land Where No One Lives: The Hebrew Bible on the Environment," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 3–6.

conclusions, with which he disagrees, to a plain interpretation of Isaiah 11:6–9:

In the context of the announcement of a new Davidic king (11:1–5), these verses proclaim a transformation in the natural, cosmic sphere. Natural enemies in the animal world will live together in peace, even changing their diets. On the one hand, as so frequently in the prophetic literature, the poem stresses the relationship between justice, mercy, peace, and harmony in the natural order (cf. also Hos 1:18 and Ezek 34:25). Who does not long for a world without fear and violence? But on the other hand, the lines suggest that the world may have been created good, even very good, but not quite good enough. The text presumes a negative evaluation of the world as it is, filled with predators and prey, violence and death. One message of the passage, to put it bluntly, is that there will come a time when the world will be made safe for domestic animals and for children.

It is a serious problem for the affirmation of a good creation. Such visions, wonderful as they are, when linked with the sense of a fallen humanity and an earth that is cursed, pave the way for the apocalyptic rejection of this world as it is. So, does creation need to be redeemed?⁴⁴

Notice Tucker's apparent agreement with dispensationalists over the original intention of Isaiah 11:1–5 (cf. Hos 1:18; Ezek 34:25). The thrust of the disagreement is not over what the text of Isaiah seems to say, but rather it is over whether or not one should accept the plain meaning. An underlying disagreement is that Tucker argues that the ground was not corrupted at the fall, but instead that humanity's relationship to nature became detached and ambiguous.⁴⁵ His article never offers a reconciliation of Isaiah 11 with his ecotheology, but seems to brush the issue under a rug.⁴⁶ This passage is troublesome for the

⁴⁴ Ibid., 11–12.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 6–9. His conclusion is based on a division of the text into a Priestly and a Yahwist source, which tends to be another point of contention with dispensationalism's high view of Scripture.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 16.

ecojustice perspectives on the past (what happened at the fall), the present (the current state of nature), and the future (whether a curse will be reduced), but it fits perfectly within the dispensational framework of history.

The curse will be partially redacted in the days of the messianic kingdom such that natural enemies from the animal kingdom can dwell in peace. This promise is stated quite plainly in Isaiah 11 and elsewhere. The defense of responsible labor on the grounds of kingdom postponement is a particularly dispensational aspect of worldview, since other theologians spiritualize, allegorize, or mythologize the promises of a redacted curse.

The Kingdom Offer and the Divine Institutions of Marriage and Family

Trends in Critical Theology

Current trends in critical theology, specifically related to feminist liberation theology and queer theology undermine heterosexual complementarianism, which is a biblical restriction of gender, gender roles, and sexuality that serves as the basis of the divine institutions of marriage and family. The Christian versions of these trends will tend to read Jesus as establishing a spiritual kingdom of social justice on earth, which comes with a church age mandate for Christians to endorse that which the world deems as “social justice,” thereby leaving the church vulnerable to views that are in clear contradiction to the biblical text. Several of these systems collapse, however, if one starts with the presupposition that Jesus offered a literal kingdom that was rejected and that he therefore postponed the kingdom to a future day.

Modern evangelical liberation theologians tend to read Jesus as spiritualizing and inaugurating the kingdom, such that the church’s current mission is to do likewise. Often the liberation theologian’s starting point is similar to that of the dispensationalists. For example, the liberation theologian, David Gushee, recounts his work with Glen Stassen:

Kingdom hope intensified, we suggest, whenever real-world Jewish realities worsened. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 587–586 BC, the Exile, the loss of Jewish sovereignty under a succession of world powers, and, in the time of Jesus, the miseries and offenses of pagan Roman occupation, sharpened and even more deeply politicized Kingdom hope—which became the hope of Israel being delivered from foreign oppressors, and sometimes broadened to the hope of a world transformed. Kingdom hope was never otherworldly, though sometimes it sounds somewhat dreamy with lions and lambs lying down in peace together. It was certainly a social hope; a this-worldly hope; a Jewish hope. Its themes are entirely alien to the classical world of Greece and Rome.

It is this account of this particular species of apocalyptic, messianic, Jewish eschatology that we offered as the theological frame within which Jesus of Nazareth, Messiah of Israel and Lord of the Church and the world, offered his moral teachings.⁴⁷

It seems from this quotation that Gushee and Stassen recognize the plain description of the kingdom according to the OT prophets. The great divide occurs over their understanding of how Jesus used the Old Testament and what he did while he was on earth. Rather than seeing Jesus as offering to establish this literal kingdom, they see Jesus as redefining the prophetic tradition and making the kingdom of God into a current reality of social justice that carries over as a mandate for the church:

Through the exegetical work that Glen Stassen primarily undertook, we became convinced that Jesus drew most heavily for his version of ‘Kingdom of God’ on materials in Isaiah, especially the redemptive/restorationist themes of Isaiah 40–66. In choosing to anchor his preaching mainly in this part of Isaiah, Jesus was authentically connected to his Jewish roots but, perhaps like all prophets, selectively appropriated those aspects of the tradition that he wanted to highlight...

⁴⁷ David P. Gushee and Cori D. Norred, “The Kingdom of God, Hope and Christian Ethics,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 31, no. 1 (2018): 5–6.

Stassen and I identified seven ‘marks’ of the Kingdom of God in Jesus’ preaching, citing passages in the Synoptic Gospels that allude to, cite or parallel passages in Isaiah. These seven purported marks of the Kingdom are deliverance (salvation), justice, peace, healing, restoration of community, the experience of God’s active redeeming presence, and joyful human response....

To the extent that we practice his peace-making, justice-making, community-restoring, relationship-healing teachings, we participate in the inaugurated Kingdom of God. This is what it means to be a follower, or disciple, of Jesus Christ. This is also the primary task of the Christian Church.⁴⁸

Their evangelical liberation theology became manifest in gender issues, which resulted in their leaving their roles at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1996.⁴⁹

Gushee and Stassen recognize “a patriarchal strand [i.e., complementarianism] and an egalitarian strand in the New Testament, in Paul and beyond Paul,” but they write it off as a “deeply ingrained patriarchalism of the ancient world,” preferring that “egalitarianism certainly fits the characteristics of our own ethical method much more adequately.”⁵⁰ This fluid approach to biblical inerrancy is common in egalitarianism.⁵¹ Phyllis Trible is a feminist who writes more bluntly:

A feminist who loves the Bible produces, in the thinking of many, an oxymoron. Perhaps clever as rhetoric, the description offers no possibility for existential integrity. After all, if no man can serve

⁴⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁹ David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 235.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 240.

⁵¹ See Carlos Montoya, “How Egalitarianism Attacks Inerrancy in the Latin American Church,” in *God’s Perfect Word: The Implications of Inerrancy for the Global Church*, ed. Mark Tatlock (Sun Valley, CA: The Master’s Academy International, 2015), 64–76.

two masters, no woman can serve two authorities, a master called scripture and a mistress called feminism.⁵²

The call to feminism is a call to abandon the objective meaning of the biblical text; indeed, the related doctrine of the social gospel typically rests on liberal theology, as Earl Radmacher explains,

The leading concept among leading liberal theologians was that the church is a spiritual society with the task of spreading the “social gospel,” which act paves the way for the coming kingdom.... Because of their blind optimism as to the essential goodness of man and his possibility of progress, they saw little need for the local churches, which simply impeded this progress by feverishly clinging to their ecclesiastical dogmas and traditions.⁵³

While the dispensationalist explains the church’s mandate in terms of evangelism and discipleship,⁵⁴ systems that advocate a liberation, a social gospel, or the like (whether they are liberal or conservative), typically blur the church’s vision into growing a spiritual kingdom on earth⁵⁵ through charitable works to usher in the eschaton.⁵⁶ This view is incompatible with dispensationalism for several reasons,⁵⁷ but one key reason is that dispensationalism

⁵² Phyllis Trible, quoted in Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism With the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992), 109.

⁵³ Earl D. Radmacher, *The Nature of the Church* (Hayesville, NC: Schoettle Publishing, 1996), 92.

⁵⁴ Bret Nazworth, “God’s Grace in Missions, Evangelism, and Disciple-Making,” in *Freely by His Grace: Classical Grace Theology*, ed. J. B. Hixon, Rick Whitmore, and Roy Zuck (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel P, 2012), 553–80.

⁵⁵ The postmillennialist version of this is presented well in David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, TX: Dominion P, 2007), 71.

⁵⁶ John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 886–88.

⁵⁷ Thomas Ice was a Christian Reconstructionist who was a dispensationalist from 1974 to 1986. The system eventually collapsed as it

sees the kingdom as postponed as opposed to an inaugurated, growing spiritual reality.

Another hermeneutical key to feminist liberation philosophy is the worldview lens that sees the world as being run by patriarchy that oppresses women. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza exemplifies this aspect of critical feminist liberation theology when she writes regarding the woman with the spirit of infirmity who was bent over in Luke 13:10–17, “Recognizing ourselves in the story of the wo/man bent double, we wo/men must identify ourselves *as wo/men* deformed and exploited by societal and ecclesiastical kyriarchy.”⁵⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza expounds further,

In short, a critical feminist the*logy of liberation names the*logically the kyriarchal bondage of wo/men in Western society and church. Kyriarchy inculcates and perpetrates not only sexism but also racism and property-class relationships as basic structures of wo/men’s oppression. In a kyriarchal society or religion all wo/men are bound into a system of male privilege and domination, but impoverished third-world wo/men constitute the bottom of the oppressive kyriarchal pyramid. Kyriarchy cannot be toppled except when the basis or bottom of the kyriarchal pyramid—which consists of the exploitation of multiply oppressed wo/men—becomes liberated.⁵⁹

We are socialized into gender roles as soon as we are born. Every culture gives different symbolic significance and derives different social roles from the human biological capacities of sexual intercourse, childbearing, and lactation. Sexual dimorphism and strictly defined gender roles are products of a kyriarchal culture, which maintain and legitimize structures of control and domination, that is, the exploitation of wo/men by men.⁶⁰

was too contradictory. His testimony is recommended and available in Thomas Ice and Hershel Wayne House, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland: Multnomah, 1988), 7ff.

⁵⁸ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons: Explorations in Feminist Interpretation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 247.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 247.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 250–51.

This lens depicts males negatively and raises the question of the reliability of a male Christ, and so a need arises for unique feminist christologies:

As the early proponents of feminist theology strove to understand the exclusion of women and women's experience in church practice and theological reflection, they were increasingly faced with the realization that it may be the very fabric of Christianity that caused the exclusion. Traditional belief held that Christ's incarnation and subsequent death and descent into hell were to enable the divine to experience all and therefore redeem all. If Christ could not experience being female, then the question arose as to whether the female state could be redeemed.⁶¹

Christian feminism often reframes the doctrine of Christ so that Christology becomes "a political practice, aiming not only at personal change, but also at structural change."⁶² The redirecting of attention to overthrowing the patriarchy distracts the feminist from the biblical teaching of redemption, as "redemption, then, within feminist Christology is about liberation. Therefore, it involves struggle against oppression as well as struggle for personal integrity and human freedom; it is about wholeness and transformation."⁶³

Feminist theologies quickly fall into christological fallacies, which are too numerous to list here, but several of the more liberal errors that are relevant to the current discussion can be boiled down to a Christology of embodiment in place of a metaphysical Christology. The notion, in so many words, is that since God became human, the Bible is not the best source of Christology, but rather people should turn to their own bodies to understand Christ. The feminist theologian, Rita Nakashima Brock, has called the more Scriptural approach to Christology "the broken heart of patriarchy, as we have been encouraged to

⁶¹ Lisa Isherwood, "Feminist Christologies," in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, ed. Delbert Burkett (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 428.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 432.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

rip ourselves away from what is dear to us: feeling, the earth, others, ourselves.”⁶⁴ The result is a Christology that associates Christ with “erotic power.” Lisa Isherwood is another feminist christologist who summarizes this school of thought:

Carter Heyward and Rita Brock are two feminist theologians associated with the notion of Christ as erotic power. Brock believes that when speaking of Jesus as powerful, we have to be quite clear about what type of power we are speaking of, and for her it is erotic power. This understanding leaves us in no doubt about where the source of this power lies. It is not an abstract concept but is deeply embedded in our very being and is part of our nature, residing there as our innate desire to relate with each other, not just for the benefit of the individual self, but for the justice and growth of the whole cosmos. This kind of power is wild and cannot be controlled, and living at this level saves us from sterility that comes from living by the head alone. Christianity has always encouraged *agape*, a type of love that Brock sees as heady and objective and therefore not as something that will change the world. *Eros* on the other hand will engage us and so can change the world. Brock is convinced that erotic power redeems both the world and Christ.⁶⁵

This is the root of feminist and queer theological understandings of God, but the topic at hand is eschatology and specifically how kingdom postponement protects dispensational congregants. Voelkel recognizes her theology’s dependence on an already/not yet view of the kingdom:

Any constructive theological project that takes seriously women’s and genderqueer people’s bodies and sexualities is deeply eschatological. That is to say, the vision of how and what the world ought to be and how and what God’s future holds forms the basis and inspiration for much of liberated, feminist, queered embodiment. Especially in a colonized context, an eschatological

⁶⁴ Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1988), cited in Lisa Isherwood, “Feminist Christologies,” 435.

⁶⁵ Isherwood, “Feminist Christologies,” 435.

vision is necessary to discern what liberation, decolonization, and hope might look like.

... Eschatology has traditionally been focused on the “last things.” But many Christians recognize that eschatology is more properly about the promised reign of God in all human experience and in all creation. It has powerful implications for both the individual and the community. Eschatology is not primarily concerned with what lies beyond death and outside of history. Eschatology is a practical and vital hope for the world as it is right now and in which we are all participating.

This “here and now” eschatology fits well with a liberation, feminist, and queer understanding of eschatology. It roots our Christian hope in what God is doing to create a more just and liberated world. Nevertheless, precisely because justice is a major part of what we are hoping for, a sense of the timing and pacing of the eschaton is key.

Here, I am aligning myself with a tradition that celebrates an inaugurated eschatology as contrasted with a “realized” or “sapiential” eschatology on the one hand and “futuristic” or “apocalyptic” eschatology on the other.⁶⁶

Several liberation and queer theologians would disagree with Voelkel’s future kingdom, but the future aspect of her eschatology does not conflict with her main contention. Rather, she seems to be demonstrating that it is the “already” aspect of the kingdom that her queer theology depends on, so allowing for a future kingdom does not contradict liberation theology so long as there is still a current spiritual kingdom to rely upon.⁶⁷ Postponement theology rejects this foundational aspect of Voelkel’s system.

Another way to view Queer Theology and Feminist Theology is to see them as the theological sides of Queer Theory and

⁶⁶ Ibid., 79–80.

⁶⁷ Social gospel sentiments have also infiltrated progressive dispensationalism, which has a similar already/not yet approach to the kingdom. See the discussion on progressive dispensationalism and related issues in Andrew Woods, *The Coming Kingdom* (Duluth, MN: Grace Gospel P), 345–47.

Feminist Theory, which in turn are fields of Critical Theory.⁶⁸ Modern Critical Theory is inseparable from “intersectionality,” which is a term that Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined in 1989 to address legal challenges for Black women,⁶⁹ but has since proven to be a constant work-in-progress, a global academic movement to identify and engulf new critical groups.⁷⁰ The queer theologian Chris Greenough illustrates,

Intersectionality shows how systems of oppression and discrimination are multiple. The most marginalised people, therefore, fall under multiple minority groups. Writings from feminist and womanist thinkers were critical in the development of thinking (contesting categories of identity and exploring issues of marginalisation) which later came to characterise queer theory.⁷¹

Critical Race Theory is another discipline of Critical Theory, which one would imagine is separate from Queer Theology and Feminist Theology, but since they are under the umbrella of Critical Theory, they are intertwined through intersectionality. Another queer theologian has observed “that questions of sex and questions of race are always inextricably related.”⁷²

Racism is sin. It is anti-biblical as are the aberrant views of gender roles and sexuality that Queer Theory and Feminist Theory promote, but queer and feminist theologies have managed

⁶⁸ Chris Greenough traces the development of queer theology from its roots in liberation theology to feminist theology to queer theology, which is the inevitable result of what came previously. See Chris Greenough, *Queer Theologies* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 8–32.

⁶⁹ Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1 (1989): 139–67.

⁷⁰ For a history of significant developments through 2013, see Devon W. Carbado, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Vickie M. Mays, Barbara Tomlinson, “Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory,” *Du Bois Review* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2013), 405–24.

⁷¹ Greenough, *Queer Theologies*, 24.

⁷² Susannah Cornwall, *Controversies in Queer Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2011), 104.

to infiltrate mainstream Christianity in recent years through their attachment to Black theology. As one “African American queer lesbian womanist scholar” puts it, “The disenfranchisement of women intersects with the disenfranchisement of Black men, of poor people, etc.; the disenfranchisement of Black lesbian women intersects with the disenfranchisement of transgender women, and so on.”⁷³ Well-intended evangelicals have become entangled with some views that undermine the divine institutions of marriage and family by accepting certain fronts of anti-racism that are accompanied by critical theology.⁷⁴

The hashtag #blacklivesmatter emerged in 2013 after the acquittal of George Zimmerman, and a movement grew, which led to the establishment of Black Lives Matter Global Network

⁷³ Pamela R. Lightsey, *Our Lives Matter: A Womanist Queer Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015), xx.

⁷⁴ Similarities that predate Crenshaw’s intersectionality can be seen in the example of Martin Luther King Jr., who did much good for America, but whose low view of Scripture led to a rejection of the divine sonship of Jesus, the virgin birth, and the bodily resurrection and therefore a spiritualization of the second coming of Christ, the day of judgment, immortality, and the kingdom of God. King’s theology has gone essentially unnoticed by evangelicals, who rightfully praise the good that he did, but fail to examine the underlying presuppositions. King is rightly declared a heretic, yet he is hailed as an icon of Christian social justice by atheists and Christians alike.

For an example of King’s low view of Scripture, see Martin Luther King Jr. “Light on the Old Testament from the Ancient Near East,” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume I: Called to Serve, January 1929-June 1951*, ed. Clayborne Carson, Ralph Luker, and Penny A. Russell (Los Angeles: University of California at Berkeley P, 1992), 162–80.

For King’s rejection of the divine sonship of Jesus, the virgin birth, and the bodily resurrection, see Martin Luther King Jr. “What Experiences of Christians Living in the Early Christian Century Led to the Christian Doctrines of the Divine Sonship of Jesus, the Virgin Birth, and the Bodily Resurrection,” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume I*, 225–30.

For King’s spiritualization of the second coming of Christ, the day of judgment, immortality, and the kingdom of God, see Martin Luther King Jr. “The Christian Pertinence of Eschatological Hope,” in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. Volume I*, 268–73.

(BLM) to serve as a loose network of activists in the Black Lives Matter movement.⁷⁵ It has been estimated that “about half of the United States’ Protestant clergy (both Black and White) were engaged by BLM, sensing its possibility for racial justice,”⁷⁶ so it seems that BLM perspectives could be integrating into a significant portion of the American Protestant worldview. At first, this may sound like good news for dispensationalists, who want to reach people of all races, but BLM actually promotes a worldview that undermines the divine institutions of marriage and family.

The BLM website featured a “What We Believe” page, which has since been withdrawn, though the original version is archived on the University of Central Arkansas website.⁷⁷ This statement put BLM’s intentions in clear terms and is worth resurfacing here since there has been no indication that BLM has changed views. The statement includes,

We see ourselves as part of the global Black family, and we are aware of the different ways we are impacted or privileged as Black people who exist in different parts of the world.

We are guided by the fact that all Black lives matter, regardless of actual or perceived sexual identity, gender identity, gender expression, economic status, ability, disability, religious beliefs or disbeliefs, immigration status, or location.

We make space for transgender brothers and sisters to participate and lead.

We are self-reflexive and do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence....

⁷⁵ Adam Szetela, “Black Lives Matter at Five: Limits and Possibilities,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 43, no. 8 (2020): 1358–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1638955>

⁷⁶ Melissa M. Matthes, *When Sorrow Comes: The Power of Sermons from Pearl Harbor to Black Lives Matter* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2021), 312.

⁷⁷ Available online at <https://uca.edu/training/files/2020/09/black-Lives-Matter-Handout.pdf>, accessed August 17, 2021.

We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and “villages” that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable.

We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking, or rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual (unless s/he or they disclose otherwise)

We embody and practice justice, liberation, and peace in our engagements with one another.⁷⁸

Of particular interest to this discussion is the explicit assault on the divine institutions of marriage and family. All spiritually healthy Christians want to help trans people—though there is disagreement over methodology. A difference with BLM is on the treatment of those who are cisgender; in addition to uplifting black trans folk, whatever that means, BLM specifically wants to dismantle cisgender privilege. In the BLM worldview, it is preferable to be queer rather than heterosexual, and families should be blurred into wider villages.

The Black Lives Matters movement does not claim to be Christian, though Christians are accepting the cause and ideology. Cru is a large Evangelical parachurch organization that is generally reflective of the state of Evangelicalism. Cru has been drifting into Critical Theory for several years now, and the events of 2020 increased the tensions within the organization, thus prompting several staff members to write a 174-page document entitled, *Seeking Clarity and Unity*⁷⁹ in November 2020. The document circulated internally before being released to the public in May 2021. Cru has since then withdrawn the document from its website.⁸⁰ While, according to the document,

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Scott Pendleton et al., *Seeking Clarity and Unity*, Report, November 6, 2020 (Cru, 2020), <https://languageandreligion.files.wordpress.com/2021/05/seeking-clarity-and-unity.pdf>.

⁸⁰ In the *Christianity Today* article, “Cru Divided Over Emphasis on Race,” Curtis Yee gives the history of the document and links to a page on

Critical Race Theory is the bulk of the concern within Cru, it is inseparable from Queer Theory, which involves topics that are recurring in the document as well.⁸¹ As circles within Cru accept the BLM agenda,⁸² one is left wondering if this Evangelical mega-organization is now, in accordance with BLM's purpose, trying to "disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure."

Perhaps a more consistent example of a critical theology movement that claims to be Christian is the Red Letter Christian movement. The movement's co-founder, Tony Campolo, describes the term:

By calling ourselves Red Letter Christians, we are alluding to those old versions of the Bible wherein the words of Jesus are printed in red. In adopting the name, we are saying that we are committed to living out the things that Jesus taught.⁸³

Campolo believes the entire Bible to be inspired, but sees a contrast rather than continuity throughout, as "those black letters that make up the words of the Old Testament are the record of those mighty acts in which we see God revealed," whereas in "the red letters of the Gospels, Jesus spells out for us specific directives for how his followers should relate to others and what sacrifices are required of them if they are to be citizens of his kingdom."⁸⁴ Since Jesus spoke much about the kingdom, and since Red Letter Christians understand Jesus' words as

the Cru website that is not functional, presumably because the document has been withdrawn. It is still available online elsewhere. See Curtis Yee, "Cru Divided Over Emphasis on Race," *Christianity Today*, June 3, 2021, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2021/june/cru-divided-over-emphasis-on-race.html>.

⁸¹ Pendleton et al., *Seeking Clarity and Unity* (Cru, 2020), 4, 12, 24, 35, 40, 45, 47, 50, 56, 59, 73, 74, 75, 92, 93, 95, 97, 98, 101, 103, 104, 110, 122.

⁸² Ibid., 4, 6, 9, 29, 40, 41.

⁸³ Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Christians* (Grand Rapids: Regal Books, 2008), 20–21.

⁸⁴ Shane Claiborne and Tony Campolo, *Red Letter Revolution: What If Jesus Really Meant What He Said?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), 8.

commanding the church to advocate social justice, it comes as no surprise that much of the Red Letter justice agenda is inseparable from a kingdom-now eschatology.

On the surface, it may seem that Red Letter Christians have a high regard for Jesus and the Bible, but the Red Letter Christians website is more telling. The website has a blog with categories such as Creation & Environment, Interfaith, Race, Women, and LGBTQ+, each featuring blog posts from their perspective, which has plenty of examples of critical theologians appealing to non-biblical and even anti-biblical sources⁸⁵ and cherry-picking⁸⁶ the biblical evidence when they do use the Bible. Red Letter Christians redefine Christ's kingdom teaching into a current spiritual kingdom of social justice as is apparent in the "Red Letter Christian Pledge," which is as follows:

I dedicate my life to Jesus, and commit to live as if Jesus meant the things he said in the "red letters" of Scripture.

I will allow Jesus and his teaching to shape my decisions and priorities.

⁸⁵ For example, a blog post from the Red Letter Christians website includes the following: "As recently as 2013, you could catch me making Christian apologetic arguments against same-sex marriage. But the more I've consumed content by artists like Lil Nas X, the more I realize the church and some of the puritanical standards I parroted end up creating a special kind of hell on earth for those on the receiving end of that condemnation. And for that I am sorry." See Mark Bauer, "What Lil Nas X is Telling Us About the Hell We Create," *Red Letter Christians*, April 7, 2021, <https://www.redletterchristians.org/what-lil-nas-x-is-telling-us-about-the-hell-we-create/>.

⁸⁶ For example, another blog post on the Red Letter Christians website has "... where is our sexual ethic to be found? In Biblical principle, not precedent. Jesus tells us to love our neighbor and to do to others what we want done to us. Is cheating on my partner wrong? Yes, because it is not how I would wish to be treated, and it is not loving toward my partner. It has nothing to do with my or my potential bedmate's genitals." See Hugh Hollowell, "Open and Affirming Because of the Bible," *Red Letter Christians*, November 30, 2011, <https://www.redletterchristians.org/open-and-affirming-because-of-the-bible/>.

I denounce belief-only Christianity and refuse to allow my faith to be a ticket into heaven and an excuse to ignore the suffering world around me.

I will seek first the Kingdom of God—on earth as it is in heaven—and live in a way that moves the world towards God’s dream, where the first are last and the last are first, where the poor are blessed and the peacemakers are the children of God, working towards a society where all are treated equally and resources shared equitably.

I recognize that I will fall short in my attempts to follow Jesus, and I trust in God’s grace and the community to catch me when I do.

I know that I cannot do this alone, so I commit to share this journey with others who are walking in the way of Jesus. I will surround myself with people who remind me of Jesus, help me become more like him and hold me accountable for my actions and words.

I will share Jesus with the world, with my words and with my deeds. Like Jesus, I will interrupt injustice, and stand up for the life and dignity of all. I will allow my life to point towards Christ, everywhere I go.⁸⁷

There are several points of contention between the Red Letter Christians Movement and orthodox Christianity, but to the extent that Red Letter Christians try to apply the Bible, they do so from a position that cannot endure being separated from a kingdom-now perspective.

The divine institutions of marriage and family have been under attack since Genesis. Current threats within Christendom to God’s plan for these institutions are found in critical theology, which combines feminist theology, queer theology, and other critical theology agendas that seem at first to have good intentions. These intentions may be attractive to well-meaning Christians, especially on the topic of racism, but Critical Theory has a way of combining these issues in an anti-biblical manner. The dispensationalist sees Jesus as offering to establish a literal kingdom on earth, but theologians who hold to liberal critical theologies will typically see Jesus as building a spiritual kingdom

⁸⁷ “Red Letter Christian Pledge,” *Red Letter Christians*, accessed August 19, 2021, <https://www.redletterchristians.org/pledge/>.

of social justice, which is a work that continues today through a mandate to build a social justice spiritual kingdom now. On the grounds of postponement theology, dispensationalists have a unique aspect to protect their worldview from current trends in critical theology.

Dispensationalist Response

Dispensationalists are not the only ones who see problems in liberal critical theologies and theories. In her critique of Christian feminism, Mary A. Kassian does well to summarize a key presupposition to the feminist hermeneutic:

Biblical feminists have as a basic premise the idea that truth is relative; there is no absolute right or wrong and no ultimate standard. According to Biblical feminists, even the truth in the Bible is subject to alteration. This attitude is well-disguised; however, if one examines Biblical feminist literature closely, one can find numerous examples of it.⁸⁸

Conservative Christians agree that the Bible has objective meaning. They may disagree with each other, and perhaps even contradict themselves on certain issues, but they recognize that the relativism of feminism is not biblically sustainable.

Anyone with internet access should be able to tell that wherever Judeo-Christian worldviews thrive, so do women. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, on the other hand, accuses the complementarian view of marriage of being a Western kyriarchy that is based on paganism, not Christianity,⁸⁹ insisting that women are “deformed and exploited by societal and ecclesiastical kyriarchy.”⁹⁰ While conservatives recognize that there is exploitation within churches, such activity is contrary to conservative biblicism, not because of it. MacArthur and Mayhue summarize the biblical position well:

⁸⁸ Mary A. Kassian, *Women, Creation and the Fall* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1990), 147.

⁸⁹ Fiorenza, *Changing Horizons*, 248–49.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 247.

The teaching in 1 Timothy 2 shows that women in the church are not permitted to hold the office of a pastor or teacher (cf. Acts 13:1; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11). However, this would not preclude a woman from teaching in other appropriate contexts, such as teaching other women (Titus 2:3–4) or teaching children (2 Tim 1:5; 3:14–15). The Bible clearly indicates that women are spiritual equals with men and that the ministry of women is essential to the body of Christ. Nonetheless, by God’s design, women are excluded from leadership over men in the church.⁹¹

Accusations that complementarianism is a paganistic kyriarchy that needs to be overthrown simply fail to represent the position.

Moreover, any conservative Christian should be grieved by the plight of racism in America, including White on Black racist attitudes and actions. Dismantling Black American families will not make the situation better, so any Christian who is willing to defend the divine institution of family should be ready to stand against Black Lives Matter for their anti-family agenda.

Christian attacks on the institution of marriage even include accusations that Jesus was gay.⁹² Postponement theology comes from a holistic reading of the Bible, which recognizes homosexual behavior as a sin that extends beyond Jewish taboo as it is a corruption of God’s intention for marriage that carries through the dispensations, but by no means does it take a postponement theologian to recognize this sinful behavior.

Accusations of Western kyriarchy, attempts to destroy black families, theories that Jesus was gay, etc.: these are all false teachings from the more liberal critical theologians, but this is not to say that every flaw in critical theology is easily identifiable. Regarding transgender people, Gushee and Stassen write,

⁹¹ MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 764.

⁹² See, for example, Theodore W. Jennings Jr., “The ‘Gay’ Jesus,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Jesus*, ed. Delbert Burkett (West Sussex, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 443–57; E. L. Kornegay Jr., *A Queering of Black Theology: James Baldwin’s Blues Project and Gospel Prose* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 114–18.

Transgender people need to be recipients of Christ's delivering, compassionate love and need to be offered welcome in community. They need justice and an end to domination violence, economic discrimination, and exclusion from community. They need to be treated as sacred persons in God's sight.⁹³

A conservative Christian may like to agree with the *words* of this statement, but the *underlying sentiment* is corrupted. Nobody in the discussion wants the transgendered to face violence, economic hardship, or exclusion from society, but the first and greatest need that all people have—queer and cisgender alike—is the gospel of salvation. Hopefully, Gushee and Stassen would agree. Hopefully, they would also agree that sacred persons in God's sight should conform to his vision for them. The disagreement is not over whether or not people should love transgender people, but rather the argument is over what God wants for them. Those who defend the divine institutions of marriage and family have a different understanding of God's intentions from those who do not.

These and many other points of contention with critical theology are readily available to any conservative Christian, but the dispensationalist has a framework of kingdom postponement that he can draw from for additional defenses against these threats to marriage and family. Jesus' earthly ministry is source material for much of the social justice reading of Scripture. To recount Gushee's earlier comment, "To the extent that we practice his peace-making, justice-making, community-restoring, relationship-healing teachings, we participate in the inaugurated Kingdom of God. This is what it means to be a follower, or disciple, of Jesus Christ." The Red Letter Pledge includes, "Like Jesus, I will interrupt injustice, and stand up for the life and dignity of all." The Bible says that Jesus performed miracles and unfortunate people benefitted. The social justice reading seems to indicate that Jesus' healing ministry was a "justice-making" ministry with the purposes to "interrupt injustice." The kingdom postponement reading has that Jesus, like other prophets, used miracles to support the authenticity of

⁹³ Gushee and Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics*, 250.

his claims, with one of these claims being the authentic offer of a literal, earthly, messianic kingdom.

For example, Matthew 9:1–8 records an instance of Jesus healing a paralytic wherein Jesus stated his purpose for the miracle. He did not heal the man for the man's sake. Some scribes were present who accused Jesus of blasphemy (Matt 9:3), so he healed the man, telling the scribes, "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sin" (v. 6). The paralytic certainly benefitted, but the miracle was to verify the Messiah for the scribes' sake. From there, Jesus went to Matthew's house, where he dined with the tax collectors (vv. 9–13), and this was a stumbling block for the Pharisees who ultimately rejected Christ. Likewise, it should be a stumbling block for the Red Letter Christians, as their worldview, if applied consistently, should have them side with the Pharisees in this situation, after all, the tax collectors were the first-century bourgeoisie who oppressed the proletariats (cf. Luke 3:12–13).

Jesus did send out his disciples to perform miracles, but that does not mean that this particular sending carries over to the church. The sending of the twelve in Matthew 10 came with the message, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 10:7). The dispensationalist Stanley Toussaint comments, "To authenticate their message concerning the nearness of the kingdom, the Lord gave them power to perform signs. These miracles were not to be used merely to instill awe, but to show that the kingdom was at hand (Matt 12:28)."⁹⁴

After Israel's utter rejection of the Messiah and messianic kingdom at the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit (12:22–50), Jesus revealed that there would be an interval before the coming tribulation and subsequent kingdom. Even after the shift, Jesus' ministry remained focused on Israel. Matthew 15:21–28 tells of a Canaanite woman who came to Jesus for a miracle, but Jesus initially refused because this was not his mission, but when she recognizes her separation from Jesus' initial ministry, he does help her. Stanley Toussaint comments,

⁹⁴ Stanley Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1981), 139.

When she comes to Him as a Gentile outside the pale of Jewish blessings, she is helped. She sees that she has no right to their blessings, but turns to Him in faith alone. On the basis of her great faith, not because of her relationship to the covenant people, her request is granted.

In this miracle of mercy there is a clear foreview of Gentile blessing which fits the pattern established in Matthew 1:1 and Romans 15:8–9. The actions of Christ show that He was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God for confirmation of the promises made unto the fathers and that the Gentiles might glorify God for His mercy.⁹⁵

Jesus loves Gentiles, but the notion that Jesus came and established a kingdom of justice on earth simply fails to recognize the entire narrative. The messianic kingdom will be of a thoroughly Jewish nature,⁹⁶ and Jesus offered it to the Jews. When God's attention shifted to the Gentiles during the postponement's resulting interim, the use of miracles went through a shift as well. Miracles initially confirmed the dispensational shift to the church age and the human agents that God selected for ministering the transition. Once the shift was accomplished, God withdrew the miraculous gifts, as is evidenced by Paul leaving Epaphroditus and Trophimus sick (Phil 2:25–27; 2 Tim 4:20) and Paul's and James's instruction for Christians to resort to medicine rather than miraculous healing (1 Tim 5:23; Jas 5:10–15).⁹⁷ If the insistence on social justice comes from Christ's kingdom offer and postponement, then it would follow that social justice should have ceased when the miracles ceased.

As noted, Rebecca Voelkel holds to inaugurated eschatology with a future kingdom. This is a fitting framework for her queer

⁹⁵ Ibid., 196.

⁹⁶ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, rev. ed. (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2018), 403–84.

⁹⁷ For an excellent treatment of this topic from a dispensational perspective, see Moses Onwubiko, *Signs and Wonders: A Biblical Reply to the Claims of Modern Day Miracle Workers* (Nashville: Grace Evangelistic Ministries, 2009), 60–61, 74.

liberation theology. What is particularly interesting is that she utilizes kingdom offer language in reference to Jesus' preaching, but unfortunately her version of the offer skews the kingdom. She writes of Christ's ministry that the "kin-dom is already 'on offer' for anyone who is willing to accept it (Luke 19:11–27)."⁹⁸ Rather than seeing Jesus offer a national kingdom to national Israel, she sees Jesus as redefining the kingdom into a present spiritual reality for individuals who accept it. This difference brings vastly different results; while the dispensationalist has evangelism and discipleship on his agenda, Voelkel's current task is to build a movement of lovers who are "guided by an embodied and sexual eschatological vision of liberation and decolonization ... practicing revolutionary patience even as they are prepared for and awaiting the inbreaking of the kin-dom."⁹⁹ To accept postponement theology is to reject the very foundations of critical theology.

As a final word on the matter, it is worth mentioning that dispensationalism's most famous doctrine, the pretribulational rapture, is frequently critiqued for distracting Christians from social justice. One critic writes, "This doctrine [the rapture], when combined with dispensational theology, had much to do with the 'great reversal' of evangelicals from their earlier commitments to civil rights and equality."¹⁰⁰ In reality, the direct opposite is true. The imminent rapture is a source of urgency for the dispensationalist.¹⁰¹ The same critic disregards dispensationalist soteriology since "their teaching specifically states that eternal security is reserved solely for those who have been saved from their sins through the atoning blood of Jesus

⁹⁸ Rebecca M. M. Voelkel, *Carnal Knowledge of God: Embodied Love and the Movement for Justice* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2017), 79–81.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 131–32.

¹⁰⁰ L. B. Gallien Jr., "American Evangelicalism's Struggle Over Civil Rights," in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Religion and Social Justice*, ed. Michael D. Palmer and Stanley M. Burgess (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 526.

¹⁰¹ For a discussion on this and other benefits of understanding the rapture, see Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House), 3–21.

Christ, God's Son—his provision for their sins.”¹⁰² The stakes are high. Perhaps there is a degree of temporal comfort in conforming to the world, but the message of salvation offers a comfort that is far beyond any discomfort in this life. By no means does a person need to be a dispensationalist to believe in Christ alone for eternal life, but the doctrine of kingdom postponement, especially when combined with the imminent rapture, has done far more good for promoting the salvific Gospel than any movements for the social gospel ever could.

Conclusion

This article has discussed three divine institutions which are apparent in the garden of Eden: responsible labor, marriage, and family. These institutions are foundational to any decent society, but they are under attack from worldly ideologies that are infiltrating Christendom. It does not take a dispensationalist to defend the divine institutions, but there are uniquely dispensational responses that are available through the doctrine of kingdom postponement. Christian forms of errant ecotheology and social justice are constantly evolving and updating, so a reactive approach to the doctrines will prove to be a tedious task in the years to come. However, these errors are usually built on frameworks of kingdom-now theology, so the dispensationalist can construct a proactive defense against institutional compromises by being well versed in postponement theology, both through an appreciation of OT descriptions of the kingdom, as well as through an understanding of Christ's ministry of the kingdom offer and postponement.

¹⁰² Gallien Jr., “American Evangelicalism's Struggle Over Civil Rights,” 526.

The Biblical Roots of the Hermeneutic in Revelation

John Oglesby

Key Words: Revelation, Hermeneutics, Genre, Speech Act

Introduction

The author of Revelation begins with arguably the most pressing introduction within all of divine literature:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John, who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.²

John the Apostle begins by identifying the source of the revelation, the stance by which to receive it, the result of those

John Oglesby serves as the Chief Academic Officer and Associate Professor for Vyrity and Colorado Biblical University. He has served as the Director of the President's Office, Program Director of Bible and Theology, and Associate Professor at Calvary University. John has engaged in various speaking engagements and conferences around the United States addressing topics from various disciplines including leadership, education, and philosophy. His articles can be found on johnoglesby.org.

This article is edited from a book chapter with the same title in *The Green Tree and Hermeneutic Roots of Biblical Faith and Practice*, ed. Christopher Cone and John Oglesby (Independence, MO: Exegetica Publishing, 2021), 21–40.

² Revelation 1:1–3 (NASB). All Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

who read and keep its contents and repeats the urgency that defines the information of the revelation.

The book of Revelation is a critical part of the biblical canon,³ yet often misunderstood due to either a shift in hermeneutics when approaching the book or simply a poor hermeneutic consistently used throughout the Bible as a whole.⁴ Reformed theologian Louis Berkhof points this out in his critique of premillennialism: “The theory [premillennialism] is based on a literal interpretation of the prophetic delineations of the future of Israel and of the Kingdom of God, which is entirely untenable.”⁵ Although Berkhof disagrees with the conclusion of premillennialism, or a literal interpretation of prophecy, he recognizes the battlefield of a proper view of prophecy is that of interpretation or hermeneutics.

³ Revelation 1:1–3, 22:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:13–17; Christopher Cone presents a convincing paper on the necessity of biblically derived premillennialism within the study of socio-political thought. While his topic is not specific to Revelation, Revelation is a major source of understanding for biblically derived premillennialism. See Christopher Cone, “Biblically Derived Premillennialism as a Necessary Condition for a Biblical Socio-Political Model,” *Council on Dispensation Hermeneutics*, Calvary Bible College, Kansas City, MO, September 17, 2014, <https://www.drcone.com/2014/09/18/biblically-derived-premillennialism-as-a-necessary-condition-for-a-biblical-socio-political-model/>.

⁴ Andy Woods writes an article regarding Revelation 17–18 and addresses Apocalyptic literature exploring the genre of Revelation. Within this context, Woods establishes the different hermeneutic approaches to Revelation and connects it with one’s understanding of the acceptance of the apocalyptic genre. See Andy Woods, “What is the Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18?” *Pre-trib Research Center*, accessed August 30, 2021, https://www.pre-trib.org/articles/dr-thomas-ice/message/what-is-the-identity-of-babylon-in-revelation-17-18/read#_ftnref214. For an example of this in practice, see Kevin DeYoung, “Theological Primer: The 144,000” *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), April 28, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevin-deyoung/theological-primer-the-144000/>; Steve Gregg, ed., *Revelation: Four Views, a Parallel Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997).

⁵ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1938), 712.

Hermeneutics finds its proper place in epistemology, the foundational category of one's worldview.⁶ Within epistemology (the study of knowledge/certainty), the source of authority and how to interpret or understand that authority is established. How should one understand the book of Revelation? Berkhof was correct—the varying answers to this question lead to varying disagreements within the metaphysics topic of eschatology. However, the more foundational question is “How should one understand the book of Revelation *based on the proper authority*?”

Hermeneutics is an important study but must be established on the proper authority. If the hermeneutic theory is not grounded upon God's word, it is fallacious and insufficient for a proper understanding of the Bible—if indeed the Bible is the word of God.⁷

Berkhof posits the idea that understanding prophecy using a literal methodology is entirely untenable. Berkhof presents a methodology for interpreting prophecy which goes against a normative understanding.⁸ For example, Berkhof posits,

Moreover, he should not proceed on the assumption that prophecies are always fulfilled in the exact form in which they were uttered.

⁶ One could argue for metaphysics being foundational, but before one could understand reality, one must understand *how* to understand reality. Without a proper understanding of how to view, it would be impossible to study metaphysics with any certainty. Christopher Cone addresses this issue extensively in *Priority in Biblical Hermeneutics and Theological Method* (Raymore, MO: Exegetica Publishing, 2018), 1–4.

⁷ Understandably some may object due to circular reasoning. However, the purpose of language presupposes a basic nature of understanding. As God created language with the purpose of understanding, a basic level of understanding is presupposed.

⁸ Cf. “In such cases the prophetic horizon was enlarged, they sensed something of the passing character of the old forms, and gave ideal descriptions of the blessings of the New Testament Church” (Berkhof, *Principles of Biblical Interpretation* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950], 152).

The presumption is that, if they are fulfilled in a later dispensation, the dispensational form will be disregarded in the fulfillment.⁹

Interestingly, though Berkhof argues for the illegitimacy of understanding prophecies in a normative fashion, he defines a prophecy as a proclamation of that which God has revealed.¹⁰ The claim, then, can be understood that within this specific genre, that which God has revealed should not always be taken normatively based on the context of when it was said and the surrounding literature. This, however, goes against the exegetical evidence found within various places of the Bible.

Christopher Cone illustrates this point well in a similar study throughout the books of Genesis and Job.¹¹ Cone observes an exegetically derived basis for a normative approach to the biblical canon through examining each speech act of God and the response to that speech act. Cone concludes,

Because of the two-thousand-year precedent evident in Genesis and Job, any departure from the simplicity of this method bears a strong exegetical burden of proof, requiring that there be *explicit exegetical support for any change one might perceive as necessary in handling later Scriptures*.¹²

Cone demonstrates the necessity of a normative understanding in two books which are commonly recognized as narrative.¹³ Many have made the claim that all messianic prophecies pointing to Jesus' first advent were fulfilled in a

⁹ Ibid., 153.

¹⁰ Ibid., 148.

¹¹ Cone, *Priority in Biblical Hermeneutics*, 17–36.

¹² Ibid., 35.

¹³ This is not necessarily true for all of Genesis and Job. An example of a specific area contrary to the given statement is the understanding of Genesis 1–3. Many debates are had regarding the genre of writing for the creation account. For an exegetical and quantitative study on the genre of Genesis 1–3, see Larry Vardiman, Andrew A. Snelling, and Eugene F. Chaffin, *Radioisotopes and the Age of the Earth: A Young-Earth Creationist Research Initiative* (Dallas: Institution for Creation Research, 2000).

literal or normative fashion. Charles Ryrie says it this way: “The prophecies of the first advent of Christ were all fulfilled literally. This obvious but extremely significant fact argues for the validity and use of the literal hermeneutics in all of biblical interpretation.”¹⁴

A Significant Reason for Recent Departure from Normative Understanding

As Cone and Ryrie have demonstrated, there is much exegetical support within Genesis, Job, and various prophecies for a normative understanding of the Scriptures. However, within fairly recent development, the genre of apocalyptic literature has taken root and spread throughout the theological community.¹⁵ Due to various reasons such as the ambiguity of the definition of “apocalyptic,” many theologians have assumed an apocalyptic genre designation and consequently an allegorical understanding of the book of Revelation. But if the genre diagnosis is incorrect, then what about the resulting hermeneutic method?

¹⁴ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 129. It is worth noting the lack of citations showing one’s work within the topic of Christ’s fulfillment of messianic prophecy. Some have disputed this claim, but upon further investigation, it seems they have misunderstood what is meant by the term “literal.” For further understanding, see Thomas D. Ice, “The Literal Fulfillment of Bible Prophecy” *Scholars Crossing*, May 2009, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1100&context=pretrib_arch.

¹⁵ William W. Klein, et. al, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), 444–48; Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Colorado Springs: David C Cook, 1991), 243; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutic Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 275–90; Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature ... and Get More Out of it* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014); J. Scott Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

Robert Thomas points out, “No consensus exists as to a precise definition of *genre*.”¹⁶ Thomas recognizes an important consequence: “... so attempts to classify portions of the New Testament, including Revelation, are at best vague.” While in some kinds of literature genre designations may be ambiguous, the Biblical author seems to leave no room for ambiguity within the book of Revelation.¹⁷ Andy Woods presents an argument for the prophetic delineation of Revelation where he establishes the necessity to consistently use the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic.¹⁸ Robert Thomas, likewise in his commentary on Revelation, states,

Most distinctive of all, however, is that this book calls itself a prophecy (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19). Its contents fully justify this self-claim. Of the thirty-one characteristics that have been cited in attempts to define apocalyptic, all when properly understood could apply to prophecy as well, with the possible exception of pseudonymity (which does not apply to Revelation). Alleged differences between the Apocalypse and generally accepted works of prophecy often rest upon inadequate interpretations of the Apocalypse.¹⁹

¹⁶ Robert Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 324.

¹⁷ Revelation 1:3. This author recognizes the external factors in establishing genres. The nature of genres would involve finding commonality among writings, grouping them under a heading pointing to those similarities, and calling that a genre. As an exegete, it is this author's intention to let God's word reign authoritative whenever it speaks. Some theologians have made the case that John does designate the genre as apocalyptic due to the first word of the book. However, after further study, there isn't any reason to believe John was dealing with genre as the Greek word simply means to reveal as J. Ramsey Michaels clearly points out in his work. Cf. J. Ramsey Michaels, *Revelation*, IVP NT Commentary 20 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1997); N. T. Wright, *The New Testament in its World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 821.

¹⁸ Woods, “What is the Identity of Babylon in Revelation 17–18?”

¹⁹ Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1992), 25.

Purpose of the Study

While the correct genre designation of the book of Revelation is not the primary purpose of this writing, it seems necessary to give some background information regarding departures and disagreements about the proper interpretation of the book. Still, the primary question is whether or not God provides an interpretive method *within* the book of Revelation. If so, it would seem the genre classification of the book of Revelation has little to no effect on the necessary interpretive approach, especially as the apocalyptic genre is an extra-biblical designation. In fact, an external designation which requires interpretive variation from the normative understanding of Scripture places that external data as authoritative, usurping the rightful authority of God.

A brief note on the sufficiency of Scripture is necessary at this point to justify the priority of internal evidence for an appropriate interpretive method. Solomon establishes *the* prerequisite for knowledge and wisdom: the fear of the Lord.²⁰ Solomon continues to provide the source of that wisdom and knowledge: the mouth of God.²¹ This leads to superiority of God's special revelation for gaining true knowledge and wisdom. In this current era, with a closed canon, that special revelation is found in written form – namely the Bible.²² The Bible is sufficient to equip the believer (and contains the necessary information to convert the unbeliever) for the good works which God has prepared beforehand.²³ Similarly, God has given the believer everything pertaining to life and godliness which is through the knowledge of him,²⁴ which we understand to proceed from the mouth of God. Because of this, the Bible should be considered sufficient to provide its own interpretive method. After all, if external data was needed to ascertain the knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures, then how could the Scriptures themselves be sufficient to transform the believer

²⁰ Proverbs 1:7; 9:6.

²¹ Proverbs 2:6.

²² 2 Timothy 3:16–17; 2 Peter 1:16–21.

²³ Ephesians 2:10.

²⁴ 2 Peter 1:3–4.

through the renewing of the mind?²⁵ Would the Bible alone be able to provide true knowledge and certainty? The answer seems clear enough. It would lack capacity for certainty and could only provide understanding to the level that fallen humanity's reasoning is able to deliver.

An Internal Model for Understanding the Bible Found Within the Book of Revelation

In order to derive an internal precedent for a normative interpretive approach to the book of Revelation each speech act²⁶ is recorded and the responses are noted. By identifying a normative understanding of the speech act, one can consider the response and observe whether the intended audience understood the speech act normatively. Each response is categorized in one of two groups: Category 1 (C1) which is regarded as a normative response or Category 2 (C2) which is regarded as a response not based on a normative understanding.²⁷

Various conjugates of *lego* (λέγω) appear 94 times in 90 verses of Revelation. Among these instances, 22 of them receive a response in the immediate context. Of the verses containing the responses, another 9 instances are accounted. Twenty of the 94 instances appear in Revelation 2–3. In these contexts, there are no responses because the recipients hadn't yet received the communication. The remaining 43 speech act contexts do not provide responses.

Speech Acts and Responses

Speech Act – Revelation 1:11

Jesus commands John to write about everything he sees and send it to the seven churches.

²⁵ Romans 12:1–2.

²⁶ This writer is not invoking speech act theory. The terminology “speech act” is simply pointing to an occurrence of one speaking to another.

²⁷ It is worth noting, this study does not identify specific types of responses outside of one based on a normative understanding. It will either be normative or not. If it is not, it will be the burden of the next student to identify specifically what type of understanding was utilized based on the response.

Response – Revelation 1:4; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14

John provides a C1 response as he writes the book of Revelation and specific sections addressed to the seven churches. The absence of a C1 response recorded for the sending of the letter does not show a C2 response, but the act of sending the book of Revelation would not be expected to have been recorded elsewhere in the Bible as Revelation is the conclusion of the canon.

Speech Act – Revelation 1:19

Jesus implores John to write the things he has seen, the things which are present, and the things to come which will be shown him.

Response

There are two ways to address the response. First, the existence of the book of Revelation shows a C1 response as John wrote the things he was told to write. Second, John wrote the book of Revelation in the three mandated categories. He wrote the things which he had seen (Rev 1), the things which are (Rev 2–3) and the things to come (Rev 4–22).

Speech Act – Revelation 4:1b

“The first voice” commanded that John ascend or come up to see what must take place in future events.

Response – Revelation 4:2

John provides a C1 response by ascending immediately to the throne room of God where he begins his journey of future events.

Speech Act – Revelation 5:2

“A strong angel” asks a question regarding the opening of the scroll which is in the hand of the one who sits on the throne.

Response – Revelation 5:3

John shows a C1 response by weeping as he found no one worthy of opening the scroll. Furthermore, the angel comforts John by showing him one who is able to open the scroll and break the seals.

Speech Act – Revelation 5:5

As John weeps from not being able to identify anyone worthy of opening the seals within the scroll God holds, the angel comforts John by identifying one who is worthy. He further implies that the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, the Lamb of God, will open the scroll because he has overcome.

Response – Revelation 5:6–7

We see Jesus provide a C1 response as he does, in fact, get up, take the scroll, and begin breaking the seals within.

Speech Act – Revelation 7:13

One of the elders approaches John and asks him, “What is the identity of the multitudes dressed in white robes?”

Response – Revelation 7:14

After John responds that the elder already knows, the elder provides a C1 response to his own question by answering the question in a normative way. The elder identifies the multitudes and why they have white robes.

Speech Act – Revelation 8:13

The eagle flies over the earth and proclaims a woe to all the earth for the three trumpets that remain.

Response – Revelation 9:1, 13; 11:15

The angels provide a C1 response to the eagle’s warning as they blow the remaining three trumpets. The result of the trumpets is mass destruction and woeful events for those on the earth.

Speech Act – Revelation 10:4

After “seven peals of thunder” spoke, John was about to write what was spoken but a voice from heaven told him not to.

Response – Revelation 10:4–5

The absence of what was said by the peals of thunder provide a C1 response. While this instance is an argument from absence

or silence, silence was the imperative and provides adequate evidence for a C1 categorization.

Speech Act – Revelation 10:8

The voice from heaven tells John to approach the angel who was previously described in verses 1–7 and take the scroll from his hand.

Response – Revelation 10:9a

John provides a C1 response as he immediately approaches the angel and takes the scroll from his hand.

Speech Act – Revelation 10:9b

After John takes the scroll from the angel's hand, the angel tells John to eat the scroll. He also communicates that the scroll will be bitter in his stomach and sweet in the mouth.

Response – Revelation 10:10

John provides another C1 response by eating the scroll and describes the experience as bitter in the stomach and sweet in the mouth.

Speech Act – Revelation 11:12

After the two prophets of Revelation 11 are resurrected, they hear a voice from heaven giving the imperative to “come up here.”

Response – Revelation 11:12

The two prophets provide a C1 response as they “went up into heaven in the cloud.”

Speech Act – Revelation 11:15

Loud voices in heaven proclaim the beginning of the kingdom and the truth of Christ's reign forever.

Response – Revelation 11:17

The twenty-four elders respond by praising God for his reign. While the elders are not acting, their response to the truth

proclaimed by the multitude of voices provide precedent for categorizing their response as a C1.

Speech Act – Revelation 14:15

“One like a son of man” was sitting on a cloud, crowned with a sickle in his hand. An angel, leaving the temple, tells him to swing the sickle across the earth for it was ripe.

Response – Revelation 14:16

“The one like a son of man” provides a C1 response as he swings his sickle across the earth as directed.

Speech Act – Revelation 14:18

Similar to the previous speech act, another angel tells the “one like a son of man” to swing the sickle and gather the grapes from the earth.

Response – Revelation 14:19–20

He swings his sickle and gathers the grapes, providing another C1 response.

Speech Act – Revelation 16:1

A loud voice comes from the temple commanding seven angels to pour out seven bowls of judgement on the world.

Response – Revelation 16:2, 3, 4, 8, 10, 12, 17

A C1 response is provided as the seven angels are recorded pouring out the bowls on the earth.

Speech Act – Revelation 17:1–2

One of the seven angels tells John that he is going to carry him away to see “the judgement of the great harlot....”

Response – Revelation 17:3

A C1 response is provided in 17:3 as John is immediately carried away into a wilderness and shown the details of the great harlot.

Speech Act – Revelation 17:7

As John is being shown the details of the great harlot, he “wondered with great wonder.” As the angel responsible for revealing these things to him sees his wonder, he responds by telling John that the angel will explain everything regarding what John has seen in the previous six verses.

Response – Revelation 17:8–18

The angel intends a C1 understanding, as the angel then proceeds to explain in detail what John has just seen. The highly figurative language has a normative meaning, and the angel explains the metaphor.

Speech Act – Revelation 19:5

After the fall of Babylon, a voice from the throne gives the imperative to praise God.

Response – Revelation 19:6

The multitude of God’s bond-servants provide a C1 response as they praise God by saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.”

Speech Act – Revelation 19:9

John is commanded to write “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the lamb.”

Response – Revelation 19:9

The fact that the words are recorded in the book of Revelation shows John’s C1 understanding.

Speech Act – Revelation 19:17–18

As Christ returns to earth for the great war, an announcement is made for all the birds of heaven to come so they can feast on the fallen kings and beasts.

Response – Revelation 19:21

The birds responded in a C1 fashion as they were “filled with their flesh.”

Speech Act – Revelation 21:5

John is commanded to write the words which God had previously spoken in verses 3–4.

Response – Revelation 21:3–4

The presence of the words in verses 3–4 provide adequate evidence to categorize John's understanding as a C1 interpretation.

Speech Act – Revelation 21:9

One of the seven angels tells John to come so that the angel could show him the “Bride of the Lamb.”

Response – Revelation 21:10–11

A C1 response is recorded in verses 10–11 as the angel carried John away and showed him the details of the “Bride of the Lamb.”

Results

After reviewing each speech act within the book of Revelation and the response to each, where one is provided, 22 of the 22 responses should be considered C1 responses. It is evident that 100% of the responses within the book of Revelation show a normative understanding of communication providing overwhelming evidence for an internal model of interpretation. Communication should be understood in a normative, common-sense fashion. The method of interpretation which models this straightforward approach has become known as the literal grammatical historical method, utilizing grammar and context to understand the normative usage of language in the communication.

Among the various speech acts and responses, many of them are found in contexts with figurative language. To understand Scripture in a normative way is not to disregard figurative language, but to utilize the context provided by the Scriptures themselves in order to understand when a figure of speech is used. A great example of this is found in Revelation 17:7–18. As John is being shown this vast metaphor, he stands in wonder as to how he should understand what is taking place. The context

reveals the obvious use of metaphor as the angel follows up by explaining what the metaphor is intended to communicate. There is a literal meaning behind the figurative language, and the presence of figures of speech should not change the hermeneutic employed by the reader.

A Brief Look at the Other Views

After examining the text for an internal model of interpretation, it is worth interacting with other scholars regarding various passages, for illustrating the importance, examining reasons to disagree with the proposed model, and evaluating the worldview implications (specifically within epistemology).

Charles Hodge, a reformed theologian, makes the claim that “prophecy makes a general impression with regard to future events, which is reliable and salutary, while the details remain in obscurity.”²⁸ As an example of this, Hodge utilizes the failure of the first-century Jews to recognize the details of Jesus’ first advent. While, admittedly, in many ways the religious leaders of Jesus’ day got it wrong, to base the argument on the response of leaders whom Jesus consistently rebuked for their lack of understanding and misplacement of God’s word proves to be an unreliable foundation for argumentation.²⁹ As one examines the fulfillment of prophecies regarding Jesus’ first advent, the details are evident enough, although admittedly what one might consider detail versus vagueness does come into play.³⁰ The examples Hodge uses to justify his argument come from a misunderstanding of the prophecies themselves. For example, Hodge argues that first-century Jews misunderstood the prophecies regarding Jesus subduing the nations. As Hodge

²⁸ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 791.

²⁹ It is important here to note the difference between descriptive and prescriptive text. While models of interpretation may be derived from descriptive passages, context and details of speakers/recipients is a critical part of deriving a proper model.

³⁰ Isaiah 53 is a great example of these prophecies. See Isaiah 53:3 and John 1:11; Isaiah 53:4–5 and Matthew 27:35; Isaiah 53:6 and Romans 4:25; etc.

states, “He is to subdue all nations, not by the sword, as they supposed, but by truth and love.”³¹ This conclusion assumes that the prophecies referenced are in fact regarding Christ’s first advent alone. If one takes later revelation into consideration, the book of Revelation clearly shows that Jesus will, in the future come back and subdue the nations.³² This type of interpretive method leads Hodge to spiritualize much of the prophecy found within the book of Revelation, including the nature of the millennial kingdom.³³ One’s metaphysical understanding of the kingdom has critical impact on one’s ethical and socio-political understandings of worldview.

N. T. Wright models the importance of an internal precedent for interpretive method and genre classification. Wright posits the idea that the book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature and should be interpreted accordingly, just as one might interpret other apocalyptic literature from the same era.³⁴ Because of this, Wright concludes, “At the same time, as with biblical prophecy more generally, the rich symbolic language invites *multiple ‘applications’ and ‘interpretations’* as the various systems of pagan power behave in characteristic ways and the church is faced with the challenge both of understanding what is happening and acting appropriately [emphasis added].”³⁵ Many scholars rightly disagree with the idea of multiple interpretations for various reasons—one being the loss of all effective communication and meaning. However, because Wright considers the book of Revelation as apocalyptic literature, the text has a meaning for the time it was written and for future events. Note that Wright is not simply advocating for multiple applications but is also advocating for multiple correct interpretations.

This idea plays a role in Revelation 17–18 as Wright identifies Babylon the Great as symbolic for the nation of Rome

³¹ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 791.

³² Revelation 19:11–16.

³³ Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 841–42.

³⁴ Examples of these would be other pseudepigraphal books such as *Ascension of Isaiah* and *Apocalypse of Peter*.

³⁵ Wright, *New Testament in its World*, 828.

contemporary to the time of the writing of Revelation. He then contends, “We appropriate this vision for our twenty-first-century context by remembering that there are many Babylons and beasts, and we need to resist them all.”³⁶ Interestingly, Wright makes the claim of ancient Rome being the true Babylon the Great but only defends his position by drawing parallels using further symbolism.³⁷ What is problematic is the lack of any internal evidence for interpreting the symbols this way. No doubt, Wright’s precommitment to the use of symbolism comes from his understanding of apocalyptic literature and his precommitment to the book of Revelation as apocalyptic.

Lastly, the 144,000 of Revelation 7 provides another useful case study. As Revelation presents the 144,000 as the “bond-servants of God”³⁸ coming from the “Tribes of Israel”³⁹ and continues by listing how many bond-servants from each tribe, a normative understanding of the passage would lead one to believe that the 144,000 are actually 144,000 Jews. However, Ryken posits, “The number of the redeemed—144,000—symbolizes completeness (foursquare symbolism of 12 times 12, and all 12 tribes represented) and magnitude (inasmuch as 1,000 symbolized a multitude in ancient times).”⁴⁰ Ryken provides the 144,000 as an example of how numbers should be taken figuratively within the book of Revelation. Ryken’s reasoning for the symbolic nature of numbers is based upon other *extra-biblical* apocalyptic sources.

Wright likewise states, “The number of 144,000 from the twelve tribes is symbolic for the church as the continuing expression of Israel,” yet provides no basis for his understanding. If one is understanding the Bible using a normative methodology, a symbolic understanding must be warranted within the context

³⁶ Ibid, 844.

³⁷ Ibid, 838–39.

³⁸ Revelation 7:3.

³⁹ Revelation 7:4.

⁴⁰ Leland Ryken, *Symbols and Reality: A Guided Study of Prophecy, Apocalypse, and Visionary Literature: Reading the Bible as Literature* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2016), 99.

of the passage.⁴¹ To establish a passage as symbolic simply because of an external genre designation places the genre—not the Bible—as authoritative, leading to a genre hermeneutic.

Conclusion

Regardless of genre the book of Revelation presents an internal precedent for a normative (literal grammatical historical) interpretive method. Genre is an important consideration for studying books of the Bible, but because of the internal interpretive precedent established, genre simply does not play a role in interpretive methodology. Beyond this, to deviate from a normative interpretive method whenever approaching the Scriptures as a whole would demand strong exegetical evidence. To deviate from the literal grammatical historical hermeneutic without exegetical roots is to enthrone oneself as a source of authority in the worldview. The consequence is an altogether different epistemology and ultimately a catastrophic deviation from the biblical worldview.

⁴¹ For further study on how to identify symbolism, see Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1991); or Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976).

Book Reviews

— *Old Testament* —

George Athas. *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs (The Story of God Bible Commentary)*

Reviewed by Mark McGinniss p. 153

— *New Testament* —

Christopher Boyd Brown. *John 13–21 (Reformation Commentary on Scripture)*

Reviewed by Roger DePriest p. 155

Andreas J. Köstenberger. *Signs of the Messiah: An Introduction to John's Gospel.*

Reviewed by Mike Stallard p. 158

— *Historical and Systematic Theology* —

Chase R. Kuhn and Paul Grimmond. *Theology is for Preaching: Biblical Foundations, Method, and Practice.*

Reviewed by Kevin Koslowsky p. 162

Matthew A. Lapine. *The Logic of the Body: Retrieving Theological Psychology (Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology).*

Reviewed by Donald McIntyre p. 165

J. Gary Millar. *Changed into His Likeness: A Biblical Theology of Personal Transformation (New Studies in Biblical Theology).*

Reviewed by Donald McIntyre p. 167

W. Ross Hastings. *Theological Ethics. The Moral Life of the Gospel in Contemporary Context.*

Reviewed by Jim Ruff p. 170

Gerald R. McDermott. *Understanding the Jewish Roots of Christianity. Biblical, Theological & Historical Essays on the Relationship between Christianity & Judaism.*

Reviewed by Jim Ruff p. 172

Joseph H. Sherrard. *T. F. Torrance as Missional Theologian: The Ascended Christ and the Ministry of the Church (New Explorations in Theology).*

Reviewed by Stephen Stallard p. 177

Scott D. MacDonald. *Demonology for the Global Church: A Biblical Approach in a Multicultural Age.*

Reviewed by Daniel Wiley p. 179

— ***Missions and Practical Ministry*** —

Justin A. Irving and Mark L. Strauss. *Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders.*

Reviewed by Alair M. August p. 182

Pete Grieg. *God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer.*

Reviewed by Douglas C. Bozung p. 184

Donald M. Lewis. *A Short History of Christian Zionism: From the Reformation to the Twenty-First Century.*

Reviewed by Roger DePriest p. 186

Gerald Bray. *Preaching the Word with John Chrysostom.*

Reviewed by Paul Hartog p. 189

William L. Hathaway and Mark A. Yarhouse. *The Integration of Psychology & Christianity: A Domain-Based Approach.*

Reviewed by Keith E. Marlett p. 192

Joshua D. Chatraw. *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age.*

Reviewed by Jared Twigg p. 195

Peter J. Leithart. *Baptism: A Guide to Life from Death.*

Reviewed by Thomas Overmiller p. 198

Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs (The Story of God Bible Commentary). By George Athas. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 400 pp. Hardcover \$39.99.

The Story of God Bible Commentary series “hopes to help people, particularly clergy but also laypeople, read the Bible with understanding not only of its ancient meaning but also of its continuing significance for us today in the 21st century” (13). In this volume, Athas tackles the most difficult books of Wisdom Literature: Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs.

For Ecclesiastes, Athas rejects Solomonic authorship, but holds to a son of David identity somewhere after the 586 BC exile (23) probably during the reign of Ptolemy III Euergetes (246–222 BC) (28). Although he sees Solomonic allusions in the first few chapters of the books, these merely represent “numerous kings of Judah and even some of the more opulent gentile kings of history” (22). Since, in Athas’ view, the author is looking back at the 586 BC exile, Solomon cannot be the author: “if the author were actually trying to pass himself off as the real Solomon, ... he does a terrible job” (22).

For Athas, the historical context is the key to understanding the book. The author of Ecclesiastes “is not just contemplating life in general, but life in a specific circumstance. This circumstance was, broadly, the era ‘Before Christ’ and, more narrowly, the error of Ptolemaic sway over Judea in the late 3rd century BC. We need to understand the circumstance in order to listen properly to what he (and the Epilogist) have to say” (36). Athas is certainly correct when commenting on 1:1 that, “Ecclesiastes is essentially the monologue of one man’s search for the meaning of life in a particular historical circumstance” (50). However, it seems that if Athens’ historical premise is incorrect, then his exposition of the text will be skewed as well.

Athas sees a different voice in chapter 12. While “the Epilogist agrees with Qohelet’s grim assessment of life in Ptolemaic Jerusalem,...the Epilogist does not believe this will somehow rescue the nation, for, as Qohelet has shown, traditional wisdom does not have the power to achieve this. Instead, the Epilogist outlook is shaped by apocalyptic eschatology which looked to God for direct intervention in human affairs to rescue the Jewish nation from the cultural and historical abyss” (39). From here, Athas sees Israel better

prepared for the coming of Jesus. “When we see Qohelet’s place in history and his bleak evaluation of life and hopes for the Jewish nation, we are in a far better position to appreciate the coming of Jesus.... And, as we will see, this gives us a far better appreciation of how Jesus’ death and resurrection opens the gates of salvation to people from all nations” (39).

In dealing with the Song, Athas, once again, disregards the clearest and easiest reading of the text and rejects Solomonic authorship of the Song. Instead, he argues unconvincingly for an anonymous work (250). Interestingly, while Athas would disregard Solomon’s authorship based on 1:1; he correctly sees the Song as a unity based on the singular use of “song” in the same verse (253).

Concerning dating, according to Athas, “If, as is likely, the Song is more than just an exploration of erotic love and conveys something of the relationship between Israel and her God, that it has the great resonance with the Antiochene persecution and the subsequent Maccabean Revolt (167–164 BC)” (252). Both his dating and allegorical reading are suspect and without textual support.

While recognizing the problem of classifying the Song as a narrative (254), Athas espouses an older and much abandoned 3-character view, the “Hollywood Love Triangle” of the female lover, her rustic shepherd lover and the scoundrel king Solomon. Expounding the white spaces of the Song, Athas observes that “[B]efore her time runs out, the woman decides to take the dramatic action of sleeping with her beloved shepherd as a means of dealing with the supreme injustice of being forced into Solomon’s bed” by her conniving brothers (258). Thus, for Athas, “Sex,..., is potentially a subversive tool for the young couple—a means by which they can outflank Solomon before he has a chance to take the woman” (308). Readers recognize that this flies in the face of Torah and wouldn’t be heralded as a legitimate strategy in Israel or be part of the story of life with God in the covenant community.

Not to give the ending away as to who wins the fair maiden, Athas surmises, “At the climax of the Song, Solomon arrives to claim the woman, but the shepherd also appears. The Song ends with the woman urging her beloved shepherd to flee. It implies a tragic end, but the abrupt finish means we never ‘see’ what happens to the woman or the shepherd. This provides enough ambiguity for the

reader to imagine various postscripts that might provide the woman and her shepherd some justice” (258).

Sadly, this volume falls short of reaching its intended goal of helping our present culture understand or apply the meaning or significance of Ecclesiastes and the Song to our lives today. This is unfortunate for the message of these books is much needed today.

Mark McGinniss, Ph.D.

Professor of Old Testament Literature, Languages, and Exegesis
Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, PA

John 13–21 (Reformation Commentary on Scripture). Edited by Christopher Boyd Brown. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2021. 384 pp. Hardcover \$60.00; Digital (Kindle) \$59.99.

A number of years ago, InterVarsity Press published a commentary series titled *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. One of the aims of that series was to make accessible what various leaders and teachers of the early church taught on various books of the Bible. Similarly, the *Reformation Commentary Series* attempts to make accessible what the many and varied voices of the Reformation era had to say on the books of the Bible. The volume at hand is Volume 5 in the series covering *John 13–21* (the second of two volumes treating the Fourth Gospel). The author and editor of this volume is Christopher Boyd Brown (Associate Professor of Church History at Boston University School of Theology). He has published numerous articles and books on subject matters pertaining to the Reformation era with special interest and expertise on Martin Luther, thus making this subject matter right within his wheelhouse.

The commentary series expressly states its fourfold goal: 1) Renewing contemporary biblical interpretation, 2) Strengthening contemporary preaching, 3) Deepening understanding of the Reformation, and 4) Advancing Christian scholarship. After having read it, I am confident that the series will achieve each of these goals. On a personal level, I have made multiple notations that I intend to use in my own teaching and preaching. In addition, it has given me a better grasp of various issues as well as a greater appreciation for the complexities involved during those times.

The Table of Contents gives a snapshot of fourteen distinct sections, but the reader can easily discern that these naturally fall into three main parts: 1) Frontmatter, 2) Commentary proper, and 3) Backmatter. The Frontmatter consists of four pages of *Acknowledgements*, *Abbreviations*, and *A Guide to Using This Commentary*, plus a 24-page *General Introduction*. The Backmatter, which is 106 pages (nearly one-third of the book), offers several useful reference tools, which one could argue is worth the price of the book itself. First, there is a one-page map of how cartographers would have viewed the way Europe was partitioned at that time. Second, there is 12-page *Timeline of the Reformation*. On the y-axis are the years beginning with 1309–1377 (on the top left entry on first page) with approximately fifteen rows of year-markers per page until the very last entry of 1691 (on the last page). Across the x-axis are the names of countries where various events occurred (viz., *German Territories*, *France*, *Spain*, *Italy*, *Switzerland*, *Netherlands*, and *British Isles*). The next section—which I found to be highly valuable and helpful—is the *Biographical Sketches of Reformation-Era Figures and Works*. Although it is 73-pages in length, I consider it to be a master of brevity yet amazing in detail and coverage. By my count there are over 400 different biographical sketches (probably closer to 420). The remaining material that finishes out the backmatter are two bibliographies (i.e., *Sources for the Biographical Sketches*, and a general *Bibliography* of the Reformer’s source material), and three Scripture Indices (*Author and Writing Index*, *Subject Index*, and *Scripture Index*).

The Commentary proper consists of an *Introduction to John 13–21* (11 pages) and then 225 pages of commentary from the works of carefully selected Reformers covering progressive passages throughout the second half of the Fourth Gospel. Each chapter of the biblical text is treated somewhere between two to four pericopes in a two-columns-per-page layout. For example, the 38 verses of John 13 are divided as follows: verses 1–11, 12–20, and 21–38. At the beginning of each of these subdivisions, the editor provides a brief overview of the sometimes-differing perspectives of the Reformers selected for comment for that pericope. The commentary selections vary in length. Perhaps it would be safe to say that the customary length of commentary would be a paragraph, or about half a one column. But there are more than a few occasions where the comments

span more than a column (Johann Wild, Wolfgang Musculus, Martin Luther, John Calvin, et al.).

Since the selections for this commentary are drawn from the Reformation era, it is to be expected that one would find many references to such things as the Catholic Church, papal authority, conformity and non-conformity, church councils, etc. There is also an uneven attention to interpretive method as evidenced by the Reformers, if one judges only by the selections provided. To be sure, the Reformers, as a whole, demonstrate a commitment to the grammatical-historical method, but there are nonetheless examples of allegory and spiritualization as well. The widest diversity of commentary treatment occurs in the Upper Room Discourse section (i.e., chapters 14–17) more so than in the passion narrative (chapters 18–19).

There are many reasons to recommend this commentary. Besides the four goals identified at the beginning of this review, I believe it also encourages humility among today's exegetes. After reading this volume, a phrase from Hebrews 12:1 resonates in my mind: We are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses. Name after name after name, followed by one earned degree after another, urges one to step back and take note of such great intellectual minds and even greater spiritual fervor for our Lord and his Word. While this *Reformation Commentary on Scripture* in no way competes with modern commentaries on the Gospel of John, I view it as a splendid complement to the rich resources available to the serious student of Scripture.

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

Signs of the Messiah: An Introduction to John's Gospel. By Andreas J. Köstenberger. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. 200 pp. Hardcover \$27.99.

The respected evangelical scholar Andreas Köstenberger has given us in *Signs of the Messiah* an extremely helpful introduction to the Gospel of John. Köstenberger serves as research professor of New Testament and biblical theology and director of the Center for Biblical Studies at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Throughout the book, he cites his other works in Johannine theology where the reader can dive deeper into questions they may have as they study the issues of John's Gospel. This also shows that he is eminently qualified to write such an introductory work on this important presentation of the life and work of Jesus.

The overall purpose of the book is to walk the reader “step by step through John's unfolding narrative of Jesus the Messiah and Son of God” (3). As a by-product, it is Köstenberger's desire that readers will come to believe in Jesus and have abundant life. After the short introductory section, he divides his discussion of the Gospel into three parts:

- Part 1 – Authorship, Prologue, and Cana Cycle (John 1–4)
- Part 2 – The Festival Cycle (John 5–10)
- Part 3 – Conclusion to the Book of Signs (John 11–12) and Book of Exaltation (John 13–21)

In presenting this material, he follows the often-used approach of a two-section understanding of John's Gospel: First, the Book of Signs composed of the Cana Cycle, the Festival Cycle, and the Raising of Lazarus; and second, the Book of Exaltation given in chapters 13–21 with Jesus' preparation of his disciples, the Passion narrative and epilogue. The Cana Cycle derives its name from the fact that the first and last of three signs occurs in Cana. The Festival Cycle derives its name from the fact that there is a focus on Jewish festivals during this part of the Gospel. According to the author, the seven signs are the following:

1	Turning water into wine at the Cana wedding (2:1–12)	Three Signs in the Cana Cycle
2	Clearing the temple in Jerusalem (2:13–22)	
3	Healing the gentile centurion's son (4:46–54)	
4	Healing the lame man in Jerusalem (5:1–15)	Three Signs in the Festival Cycle
5	Feeding the five thousand in Galilee (6:1–15)	
6	Healing the man born blind (9)	
7	Raising of Lazarus (11)	

While presenting this material, Köstenberger does not fail to address other elements within the text such as Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman (3–4). In addition, before he gets to the actual details of the Cana Cycle, he reviews the authorship of John's Gospel and gives an overview of the prologue. As a solid conservative he deftly defends the truth that the Apostle John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, authored the Gospel that bears his name. Köstenberger relies mostly upon internal evidence although he also deals with external evidence from later church history. One telling comment in a footnote reveals his desire to distance himself from those scholars who call the author the "Fourth Evangelist" due to their rejection of Johannine authorship (68).

There are many commendations that could be mentioned for this work of which only a few can be given here. First, there is a writing style that possesses great readability. Explanatory value exists not just for other scholars and pastors but also for the well-read layperson who has never been to seminary. The addition of many outline charts scattered throughout the book assist in bringing clarity to the reader. Second, *Signs of the Messiah* customarily yields accurate analysis. The writer is text-driven in his approach. Even where this reviewer disagrees, it can be acknowledged that Köstenberger is honestly trying to present the text as God gave it through John the Apostle. One specific example is the clear handling of the central question of John's Gospel, the very purpose of the writing of it, that men would believe (John 20:30–31). He does not just state this early on but

comes back to it throughout the work faithfully unfolding its significance (e.g., 127). In addition, the author shows accuracy when he lets the nature of the time markers in John's Gospel prevent him from adopting other scholars' understanding that there was only one cleansing of the temple in Jesus' life. Instead, he sees John describing an event where Jesus clears the temple (John 2:13–22) that was earlier in time than a similar event described in the Synoptics (37). The ability to avoid conflation and reduction by just following the text is refreshing.

Along this line, the author from time to time points out differences with the Synoptics (69, 91, 128) without overpowering his main thrust within John's Gospel. Of particular interest is the focus of John on life in contrast to the emphasis on kingdom found in the Synoptics. Finally, with respect to accuracy, Köstenberger occasionally shows breadth of theological integration when he rebuts the New Perspective on Paul with its refusal to accept first-century Jews as legalistic. That some Jewish people were legalistic is surely established by passages such as John 6:28–30 and others as the author points out. However, he does so in a footnote. Readers must read the notes, because they list good resources for further study and also due to the fact that explanatory information can be found that is theologically valuable.

A couple of other positive qualities must be pointed out. *Signs of the Messiah* regularly makes practical application to everyday life. A couple of examples will suffice. First, Köstenberger takes the delay of Jesus is going to heal Lazarus as an indication that delay for believers in getting their prayers answered is not a sign that God does not care (124–25). A second example is the application he makes upon reviewing the footwashing by Jesus in John 13: "Leadership is not about self-promotion. It's not about building our own platform, peddling our own wares, or recruiting others to serve our own agenda. It's about seizing upon existing, real needs and rising to meet them even if it is inconvenient or causes us to get our hands dirty" (147). He also occasionally makes application to preaching as he does when he makes a couple of suggestions on how to divide up the preaching texts from 2:23 to the end of chapter 4 (48).

In spite of the many positive qualities there are a few areas that cause concern. First, a traditional dispensationalist like this reviewer will naturally not follow the inaugurated eschatology that crops up

sometimes throughout the work. I do not find this, however, to distract from the overall contribution that is made. Second, there are some minor exegetical differences. In John 3:5, the author understands “born of water” based more on the cross reference to Ezekiel 36:25–27 rather than the more proximate statement in John 3:6 which promotes a natural birth understanding (50). In 3:14, in the analogy from Numbers in which Jesus is lifted up like the snake in the wilderness, Köstenberger takes the snake as a positive image (53). Certainly, the entire episode in Numbers and the cross work of Jesus, had an overall positive effect. However, that is a different matter than saying the serpent is a positive image. The serpent represented all that was wrong or evil. When on the cross, Jesus became sin for us. That sin was not a positive thing. What is positive, and Köstenberger does give us this, is that the way God used the serpent was the best thing that could happen—deliverance from sin. In another example, readers, depending on their view of textual criticism, might balk at the author’s view that John 7:53–8:11, the pericope about the woman caught in adultery, is not in the text, a view held by most NT scholars (101–02). Perceptive readers might also ask why the temple clearing is one of the signs (29ff.). Perhaps more significant is the trifocal lens of history, literature and theology that is part of his stated hermeneutical practice (9–10). While a potential concern exists that the Bible text will be diminished in this scenario, that conclusion does not seem to work itself out in Köstenberger’s commentary. Even when he invokes extra-biblical literature like the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* to help understand the forms of farewell addresses (140–41), there does not seem to be a reading into the text of such extra-biblical forms.

One other issue is perhaps one of style. The book ends rather abruptly in the estimation of this reviewer. I was asking for more when I made it to the last page. Perhaps that was because of the positive quality of the rest of the book. Disagreements aside, I recommend this book to pastors. It is a resource that helps to unlock the structure of the wonderful Gospel of John.

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

Theology is for Preaching: Biblical Foundations, Method, and Practice. Edited by Chase R. Kuhn and Paul Grimmond. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. 416 pp. Softcover \$29.99.

A theologically rich sermon disconnected from the biblical text runs the risk of highlighting only the preacher's hobby horse interests. Sadly, we have all heard and perhaps preached sermons that divert our listeners away from the Scripture text into the theological weeds of our personal preferences. Chase Kuhn and Paul Grimmond gather a collection of essays that strengthen the connection between theology and preaching. They encourage preachers to dive deep into theology in their preparation, to let theology rightly shape the interpretation of the biblical text, and to allow theology to shine in the explanation and application of the text in the sermon. The essays share a "reformed evangelical ministry" context with the majority of contributors writing from Australia (186). The essays reflect the biblical and missional commitments of Moore Theological College. The book will be most helpful to the preacher who shares the reformed, Christ-centered approach of the contributors but will help all preachers eager to strengthen their preaching.

Kuhn and Grimmond arrange the book into four main sections with a fifth section containing two brief sermon samples. Part 1 provides the Foundations with Methodology in Part 2, the longest section. Parts 3 and 4 are organized as Theology for Preaching and Preaching for Theology, overlapping categories that connect systematic theology with the practice of preaching. Kuhn's opening chapter provides guardrails for the essays. He argues "that preaching in its most biblically faithful form is deliberately theological" and places an emphasis on expositional preaching (1). The goal of a sermon is not the same as a theological lecture. The relationship of theology to preaching is summarized by Kuhn: "Theology does not hijack the sermon, but the sermon must be theologically informed" (13). The remainder of Part 1 continues with the theological underpinnings for preaching. Mark Thompson identifies the "word-saturated" ministry of Jesus (29). Sermons are not merely a pragmatic strategy for communication; "preaching reflects the character of God" (31). Claire Smith develops Peter Adam's classification of the New Testament terms for the ministry of the word. Timothy Ward uses the Second Helvetic Confession's language that "the preaching

of the word of God is the word of God” to show the submission of preaching to the Scriptures (54). Peter Ash identifies ordained ministers as the primary preachers in local church contexts.

Part 2 begins with David Starling’s application of the hermeneutical circle to preaching. “We always, inescapably, approach the text from somewhere” (85). Paul House traces Paul’s use of Scripture in 1 and 2 Corinthians to show Paul’s “whole-canon approach” with application to the present-day church (98). A highlight of the book is Daniel Wu’s combination of Christocentric and Christotelic interpretive methods. Rather than adopt an either-or juxtaposition, Wu develops Christocentric and Christotelic methods as “corresponding, but deeply connected aspects of the hermeneutical spiral” (119). The Christotelic wrestles with the text in its original context while the Christocentric reminds readers that every text is “*ultimately* Christological” (117). Even if Wu’s arguments leave the reader unconvinced, his tone is a model for hermeneutical debate.

Part 2 also offers Peter Orr’s reminder that Christ is active in the preaching of the word as the Spirit applies the gospel to the lives of listeners. Will Timmins identifies the dangers of “worldly wise speech” from 1 Corinthians so that the preacher remembers that it is “God’s agency, not the preacher’s, which is decisive in persuading the audience of the gospel message” (149). Peter Adam’s brief historical review focuses on Augustine and Calvin, and his “Twenty Features of Expository Preaching” are alone worth the price of the volume. He begins with the exhortation that “Expository preaching is sequential preaching, based on sequential reading, the obvious way to read a book!” (156). Graham Beynon warns against artifice as he encourages preachers to allow God to use their strengths and weaknesses.

Part 3 connects specific categories of systematic theology to preaching. Edward Loane identifies the importance of preaching as “an instrumental cause of salvation” (208). Andrew Leslie strengthens the preacher’s understanding of a reformed perspective on sanctification. He maintains each Christian’s responsibility while emphasizing God’s grace. We must remember “the active role of the individual is entirely contained within and energized by a sovereign work of divine grace” (219). Peter Jensen sets preaching within the now/not yet framework of eschatology. David Peterson’s liturgical recommendations are most applicable for Anglicans but will serve to

center the sermon in the worship service of any denominational tradition.

Part 4 offers three essays to tie the collection together. Simon Gillham entwines knowledge and transformation as mutually dependent. Jane Tooher turns the focus on listeners and offers practical suggestions for developing “ideal hearers” (277). Grimmond draws the theological threads together. He exhorts submission to the text and preaching to the heart. Part 5 offers sample sermons from Simon Manchester and Phillip Jensen along with their own reflections on the theological intentions within each sermon.

Theology is for Preaching does not highlight theology for theology’s sake, but to draw “people into the Bible” (161). While some of the essays are theologically dense and require a careful reading, none of the essays are merely abstract. The goal is always to strengthen preaching so that it leads to transformation. The preacher with a reformed soteriology and expositional methodology will be the most fertile soil for the essays, but even a non-reformed preacher will glean meaningful lessons and the topical preacher will strengthen his preaching. The authors strengthen a Christ-centered ministry without ostracizing those who do not already share the same hermeneutical commitment. The essays flow with the pastoral warmth and the wisdom of seasoned preachers. We are not left in the ivory towers of academia but are drawn into the Scriptures themselves so that we can proclaim the gospel in the pulpits of our local churches. Kurn and Grimmond offer rich theological reflection that remains anchored in the local church. *Theology is for Preaching* is not a breezy how-to manual for preachers but offers something much more valuable in its deep theological reflections. Allow God to use the community of preachers, writing primarily from their Australian context, to strengthen your preaching ministry as you recommit to the authority of Scripture and the transformation of your hearers.

Kevin Koslowsky, Ph.D.
Senior Pastor
Faith Presbyterian Church
Wilmington, DE

The Logic of the Body: Retrieving Theological Psychology (*Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology*). By Matthew A. Lapine. Bellingham: Lexham, 2020. 416 pp. Softcover \$19.69.

Matthew A. Lapine (Ph.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) seek to reconcile the competing answers to negative human emotions that are offered from contemporary psychology and Christian theology (16). In seeking to forge a new path under the assumption that “any approach to psychology that does not account for how the body qualifies human emotions is inadequate” (19), he attempts to revise Reformed psychology which he believes “can gain empirical consistency and pastoral nuance by endorsing a genuinely holistic and tiered model of emotion, which is sensitive to how the body qualifies emotion” (19). He seeks to do this through examining the contributions of the theological psychology presented in the Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas, of which he endorses as a plausible answer. Lapine’s method seeks to reduce psychology, in the Latin sense of “to bring home” (20), into Christian theology, by descriptive and prescriptive means.

The first half of the book treats the psychology of Aquinas and Calvin while noting significant developments between the two. During these chapters the author seeks to introduce conceptual categories, compare and contrast the psychologies of Thomistic and Calvinistic thought, and provide an explanation of virtues disappearance from Calvin’s psychology. The second half of the book moves to the contemporary scene since Calvin and then seeks to show how Thomistic-like dualism (like that of J. P. Moreland) can best account for embodied plasticity, showing the biblical warrant for holism and biblical agency with the assumed “possibility of conflict between body and mind as psychological principles, rather than body and souls as metaphysical ones” (27). He concludes with a Thomistic model of emotion influenced by neuroscience “to make sense of the relationship between body and cognition” regarding emotion (27).

This book was thoroughly researched and highly technical. Terms such as moral valence, emotional voluntarism, SSRIs, and plasticity abound on the psychological side of the argument. From the theological side, a person lacking a background in Thomistic thought will struggle to make sense of much of the work, as it prefers to use terms such as “hylomorphic” instead of the more approachable terms

like “composite” (50) and refers to Galenic medicine throughout. The Thomistic-like dualism, which Lapine believes is a reasonable solution to the psychological situation that now exists, is a minority cosmological view among theologians since Augustine. Platonic dualism and/or substance dualism (like that espoused by Richard Swinburne) has tended to carry the conviction of contemporary evangelical philosophers and theologians and is even present in the thought of Catholicism’s leading theologian of this century, Joseph Ratzinger, though this is changing.¹ It seems that, for Lapine’s argument to gain traction, there must multiple preliminary discussions that are offered in an accessible format.

Lapine’s work has a legitimate and worthy goal. Psychology and Theology must be reconciled. His six theses on therapy and embodiment can be wholeheartedly endorsed by any evangelical theologian. These six theses include God’s grace throughout the entirety of Christian therapy, the limitations of agency from physicality, the agency of God in renewal despite physical limitations, God given capacities as preparatory for the receipt of the Gospel, the results of the curse on the human body, and the ability to form habits as a God-given grace which has been corrupted but can be redeemed. Though some may caution limiting agency due to biology, mental illness, and correction through medication, in some cases it does seem to be warranted. These six theses are helpful and gospel driven. It is questionable whether much of the discussion of Aquinas cosmology was necessary to arrive at these conclusions, or if they were distracting to well-meaning readers.

As a person with an undergraduate psychology minor, a graduate degree in pastoral counseling, and currently in post-graduate studies in theology, I still found this work to be largely inaccessible. To the person with the proper background, this work could be extremely

¹ Richard Swinburne, *The Evolution of the Soul*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1997), 145; Abraham P. Bos, “‘Aristotelian’ and ‘Platonic’ Dualism in Hellenistic and Early Christian Philosophy and in Gnosticism,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 56, no. 3 (2002): 273–91; Patrick James Fletcher, “Resurrection and Platonic Dualism: Joseph Ratzinger’s Augustinianism” (PhD diss., The Catholic University of America, 2011); Jonathan J. Loose, Angus J. L. Menuge, and J. P. Moreland, *The Blackwell Companion to Substance Dualism* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2018).

useful and is highly praised in the publisher's solicited recommendations. However, the model reader for this work will need to have familiarity with Calvin, Aquinas, psychology, and the debate between Aristotelian and Platonic cosmology to gain the most profit from the time spent reading this work. If one lacks such a broad foundation, they will probably be frustrated reading the work. However, for those willing to study the concepts and debate surrounding J. P. Moreland's view of cosmology they may find great reward from this ongoing debate.

Donald C. McIntyre
 PhD Student in OT
 Baptist Bible Seminary
 Clarks Summit, PA

Changed into His Likeness: A Biblical Theology of Personal Transformation (New Studies in Biblical Theology). By J. Gary Millar. Downers Grove: Apollos, an Imprint of IVP Academic, 2021. 273 pp. Softcover \$23.49.

J. Gary Millar (D.Phil., Oxford) is Principal of Queensland Theological College of Australia and the co-founder and chair of the Gospel Coalition Australia. His recent work *Changed into His Likeness: A Biblical Theology of Personal Transformation* is part of the NSBT series edited by D. A. Carson which seeks to assist Christians in understanding their Bibles in creative ways. Millar accomplishes this task in 6 brief chapters by humbly acknowledging the fact that it is “much easier to write about transformation than embody it” (ix) and then seeks to show how the Bible depicts the power of the gospel to change Christians in a holistic manner.

The first chapter seeks to establish the process, definition, and evaluation of change in human behavior by building on the work of Jeffrey Kottler—modifying his definition through theological shaping (4). Millar shows how people are prone to think that change is unnecessary and must be motivated through some type of trigger in a “complex (and unpredictable) process” (6) but states that this change is both promised and demanded in the Gospel (8). These principles, that believers already have been, and yet will still be, changed,

establishes the pillars of sanctification but still leaves life in the middle to be addressed.

The second chapter develops biblical anthropology and personal transformation reflecting on psychology, neuroscience and quantum physics before referencing the *imago dei* and the discussion of dualism versus “(w)holism” (36–39). After a series of word studies, Millar lands on a stance of holistic dualism (53).

The third chapter of the book begins with Jeremiah 13:23 and poses the famous question of whether a leopard can change its spots. It then offers character studies to show how Old Testament characters nearly always showed a “discernible downward spiral” in key individuals while other minor characters showed “little sign of change or growth” (93), though this is consistently promised in the preaching of Moses and the prophets. The author concludes chapter 3 by asserting that the Old Testament shows change as needed and desirable but unobtainable until the New Covenant.

The fourth chapter of shows the difference Jesus made by contrasting law and gospel showing that the gospel leads to stories of change beginning with the demands of Jesus and the power that Jesus promised to his followers. Millar then goes on to show the biblical theology of Paul concerning personal transformation through heart filled obedience which bears fruit in a broken world while the believer learns to discern the will of God as believers increasingly reflect Jesus’ own character through Spirit empowerment (154). Chapter four ends with a brief discussion on Peter, John, and James’ theology of change.

The fifth chapter discusses how the believer is to pursue change referencing the works of many historical theologians showing “both the need for and willingness of God to change us at the level of our instincts, aspirations and choices” (192). Halfway through the chapter Millar discusses how Christology (particularly that of Calvin) and piety influences change before discussing the biblical counseling movement. Millar concludes the chapter by reminding the reader that biblical change is complex because change is viewed as being God’s work within a trinitarian framework which is derived from the believer’s union with Christ and driven by the word of God. This type of change requires biblical piety and Millar believe is comprehensive if it is to be the biblical change he has found in the New Testament.

The sixth chapter is Millar's conclusion of his findings where he articulates his biblical theology of personal transformation. Millar finds change transformation to be a New Testament reality which is completely the work of God through His transformation of believer's relationship to Himself through transforming their knowledge and desire for God which leads to character transformation and thereby transforms the experience of life's situations for the believer which can only be found in and through the gospel through a life of human responses of repentance and faith. This process changes believers inside of the church and inside of the world which are the two primary relationships of the believer so that they can persevere and be changed into the likeness of Christ.

This book is a worthy addition to any library for a variety of reasons. The character studies of the Old Testament characters and the assessment of the downward spiral is worth reading by every reader of the Old Testament. Where many Old Testament sermons have devolved into character studies where these characters are put up as exemplary, Millar rightly challenges this concept in light of the consistent narrative trajectory which instead places the emphasis on God's grace in spite of the character's human limitations. The second greatest benefit of Millar's work was his insight that a biblical theology of change has been hindered by both over and under realized eschatology (9–12). The danger of an over-realized eschatology is that there is too much change promised. Though the gospel does undoubtedly radically change the believer, the complex process of gospel change and its holistic affects can be dangerous. Though movements which Millar notes were contrary to scriptural teaching in certain ways, the idea that such over statements can be "pastorally damaging" (11) still holds true for any over-realized, or over emphasized, eschatology, even within more biblical views. Likewise, the dangers of an under-realized eschatology can lull believers to sleep so that they fail to pursue any meaningful sanctification which is clearly antithetical to the scriptural teaching on the subject. Perhaps none of the conclusions reached by Millar were so appealing than was the emphasis on God's role in sanctification as the one who initiates, sustains, and facilitates transformation through His Son, His Spirit, and His Word.

There were some hesitations in work, though they were methodological and do not detract from the views. Since Biblical

Theology as a field has been deemed by the book series editor D.A. Carson as a wasteland where every man does what is write in his own eyes, it is not surprising that Millar has no problem discussing the philosophical, psychological, biological, and historical aspects of personal transformation.¹ However, a biblical theology is strengthened by its lack of distractions from extra-biblical sources. This collation of extra-biblical evidence and assessment is more likely the realm of systematic theology.

In conclusion, this book is heartily recommended to every reader. There is no greater need for the believer than to bear fruit and be conformed to the image of Christ, being “changed into His likeness.” The character studies from the Old Testament should be consulted by every preacher, and the concluding chapter should be referenced by all believers frequently as a tool for self-reflection. This book maintains the excellence that has become expected of this prestigious series.

Donald C. McIntyre
PhD Student in OT
Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, PA

Theological Ethics: The Moral Life of the Gospel in Contemporary Context. By W. Ross Hastings. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021. 244 pp. Hardcover \$29.99.

W. Ross Hastings is Sangwoo Youtong Chee Professor of Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, BC. He earned both a Ph.D. in Chemistry (Queen’s University, Kingston) and a Ph.D. in Theology (University of St. Andrews, Scotland). In this book, he applied his obviously brilliant mind to the question of what theological ethics should look like.

The book consists of nine chapters; a helpful Conclusion; and Scripture, Subject, and Author indexes. The nine chapters reveal the same number of characteristic features of theological ethics:

¹ D. A. Carson, “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 91.

theological; Trinitarian; biblical; eschatological (ethics of creation) and (ethics of reconciliation); evangelical; resurrectional; sexual; and public. The last two chapters, “Theological Ethics are Sexual,” and “Theological Ethics are Public,” serve as applications of the previous chapters to two major areas of ethical concern today.

Hastings’ work is truly theological in several senses. The author interacts with theologians and the Scriptures in developing his arguments. He carefully weaves together theological explanations of the connections between the deep things of the Trinity, revelation, creation, the gospel, the Word of God, Christians, the Church, missions, and the relationship between God and the world. Ethics functions as it should only in relation to all of these.

Some of the insights the author gives in the earlier chapters on the biblical, theological, and Trinitarian (including Christological and Pneumatological) nature of theological ethics are thoughtfully applied in the final chapters on the sexual and public nature of theological ethics. Those chapters are his Trinitarian, biblical, and theological insights applied to two very practical realms in which Christians should be understanding and applying ethics in the same way. The first two and last two chapters are worth the price of the book. Chapter 8 on theological ethics and sexuality is exceptionally helpful to the student who needs a biblical/theological foundation for dealing with the sexual issues of today. In many places throughout the book, Dr. Hastings takes a very strong, biblical, traditional, evangelical position.

However, in some ways the book is disappointing. It is intended to be a textbook, but the level of opacity of much of the explanation reduces its effectiveness as a textbook. At points the explanation is unnecessarily verbose and vague. The repetition of terms, such as gospel, creation, evangelical, election, eschatological, and even ethics (!), for example, in multiple contexts with different referents and meanings in each is confusing. The interactions of Hastings with Oliver O’Donovan and Karl Barth demonstrate the author’s knowledge of their theological and ethical positions, but they also draw the reader into an atmosphere that is more dense, more theoretical, and less accessible than the parts of his argument outside of those discussions. They assume a knowledge and appreciation of the ethical and theological writings of these theologians which many students will not have. The chapters on the eschatological nature of

theological ethics, especially the ethics of reconciliation, and the chapter on theological ethics as evangelical, are not impossible, but unnecessarily difficult to follow.

Nothing in the last paragraph should be construed as a dismissal of the value of the book. It has flashes of brilliance, and it effectively demonstrates the necessity of a Trinitarian, theological, biblical, “resurrectional” mindset and purpose in the moral and ethical action of Christians and churches in culture. It identifies flaws in the Church’s representation of our God to the world, cultures, and the individuals that make it up. God as the ground and power of ethics is beautifully demonstrated in a solid presentation of the Trinity. Scriptural issues are not neglected, nor are questions concerning the image of God and the ethical relationship/ responsibility of believers and unbelievers.

The question I am raising is the accessibility of Dr. Hastings’ book as a textbook. For a graduate program, in a class on the theological imperatives in ethics with adequate discussion, or in a class on the Trinity, this would be a stimulating textbook to be used with care.

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

Understanding the Jewish Roots of Christianity: Biblical, Theological & Historical Essays on the Relationship between Christianity & Judaism (Studies in Scripture and Biblical Theology). Edited by Gerald R. McDermott. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. 271 pp. Softcover \$29.99.

Gerald McDermott and his essayists have provided a thought-provoking glimpse of several of the facets of the jewel of the concept that there always should be a consciousness of the strong relationship between Judaism and Christianity. The book takes on the “radical discontinuity” between Judaism and Christianity that resulted in the catastrophic extermination of Jewish people in various countries through the centuries. In the Introduction and final chapter McDermott provides both the introductory and concluding

summaries of the various arguments presented by the contributors to the book and an answer to the question, “What difference does this make?” Before looking at his answer, a quick summary of each essay would be helpful.

Mark Gignilliat responds to the question: “How did the New Testament Authors use Tanak?” He argues that the hearers of the New Testament recognized its authority based upon its having been shaped by the Scriptures [Old Testament]. He also explores an illustration founded upon the Chalcedonian formula (concerning Jesus Christ). He states that, though the two Testaments retain their distinct voices and integrity, neither Testament “subsists apart from its relation to the other, and each Testament shares in the same divine subject matter” (16). “New Testament Christians” have been and always will continue to be “Old Testament Christians.”

Matthew Thiessen endeavors to answer the question, “Did Jesus Plan to Start a New Religion?” His answer is that the evidence of Jesus’ teaching is that He was ministering to the lost sheep of Israel, and he was teaching to observe the things they had learned in the spirit in which they were originally given—to strengthen, correct, and revive Judaism.

David Rudolph’s task is to tackle the tough question of whether Paul was championing a new freedom from, or an end to, Jewish Law. Paul is often thought of as the apostle who clarified the difference between Judaism and Christianity. Using especially Acts 15:22–29; 21:17–26; and 1 Corinthians 7:17–24, Rudolph argues that Paul was an observant Jew whose point for other Jewish Christians was that they should faithfully live out the laws and customs they had received while following Christ.

David Moffitt writes a chapter on “Jesus’ Sacrifice and the Mosaic Logic of Hebrews’ New-Covenant Theology.” In opposition to the opinion that the idea of the new covenant in Hebrews is expressive of an obvious break with Judaism, Moffitt argues that the process of sacrifice (not just the slaughter of the sacrifice), the necessity of sacrifice for reestablishing relationship, and the appropriateness of sacrifice within the covenant, are all assumed by the author of Hebrews. He sees the sacrifice of Jesus as more than His death on the cross and demonstrates how the author of Hebrews does the same. The whole process, including Jesus’ drawing near to the Father to offer His blood in the heavenly holy of holies is necessary

for a full sacrifice. Jesus' death is seen in Hebrews as the means of establishing the New Covenant, and His ongoing high-priestly ministry, including intercession which Moffitt describes as being vital for the continuing spiritual lives of believers.

Matthew S. C. Olver's subject is missed and misunderstood Jewish roots of Christian worship. Olver, who has been a member of the Anglican-Roman Catholic Consultation of the U.S., approaches his subject from the perspective that both Christianity and Judaism were both religions of sacrifice. Though the sacrifice of Christianity is bloodless, the celebration of the Lord's Supper/Eucharist has been, from the time of the writing of the New Testament, seen to be a sacrifice "directly tied to the Old Testament cult" (92). He attempts to prove that the Eucharist was from the beginning the central act of worship for Christians, and that it was called a sacrifice. This, then, demonstrates the Jewish roots from which Christianity came.

"The Parting of the Ways. When and how did the *Ekklēsia* split from the Synagogue?" is the subject of Isaac Oliver's essay. His purpose is to demonstrate that the conception that the time of the split of the *Ekklēsia* and the Synagogue was later than the second century, and that Torah-observant followers of Christ continued beyond the time when theological differences brought about exclusion of Christ-followers from the synagogues and questioning of whether Jewish Christians could continue to keep the Torah. Since Jewish followers of Jesus were at the center of Christianity from the first, it is a mistake to place the parting of the ways too early. The decisive parting was after the majority of Christians were gentiles. Then Jewish followers of Christ were welcome neither in the synagogue nor in the Church.

Eugene Korn tackles the problem of the relationship of the Church and the Jews in a chapter entitled "From Constantine to the Holocaust." From the time of Constantine through the Holocaust, the theology regarding Jews and Judaism that dominated the Church "was known in Christian scholarly circles as the *Adversus Iudaeos* ('against the Jews')" (129). Though the Messiah was a Jewish idea, the Jews refused to accept that Christ was the Messiah. Also, many Church Fathers and those who followed the through Church history, wrote and taught anti-Jewish statements based upon the Jews being "Christ-killers." Theologically, supersessionism supported the concept that God had abandoned the Jews. Korn also includes an interesting discussion of the attitudes of Jewish and Rabbinic thinkers

concerning Christianity and Christians, demonstrating how several phases can be seen from denouncing Christians as heretics to a greater appreciation of Christianity as a “positive phenomenon for gentiles that helped spread fundamental beliefs of Judaism” (143). He concludes with positive thought about improvement in relations.

Continuing the historical summary started by Korn, Jennifer Rosner deals with post-holocaust Jewish-Christian relations. The subtitle of the chapter is significant: “Challenging boundaries and rethinking theology.” She highlights what she calls the “new Jewish-Christian encounter” (149). She provides four distinctives of this encounter, including theological and doctrinal rigor, an attempt to understand each other’s religious tradition “in terms and categories of their own religion,” perception of a “deep commonality” between Christianity and Judaism, and a reconceptualization of their “own religious identity” (150), on the part of those engaged in this encounter. She highlights Barth, Franz Rosenzweig, and other post-Holocaust voices including, and especially, Mark Kinzer, who connects Israel and Jesus in his concept of Messianic Judaism.

In Chapter 10, Sarah Hall tells the (largely) untold story of the relationships between many Anglicans and Israel. Her description of the efforts made in missions, in Britain, in the Holy Land, and in facilitation of Zionism, is fascinating.

Mark Kinzer’s concern in the 11th chapter, “Messianic Judaism” is “the recovery of the Jewish character of the *ekklesiā* in the present and the future” (184). He emphasizes that while the *ekklesiā* should see herself as rooted in the story of Israel, various forces brought about the mutual exclusivity of their identities as communities. He relates the truth that three groups are actually in the conflict: “the wider Jewish community,” the Jewish members of the Church, and the gentile Christian church (190). He goes on to describe the growth of the Messianic Jewish movement, and other movements in the Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches.

In a chapter entitled “Christian Churches. What difference does the Jewishness of Jesus make?”, Archbishop Foley Beach reviews the facts concerning the Jewishness of Jesus, and then suggests the implications of these facts for contemporary followers of Jesus. Those implications are as follows: “Because Jesus was Jewish,” there should be no anti-Semitism among Jesus followers; ... modern followers of Jesus should desire to understand the Hebrew roots of

their faith; ... followers of Jesus should value the Jewish Bible; ... modern followers of Jesus should seek to understand His teachings in light of His Hebrew background; ...we should seek to share Jesus with our Jewish friends; ...we followers of Jesus owe a great debt to the Jewish people” (206–212).

Editor McDermott’s anticipated answer to the question “What difference does it make” summarizes the above and challenges us at the point of our theology. He writes: “We Christians should keep wrestling, especially if we discover that the particular stream of Christian tradition in which we have been raised is supersessionist. ... By exploring the history and faith of the people whom God loves, we will learn more about God Himself” (222).

There is so much to agree with and appreciate in this book. The reader will struggle with Olver’s treatment of the Eucharist, and it is important to chiliasts to know that the supersessionism mentioned in the book is based upon an eschatology that sees the restoration of Israel not in the millennium but at the coming of Christ to inaugurate the eternal state. Skarsaune and Havlik’s collection of essays in *Jewish Believers in Jesus* (2007), and Feldman’s *Jews and Gentiles in the Ancient World* (1993) are not mentioned in the bibliography. However, the very fact that the book seeks to set the record straight about the relationship of the Messiah and the *Ekklēsia* to Israel, God’s continuing love and plan for Israel, and the importance of our valuing and understanding our heritage in the Hebrew Scriptures, makes this collection of essays a valuable read for every serious Christian and Jewish reader.

Jim Ruff, D.Min.
 Training and Research Associate, ABWE
 Adjunct Professor, Baptist Bible Seminary
 Clark Summit, PA

T. F. Torrance as Missional Theologian: The Ascended Christ and the Ministry of the Church (New Explorations in Theology).

By Joseph H. Sherrard. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021. 256 pp. Softcover \$40.00.

Joseph Sherrard (Ph.D., University of St. Andrews) serves as the Associate Pastor of Discipleship at Signal Mountain Presbyterian Church. He is a fellow of the Center for Pastoral Theologians and participates in the work of the Paideia Center for Theological Discipleship. Sherrard's vantage point—as one who writes from within the Church, rather than from within the Academy—is fitting, given the aim of this erudite volume.

Sherrard notes that there are three typical approaches to missional theology (2–5). First, some employ sociological analysis of western culture to demonstrate the need for a fresh missionary encounter with the gospel. Second, some utilize the field of biblical theology to demonstrate that the Bible is inherently a missional document that records the story of God's mission, and of our eventual participation in that mission. Third, some thinkers have plumbed the depths of systematic theology to articulate a rationale for our missional encounter with contemporary culture. In Sherrard's estimation, it is this final category that has been neglected, and he believes that Torrance can help us develop a theologically robust missional theology for the Church.

The chief strength of this volume lies in its introduction of Torrance to missionally-minded readers (both within the Academy and within the Church) who might not have previously engaged his body of work. For readers who are unfamiliar with Torrance, the biographical snippet in the forward (by Alan Torrance) is a helpful introduction. Torrance was born in China to missionary parents. One of six children, he joined with all his siblings in ministerial service (some became missionaries, some married pastors, and Torrance became a theologian). His upbringing in a missionary family would have a profound impact upon the course of his life. Before becoming an academic theologian, Torrance spent time on the front lines of the European front, serving as a chaplain during the horrors of World War II. Shaped by his missionary family, and by his mission to suffering (and in some cases, dying) soldiers, Torrance would develop a unique sense of vocation. He believed that his task as a

theologian was to follow an ancient pattern: “The theologian has to do what the ancient bishops often had to do in the early church. They had to be, among other things, evangelists. The theologian needs to help the church evangelize the entire culture” (5).

Sherrard believes that Torrance consistently theologized in a missional manner throughout the course of his career. Indeed, Sherrard’s central argument is that “Torrance’s theology is not only consistently informed by his own sense of theological vocation ‘to help the church evangelize the entire culture,’ but also that he provides a comprehensive and constructive theology of the missional church” (217). Sherrard successfully introduced his readers to Torrance, and he also successfully portrayed him as a genuinely missional systematic theologian, one whose primary contribution to the missional conversation was his emphasis upon the *munus triplex* (Christ’s threefold office as prophet, priest, and king) and its connection to the life of the Church.

Thankfully, this was not a work of hagiography. Sherrard was clear and pointed when he believed that Torrance was exegetically or theologically suspect. For instance, he repeatedly challenged Torrance’s description of the prophetic ministry of both Christ and of the Church (74–78).

The chief weakness of the book is its complexity. Torrance was a systematic theologian, and those who are active in the missional church conversation are frequently positioned as practical or applied theologians. Missional leaders within the Church (whether evangelistic pastors, church planters, or missionary network leaders) will probably struggle to connect with the dense, academic language and structure of this volume. From Sherrard’s extensive descriptive work, it is clear that Torrance was a formidable theologian, one whose work was theologically sophisticated and intricate (much like the work of his Doktorvater, Karl Barth).

Although Torrance may, indeed, have made an important theological contribution to the missional conversation, this book will probably have a greater impact in the academy than within local churches. Perhaps a future book by Sherrard (or other interpreters of Torrance) could make his work even more accessible to missional leaders who are on the front lines of missional engagement with western culture.

Overall, this volume by Sherrard is a significant contribution to the *New Explorations in Theology* series. Although *T. F. Torrance as Missional Theologian* could have benefited from greater clarity, it still served to offer a fresh, missional lens through which to read the extensive Torrance corpus. As a theologian whose goal was to help the Church to evangelize entire cultures, Torrance would no doubt approve.

Stephen Stallard, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Pastoral Ministry
Western Seminary
Portland, OR

Demonology for the Global Church: A Biblical Approach in a Multicultural Age. By Scott D. MacDonald. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2021. 182 pp. Softcover \$21.99.

Demonology is a uniquely challenging subset of theological studies. While nearly all cultures serve as witnesses to the activity of evil supernatural forces, skepticism and sensationalism frequently overrun conversations on the subject. Furthermore, while the Scriptures unashamedly testify to the reality of the demonic, cultural influence upon interpretation threatens to annul global church consensus on this important issue. With these challenges in mind, Scott MacDonald (Academic Dean and Instructor of Theology and New Testament studies at the Baptist Theological Seminary of Zambia) writes *Demonology for the Global Church: A Biblical Approach in a Multicultural Age*, aiming to present a biblically grounded resource for Demonology that is both accessible and unifying for believers from diverse cultural backgrounds. MacDonald's experience in both the Western and Majority Worlds (cf. 5) gives him a unique perspective on the issues and certainly qualifies him for such a task.

Demonology for the Global Church spans 10 chapters. Following an introduction explaining the necessity and challenges of crafting a Demonology in the global church (chapters 1–2), MacDonald crafts the criteria for constructing a Demonology for the global church, which he identifies as biblical centrality, hermeneutical consistency, historical faithfulness, and theological harmony (chapter 3). He then

follows with a survey of the biblical data, beginning with an evaluation of demonic activity (chapter 4) and the recorded speeches of demons (chapter 5). This survey is used as the foundation to address the biblical ontology of demons (chapter 6). From here, MacDonald addresses how demons impact important institutions, including the family, religion, church, and politics (chapter 7). Lastly, he concludes with an evaluation of both current and future issues facing the global church and its contextualization of Demonology (chapters 8–10).

Readers will appreciate the uncompromising emphasis of *Demonology for the Global Church* upon biblical authority. Noting that community approval, pragmatism, and autonomous reason are not qualified as final authorities on Demonology (26), MacDonald argues that, per God's ontological supremacy, "God and God's word can authoritatively proclaim who we are, what we are supposed to do and think, and why we exist" (28). Of course, asserting the authority of God's word is not simply good theology, but is also significantly constructive. From this vantage point, "The Bible alone avoids the excesses and dismissals of competing cultural positions on the demonic" (27), and, for this reason, the foundation of biblical authority provides for common ground and cooperation amongst the cultures of the world (20–21, 136, 151). MacDonald's words are timely. As the Majority World enters the academic conversation on theology in the Postmodern era, the temptation will be to conclude that the cultures of the world cannot come to a consensus on theological matters, and the differing opinions on the demonic will only forward this thesis. Beginning one's Demonology on the foundation of the authority of the word of God is a start in overcoming this challenge and, contrary to the ethos of Postmodernism, will create a unique opportunity to bring believers from all different cultures together on an issue that is universally impactful.

Readers will also appreciate the wisdom of *Demonology for the Global Church*. Due to Western skepticism of the supernatural, it is easy for Western Christians to subconsciously question the practicality of Demonology. Nevertheless, MacDonald does an outstanding job at explaining why Demonology is essential for the Christian life. For example, a biblically faithful Demonology places salvation in its proper context. Per the Scriptural data, evil spiritual forces have been given rule over the world (50–53, 119–120) and

operate through false religious systems (54–59; 111–114), thus creating a clear dichotomy between the Christian faith and other worldviews that oppose the truth. For this reason, soteriological exclusivism, rather than pluralism or inclusivism, is the only biblical option (128), and all forms of syncretism must be rejected (114, 130, 133). However, for the same reason, believers must compassionately witness to unbelievers, knowing that the demonic realm has incredible power and influence over the unbeliever's spiritual blindness (131, 133). As MacDonald concludes, "We have no right to send people on missions ... without first giving them an understanding of demonology! Since demons are behind the religions of the world and confrontations with those spirits can occur in evangelism ... we need people who are entering new contexts to have open eyes to the spiritual dimension of missions" (154). As another example, Demonology is partially responsible for the charge that elders be mature, as church leaders are vulnerable to spiritual attack (116). In short, no one can walk away from a biblical study of the demonic without it changing one's perspective on ministry.

While there are no outright criticisms of the text, there are two important disclaimers readers should keep in mind. First, *Demonology for the Global Church* does not attempt to offer extensive work in contextualization. MacDonald is aware of diverse global challenges facing different cultural contexts (e.g., 11–15) and addresses a few case studies, such as the practice of contacting so-called familial spirits (111) and the foundations of Enlightenment-esque skepticism of the supernatural (138–141). Nevertheless, the author admits that it is beyond his ability to offer contextualization for every possible scenario. Instead, *Demonology for the Global Church* intends "to present the biblical material with clarity ... [so] that multicultural and monocultural communities can continue to face the contextualization challenges themselves" (138). This is fair as far as the purpose of the text is concerned. Nevertheless, readers should be aware that more resources may be needed depending upon one's present needs. Perhaps this is why, for example, MacDonald's discussion on demon possession is selective (64–67), a hot topic that readers might find too limited in a text of this nature.

Second, per MacDonald's emphasis on biblical priority, *Demonology for the Global Church* does not utilize ANE or Second Temple literature as primary dialogue partners in his exegesis of key

biblical texts (33, 137; cf. 48–49; 104–105). Contrarwise, he critiques Michael Heiser’s recent work *Demons* (cf. 144–148), which draws extensively from such literature, noting that, “in some cases, Heisler’s efforts to detach demonology from church traditions can lead to an extrabiblical attachment to ancient cultural traditions” (144), a common critique of Heiser’s work. Even so, while the reader who holds to biblical authority will ultimately agree with MacDonald’s decision, as the content of some ANE and Second Temple literature is significantly fanciful and lacks divine authority (cf. 148–149), those who desire greater research in extrabiblical Demonology will need to look elsewhere.

The final verdict? *Demonology for the Global Church* is a solid introduction to Demonology. It could serve as a great supplemental text for a theology course at the undergraduate level or for training through a missions organization, although it is accessible enough for any believer looking for a biblical grounded work on the demonic.

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

Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders. By Justin A. Irving and Mark L. Strauss. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 224 pp. Softcover \$24.00.

Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leadership is not just another book on leadership, rather it is a foundational contribution to the field. Irving and Strauss pack a punch in providing a fresh perspective on servant leadership in which they write, “A better description might be *empowering* leadership. It is a leadership that is other-centered, the goal of which is to enable others to fulfill their calling before God, to be all that God wants them to be” (4). This book demonstrates that to be a truly effective leader is to be a servant. True servant leadership is best exemplified in our Lord Jesus Christ, as Mark 10:45 states, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” By thoughtfully combining

their areas of expertise, Irving, having served as Professor of Ministry Leadership at Bethel Seminary and currently serving as Professor of Leadership at The Southern Baptist Theology Seminary, and Strauss, serving as University Professor of New Testament at Bethel University, provide an integrative perspective weaving together three focus areas: biblical foundations, leadership research and theory, as well as practical applications. In so doing, they provide a holistic perspective on leadership.

One of the strengths of the book is its organization. The book is divided into three parts 1) Beginning with Authentic and Purposeful Leaders; 2) Understanding the Priority of People; and 3) Navigating toward Effectiveness. Each part contains three chapters that highlight one core leadership practice. Along with an introduction, there is a total of nine chapters that emphasize four major themes: 1) Servant Leadership and Follower Focus; 2) Transformational Leadership and Organizational Transformation; 3) Team Leadership and Collaborative Orientation; and 4) Leader Purposefulness and Meaning-Based Work. One critique of the book is that it ends abruptly leaving the reader longing for a conclusion of some sort.

Irving and Strauss write as one voice in a clear, direct, and easy-to-read manner. In each chapter, the authors strike a fine balance of providing solid biblical foundations, contemporary/modern best practices, and practical next steps for real-life application. In addition, the authors offer next steps and additional resources for a deeper look and further study. Throughout the book, the authors break down the content into key leadership priorities, practices, and perspectives. Right up front, Irving and Strauss provide their definition of leadership and state, “Empowering leadership is a process by which leaders and followers partner together for the purpose of achieving common goals and shared vision” (1). Very early on, they define values and give a brief history of leadership theory which is helpful for those new to the field or for seasoned leaders who may need a brief overview. The authors establish key themes that they build upon based on biblical anthropology (the study of human beings). The authors assert that humans are created in the image of God (75, 82, 106), whole (47, 134), relational (53), spiritual (116–17) and creative beings (76, 117).

Irving and Strauss’s book provides an alternative to traditional, authoritarian, hierarchal forms of leadership. The authors’ approach

of empowering leadership stands in stark contrast to the traditional model because it does not use fear or control. Rather, this approach focuses on equipping people to be who God created them to be through humility and service. The authors state, “It is our hope that your journey through this book will provide a vision for leadership that empowers others and transforms the teams and organizations within which you serve and work” (14). This book is an asset for any Christian who desires to empower and equip others to lead in Christian perspective, whether they find themselves in a formal leadership capacity or not.

Alair M. August, Ed.D. (in progress)
Adjunct Professor of General Education
Northeastern Baptist College
Bennington, VT

God on Mute: Engaging the Silence of Unanswered Prayer. By Pete Greig. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 352 pp. Softcover \$19.99.

Pete Greig is both the founder of the *24–7 Prayer* movement and the senior pastor of a church in England. So, it should not be surprising that he has written (and recently revised) a work that reflects seriously on the commonly experienced phenomenon of unanswered prayer. As Greig puts it in his introduction, “the brutal fact of the matter is that, while most of us pray, prayer does not always seem to work and it’s not easy to be honest about this” (7). Even Jesus, he observes, suffered the silence of unanswered prayer. But this is no ivory tower dissertation. It is a thoughtful and very personal wrestling with a significant spiritual issue born at least in part out of the author’s own experience with his wife’s chronic and often debilitating illness.

The chapters of the book are divided thematically by the four days of the passion weekend: Maundy Thursday (“How am I going to get through this?”), Good Friday (“Why aren’t my prayers being answered”), Holy Saturday (“Where is God when heaven is silent?”), and Easter Sunday (“When every prayer is answered”). Greig also provides a *Forty-Day Journal of Prayer* (227–318), based upon the same passion weekend format, and two brief but helpful appendices.

There is much to commend in this work. First, despite the profound subject matter, the book is accessible to a wide audience. Second, besides the many personal anecdotes and real life-based illustrations, Greig consistently and pastorally grounds his propositions in the text of Scripture. The core of the book consists of fifteen explanations for unanswered prayer that are largely well-known and uncontroversial (90–161). But the way Greig packages his explanations both scripturally and anecdotally conveys his pastor's heart and provides a very practical, encouraging, and easy to grasp illumination of a theologically troubling and spiritually vexing issue.

On the other hand, while Greig's theology is principally evangelical, he obviously pursues broad ecumenical appeal as seen in the multitude of favorable citations from persons of virtually every stripe of Christendom (e.g., Karl Barth, Henri Nouwen, Søren Kierkegaard, Andrew Murray, C.S. Lewis, Hudson Taylor, Anatoly Emmanuilovich Letvin, Ignatius of Loyola, Thomas à Kempis, N. T. Wright, the Council of Trent, Rudolph Bultmann, and Mother Teresa). For this author, such a wide theological spectrum serves not only to legitimize heterodox beliefs it undermines a basic cause of unanswered prayer, namely, the absence of a genuinely regenerated heart.

More concerning is Greig's apparent embrace of Open Theism. For example, he asserts that Scripture depicts "the Almighty as one who continually chooses to limit His own power" and "not to override the free will that he has given to humanity." In fact, he states, "I believe that we will fail completely to understand the dynamics of prayer and the reasons for unanswered prayer unless we first understand God's determination to respect the free will of humanity" (121). For this reason, "There has never been a greater risk than the one God took in choosing to create humanity" (123). Indeed, "we believe that the almighty God does not always get His way on earth—even though He is the almighty God ... Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, 'Your kingdom come, your will be done' (Matt. 6:10), precisely because it isn't a foregone conclusion" (136).

Whether Greig is a full-fledged Open Theist or just a theologically careless Arminian (he does not distinguish God's decretive will from his permissive will) is not clear. But, as many have observed, such beliefs tend to weaken faith in a God who truly can bring about his plan and purposes, including answering the

prayers of his people, who take great comfort in his omnipotence and omniscience.

Despite these caveats, I would recommend *God on Mute* for any mature believer who is struggling with apparent unanswered prayers. One of my favorite statements in the book is: “We cannot remove Gethsemane and Golgotha from the reality of life in Christ” (107). If more Christians clearly understood and embraced this down-to-earth truth, I believe less would truly struggle not only with unanswered prayer but with the painful vicissitudes of life in general.

Douglas C. Bozung, Ph.D.
Lead Pastor
Christian Fellowship Church
New Holland, PA

A Short History of Christian Zionism: From the Reformation to the Twenty-First Century. By Donald M. Lewis. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2021. 384 pp. Softcover \$36.00; Kindle \$26.32.

The late Donald M. Lewis (d. October 2021) has provided an impressive history of Christian Zionism. While the title accurately represents the contents of the book, one might falsely conclude that the author has little to say about the various other kinds of extant Zionism (viz., secular, religious, political, revisionist, etc.). Clearly, the author’s focus is on *Christian* Zionism, but for anyone to have a good grasp of such a complicated subject, he must also have a keen awareness of the various other types of Zionism, since each one in some way affects all the others. And while Lewis’ credentials indicate he is qualified to do so, his writing even more so demonstrates his mastery of the subject matter.

Lewis, a thoroughgoing Anglican since his early twenties, but raised in the tradition of the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada (his father a pastor), served for over forty years as Professor of Church History at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia. He earned his doctorate at Oxford University specializing in the Victorian era of evangelicalism. He has many publications, including a prior one on the same subject published in 2014 titled *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland*, wherein the book traces the nineteenth-century background of

Christian Zionism. Thus, one might say that this current book (2021) is an enlargement of the former encompassing as far back as the sixteenth-century and extending to the present day. Although his 2021 work seeks to span six-hundred years of an intricate history, he sets it all up by devoting the first chapter (27 pages) to covering the first fifteen hundred years of church history with respect to the attitudes of both Jews and Gentiles toward the land of Israel and the Jews relationship to that land. Thus, the heart of his work begins with the second chapter.

While the book is 381 pages in length—with just 18 pages of frontmatter (Acknowledgments, Introduction) and 11 pages of backmatter (General Index, Scripture Index)—one would expect a much longer volume since it covers such a vast span of history that involves quite a convoluted development of Jewish history interfacing with many cultures and eras of time. We could view the fifteen chapters of the book as nicely falling into two unequal parts. The first part would be chapters 2–6, where Lewis systematically discusses developments in certain countries, but always in the light of a progressive timeline. He begins discussing events in Geneva, Switzerland (ch. 2, ca. 1500–1550s), then points out further developments in Britain with the English Puritans (ch. 3, ca. 1550s–1750s), followed by an explanation of developments in Germany among the German Pietists (ch. 4., ca. 1650s–1750s). Next, Lewis traces further refinements in the new world of America where the notion of “restorationism” becomes firmly established (ch. 5, ca. 1650s–1790s), even though it was a carry-over largely from the German Pietists. Next, he returns to discussing further developments in Britain with its British Evangelicalism (ch. 6, ca. 1790s–1850s).

As for the second part, I would characterize chapters 7–15 as primarily tracing disparate theological strands loosely grouped together as falling within the same dispensational tradition resulting in an ever-rising political force in various places in the world. In chapters 7–10, Lewis highlights the Balfour Declaration, which was first conceived in December 1917. He recounts the history leading up to, centering on, and flowing out of it. Then in chapters 11 and 12, he outlines how Israel achieved independence (ch. 11) as well as the internal changes within American Christian Zionism (ch. 12). In the final three chapters (chs. 13–15), he discloses how various organizations are motivated to get behind the idea of Zionism—with

many groups completely ambivalent to the political and social issues generated when the Jews reoccupied the land of Israel and displaced many Arabs (ch. 13). He shows how the Zionist movement essentially became overtaken by charismatic influences and Renewalist Theology (ch. 14). Finally, he assesses the status of today's Christian Zionism as seen by the title of his last chapter, "Christian Zionism Today: A 'New' Christian Zionism" (ch. 15).

So how should we assess this work by Lewis? There are several ways to view it. First, there is a wealth of well-documented information which I found to be enlightening. Second, the tone is irenic and professional. All the way through the book I kept trying to discern his theological leanings. And there are places here and there where I thought I could discern it, but it was not obvious. Third, he masterfully untangles the many strands of theological movements and underpinnings of Zionism and shows the reader that the forces that converged for the Jews to have a homeland were disparate, often motivated by opposing philosophies and quite distinct eschatologies.

My final point is a negative one. While Lewis' tone is kind and seemingly neutral, in the final analysis, I believe his theological commitments prevail. We see this in his overall premise, namely, that history shows no evidence of Christian Zionism in the early church, but rather it began in the 1600s shortly after the Reformation. Moreover, he argues that it was fueled by a type of dispensational eschatology, which morphs itself with the winds of the times. Such a pliable eschatology, he argues, allows proponents to project themselves into biblical prophecy as activists in helping the Jews return to their land. This is because dispensational eschatology holds that the return of Messiah will not happen until "his people" (i.e., the Jews) are back in the land. This is a view, he argues, that simply didn't exist the first fifteen hundred years of the church, and when it did emerge, most of the Jews themselves opposed it.

My main criticism of Lewis is methodological. He only spent 27 pages tracing any evidence of Zionism in the first 1500 years of the Church. Admittedly, there is a paucity of evidence, but nevertheless, there is *some* evidence both within the early church (e.g., Irenaeus in A.D. 185) and within the medieval church (e.g., John of Rupescissa, ca. 1310–1366), as other dispensational scholars have argued. Beyond that, there are also compelling arguments for *why* there is a paucity of evidence, which engages one in his or her overall

eschatological ideology. Lewis does not wrestle with these important matters in any significant way. Granted, such is not the aim of the book, but he does build on the premise of it. Thus, in my estimation, his premise is largely untested, from which he proceeds to characterize dispensationalism (especially dispensational premillennialism) as ever-morphing according to the political developments of the day, rather than being grounded in a biblical hermeneutic.

Though my one criticism above is significant, I did learn much from reading it and commend it as a valuable historical reference work, albeit, with the caution noted above.

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

Preaching the Word with John Chrysostom. By Gerald Bray.
Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. 132 pp. Softcover \$12.99.

Lexham's "Lived Theology" series (edited by Michael Haykin, Professor of Church History at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary) thus far includes volumes on Samuel Pearce and Abraham Kuyper, as well as this entry on John Chrysostom. John of Antioch, the fourth-century bishop, was known as *Chrysostomos* or "Golden-Mouthed" because of his powerful pulpit ministry. Therefore, the book is aptly titled, *Preaching the Word with John Chrysostom*. Gerald Bray, who is a Research Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School, has structured this study around "John the Man" (Chapter 1), "In the Beginning" (Chapter 2), "John's Portrait of Jesus" (Chapter 3), "In the Footsteps of Paul the Apostle" (Chapter 4), and "The Legacy" (Chapter 5).

Chapter 1 places John within the political, cultural, and ecclesiastical contexts of his day. One can only understand him fully by taking into account the rhetorical training of the period, the palace and imperial intrigues, and the tensions between major episcopal sees. Yet John himself rises as a summit above these surrounding ranges. "The simplicity of his life, the sincerity of his faith, and the

sufferings he was unjustly forced to endure all combined to enhance his reputation” (4). He composed several influential treatises on suffering, virginity, child-rearing, pastoral ministry, and monastic living.

The core of his legacy, however, is embodied in his preaching and homiletical works. Chrysostom has sometimes been portrayed as a moralist, constantly railing against the entertainment habits of his hearers. But he was primarily an expository preacher, and he famously sermonized his way through numerous biblical books, especially the epistles of Paul. Although a gifted intellectual, he was able to communicate to the masses. Such understandable speech was characterized by accommodation but also precision (20). As Bray notes, “... he had mastered the essence of the classical style, which was to present complex ideas in a simple way that spoke to educated and uneducated alike” (12). John also spoke boldly, as when he forthrightly rebuked the fashionable excesses of the Empress Eudoxia and her entourage. Like Athanasius before him, and like Calvin and Edwards after him, John was dismissed from his own church, although he was reinstated for a time before a second exile (and eventual death).

“In the Beginning,” the second chapter, covers John’s teaching on Creation and the Fall. According to Bray, “John knew that if he was to expound the gospel he had to start at the beginning” (32). Bray explains, “The most fundamental challenge to the Christian church in the ancient world was its need to convince a pagan culture that the biblical view of creation and the material universe was true” (29). John’s rootedness in the doctrines of Creation and Fall applied directly to his interactions with his congregants as divine image bearers distorted by sin. “John obviously felt more comfortable in dealing with actual realities rather than with theoretical possibilities, and in this respect he showed a sure theological and pastoral instinct” (55).

Although Chrysostom may be most famous for his sermons on the Pauline Epistles, Bray initially focuses upon John’s exposition of the Gospels (Chapter 3: “John’s Portrait of Jesus”). John viewed Jesus’ life and teaching through the prism of his own practical concerns as a preacher and pastor (85). He was “very quick to apply the pastoral practice of Jesus during his earthly ministry to the needs of the church in his own day” (92). For example, Chrysostom

emphasized the individualized touch of Jesus' personal encounters (79). He recognized, however, that the ultimate goal of the incarnation was not only instruction and discipleship but the cross (87).

The fourth chapter examines Chrysostom's following "In the Footsteps of Paul the Apostle." It would be difficult to overestimate the influence of the Apostle Paul upon the life and ministry of John Chrysostom. "John was obsessed with Paul and seldom passed up an opportunity to lean on the apostle's authority and example" (102). He addressed the apostle with no fewer than sixty-five "laudatory epithets," including "the mouth of Christ," "the lyre of the Spirit," and "the heavenly trumpet" (103–104). "Not only did he comment on all fourteen epistles that make up the Pauline corpus (including Hebrews, which John accepted as Paul's work), but throughout his writings he quotes Paul abundantly and the lessons he draws from his teaching and example are almost too numerous to count" (97). Chrysostom viewed the apostle as "a living presence" and as "a dialogue partner in his own pursuit of the gospel message" (101–102).

Bray summarizes Chrysostom's lasting legacy as follows: "Reading, studying, and applying the teaching of the Bible to our lives—this is the enduring message of John Chrysostom and his greatest legacy to the church" (118). Those from other theological frameworks would probably also mention the continuing influence of the *Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*—the most celebrated divine liturgy in the Byzantine Rite, and one not only used "on particular feast days" as mistakenly claimed (9). However, although the liturgy is named after him, "how much of it goes back to John himself is uncertain" (9). The book ends with several helpful tools, including a short bibliography for "Further Reading" ("the best and most comprehensive recent works," 119), as well as both subject and scriptures indexes.

Bray walks somewhat of a tightrope in introducing John Chrysostom's legacy to a largely Evangelical audience. Bray asserts, "John was not a Protestant, of course, but his understanding of salvation, derived from the apostle Paul, was one that resonated with the Reformers ..." (36). However, such a framing of the patristic bishop could be misleading. Certainly, we should not read Chrysostom anachronistically nor judge him by later standards (89).

Chrysostom naturally “had no idea of the later controversy that would emerge” (112). Nevertheless, the Reformers themselves noted that they differed from Chrysostom’s perspectives on grace and human cooperation. Bray discusses Thomas Cranmer’s appropriation of Chrysostom, but he does not mention John Calvin’s mitigated appreciation for the bishop. The Genevan Reformer pinpointed areas of disagreement concerning the doctrines of grace, human cooperation, merit, election, predestination, and free will. Yet Calvin refused to dismiss Chrysostom in a wholesale manner, arguing that his sermons remain instructive regarding Christian living and worship.

John was not a perfect leader. He erred in some of his theological positions (7–8, 15), held some logically inconsistent views (53–54), and manifested anti-Jewish suppressionism (20). Nevertheless, his expository and homiletical works remain treasures of church history. In particular, his exegetical decisions found within his New Testament studies are worthy of consideration. Readers may still gather rich ingots of insight from the Golden-Mouthed preacher from Antioch, as they mine deeply into *Preaching the Word with John Chrysostom*.

Paul Hartog, Ph.D.
Professor of Bible, Theology, and Humanities
Faith Baptist Theological Seminary
Ankeny, IA

The Integration of Psychology & Christianity: A Domain-Based Approach. By William L. Hathaway and Mark A. Yarhouse.
Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2021. 216 pp. Softcover \$28.00.

Although certainly not a new concept but one that has generated significant interest and investigation in recent decades, the historical background and present-day application of the integration of psychology and Christianity is carefully considered in this book. Numerous examples are offered of writings by others that have sought to elucidate the examination of this concept. Throughout this book, this integration project, as the authors have labeled it, a good summary is provided of the journey that this project has had and the import that it could have for those who are believers in people-

helping work. Hathaway and Yarhouse unapologetically confess that they have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and share their journey both spiritually and professionally as psychologists who are earnest to not keep these two aspects of their lives separate.

The organizational structure of this book is appreciated. To aid the reader, the authors have divided their work into five domains: worldview integration, theoretical integration, applied integration, role integration, and personal integration. The exploration of the domains is not for casual reading, as the authors have carefully and deeply investigated but also summarized the various key concepts that have shaped these domains over the years.

Regarding “worldview integration,” the reader is implored to grasp the foundational significance that a person’s worldview has and the importance of being self-aware so that biases are avoided in one’s professional work. Again, in this section of the book, the authors provide a historical overview of the philosophies that have affected the people-helping professions and contrast these philosophies with the claims of scripture.

The next domain that is discussed is “theoretical integration.” Noting that theoretical integration logically follows worldview integration, Hathaway and Yarhouse note: “Theories can be thought of as what one sees when looking out from one’s view of the world at specific aspects of that world” (67). It is a well-known understanding that people-helpers who are astute to their professional calling will approach the need of each person that is served with at least some basic theoretical structure. But how does one evaluate that structure to make sure that it agrees with scripture? The reader is offered helpful admonition and examples are also provided. Navigating this domain can be challenging considering present-day issues that people-helping professionals face.

The third domain that is discussed by the authors is “applied integration.” If the reader is not tenacious to keep moving through the chapters and stops before reaching this point, it seems that much of the benefit of the book will be forfeited. As the authors state: “In this chapter we focus on the domain of application of the psychological disciplines to address practical tasks such as treating mental illness or providing data-based change consultation to individuals, groups, or societies” (95). An extremely valuable discussion in this chapter is on implicit, explicit, and intentional integration. A people-helper who is

a Christian can exercise wisdom and find encouragement as these concepts are explored.

The fourth domain, “role integration,” an area that can be fraught with questions and challenges, is the next area of the integration project that is addressed. The authors have said: “The need for professional role integration arises when Christians voluntarily enter a profession that requires fidelity to ethic codes, professional practice standards, relevant legal statutes, or regulation” (125). This section of the book is helpful for those individuals who have been called to serve in secular people-helping vocations but struggle with navigating the tensions that frequently occur. However, giving to “Caesar” what is appropriately owed and having a dynamic witness for Christ’s kingdom is achievable.

The last domain, “personal integration,” was this reviewer’s favorite part of the book. This is not because it is more important than all the other domains that have been discussed, but because the authors share at length their own personal journey from the time that they trusted Christ as Savior to the present place that they occupy in their professional work. Their stories are interesting and an encouragement to those who pursue a passion for Christ even though there are challenges. The reader is reminded in this chapter that if we are to be faithful in our personal integration, then we need to value cultural humility. The authors emphasize that cultural humility is fleshed out in the multicultural counseling literature and is a mindset that must pervade our professional and personal endeavors.

In summary, this book supplies an excellent historical overview of the integration project and supplies incentive for this exploration to continue. It is not a book that should be read hastily, expecting to obtain quick and easy answers but rather provides an opportunity for the Christian people-helping professional to explore more deeply how one can be faithful to their vocation and pleasing to God.

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

Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age.
 By Joshua D. Chatraw. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2020.
 228 pp. Softcover \$18.99.

Chatraw's *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age* convincingly calls readers to consider a new approach to the apologetic task for our post-Christian (and postmodern) age. The volume consists of three parts: part one lays out Chatraw's apologetic method, part two gives examples of the method in practice, and part three helps the reader to address obstacles the apologist may encounter when using this method to evangelize.

The key chapter of the book, chapter five, lays out the particulars of Chatraw's apologetic method. Chatraw calls his method "inside out apologetics," a name which points to the approach's two key tasks. First, inside out apologetics calls the believer to enter "inside" (i.e., come to understand) the "story" of the unsaved person he seeks to reach. By "story," Chatraw means the person's metanarrative framework (i.e., worldview) they are using to assign meaning to their life experiences. The basic assumption in this first task is that any metanarrative framework that excludes God will inevitably run into difficulties to fully and satisfactorily explain our experiences as human beings. The first job of the apologist, therefore, is to locate those difficulties through a careful analysis of the lost person's story.

This analysis of the unsaved person's story then gives way to the apologist's second task: to move from "inside" the lost person's metanarrative framework "outside" to the better story of the Gospel—the better metanarrative framework that more satisfactorily explains human experience. As Chatraw writes, "By working inside rival stories to show how their own narratives fail to adequately answer life's biggest questions we've created space for the other person to seriously consider how Christianity offers a more satisfying and rationally coherent story" (69–70).

In part two, Chatraw gives examples of the worldview analysis integral to his inside out approach. To do this, he takes five elements of the secular worldview, examines their insufficiencies, and explains how the gospel offers the better framework for understanding the human concerns embodied in these elements. For example, Chatraw explores society's longing for self-worth and how the gospel offers a better framework for answering this longing than the framework

offered by a secularist worldview. Chatraw's list of five elements is not meant to be exhaustive; rather, Chatraw is offering a model of going inside the secularists' stories in order to find opportunities to lead the lost person out to the better story offered in Scripture. Part three, the shortest of the three parts, concludes the volume by responding to common objections to the notion that the Bible's story is indeed the better story. Here, Chatraw hopes to answer objections from the lost that the gospel story is indeed the better story the apologist claims it is.

In an earlier publication by Chatraw, the strategy presented in *Telling a Better Story* is contextualized within the broader landscape of apologetic method. Chatraw sees the inside out method as sharing some of the DNA of presuppositionalism in that both methods "stress that all evidence and reasoning depends on a person's particular framework [i.e., that person's story or metanarrative]."¹ Additionally, within *Telling a Better Story*, Chatraw promotes the use of evidentialist arguments when the apologist is faced with certain objections to the better story (e.g., objections to the factual nature of the biblical story). In other words, Chatraw's method shares a similarity with presuppositionalism and is not against the incorporation of classical or evidentialist apologetics in certain situations. That said, Chatraw's inside out apologetic lays out a unique approach making its own contributions to Christian apologetics alongside classical, evidentialist, and presuppositionalist methods.

One such contribution of Chatraw's inside out apologetic is its offer of a more organic route to the gospel. Chatraw claims the key component of his apologetic, a critical reflection on the lost person's story (metanarrative), allows the apologist to build "a bridge" to the better story of the Gospel (7). What is uniquely helpful about the bridge inside-out apologetics builds is that the raw materials for the bridge—the connections that facilitate Christian witness—are located within the lost person himself. The inside-out apologetic "is about engaging the deepest aspirations of our secular friends and asking them to consider how the story of the gospel ... just may lead them

¹ "A Way Forward for Pastor-Apologetists: Navigating the Apologetic Method Debate," *Journal of Biblical and Theological Studies* 3, no. 1 (2018): 73.

to what their heart has been looking or all along” (7). In other words, the aspirations are already there—the raw materials necessary for building a bridge to the gospel are already present. Thus, the method provides an organic route to the Gospel making the method highly accessible to the lay person (human aspirations are something we are all intimately familiar with) while also making the method immediately relatable to the lost person.

While the approach itself is very accessible, Chatraw’s decision to not include real-life examples of his apologetic in action feels like a missed opportunity in his attempt to provide a true “how to” as his title promises. Not only would such examples demonstrate the effectiveness of his method, but they would also serve as a guide to help readers visualize what real-life implementation of the inside-out apologetic might look like in regular conversation. Multiple times throughout the volume, Chatraw discusses his intentional avoidance of presenting his apologetic in any sort of formulaic way. When introducing part two, for example, Chatraw clarifies, “The goal in this section is not to give you a list of apologetic ‘moves,’ but instead to pass on a *way* to approach engaging others.” He continues, “Rather than strict step-by-step instructions, the goal is for you to come away with trajectories for talking about God in a post-Christian landscape” (74). It is possible that the lack of real-world examples simply reflects his goal to not “offer a rigid system to be followed slavishly” (66). However, for the sake of demonstrating the method’s effectiveness, and for the sake of equipping readers with a clear visualization of the method in real-world conversations, inclusion of examples from Chatraw’s own experiences would have helped toward fully realizing his goal of providing a “how to.”

This is not to say that the “how to” question is left unanswered. While his own experiences with his method are left out of the volume, Chatraw nonetheless includes many examples of how to think critically about secular metanarratives and identify those places within these stories where bridges to the gospel can be built. In fact, one of the greatest values of *Telling a Better Story* is the way in which it provides an excellent model of cultural analysis. Chatraw repeatedly demonstrates what it looks like for a believer to carefully analyze the worldviews of the lost—a critical skill Chatraw correctly identifies as being key to successful Christian witness in a post-Christian world.

Overall, *Telling a Better Story* is a great read for pastors and interested laymen. Not only does it provide a compelling method for introducing the lost to the Gospel within this post-Christian and postmodern age, but the volume also offers ample encouragement to the believer as page after page confirms the “better story’s” powerful and satisfying explanatory power for all human experience.

Jared Twigg, Ph.D. (candidate)
Baptist Bible Seminary
Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania

Baptism: A Guide to Life from Death. By Peter J. Leithart.
Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021. 128 pp. Softcover \$15.99; Kindle \$9.99.

With this book, Peter Leithart attempts to “reunite a church divided by baptism” by recovering “the baptismal imagination of earlier generations” (2). In other words, he hopes to bridge the credobaptist/paedobaptist divide, which is an admirable aspiration for sure, and he aims to do so in an imaginative way. It’s this imaginative approach that will leave the reader disappointed who expects either a careful explanation of biblical texts pertaining to baptism or a methodical exploration of the development of this doctrine and practice throughout church history. The author follows neither of these strategies. Instead, he follows Martin Luther’s “Great Flood Prayer” as a guide and template for his study, an approach which gives this book a distinctively Lutheran flavor. The author himself acknowledges that the book features “Lutheran overtones” (105). He prefaces each of his ten chapters with a sequential quotation from Luther’s formulaic prayer, then he constructs each chapter around concepts that relate to each quotation some way or another.

Throughout the book, Leithart offers a variety of imaginative connections and interpretations of biblical and theological concepts which he believes will enhance our understanding of and appreciation for baptism. He states these proposed insights, however, in ambiguous and imprecise ways. To reinforce his perspective, he cites a variety of sources and personalities from church history, turning most frequently to ancient figures like Tertullian, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Jerusalem, and also to a contemporary

figure in N.T. Wright. Among others, he cites the Shepherd of Hermas and even draws from John Paul II on one occasion, whom he names side-by-side with William Carey and Hudson Taylor and whom he claims spoke “prophetic words” which were “energized by the Spirit” (94). He draws from such ecumenical sources throughout the book.

Leithart follows a flexible and fluid hermeneutical method when citing or interpreting Bible passages that speak of baptism. Not only does he fail to distinguish between passages pertaining to water baptism and those pertaining to Spirit baptism, he also fails to distinguish between water baptism and regeneration, as when he makes unclear statements like “baptism makes the baptized a new creature” (31) and “Jesus’ blood cleanses us through baptismal water” (63). Such theological ambiguity is confusing and unhelpful for both scholarly study and congregational ministry alike. The author also offers unmistakable admiration for infant baptism. In one place he makes an impassioned plea for credobaptist readers to acknowledge the spiritual value of infant baptism (41–44), claiming elsewhere that “in baptism, adults and infants are pledged to Jesus...” (55).

Leithart’s fluid hermeneutical method emerges most prolifically, however, by how he draws baptismal significance from what seems to be any biblical mention of water whatsoever. For instance, when discussing the messianic king of Psalm 72:6, “who is like rain upon the mowing, like showers that water the earth,” he suggests that “the just king baptized the land” and concludes that “baptism is the good news that Jesus’ royal rain has fallen from heaven to earth” (85–86). Such imaginative interpretations permeate this book, from the waters of Creation and Eden to the waters of the Flood, to any water appearing in Moses’ life, to mentions of water in the Old Testament prophets, and more. Leithart’s fundamental hermeneutical principle here seems to be that whenever Scripture speaks of water it provides us with yet another insight into the significance of baptism.

Throughout this book, Leithart certainly applies a high degree of “baptismal imagination,” and this highly imaginative approach is precisely what makes the book difficult to recommend. While it makes clear that Leithart thinks highly of baptism and desires for the reader to do the same, it fails to provide a clear biblical theology of baptism, leaning hard upon imaginative statements by ecumenical

figures from church history and on loose creative and philosophical interpretations instead. As such, there is no compelling reason to add this book to your personal or ministerial curriculum, library, or reading list.

Thomas Overmiller
Lead Pastor
Brookdale Baptist Church
Moorhead, MN

Dissertations in Progress at Baptist Bible Seminary

— *Old Testament* —

Alex Morris – *Inner-Biblical Portraiture: The Use of Genesis 1-3 in the Song of Songs*

David Wyant – *An Assessment of Robert Alter's Categorization of Well-Setting Type-Scenes in Genesis*

— *New Testament* —

Kenneth Banks – *The Timing of Justification—An Inductive Study of the New Testament*

Alfred Nyamiwa – *A Biblical Theology of ζῶν in the Gospel of John*

Brian Shealy – *The Hermeneutical Methodology of N. T. Wright: A Critical Evaluation*

— *Systematic Theology* —

Ward Harris – *An Analysis of the Eschatological Teaching of Dr. Hoyle Bowman in Comparison to John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Charles C. Ryrie*

Troy Lohmeyer – *F. W. Grant: An Examination of his Theological Method and Enigmatic Contribution to the Dispensational Tradition*

Tim White – *An Exposition of the Non-Evangelical Character of Walter Rauschenbusch's Views of the Social Gospel and Penal Substitution*

Wayne Willis – *An Evaluation, Explanation, and Comparative Analysis of the Mediatorial Kingdom View of Alva J. McClain*



538 Venard Road | Clarks Summit | Pennsylvania