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Edited by
Calvin L. Smith
Stephen M. Vantassel

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The *Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics* subscribes to the historic decisions of the early church councils. We hold dearly to the deity of Christ, the virgin conception, salvation through Jesus Christ, and the Trinity. We also believe in the unity of Scripture and consider the Bible as the final authority on all issues of faith and practice. This high view of Scripture requires submissions to be underpinned by a thoughtful biblical and theological analysis. The Editors also welcome non-Evangelical contributors to submit critiques of Evangelical political and social thought, providing they are suitably respectful of our values and beliefs, and that submissions are of interest and relevance to the aims and readership of the journal. Articles appearing in the journal do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editors.

Editors

Dr Calvin L. Smith, King's
Evangelical Divinity School, U.K.

Dr Stephen Vantassel, King's
Evangelical Divinity School,
U.K., and, University of Nebraska
(Lincoln), U.S.A.

Book Reviews Editor

Timothy Lim T. N., Regent
University (Virginia, U.S.A.) and
King's Evangelical Divinity School
(U.K.)

Design, Web, and Production Manager

P.H. Brazier (Ash Design),
Wimbledon London, U.K.

Consulting Editors

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Contributors

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Articles

REVD DN. DAVID MUTHUKUMAR S.

The author is a PhD Candidate (Systematic Theology) at Fuller Theological Seminary, California. He is from India and is interested in the systematic articulation of the uniqueness of Christ in the context of Indian religious diversity, especially in dialogue with Hindu faith. He is ordained as a Deacon in the Church of North India (CNI) Mumbai Diocese.

(Published May 6, 2019)

JONGSEOCK SHIN

Jongseock Shin is a PhD candidate at Fuller Theological Seminary. He is currently working on his dissertation on the topic of natural and cosmic theodicy and creative/redemptive divine action in a Trinitarian panentheistic framework of creation. This study is interdisciplinary as it seeks to present a mutually fruitful dialogue between natural science and theology.

(Published June 20, 2019)

P. H. BRAZIER

Paul Brazier is an independent theologian and scholar who lives in London, U.K. Since 1999 he has been the full-time care-giver to his wife who has epilepsy. His doctoral work was on the influence of Dostoevsky on the young Karl Barth. He is editor of the late Colin E. Gunton's work (*The Barth Lectures*, also, *Revelation and Reason*). He has published widely in theology and philosophy including an in-depth systematic theological works on C.S. Lewis and Dostoevsky.

(Published June 20, 2019)

ROBB TORSETH

Robb Torseth (S.T.M., Yale University) is a research assistant at the Jonathan Edwards Center at Gateway Seminary near Los Angeles, California. His thesis, published at Yale Divinity School, was entitled "Transhumanism, Humanity, and the Image of God: A Systematic Theological Critique."

(Published September 26, 2019)

Review Articles

VIKTOR TÓTH

Viktor Tóth is a PhD candidate at Fuller Theologica Seminary in Theological Anthropology. In connection with theological resources, his fields of research include brain sciences, complex systems theory, philosophy of mind, psychology, and paleoanthropology. He currently studies Phenomenology at Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary. He is an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ, USA. He holds various ecclesiastical positions.

(Published January 1, 2019)

Book Reviews

DANIEL L. STEVENSON, JR.,
Fuller Theological Seminary
(Published January 1, 2019)

ESTEBAN MIRANDA,
Fuller Theological Seminary
(Published January 1, 2019)

AGNES CHIU, PH.D. 趙李秀珍博士
Assistant Professor 助理教授 / Director of Development 拓展部主任
China Evangelical Seminary North America 北美中華福音神學院
(Published January 1, 2019)

JOYCE DEL ROSARIO,
Fuller Theological Seminary, PhD Candidate
(Published January 1, 2019)

STEPHEN M. VANTASSEL,
King's Evangelical Divinity School
(Published March 2, 2019)

AARON PERRY
Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and Leadership, Wesley
Seminary at Indiana Wesleyan University, Marion, IN
(Published March 21, 2019)

DANIEL L. STEVENSON, JR.
Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California
(Published June 20, 2019)

EMILY BUCK
Fuller Theological Seminary
(Published June 20, & July 17, 2019)

DR. CRAIG HENDRICKSON
Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL
(Published June 20, 2019)

BRENDON MICHAEL NORTON
Hamilton, MA
(Published June 26, 2019)

KENNETH R. MARPLE
Director/Founder of C2U Ministries
(Published August 12, 2019)

MARK ANDERSON
(Published October 8, 2019)



Introduction

Calvin L. Smith

About

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics is an online journal. All articles and reviews are published online as PDF files, and are downloadable by subscribers.

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What you have here are the articles, review articles, and reviews from 2019 collected together in a single edition for subscribers to print-off, or consult in electronic mode on Kindle or an e-Book reader.

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The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics is a peer-reviewed, online, subscription journal exploring God’s revelation to humanity in the form of Jesus Christ. Scholarly submissions that are suitably respectful of the Evangelical Christian tradition are welcomed and invited from across the disciplinary spectrum: Evangelical theology, biblical studies, biblical theology, politics, society, economics, missiology, homiletics, discipleship, preaching, conversion, salvation, atonement, redemption, the Church et al.

About...

The Evangelical Review of Society and Politics and *The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics*, are international peer-reviewed journals exploring Evangelical issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. The purpose of the journal is to bring an international and scholarly Evangelical analysis to bear upon various social and political issues of national and international interest. The Editors are committed to presenting the full spectrum of Evangelical thought to provide readers (whether Evangelical or those analysing Evangelical phenomena) with thoughtful, scholarly debate and original research that is biblically based and theologically sound.

Core Values

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics subscribes to the historic decisions of the early church councils. We hold dearly to the deity of Christ, the virgin conception, salvation through Jesus Christ, and the Trinity. We also believe in the unity of Scripture and consider the Bible as the final authority on all issues of faith and practice. This high view of Scripture requires submissions to be underpinned by a thoughtful biblical and theological analysis. The Editors also welcome non-Evangelical contributors to submit critiques of Evangelical political and social thought, providing they are suitably respectful of our values

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Submissions

Scholarly submissions that are suitably respectful of the Evangelical tradition are invited from across the disciplinary spectrum. Given the broad and interdisciplinary nature of the subject matter covered by the journal, contributors should refer to our core values and submission instructions, which provide further details of material suitable for inclusion.

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Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics
Articles





History as Revelation and Divine Discourse in History: A Postfoundationalist Anchoring of Scriptural Authority

David Muthukumar S.

KEYWORDS:

| Revelation | Scriptural Authority | Postfoundationalism |
| Epistemology | History as Revelation | Divine Discourse |

ABSTRACT:

Is it even legitimate to talk about scriptural authority in the postmodern context where metanarratives are rendered obsolete; or, do we need to rely on a circular appeal to scripture to validate its own claims? This essay grapples with the issue of revising the scriptural authority by challenging the epistemic presuppositions of foundationalist and nonfoundationalist methods to construct a postfoundationalist conception through a dialectical interaction between these suppositions. This thesis will argue that while Wolfhart Pannenberg's theological methodology confines the scope of propositional revelation to only history (manifestational revelation), Nicholas Wolterstorff's Divine Discourse limits propositional revelation to only divine speech (nonmanifestational), by reading them dialectically, we can arrive at a viable postfoundationalist position that enables us to understand scriptural authority without succumbing to foundationalist or nonfoundationalist binary..

INTRODUCTION

The Royal Society of Great Britain, founded in the year 1662 (Sir Isaac Newton served as its president from 1703 to 1727) has its motto as: *Nullius in Verba*, meaning, “take nobody’s word for it.”¹ In other words, it states “We refuse to be bound by the words of any authority, however venerable or sacred.”² Science and its leading light, human reason, dethroned the “past” centers of authority – scripture, tradition, and ecclesiastical structures – and set out to rule undisputedly. But, beginning with the latter half of the twentieth-century, with the unleashing of “postmodern” project, the authority of reason has been seriously compromised, and we have ended up in a relativistic world where no single authority holds authority *per se*. One of the crucial factors that engendered this complex process of undermining all forms of authority is the “historical consciousness” that has exposed the “relativity” of all certainty.³ The core notion of this historical consciousness is that everything is relative to the context in which things exist and there is nothing human that is “supra-temporal, supra-cultural, or supra-historical.”⁴

But, the question that is often left unasked is: how ultimate is this authority that denies the possibility of ultimate authority? Despite the relativistic disregard for all authorities, we do find instances of authority, for example, in the medical field. A doctor has authority as she is authorized by her medical training and professional expertise, so that with true authority she can state, “you must” or “you must not” to her patients.⁵ This “professional application” of authority can be traced in other fields like the judiciary, law and order, and academics. Considering such an

1 “History,” accessed March 13, 2016, <https://royalsociety.org/about-us/history/>.

2 Paul Gifford, “Scripture, tradition, charisma,” in John R Hinnells, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), accessed March 17, 2016, <http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9780203868768, 324>.

3 *Ibid.*, 326.

4 *Ibid.*, 325.

5 *Ibid.*

analog, it is reasonable for us to explore how we can talk about the denied authority (by Enlightenment and also by postmodernism) of Scripture.

Scripture was originally used to refer to the Christian Bible with its attended notions of inspiration, revelation, and inerrancy.⁶ But after the publication of Max Muller's *The Sacred Books of the East* (1879-94) the term has "come to be applied in a less metaphysical and more descriptive sense" to the sacred literatures of other religious traditions.⁷ However, this essay will specifically address the Christian scripture in particular, and the arguments can be applied *mutatis mutandis* to religious scriptures in general. Although scriptures across multiple religions vary in their form and content,⁸ what makes a text or texts scripture is its relationship to a community and also the authority that this scripture holds over the community.⁹

Now, coming back to the Christian scripture, the notion of its authority hinges upon its canonical heritage in the Church.¹⁰ Within the canonical understanding, the authority of Scripture is intrinsically related to the concept of revelation. However, as the Reformers clarified, this authority is not ascribed to the Scripture by the Church; rather it derives its authority from God. Given the Christian faith claims about God's attributes and his actions in creation and redemption, one would expect what God reveals ought to be reliable and true.¹¹ But, conflating the revelation and scripture would be a categorical error for God has spoken through and

6 Ibid. Scripture is etymologically from the Latin *scribere*, "to write."

7 Hinnells, *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion*.

8 We cannot oversimplify the complex nature of the understanding among the religious literatures. "If we ask what it is that constitutes these particular texts scripture or sacred, we quickly see that it is not a matter of form or content. There is no essence, or intrinsic formal quality, or even set of family resemblances, that characterize all these diverse texts. As regards content, the diversity is enormous – from the hymns (*gathas*) of Zoroaster to the letters of Paul, the law codes of Deuteronomy and the sacrificial rituals of the Vedas." (Ibid.)

9 Ibid., 325.

10 William J. Abraham, "Revelation and Scripture," in Philip L Quinn and Charles Taliaferro, *A Companion to the Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997), 589.

11 Ibid.

still speaks through media other than scripture also.¹² Following Barth’s understanding of the Word of God in its three-fold form – revealed, written and proclaimed – the event of revelation in the incarnation of Jesus Christ will constitute the original revelation to which Scripture bears testimony.¹³

However, Scripture and revelation, while being distinct categories, are “materially inseparable” entities¹⁴ Our understanding of scriptural authority in this essay will deal with the concept of revelation with the qualifier that Scripture subsists in God’s revelation while revelation ultimately depends on the testimony of Scripture. The use of revelation and Scripture here will retain this semantic distinctness. And also, as William Abraham notes, revelation and hence scriptural authority should be dealt with as an epistemic concept for it deals with the “unveiling of the divine nature, actions and purposes.”¹⁵ The purpose of this essay is to look beyond the notions of “naïve foundation” or destabilizing “nonfoundations,” to locate a viable alternative in “postfoundation,” to recapture the authority of Scripture that is vital for the existence of a relevant Christian community in the contemporary world. The sequence of arguments will be: First section deals with the prior models of epistemic approaches to Scripture and revelation – foundationalism and nonfoundationalism – followed by a presentation of postfoundationalism as an alternative by augmenting LeRon Shults’ “four-couplets” conception to frame an additional couplet in order to critique the dichotomous assumptions in the former two models. The second section will trace Wolfhart Pannenberg’s theological methodology as a test case for postfoundational application through LeRon Shults’ postfoundationalist statements. This will be followed by a critique that employs my new “couplet” to explore the ideas of history and divine discourse in Pannenberg’s understanding. Then a suggestion for a corrective will be effected by dialectically relating him with Nicholas Wolterstorff’s *Divine Discourse*.

12 Ibid.

13

14 William J. Abraham, *Philosophy of Religion*, 589.

15 Ibid.

The thesis of this paper is that while Pannenberg confines the scope of propositional revelation to *only* history (manifestational revelation), Wolterstorff limits propositional revelation to *only* divine speech (nonmanifestational), by reading Pannenberg and Wolterstorff dialectically, we can arrive at a viable postfoundationalist position that enables us to understand scriptural authority without succumbing to foundationalist or nonfoundationalist binary.

II. EPISTEMIC APPROACHES

The question of authority essentially depends on some basis or foundation to legitimize it. But, as pointed earlier, the notion of “historical consciousness” has attempted to erase all possibilities of certitude only by self-contradicting itself in ensuring the certitude of such a position. Foundationalism continues to exist in morphed versions and has to be analyzed and accounted for its strengths while we learn to discern and discount its negative influences its extreme versions. However, these positions do exert considerable epistemic influences in the current world and hence it impinges on us to see how these existing epistemic approaches to scriptural authority are construed and what presuppositions drive them and are they warranted? We will deal with them in succession and then introduce postfoundationalism.

A. Foundationalism

Foundationalism has been an influencing epistemic position for a long time. Generally, the foundationalist epistemological proposal conceives human knowledge as something that is constructed on a sure footing.¹⁶ Nancy Murphy traces Descartes’ “building metaphor” as he compares his method of doubting everything to destructing old structures and erecting

16 Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, 1st Edition edition. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 30.

new ones on the indubitable certainty of *cogito, ergo sum* on which he “founds” his new rationalistic construction.¹⁷ Like a material edifice, knowledge requires a sure foundation.¹⁸ This epistemological foundation is to be provided by a set of undisputed beliefs or certain first-principles, which sustains further edifice building. These fundamental beliefs or first-principles that are innate to human reason are supposedly “universal, context-free, and available to any rational person.”¹⁹

John Locke, while rejecting Descartes’s view that our basic belief consists in innate ideas from which we deduce other beliefs, argued that the foundation for human knowledge lies in empiricism – in sense experiences and observations of the world from which we induce conclusions.²⁰ However, by the end of the Age of Reason, either skepticism or religious relativism became the prominent worldview.²¹ Scriptural authority proponents had only two alternatives left: to blindly accept classical Christian doctrine by appeal to the Bible or to embrace the skeptical rationalism that seemed to be the final product of the enlightened mind.²²

Conservative theologians chose the former option and appealed to the “invulnerable foundation [that] lay in an error-free Bible.”²³ Princeton theologian Charles Hodge’s assertion that the Bible is “free from all error, whether of doctrine, fact, or precept,” is characteristic of this notion.²⁴ LeRon Shults names this as “paleo-constructive response” that “reject(s) or ignore(s) the challenge of postmodernity and appeal to an earlier premodern era in which truth and knowledge were allegedly

17 Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism, and Fundamentalism: How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda*, 1st edition edition. (Valley Forge, Pa: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1996), 11.

18 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 30.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*, 32.

21 *Ibid.*, 33.

22 *Ibid.*, 33.

23 *Ibid.*, 33.

24 Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, Reprinted 1981 edition. (Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), I:152.

unproblematic.”²⁵ Pannenberg also critiques this obsession for certainty saying, “There is no a priori warrant of truth if only one bases one’s argument on the proper foundation, be it sense perception or principles of reason.”²⁶

And epistemically, the foundationalist model depended on a “correspondence theory of truth.”²⁷ William P. Alston states that in a correspondence theory, “the details of the correspondence that is supposed to constitute truth involves some structural “matching” or “fitting” of propositions and fact to each other.”²⁸ Thus, the correspondence of propositions to absolute facts constituted the epistemic underpinning of foundationalism.

B. Nonfoundationalism

But with the end of the Modern era, postmodern thinking challenged the idea that human beings possess an objective vantage point from which they can perceive the world objectively. Rather, we structure our world through concepts such as language that serve as social convention enabling us to describe the world depending on the subjective context of the speaker.²⁹ And there is “[n]o simple, one-to-one relationship [that] exists between language and the world, and thus no single linguistic description can serve to prove an objective conception of the “real” world.”³⁰ By decimating the “all-encompassing narratives of scientific progress that shaped and legitimated modern society,” the very idea of the metanarrative as a foundation was rendered incredible.³¹ Shults calls this as “deconstructive response” which “fully affirms the postmodern

25 LeRon, 55

26 Ibid., 22

27 William P. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Cornell University Press, 1997), 32.

28 Ibid.

29 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 23.

30 Ibid., 23

31 Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism, and Fundamentalism*, 23.

challenge and concludes that because there is no neutral knowledge we must be content with a plurality of interpretations.”³²

In contrast to the correspondence theory of truth, the rise of postmodern thinking engendered two alternative epistemologies: coherentism and pragmatism. Coherentism suggests that the “justification for a belief lies in its “fit” with other held beliefs.”³³ This justification entails “inclusion within a coherent system.”³⁴ Rather than remaining as an assortment of unconnected, discrete members that have nothing common with one another, the set of beliefs constitute an integrated whole, and this whole carry the “explanatory power.”³⁵ Instead of visualizing human knowledge as a building, coherentists conceive knowledge as a “web of belief.”³⁶ Pragmatism states that the veracity of any belief ought to be measured “according to the belief’s success in advancing “factual inquiry” (that is “the activity aimed at the discovery of truth”).”³⁷ Coherentism and pragmatism along with the “turn to linguistics” (Wittgenstein’s) upended the metaphysical realism of foundationalism.³⁸

But all hope is not lost. It is not that narratives have no function in the postmodern context, but the narratives that rise within the postmodern ethos are no more universal and hence “local”³⁹ Accordingly, “Postmodernity embraces the narratives of particular peoples and celebrates the diversity and plurality of the world without attempting to discover a “grand scheme” into which all of these particular stories must fit.”⁴⁰

32 F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 55 Kindle.

33 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 38 citing W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous* (IVP Academic, 2009), 114.

34 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 39.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 42

39 Ibid.,

40 Ibid. 23.

C. Postfoundationalism

Claims about epistemology and hermeneutics are present both in foundationalist and nonfoundationalist agenda. Foundationalists conceive the relation between epistemology and hermeneutics by privileging epistemology⁴¹ and by downplaying interpretation and nonfoundationalists tend to focus on the hermeneutic side of the issue while emphasizing the “untenability of the modernist approach to theory justification.”⁴² Postfoundationalist model endeavors to link epistemology and hermeneutics in a certain relational unity.⁴³ We need to recognize the metaphorical nature of the term “foundation,” and even the nonfoundationalist has a “basis” for theological beliefs.⁴⁴ The assertions that “narrative shapes our experience” functions in a metaphorical sense as a “foundation” for the methodological decisions of some nonfoundationalist theologians.⁴⁵ Following J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, Shults makes the following preliminary observations about postfoundationalism:

First, it fully acknowledges contextuality, the epistemically crucial role of interpreted experience, and the way that tradition shapes the epistemic and nonepistemic values that inform our reflection about God and what some of us believe to be God’s presence in this world. At the same time, however, a postfoundationalist notion of rationality in theological reflection claims to point creatively beyond the confines of the local community, group, or culture towards a form of interdisciplinary conversation.⁴⁶

41 Foundationalist epistemology does presuppose a “transcendental ontology” which affirms that God is the Ultimate Reality beyond all perceived reality.

42 Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 323, Kindle.

43 Ibid., 326.

44 Ibid., 339.

45 Ibid., 339.

46 Ibid., 298 citing J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 4. For an alternative account of the rejection of post-Enlightenment thinking and a reconception of scriptural authority see Henry Vander Goot, *Interpreting the Bible in Theology and the Church* (The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990). His thesis is: “The main contention of this essay is that prior to and outside of the scientific study of the Bible in the Christian

The challenge for postfoundationalism is to balance the contextuality of hermeneutics and to find an epistemic “basis.”

In this endeavor, Shults identifies four conceptual pairs:⁴⁷

1. experience and belief
2. truth and knowledge
3. individual and community
4. explanation and understanding

These pairs operate in a binary opposition within the foundationalist and nonfoundationalist paradigms, privileging one aspect of the pair over the other. Postfoundationalism seeks to reengage them in their dynamic relational unity.⁴⁸ Shults expounds the link between these couplets by formulating four postfoundationalist statements:

(PF1): “interpreted experience engenders and nourishes all beliefs, and a network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience.”⁴⁹

How are we to understand the relation between our beliefs and our experience? Is there a balance between the foundationalist stress on the “basis of experience” and the nonfoundationalist emphasis on the “web of belief”? While a nonfoundationalist construal of rationality would argue that experiences are “embedded in networks of belief, and that this linguistically shaped “web” limits and mediates all experience,” foundationalists, on the other hand, “justify beliefs by appealing to their groundedness in experience (whether conceptual or sensual).”⁵⁰ Shults contends that, because our relation to the world is only through the “mediation of interpreted experience,” we are “always limited in

community of Faith, interpretation is already there and that this existing phenomenon of interpretations and immediate confessional responses to the Bible is what should fund the theoretical enterprise of theology and Biblical studies.” (p. 11) He argues that the traditional, canonical interpretation of the Bible must have epistemological priority within the faith community For a succinct review cf. Stephen M. Vantassel, “An Overview of the Hermeneutics of Vander Goot,” in *Church Divinity* 1988, ed. John H. Morgan, (Bristol, IN: Wyndham Hall Press, 1988), 58-67.

47 Ibid., 299.

48 Ibid.

49 Ibid., 478.

50 Ibid., 484.

perspective, in focus, and in experiential scope.”⁵¹ “[B]eliefs are both brought to experience and derived from it, and our interpreted experience thus becomes the matrix within which meaning and knowledge arise.”⁵² Postfoundationalism attempts to locate our epistemic quest in reciprocity between beliefs that are generated within historically and culturally conditioned human experiences and the interpretation of such experiences that is in turn informed by the beliefs we hold.

(PF2): “the objective unity of truth is a necessary condition for the intelligible search for knowledge, and the subjective multiplicity of knowledge indicates the fallibility of truth claims.”⁵³

In conceiving the relationship between truth and knowledge, the classical foundationalist stressed the need for “certain and objective knowledge of the truth,” while the nonfoundationalist pointed to the apparent plurality of knowledge claims that are subjective to the knower that denies the possibility of “truth” independent of the subject.⁵⁴ Postfoundationalist model understands this conundrum in terms of intelligibility and fallibility in the light of “critical realism.” As van Huyssteen states,

A critical-realist stand is realistic because in the process of theological theorizing this concept enables us to recognize the cognitive and referential nature of analogical language as a form of indirect speech. It is also critical, however, because the role of metaphoric language in theology would teach us that models should never be absolutized or ideologized, but should retain their openness and provisionality throughout the process of theorizing.⁵⁵

The provisionality of knowledge is rightly acknowledged. However, while we need to avoid such “absolutization” or “ideologization” of

51 Ibid., 493.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 551.

54 Ibid., 548.

55 Wentzel Van Huyssteen, *Theology and the Justification of Faith: Constructing Theories in Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 142.

metaphorical language, we need to acknowledge the transcendental truth value of which they are earthly containers. For example, Jesus as the Way, Truth and Life point to a transcendental truth about the nature and scope of the Person of Jesus to us and these metaphors or concepts cannot capture that full essence for us to possess it completely. Also, postfoundationalism emphasizes “intelligibility” to accommodate the foundationalist intuitions about truth as an ideal even while persisting on “fallibility” of such conceptions to accommodate the nonfoundationalist worry about absolutism and hegemonic totalization.⁵⁶ This fallibility is because of the inherent limitations in human conception and comprehension. Van Huyssteen acknowledges this corrective input from the nonfoundationalist critique of foundationalism while he is not negating the ontological truth presupposition of foundationalism.

(PF3): “rational judgment is an activity of socially situated individuals, and the cultural community indeterminately mediates the criteria of rationality.”⁵⁷

Foundationalism tends to privilege the individual while discussing reason and nonfoundationalism on the other hand overemphasizes the postmodern critique of individualism.⁵⁸ The postfoundationalists insist that “the locus of rational choice is the individual agent, yet also affirms that what a person judges to be rational is affected by the cultural-historical group of which he or she is a part.”⁵⁹ For van Huyssteen, “rationality not only involves evaluation against the standards of a community of inquiry, but also assures that the personal voice of the individual rational agent is not silenced in this ongoing process of collective assessment.”⁶⁰ Thus, the nonfoundationalist sensitivity to the community inspired-interpretation and the foundationalist intuition that it is the individual who really makes

56 Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 561, Kindle.

57 *Ibid.*, 651.

58 *Ibid.*, 648.

59 *Ibid.*, 652.

60 J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, *The Shaping of Rationality: Toward Interdisciplinarity in Theology and Science* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 150.

a rational judgment are maintained.⁶¹ The postfoundationalist model, therefore, sees “individual and communal factors as mutually conditioning elements in the shaping of rationality.”⁶² The individual agent who is the actual locus of the rational judgment is only able to make such judgments because of “the distanciation involved in his or her self-differentiation from the community.”⁶³

(PF4): “explanation aims for universal, transcontextual understanding, and understanding derives from particular contextualized explanations.”⁶⁴

It was Wilhelm Dilthey who initially proposed a clear demarcation between *Erklärung* (explanation) and *Verstehen* (understanding).⁶⁵ The foundationalist, following the model of natural sciences, attempts to offer absolute “explanations,” essentially derived by following definite rules that are held true apart from any tradition or context.⁶⁶ The nonfoundationalist, on the other hand, holds on to “understanding” and confine the scope of theology to just “Verstehen (defined as empathic understanding).”⁶⁷ It conceives understanding as being rooted in particular traditions (contexts) with their own criteria of coherence, and denies the possibility of an all-encompassing explanation that defies its tradition-specific context. Alternatively, the postfoundationalist rejects the strict methodological opposition between “human” and “natural” and stresses the mutual conditioning of two movements in human rationality.⁶⁸ In mutual dialogue with theology and (natural) science, the postfoundationalist model sees valid resemblances between them. Shults notes that for van Huyssteen, in all sciences “the subjectivity of interpreting belongs right in the heart of

61 Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 654, Kindle.

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid., 730.

64 Ibid., 752.

65 Ibid., 734.

66 Ibid., 746.

67 Ibid., 746.

68 Ibid., 752.

the explanatory task.”⁶⁹ However, Shults notes that this need not lead to relativism but to “ongoing rational reconstruction of our understanding.”⁷⁰ He further notes that “theological explanations attempt to establish a link between the inherited beliefs and practices of a specific religious tradition and the contemporary experience of its adherents.”⁷¹ For the task of theology is both to understand and to explain. Shults further illuminates this concept by borrowing the concept of “chronotope” from the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin as used by Calvin Schrag. He says, “[Schrag] emphasizes the spatio-temporal background of the interplay between whole and part. In this interplay, he wants to refigure ‘understanding’ and ‘explanation’ as twin tasks in a discursive event, understanding as we explain and explaining as we understand.”⁷²

Shults has thus successfully critiqued the presuppositions that operate within foundationalism and nonfoundationalism as binaries and his postfoundationalist statements adequately bring out the reciprocity mode within these intra-couplet interactions as a viable alternative to theologizing. As our primary goal is to locate scriptural authority, I would like to extend Shults’ conception by introducing the aspect of revelation as proposition to formulate a new couplet “History and Divine Speech” and a corresponding statement:

(PF 5): Historico-temporal events of God are propositional and are attendant with the divine speech in Scripture and the divine speech in Scripture is propositional which is intrinsically linked with the divine acts in history.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, in his discussion about revelation, introduces two concepts of revelation: manifestational and propositional by contrasting one with the other. Manifestational revelation, according to Wolterstorff,

69 Ibid., 760 citing van Huyssteen, “Theology and Science: The Quest for a new apologetics,” in *Essays*, 132.

70 Ibid., 757.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 774 citing Calvin O. Schrag, *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 86.

happens through “natural signs” (history) and it is normally devoid of any propositional content.⁷³ On the contrary, when the means of revelation is not a “natural sign”, the revelation is nonmanifestational, which according to Wolterstorff is identical with *propositional revelation*.⁷⁴ Hence in propositional revelation, “the actuality revealed is [always] the actuality corresponding to some *thought* of the revealer, that is, to some proposition entertained by the revealer – and not just entertained but known.”⁷⁵ Such nonmanifestational revelation “essentially involves known (or true and believed) proposition as the entities revealed.”⁷⁶ Wolterstorff is thus wedging a split between natural signs (God’s act in history) and non-natural signs (Divine speech in Scripture). If a nonmanifestational revelation is “propositional revelation,” it implies that *manifestational revelation is a non-propositional revelation*. Hence, the insinuation of this reasoning is that it denies the correlation between God’s speech and God’s act in history. On the other hand, Pannenberg would argue for a history-as-revelation paradigm: “Revelation is no longer understood in terms of a supernatural disclosure ... but in terms of the comprehensive whole reality, ... a temporal process of a history...”⁷⁷ Here, Pannenberg seems to deny the correlation between God’s act in history (which is the proper locus of God’s revelation for him) and divine speech in Scripture as revelation (relegated to a secondary sense).

In the light of Shults’ couplets that expose the binaries within foundational and nonfoundational models, propositional (non-manifestational) revelation would be akin to the foundationalistic

73 Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim That God Speaks* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 589.

74 Ibid. 594. (emphasis mine)

75 Ibid., 624.

76 Ibid., 678. At this point, Wolterstorff attempts to depart from the traditional notion of identifying divine speech as revelation, though he continues to emphasize the propositional content within divine communication. But this distinction between revelation and divine speech, in my understanding, seems to be only conceptual and not substantive and it will not in any way affect the outcome of our use of his presentation.

77 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, trans. E. Quinn (London: Sheed & Ward Ltd, 1969), ix.

sensitivity as it argues for the certitude of propositions derived from Scripture only and the manifestational (or non-propositional) revelation is similar to nonfoundationalism that denies the possibility of propositions within the contextuality of history.⁷⁸ Postfoundationalism, as Shults has established, looks for the reciprocity between these dichotomies. I agree with Mats Wahlberg that Wolterstorff's conception of propositional and non-propositional revelation cannot be true. As we have already ascertained, revelation is essentially an epistemic concept: "it has to do with knowledge, and knowledge is, or involves, a propositional attitude."⁷⁹ This means that, in the act of revelation, one reveals something that the other person "either actually comes to know as a result of the revealing or something that a person potentially *could* come to know," and what is known or knowable is—propositional.⁸⁰ As this knowledge is mediated through both linguistic and non-linguistic modes, confining propositions to text-only revelation is unsustainable. To deny that propositions are revealed through natural signs is to deny that revelation has to do with the transmission of knowledge through other modes. Propositions, hence, inevitably figure in both non-manifestational and manifestational revelation. A postfoundational conception as formulated in the above statement enables us to overcome this imposed distinction between God's action in human history (creation, incarnation, resurrection) and divine discourse in Scripture. This will be taken up in the next section.

78 I am not arguing that Nicholas Wolterstorff is a foundationalist (he is clubbed with "Reformed Epistemologists.") I am only implying to the inferences of his assumptions. Kenneth Einar Himma also argues that Wolterstorff's position betrays foundationalistic tendencies and not non-evidentialism. See, Kenneth Einar Himma, *Auslegung*, (Vol. 23, No. 1) accessed March 18, 2016. <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/9462/auslegung.v23.n01.099-113.pdf?sequence=1>

79 Mats Wahlberg, *Revelation as Testimony: A Philosophical-Theological Study* (Eerdmans, 2014), 30.

80 Ibid.

III. HISTORY AND/OR DIVINE SPEECH?

The single basic principle as an overarching idea in Pannenberg's theology is often identified as either "reason," or "history," or "prolepsis".⁸¹ People who argue for "reason" as the central element in his theological program emphasize his treatments of "verification, validation, truth, or analogy (theological language and knowledge)."⁸² Pannenberg's *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (1976) is often cited as a basis for this conclusion. Others see the key concept as "history." Pannenberg's *Revelation as History* (1969), *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (1985) and related articles are held as proof for this claim.⁸³ Those who find the concept of or "prolepsis" or anticipation of the future cite his *Jesus – God and Man* (1968) and his treatments of future ontology for their claim.⁸⁴

While all the aforementioned concepts are definitely present in Pannenberg's writings, Shults observes that such claims for Grundprinzip would lead to a foundationalist reading of Pannenberg's method. He notes,

If the reason is seen as dominant, his method can easily be read as simply another page in the history of the (moribund) Enlightenment modernist approach to epistemology. If "universal" history is the starting point, then it may appear that a foundationalist longing for an absolute metanarrative permeates Pannenberg's interpretation of the findings of historical research. If the anticipation of "totality," based on the priority of the future, is a metaphysical (or epistemic) self-justifying assumption that grounds his system, we would seem to have some form of foundationalism.⁸⁵

To eschew this foundationalistic reading of Pannenberg, Shults argues that the principle of *sub ratione Dei* ("under the aspect of their 'relation

81 Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 879, Kindle.

82 *Ibid.*, 879.

83 *Ibid.*

84 *Ibid.*

85 *Ibid.*, 949.

to God”) as the basic concept in Pannenberg’s approach.⁸⁶ This concept Pannenberg borrows from Thomas Aquinas with modifications. In *Metaphysics and the Idea of God* (1990), Pannenberg avers that Christian theology “is essentially an inquiry [*Wissenschaft*] into God and his revelation. Everything else that occurs within theology can become a theme for the theologian only “in relation to God,” as Thomas Aquinas put it: *sub ratione Dei*.”⁸⁷

Another aspect that Shults highlights is how Pannenberg appropriates the aspects of the relational methodology that makes his *sub ratione Dei* approach radically different from that of Thomas: He conceives “relation” as different by explicating in terms of the true infinite, and the concept of “God” in a robustly trinitarian view.⁸⁸

With these preliminary observations,⁸⁹ Shults goes on to evaluate Pannenberg’s theology using his four postfoundationalist couplets and statements to verify whether Pannenberg qualifies as a postfoundationalist.

A. Experience and Belief

(PF1): “interpreted experience engenders and nourishes all beliefs, and a network of beliefs informs the interpretation of experience.”

To bring Pannenberg into conversation with a postfoundationalist understanding, Shults examines Pannenberg’s theology in order to see to what extent he eschews both foundationalism and coherentism and adopts a midway. He notes, Pannenberg unequivocally asserts that theological statements “are not self-evident and ... do not follow with logical necessity from self-evident propositions.... Their truth depends on conditions that are not posited along with them.”⁹⁰ Also, Pannenberg holds that beliefs are

86 Ibid., 953.

87 Ibid., citing Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*, trans. Philip Clayton (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001), 73.

88 Ibid., 1024.

89 I have only produced a very brief summary of LeRon Shults extensive details

90 Ibid. citing Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1st US edition. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 56.

to be justified (in part) by their coherence with other beliefs. Regarding the empirical foundations too, Pannenberg is categorical: “Individual experience can never mediate absolute, unconditional certainty.”⁹¹ Even in his intent to reinstate metaphysical discussions in theology, he insists that “... one cannot let the philosophical concept transcend its own starting point in experiential knowledge, a limitation that applies equally to the religious consciousness.” Shults observes that according to Pannenberg, if metaphysics is to be considered earnestly, one can no longer claim “the character of a definitive foundation, constructed of concepts, for being and knowledge.”⁹² He states, for Pannenberg, “Metaphysical reflection must instead take on the form of a conjectural reconstruction in relation to its object, one which distinguishes itself from its intended truth while at the same time construing itself as a preliminary form of this truth.”⁹³ He also notes that it is evident that Pannenberg will not permit the notion of *a priori* concepts that are not mediated by experience.⁹⁴ Pannenberg insists that all interpretations are “always mediated by the context of the experience.”⁹⁵ In Shults’ observation, for Pannenberg “all of our interpreted experience, as well as our emergent networks of belief, are mediated through ... [our] relation to the infinite.”⁹⁶ Hence, Shults concludes that Pannenberg eschews foundationalism and coherentism and attempts to steer a middle path yet not shying away from proposing a metaphysical reconstruction.⁹⁷

B. Truth and Knowledge

(PF2): “the objective unity of truth is a necessary condition for the intelligible search for knowledge, and the subjective multiplicity of knowledge indicates the fallibility of truth claims.”

91 Ibid., 1183 citing Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 46.

92 Ibid., citing Pannenberg, *Metaphysics*, 93.

93 Ibid. citing Pannenberg, *Metaphysics*, 94.

94 Ibid., 1189.

95 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 234.

96 Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology*, 1252, Kindle.

97 Ibid.

To see how Pannenberg deals with the concepts of intelligibility and knowledge, Shults explores how his theology corresponds to the postfoundationalist themes of fallibility and intelligibility. Shults notes that, the notion of the provisionality of all theological statements is prevalent in Pannenberg's writings as he remarks, ". . . we can attain only provisional knowledge, which is subject to constant revision."⁹⁸ Also, Pannenberg avers, "I have a rather modest interpretation of knowledge and of reason. There is hardly knowledge of any ultimate character."⁹⁹ And Shults also cites from *Theology and Philosophy of Science* where Pannenberg explicitly says, "theological testing and reformulation of traditional religious statements can never attain theoretical certainty."¹⁰⁰ On the question of truth, Shults finds Pannenberg as arguing against a mere "subjectivity" as he emphasizes the unity of truth by portraying God as the "one origin of everything that is real."¹⁰¹ But Shults also notes that on account of the historical consciousness, Pannenberg asserts that the unity of everything must be conceived as a history. Also, Pannenberg posits, "the unity of truth is constituted only by the proleptic revelation of God in Jesus Christ," locating the final possibility of all truth in the *eschaton*.¹⁰² The dynamic of conceiving truth in its unity and its particularity as explicated in Pannenberg's theology convinces Shults to conclude that it is in alignment with the postfoundational sensibilities.

C. Individual and Community

(PF3): "rational judgment is the activity of socially situated individuals, and the cultural community indeterminately mediates the criteria of rationality."

98 Ibid., 1271 citing Robinson and Cobb ed., *Theology as History* (NY: Harper and Row, 1967), 238.

99 Ibid. citing "A Theological conversation with Pannenberg," *Dialog* (1972): 294.

100 Ibid., 1271 citing Wolfhart Pannenberg and Francis McDonagh, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Pr, 1976), 344.

101 Ibid., 1308 citing Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, Vol. 1 (Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 2008), 27.

102 Ibid.

Here, Shults analyzes how Pannenberg's theology conforms to the postfoundationalist way of acknowledging individual and communal elements in shaping hermeneutical decisions. He notes that Pannenberg is dealing with these issues in *Theology and Philosophy of Science* by engaging the debates between Habermas and Gadamer within the context of the hermeneutical tradition. By avoiding the abandonment of objectivity by Gadamer and by critiquing Habermas's grounding of hermeneutics in communicative practice, Pannenberg attempts to reclaim the "dialectic" and not be satisfied with "hermeneutic" alone.¹⁰³ But again, this is not a mere Hegelian or Platonic dialectic, but "a refigured understanding of dialectic as including the historical particularity of human existence."¹⁰⁴ Pannenberg notes, "While the identity of individuals is not to be conceived as the product of a subject that already exists with its own identity, neither is it to be understood as a simple internalization of social appraisals and expectations."¹⁰⁵ Also, he argues for an idea of the self which, on the one hand, is "mediated through the dialogically structured social sphere and ... on the other hand, the ego knows itself to be identical in the for-itselfness of its self-consciousness."¹⁰⁶ Shults observes that for Pannenberg this particular temporal structure of the person's totality is vital for its relation both to its social context and to the ego.¹⁰⁷ Shults concludes that a creative dialectic between individual and society is present in Pannenberg's theological methodology.

D.Explanation and Understanding

(PF4): "explanation aims for universal, transcontextual understanding, and understanding derives from particular contextualized explanations."

103 Ibid., 1409.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid., 1420 citing Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell, 1st edition. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Pr, 1985), 225.

106 Ibid., citing Pannenberg, *Anthropology*, 237.

107 Ibid.

Shults notes that Pannenberg’s emphasis on the relation of part and whole is key to his view of hermeneutics that involves both explanation and understanding. Pannenberg conceives this relation as vital for the task of theologizing as understanding and explaining all things *sub ratione Dei*. This implies that the “whole” (*sub ratione Dei* as an object of theology) is beyond the distinction between the whole and the parts.¹⁰⁸ The concept of “universal history” is also very crucial for Pannenberg.¹⁰⁹ For Pannenberg, the concept of the “whole” is required for the “parts” to have meaning, and this requirement applies not only to the science but to all human inquiry.¹¹⁰ Shults also notes that Pannenberg counters the dichotomy between “Explanation” (*Erklärung*) “Understanding” (*Verstehen*).¹¹¹ Shults states that for Pannenberg, “explanation should be seen as always presupposing understanding. On the other hand, explanation always has the goal of understanding.”¹¹²

Thus, by his analysis of Pannenberg’s theology within his four postfoundationalist principles, Shults concludes that his theological method is in alignment with the postfoundationalist attempt to establish reciprocity between the binaries.

E. History and Divine Speech

While evaluating Pannenberg’s theological method for postfoundationalist alignment, LeRon Shults rightly identifies that “historical consciousness,” and “universal history” are important concepts for Pannenberg, through which he explicates the “provisionality of knowledge” and “part-whole dialectics” and reconciles them with the eschatological fulfillment. But, on closer reading, it becomes apparent that these conceptions are also part of his understanding that marginalizes the scriptural authority as

108 Ibid., 1471.

109 Ibid., 1475.

110 Ibid., 1476.

111 Ibid., 1530.

112 Ibid.

propositional. I will begin by analyzing this tendency in Pannenberg's theology followed by a critical reflection on Nicholas Wolterstorff's conception in *Divine Discourse*. Then I will attempt to reconcile them by dialectically relating them.

(PF 5): Historico-temporal events of God are propositional and are attendant with the divine speech in Scripture and divine speech in Scripture is propositional which is intrinsically linked with the divine acts in history.

To see whether Pannenberg's theology is in line with this couplet, we need to evaluate his understanding of history and Scripture. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen notes that in *Revelation as History*, Pannenberg attempts an even more radical turn to history than the "salvation history" (*Heilsgeschichte*) school as he is replacing salvation history with "universal history" as the sphere of God's revelation.¹¹³ Pannenberg propounds that history is the proper sphere of God's revelation and not divine speech as found in Scripture. Mats Wahlberg notes that such a "historical" notion of revelation "... occurs primarily through deeds, rather than words and ... its primary content is the series of events by which God has manifested himself in the past."¹¹⁴ In Pannenberg's "Preface to American Edition" in *Revelation as History*, he sketches his intent:

Revelation is no longer understood in terms of a supernatural disclosure or of a particular religious experience and religious subjectivity, but in terms of the comprehensive whole reality, which, however is not simply given, but is a temporal process of a history that is not yet completed, but open to a future, which is anticipated in the teaching and personal history of Jesus. *To speak of revelation in this way does not involve any irreducible claims to authority, but is open to rational discussion and investigation. ... Instead of the authoritarian style of theological thought, the open rationality of the Enlightenment is preferred, but combined with a*

113 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Trinity and Revelation: A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World*, Volume 2 (Eerdmans, 2014), 32.

114 Wahlberg, *Revelation as Testimony*, 52.

concern for the substance of the Christian tradition.¹¹⁵

Pannenberg goes on to locate the Resurrection event as the historical locus of God's revelation in Christ and advocates for a retrospective/retroactive understanding of all history that in turn looks to the *eschaton* when it will be consummated. Kärkkäinen observes a few key themes in Pannenberg's focus: a. "the indirect nature of God's revelation in the forms of the historical acts of God;" b. on the intended role of Scripture: "Rather than a 'deposit of divine revelation,' as in tradition, Scripture contains promise ('foretelling') 'forthtelling' indicating the will of God towards his people; and 'kerygma' (which Pannenberg oddly calls 'report')." ¹¹⁶ It is evident that Pannenberg's notion of universal history is a historicized understanding of revelation itself.

Wahlberg objects: "It is impossible for God to reveal that he (sic) is going to raise the dead in the future manifestationally, that is, by presenting a "natural" sign of the reality revealed." ¹¹⁷ While Pannenberg's account accedes propositions in a nonmanifestational way to humans, "nevertheless denies that these communications deserve the title 'revelations.'" The reason for this is, Wahlberg argues:

Revelation is God's self-disclosure. To disclose something means to make knowledge of the reality available. But knowledge is not just true belief; it is (at least) *justified* true belief. A mere experience of hearing God speak can never, in Pannenberg's view, justify the belief that it is God who speaks. The experience could be delusional.¹¹⁸

This further highlights Pannenberg's understanding that nonmanifestational revelation (divine speech) can never be constituted as proper revelational aspect as it lacks propositional validity. Unlike Shults' earlier evaluations of Pannenberg, this would not align his methodology with the stated postfoundationalist notion of reciprocity between history and divine

115 Karkkainen, Trinity, 33 citing Pannenberg, *Revelation as History*, ix.

116 Ibid.

117 Wahlberg, *Revelation as Testimony*, 57.

118 Ibid.

speech as propositional. This would seriously compromise the authority of Scripture. Hence, I propose that by dialectically incorporating insights from Nicholas Wolterstorff's *Divine Discourse*,¹¹⁹ We can mutually reconcile history with divine speech.

Intriguingly, in contrast to Pannenberg, Wolterstorff argues that only the nonmanifestational (divine speech) aspect of revelation is a propositional and manifestational revelation (history) is non-propositional. Wolterstorff cites James Barr's article and remarks:

That mode of divine revelation which I characterized above as intended manifestational revelation Barr calls "revelation through history." He claims it to be a near-consensus among contemporary theologians that all divine revelation is of that sort, viz., revelation through history. And the argument of his paper is that this thesis conflicts in various ways with the Old Testament text itself. The starkest point of conflict is with those many passages which present God as engaging in propositional revelation (or more precisely, on my view, as engaging in speaking). "Far from representing the divine acts as the basis of all knowledge of God and all communication with him," says Barr, the Old Testament texts "represent God as communicating freely with men (sic), and particularly with Moses, before, during, and after these events. ... If God had not told Moses what he did, the Israelites would not have demanded their escape from Egypt, and the deliverance at the Sea of Reeds would not have taken place."¹²⁰

In arguing against the "erroneous" notion of calling only manifestational revelation as divine revelation, along with Barr, Wolterstorff is affirming that the nonmanifestational revelation is the only propositional revelation.

119 Though Wolterstorff is making a rigid distinction between revelation and divine speech, I understand that as having only conceptual distinction and not substantive in content. One reason he cites is to avoid the traditional conception of metaphorical representation of divine discourse. Another one is his strict separation of locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. While they can be considered in distinction, there is no need to conceive them in total isolation as even for divine illocutionary acts, human locutionary acts are essential.

120 Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 663 citing "Revelation through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology" (*Interpretation*, Vol. 17, 1963), pp 7-9. (Emphasis Mine)

In addressing the aspect of divine discourse in Scripture, to encounter the traditional metaphorical representation of God’s speech, Wolterstorff employs J L Austin’s speech-act theory to show that God speaks in a literal way. By emphasizing the distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, Wolterstorff argues that the three are logically separable.¹²¹ Hence, by showing that illocutionary acts can be performed without any locutionary act immediately preceding it, Wolterstorff successfully establishes that divine discourse is logically possible—that it is logically possible for God to literally speak even though God does not possess a physical body.¹²² In his argument to prove that God can be part of a human community of speakers, Wolterstorff establishes God as a moral agent through the divine command theory (God is morally perfect), and hence God is capable of performing illocutionary acts (commanding, asserting, promising).¹²³ Wolterstorff qualifies his use of illocutionary act saying that only divine assertions constitute propositional revelation; and commands and promises do not, as they are not intended to reveal something, rather to direct us to do something.¹²⁴ Wolterstorff seems to be constrained by his strict distinction of illocutionary and perlocutionary acts, as commands and promises also can clearly reveal the character of the speaker through their perlocutionary influence.

In further expanding the notion of God as performing illocutionary acts, Wolterstorff uses “double agency” discourse by which he shows that God uses words not uttered or written by Godself to communicate.¹²⁵ That is, God’s illocutionary act is performed through the locutionary act of the Biblical authors. In this context, he uses “Deputizing” - when a person in certain specified circumstances is authorized to speak for another (e.g. an ambassador) and “Appropriation” - when one consents to the discourse of another. Through this conception, Wolterstorff maintains the authorial-

121 Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 335.

122 *Ibid.*, 1367.

123 *Ibid.*, 1934.

124 *Ibid.*, 769.

125 *Ibid.*, 821ff.

intent of God for Scripture in his hermeneutical practice. Thus, he makes a convincing argument for the divine speech.¹²⁶ John Douglas Morrison also agrees that in Wolterstorff's conception, God is "not incommunicative beyond bare act or meeting ("manifestational revelation"), but rather that God can make and has made ... "assertions," "propositions" (non-manifestational revelation), and that this speaking can result and has resulted "in a text which, when properly interpreted, transmits knowledge from God to us".¹²⁷

While not conceding propositional revelation to the historical events (nonmanifestational), Wolterstorff makes a strong case for God's speech (assertions) as a proper aspect of divine revelation. However, Wolterstorff's rejection of divine revelation in history as nonpropositional is unwarranted. As mentioned earlier, this is in juxtaposition to Pannenberg's claim that only history is the proper sphere of God's revelation. A dialectic relation between the two will provide the needed antidote for reconceiving the authority of Scripture through the postfoundationalist option. As Kärkkäinen points out, "Pannenberg's proposal suffers from a one-sided rejection of, ... or a marginalization role of, God's direct communication."¹²⁸ It completely ignores the multiple pieces of evidence of the scriptural presentations of direct divine discourse. I concur with Kärkkäinen: "The divine Word, as a means of direct communication, may indeed amplify, clarify and thus 'add to' the revelation taking place in events and other modes."¹²⁹ He further cites the Vatican document *Dei Verbum*: "This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them" and remarks that

126 Ibid., 2952ff.

127 John Douglas Morrison, *Has God Said?: Scripture, the Word of God, and the Crisis of Theological Authority* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 211 citing Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse*, 616.

128 Karkkainen, *Trinity*, 37.

129 Ibid., 38.

by linking words and deeds we can provide the “needed balance between tradition’s at times too-limited emphasis on the revelatory power of the Word and a Pannenbergian focus on historical events.”¹³⁰ This corrective for Pannenbergian one-sided emphasis on history as revelation is thus found in Wolterstorff’s divine speech as literal and propositional (assertorial). Also, Wolterstorff’s bias against manifestational (non-propositional) revelation finds a curative in Pannenbergian history as revelation. This dialectic addresses the limitation in Pannenbergian theology as unveiled by our application of the new postfoundationalist couplet. Through this dialectic relation, we can conclude that: Historico-temporal events of God are propositional and are attendant with divine speech in Scripture and divine speech in Scripture is propositional which is intrinsically linked with the divine acts in history.

IV. A CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION

We will attempt an application of this postfoundationalist epistemology to a contemporary context where the foundationalist interpretation alone skews the holistic meaning of the text while the notion of historicized revelation alone is not sufficient to derive the propositional content. It will be shown that the use of a postfoundationalist reading to understand the mutuality of relationship between the two will ascertain the scriptural authority and its relevance.

On June 14th, 2018, the United States Attorney General Jeff Sessions cited a Bible verse to defend his department’s policy to prosecute all those who illegally cross the US border from Mexico¹³¹ He said, “I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13, to obey the laws of the government because God has ordained the

130 Ibid., citing “*Dei Verbum*,” accessed March 17, 2016, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html.

131 https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/06/14/jeff-sessions-points-to-the-bible-in-defense-of-separating-immigrant-families/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.6a248512092c accessed on June 28, 2018.

government for his purposes,” Sessions said during a speech to law enforcement officers in Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA. The first question that can be raised about such an application is: does Paul’s command have the same authority as that of God’s direct command? In order to answer this, Wolterstorff’s explication of the divine illocutionary (assertorial) speech being carried out through the deputizing of the locutionary act of Paul helps us to establish the propositional authority of this text as a divine command. Thus, Sessions was definitely right in citing Paul in order to establish that the laws of a country ought to be obeyed and honored as God’s direct command.

However, what was found egregious by some (including me), if not many, was that his application of that verse and hence the requirement to the obedience of the law of a land, is expressed in an absolutist sense. By citing the verse in order to justify the actions of the Department of Justice, Sessions has alluded to a foundationalist reading of the text in Romans 13:1a, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities;” He construes it as a stand-alone proposition and thus argues that the interpretation is self-evident as a direct command of God in its application to the context of prosecuting immigrants illegally entering the US. Foundationalism, as we discussed earlier in this paper, argues for the epistemic priority of a proposition over that of a hermeneutical one. And for the hermeneutical balance, we need to look for context beyond the textual basis to uncover its comprehensive propositional force.

In the case of illegal border crossing that Sessions referred to, people who illegally cross the borders are not always the drug mules of the cartels or felons escaping the reach of law on the other side of the border. But, also there are desperate fathers, mothers, and children escaping civil wars, gang violence and other calamities, often walking thousands of miles with the hope of a new future. In order to escape the scrutiny and a long delay in being processed at the Customs and Border Agency, as a desperate attempt they do violate the law and enter the country illegally. But, to treat them at par with drug mules and felons is too harsh a punishment.

And also, in order to punish the parents for their violation, separating their dependent children and subjecting both parents and children through tremendous psychological distress and pain at this vulnerable moment seems like a very inhumane practice, to say the least.

Therefore, such a foundationalist underpinning of scriptural authority alone does not seem to do justice to the application of God’s command. God is also perceived as the God of the oppressed, as the Israelites themselves experienced in God’s self-revelation through Moses as recorded in Exodus 3:14-15. This historical memory of God’s redemption in Exodus happened when Israelites themselves were the oppressed aliens in Egypt. They were elected by God and to be led by Moses to the experience of a marvelous redemption. Leviticus 19:33-34 reminds the Israelites of this historical memory while stipulating the responsive behavior of Israelites as one of cordiality toward other aliens. Leviticus 19: 33-34 states as follows:

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, *for you were aliens in the land of Egypt*: I am the Lord your God.” (NRSV; Emphasis mine)

This memory of Israelites’ past status and subsequent redemption is also reiterated in Deuteronomy 15:15. It states:

“*Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you*; for this reason, I lay this command upon you today.” (NRSV; Emphasis Mine)

These verses appeal to the historical (manifestation) aspect of the revelation of God’s dealing with the Israelites and in turn define the context and the response to God’s command. It combines the propositional force of both manifest and non-manifest revelations, as both are constituent for a holistic understanding. Now, referring back to the use of Romans 13:1a, the Foundationalist reading of the text is devoid of any historical context. However, as our reading of the historical memory of Israelites

helped us to understand God's command in relation to aliens, it ought to be one of compassion and justice, and it directly follows from the fact that the Israelites themselves were the recipient of such from God and the subsequent redemption.

As the postfoundationalist model postulates, the epistemic and hermeneutical concerns are to be balanced in our understanding and application of the propositions (combining both manifestational and non-manifestational dimensions). Thus, it is possible to establish that Sessions' application of Romans 13:1a requires further input from the interpretation of the historical manifestation. When read together, they would shed light on a proper conduct and response toward illegal aliens—the vulnerable children, parents—to be one of compassion and love. When we attempt such a postfoundationalist reading, it shows that Session's claim to separate the children and the parents at the border without consideration for the extremity of their situation is not a proper application of God's command, though he is justified in applying that to drug smugglers and felons. Thus our model helps us to establish the scriptural authority of a text (through Wolterstorff's illocutionary deputization) and also to bring out the full propositional force through the interpretation of a historical revelation.¹³²

V. CONCLUSION

Foundationalism and nonfoundationalism, as models of epistemic approaches to scriptural authority, thrive on certain presuppositions that are often in binary opposition to each other. Foundationalists'

132 Also, negatively, passages from Acts 5:27-29 and Daniel 3 can be used to show that obedience to government authorities is not always possible when one's allegiance to God is challenged. In Acts, Peter and the apostles answered the scribes: "*We must obey God rather than any human authority...*" (NRSV) And another historical account of the defying of a human authority in Dan. 3:16 says: "Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, "*O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to present a defence to you in this matter... But if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods and we will not worship the golden statue that you have set up.*" (NRSV) On both these occasions, there is a refusal to obey the human authority which will directly contradict the propositional content of Romans 13:1a.

preoccupation for identifying a sure basis follows the correspondence theory of truth that essentially “corresponds” propositions to external *a priori* facts. Nonfoundationalists use the prism of the coherence theory of truth and locate the propositional content as a network of ideas, relative to the context in which they emerge and exist. Also, we observed that we could not totally negate the quest for “foundations,” as even the coherency model depends on its assertions like “narrative shapes our experience” to provide “foundation” for their method. In this legitimate quest for propositions and truth, we attempted to reconceive the scriptural authority through the alternative paradigm of postfoundationalism. Postfoundational option being necessitated by the fact that the dichotomy between foundationalism and nonfoundationalism will not do full justice to the authority of Scripture, as they succumb to the notions of either “naïve foundation” or relativizing “nonfoundations.”

LeRon Shults’ “four-couplets” conception of postfoundational method identifies and engages “experience and belief,” “truth and knowledge,” “individual and community,” and “explanation and understanding” in a reciprocal fashion in order to set them as parameters for the alternative epistemic enterprise. Postfoundationalism combines the strengths of each model—foundationalism and nonfoundationalism—bringing these parameters in a dynamic interrelation while restraining their proclivity toward absolutization or relativization.

In order to address the primary aim of this paper in reconceiving the authority of Scripture, an additional set of parameters, “history and divine speech” was conceived that engaged the aspects of Scripture, revelation, and propositions. Nicholas Wolterstorff’s conception of propositional and nonmanifestational revelation establishes the propositional value of divine speech in the Scripture through the explication of God’s illocutionary deputizing of human authors. But, his preoccupation with illocutionary force of speech-acts and hence assertorial propositions, prevent him from understanding God’s promises and commands as divine revelation because of their perlocutionary effect. This is rather

an unwarranted assertion. Also, his denial of the propositional validity of manifestational (historical) revelation, is a serious limitation as it betrays the foundationalist tendencies with its epistemic priority over hermeneutics.

Shults' evaluation of Pannenberg's theology found it in alignment with the postfoundationalist requirements. However, Pannenberg's revelation-as-history paradigm, under scrutiny, seeks to confine revelation only to its manifestational dimension—in human history—while denying the possibility of a non-manifestational revelation. It claims history as the only proper locus of divine revelation. This tendency betrays a nonfoundationalist position in which interpretation assumes priority over epistemology and hence needs correction.

Using the postfoundationalist framework, through a dynamic interplay of Pannenberg's manifestational revelation and Wolterstorff's divine speech (non-manifestational), it was claimed that one could establish the authority of scripture. This was demonstrated through the evaluation of Jeff Session's use of Romans 13.1a. His application of the "obedience to government authorities" to justify the position of the Department of Justice in separating the children from the parents caught illegally crossing the border was evaluated. Wolterstorff's conception of divine speech through illocutionary speech-act does establish Paul as the agent of God in uttering God's direct command. This manner of establishing the scriptural authority, where human authors' pronouncements are ascribed as divine assertions, is very pertinent. However, on a closer scrutiny, Session's application was found to be following a foundationalist reading, as the context was ignored, especially that of migrant parents and children escaping oppression. When this propositional reading was engaged in a postfoundationalist framework with the historical aspect of revelation, especially the Exodus experience of the Israelites, it shed new light on the reading of the above text. God reminding the Israelites about their historic memory of oppression and a subsequent liberation from Egypt is followed by an assertion to treat aliens with compassion. When the

input from the historical revelation and textual revelations are brought in mutual play, it provides a more holistic interpretation of the text. Thus, Session's simplistic reference to "obey authorities" in order to justify the treatment of illegal aliens is shown to be in error in the case of migrant children and parents who need to be rather dealt with compassion. Such postfoundationalist balancing of interpretation maintains the authority of Scripture through its holistic and compassionate application.

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The Church as a Messianic Fellowship in Jürgen Moltmann's and Wolfhart Pannenberg's Public Ecclesiology: Constructing a Holistic and Participatory Pneumatology and Ecclesiology

Jongseock Shin

KEYWORDS:

| Pannenberg | Moltmann | Public Ecclesiology & Pneumatology |
| Messianic Fellowship | Church & Society | Non-Violent Resistance |

ABSTRACT:

In this article, I critically put Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg in dialogue as to their understandings of the Creatorship of the Triune God and its implication for the Church's responsibility to witness and embody the divine life. This article seeks a theologically balanced reconstruction of the notion of divine transcendence and immanence and its implications for the churches' participation in public advocacy as a witness to the gospel of Christ. In this comparative and constructive work, I argue that the Triune God's transcendent immanence in creation is not only (self-) revelatory, but also co-suffering yet liberative, and that accordingly, living in compassionate solidarity with the oppressed and the marginalized is determinant to the Church's identity as a messianic fellowship. The liturgical life of the Church shines forth the reality of the kingdom of God as its sign. At the same time, the Church is to participate in the continuous divine liberation of the world in order to be the authentic body of Jesus Christ. This life of Christians is to be non-violent but resistant to the injustice that stands against the life-affirming Spirit of Christ. It seeks a Christian witness through public advocacy that is grounded in the Trinitarian revelation. ..

INTRODUCTION

The approaches of Wolfhart Pannenberg and Jürgen Moltmann to theology are similar, but, at the same time, they are discrepant. A notable similarity between the two theologians' approaches is that both theologians bring the hope for the eschatological kingdom of God into the center of the Christian life. They both stress in their theology the power of the future over the present. However, whereas Moltmann is interested in relating his theology to the experiences of life, especially the problem of suffering, Pannenberg tends to focus more on presenting a coherent and mutual dialogue between theology and other academic disciplines in pursuit of the Truth of God who is the “unifying unity” of all reality.¹

This seems to logically lead to the difference in their views of the power of the future over the present. In the conflict between the divine promise of the kingdom of God and the reality of the present world, Moltmann regards the promised future of God as a transformative overcoming of creatures' suffering from evil in the present creation. Pannenberg, on the other hand, regards the promised future of God as the driving force which leads different pieces of history into unity and totality, based on his view of history as the sphere of a gradual divine revelation.

This difference is reflected in their distinct views of the Church as a messianic fellowship. For Moltmann, the Church is a messianic fellowship, which is called to embody the reality of the kingdom of God in the presence and the power of the Spirit. At the same time, the Church understands the “creative tension” between the reality of its contemporary world and its hope for the future kingdom of God as the history of the Spirit that makes all things in creation new.² For this reason, the fact that the Church lives in the tension between ‘already’ and ‘not yet’

1 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, trans. Francis McDonough (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 336, 368.

2 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 279, 286.

does not make the Church withdraw from the contemporaneous context of its life but makes the Church “a messianic fellowship in the world and for the world.”³ According to Moltmann, “the synoptic writers, in the tradition of Deutero-Isaiah [40-55], evidently present Jesus as the One who brings the good news of the expected last time.”⁴ Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom to the poor and called them into the genuine liberty of the eschatological kingdom of God. In his life, cross, and resurrection, he was regarded as the eschatological Son of Man or the herald of the kingdom of God.⁵

The category of the poor is comprehensive in that they represent not only those who suffer from physical, social, and economic poverty but also those who experience psychological, moral, and religious poverty.⁶ The poor according to Mark and Luke include “all those who just have to endure the acts of violence and injustice without their ability to defend themselves against oppression, injustice, violence.”⁷ Hence, the Church is called to the same messianic ministry in the presence and the power of the Spirit of Christ.

Like Moltmann, Pannenberg regards the Church as an eschatological community that participates in the creative and redemptive work of the Triune God that embraces the whole of humanity and the entire creation.⁸ What defines the Church as a “messianic fellowship” is the inner liturgical life of the Church as the sign of the kingdom of God.⁹ The Church’s political ethic is important also for Pannenberg since the Church is the sign of the kingdom that will be the renewal of this world. However, as discussed in this article, unlike Moltmann, Pannenberg does not regard the active standing in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed as a

3 Ibid., 198.

4 Ibid., 78.

5 Ibid., 215-24.

6 Ibid., 79.

7 Ibid.

8 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1991), vol.3, 98. Henceforth, *ST III*.

9 Pannenberg, *ST III*, 65.

kernel of the Church as a messianic fellowship.

In my view, the difference in their understandings of the Church as a messianic fellowship seems to lie in the dissimilitude of their understanding of the Spirit's presence in the world. For Moltmann, "The messianic community belongs to the Messiah and the messianic word."¹⁰ In present creation, the Spirit of Christ continues to stand in solidarity with the suffering of creatures that originates in the conflict between the present and the promised eschatological new creation.¹¹ On the other hand, for Pannenberg, the work of the Spirit is observable to the public eye in his framework of the concept of God as the all-determining reality.¹² That is, while the eschaton as the all-determining reality is still hidden from us, the work of the Spirit continues to be revealed in the history of the world.

In this article, I argue that the presence of the Spirit of Christ is not only revelatory but also represents God's redemptive co-suffering in creation, and that accordingly, living in compassionate solidarity with the oppressed in the world is determinant to the Church's identity as a messianic fellowship. The liturgical life of the Church shines forth the reality of the kingdom of God as its sign. At the same time, the Church is to participate in the continuous divine liberation of the world in order to be the authentic body of Jesus Christ.

To that end, I first perform a comparative evaluation of Moltmann's and Pannenberg's concepts of the Church as a messianic fellowship. I ground this evaluation on my critical engagement with their understandings of the presence of the Spirit of Christ in the world. In so doing, I also make a constructive suggestion as to Pannenberg's view of the presence

10 Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 226. In his *God in Creation*, Moltmann also calls the Church "a messianic fellowship of service for the kingdom of God." *God in Creation*, Margaret Kohl, trans. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 228-29.

11 Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 69

12 Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 344. Also, see his *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), vol. 1, 158-161 (Henceforth, *ST I*) as well as Ted Peters, "Introduction," in Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Toward a Theology of Nature*, ed. Ted Peters (Louisville: WJK, 1993), 13-4.

of the Spirit in the world through employing Sallie McFague's concept of religious language as a metaphor. Also, I suggest non-violent resistance as an example of the Church's solidarity with the oppressed. I believe this work is significant as it brings into light the holistic nature of the Spirit's Creatorship.¹³ In so doing, this article investigates how the followers of Christ are invited by the Spirit to engage with the secular sectors of society by participating in the redemptive yet co-suffering presence of the Spirit in the world.

II. THE COMMONALITY OF MOLTSMANN'S AND PANNENBERG'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHURCH FOR THE WORLD AS A MESSIANIC FELLOWSHIP

For both Pannenberg and Moltmann, in the tension between "already" and "not yet," the Church as a messianic fellowship is called to proclaim the eschatological coming of the kingdom of God in the world. It appears obvious that, for both of Moltmann and Pannenberg, the fulfillment of the kingdom of God is both apocalyptic and historical. To be more specific, based on the resurrection of Jesus, Moltmann affirms that the Spirit continues to faithfully fulfill in this world the universal reality of the resurrection as an eschatological reality that God promised in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Here, Moltmann regards the reality of

13 According to José Comblin, in the Western Christian traditions, the disconnection between the Wisdom Christology and the Logos Christology eventually led to the ignoring of the cosmic role of the Spirit and the institutionalization of the Spirit for the sake of the salvation of a person's soul. The Spirit was regarded as engaging with the inner piety of a believer through the celebration of the sacraments and the hearing of the Word of God. In this way, the Western soteriology finally led to the opposition between salvation that is detached from the liberation of the world, and a liberation of the world divorced from God. José Comblin, *The Holy Spirit* (Eugene, OR : Wipf & Stock, 2004), 15. It was not until Vatican II that the Western Churches began to rediscover the Creatorship of the Christ and the Spirit. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 57.

the kingdom of God as *adventus* that breaks into the present with the new possibilities from the promised new creation, whereas *futurum* is extrapolated from the processes of the past and the present.¹⁴ This eschatological reality can be hoped for only in “the trust that God will remain faithful to his promise” just as what took place in the bodily resurrection of Christ.¹⁵

For Moltmann, Logos Christology is originally Wisdom Christology, and is as such cosmic Christology.¹⁶ In this regard, we can categorize Christ’s mediation in creation into three different phases: “(a) Christ as the ground of the creation of all things (*creatio originalis*), (b) Christ as the moving power in the evolution of creation (*creatio continua*), (c) Christ as the redeemer of the whole of creation (*creatio nova*).”¹⁷ Cosmic Christology is inseparable from the cosmic pneumatology. According to 1 Peter 3:19, in the body, Jesus was put to death and brought back to life by the power of the Spirit. In Romans 8:11, Jesus Christ became the first fruit of the general resurrection. For Moltmann, the whole of creation awaits the resurrection in the Spirit in whose power Jesus rose from the dead. In that sense, the Spirit is the pledge of the kingdom of God.¹⁸ In *creatio continua*, the Son and the Spirit are the two hands of the Father working together in unity toward the fulfillment of creation.

Likewise, for Pannenberg, “[t]he Spirit as the source of life as a whole and the dynamic field in which creatures exist, and finds its eschatological salvation.”¹⁹ Based on the bodily resurrection of Jesus as a proleptic event of the new creation, Pannenberg contends that the Spirit as the power

14 Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1967), 58, 212. Likewise, the resurrection of Jesus is both apocalyptic and historical in that it is an event transformative of the present “embodied” creation while it cannot be conceived based on the past and present experiences. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 247-52.

15 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 149.

16 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 282.

17 *Ibid.*, 286.

18 *Ibid.*, 45. For his discussion of the relationship between logos Christology and spirit Christology, see *ibid.*, 73-8.

19 Stanley Grenz, *The Reason for Hope* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 275.

of the eschatological future is immanent in the present creation through continuing to fulfill the promised eschatological kingdom of God. While creation as a whole is contingent on the Creatorship of the Triune God, throughout *creatio continua*, the faithfully creative presence of the Son and the Spirit indirectly demonstrates who God is. That is, “as God fulfills God’s vows.”²⁰

In this regard, for both Moltmann and Pannenberg, since the eschaton is not only the goal of creation but also the basis of creation, the Triune God’s Creatorship bears a fundamentally soteriological dimension.²¹ In the context of their understanding of God’s creation and redemption of the present creation, the Church as a messianic fellowship is essentially *missionary* for the world. Moltmann affirms that the Church is to be missionary because it is essentially “relational to God and to the world.”²² Being missionary embraces the political nature of the ministry of the Church.²³ Pannenberg also defines the Church as “essentially missionary” as its existence points to the coming kingdom of God that represents the consummation of history.²⁴ Only in the eschaton can the present creation find its telos and ultimate meaning under the just and peaceful reign of God.²⁵ In my view, both Pannenberg and Moltmann advance their public ecclesiology based on their cosmic pneumatology and in their eschatological ontology of creation.

20 Pannenberg, “Redemptive Event and History,” in *Basic Questions in Theology : Collected Essays*, 19 [13-80].

21 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 94-6. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), vol. 2, 77-84, 388-394. Henceforth, *ST II*.

22 Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 19.

23 *Ibid.*, 1-18.

24 Pannenberg, *ST III*, 46.

25 Pannenberg, *ST II*, 173-4.

III. THE DISSONANCE BETWEEN THE TWO THEOLOGIAN'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE MESSIANIC FELLOWSHIP

In comparing Moltmann's and Pannenberg's ecclesiology, I see disparities between Moltmann's and Pannenberg's notions of the Church as a messianic fellowship. I contend that their ecclesiological views diverge because of the divergence of their pneumatology. To be more specific, as Christ is in the world as the co-suffering and liberating risen Lord, the Spirit of Christ is in that messianic presence.²⁶ The Church is to participate in the mission of the Spirit of Christ by standing in compassionate solidarity with the poor, the marginalized, and the oppressed, who bear the name of "ochlos."²⁷ For this reason, Moltmann affirms that "[h]ope for God's kingdom and the experience of poverty among the people of the poor, the sad, and the suffering, go together."²⁸

Moltmann calls for recognizing the dialectic of eschatology and history when the present is in "discord" with the eschatological future.²⁹ In that sense, the Church is called to actualize "the possibilities of the messianic era, which brings the gospel of the kingdom to the poor, which proclaims the lifting up of the downtrodden. . . , and begins the glorification of the coming God through actions of hope in the fellowship of the poor, the sad and those condemned to silence, so that it may lay hold on all men."³⁰ This messianic life is "neither to be legalistic, nor moralistic", but is lived out of freedom.³¹ In order for this life of mutuality, freedom, and unity to be lived out, the renewal of a life is to be a holistic redemption, in

26 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 93-4. Also, see his *The Spirit of Life*, trans. Margaret Kohl, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 62-64.

27 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 124.

28 *Ibid.*, 127.

29 Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 49. [emphasis mine]

30 *Ibid.*, 226-27.

31 *Ibid.*, 278.

which body and soul are transformed into conformity to the reality of the kingdom of God.³²

For Pannenberg, on the other hand, the active political and social participation of the believers in solidarity with the oppressed and the marginalized does not seem to be essential to the life of the Church as a messianic fellowship. I notice that for Pannenberg, living out the ethic of the kingdom of God is irreducible in the Christian faith. While the cosmic Spirit is working towards the universal consummation of the history of the world, the Spirit's ministry within the Church is distinctive. It always relates to the history of Jesus as well as the eschatological reality – namely, a corporate life of the entire humanity in freedom and justice in the kingdom of God – which has already dawned in Jesus' resurrection.³³

However, Pannenberg does not believe that an active act of standing in solidarity with the oppressed constitutes the kernel of the Church's identity as a messianic community. He emphasizes "the Church's function as a witness to the incomplete nature of any human political structure."³⁴ His affirmation is based on his belief that the kingdom of God is not established by the human capacity to accomplish the order of the peace and justice that belong to the kingdom of God.³⁵ It is crucial for the Church to perceive the discontinuity between political actions and the coming of the kingdom of God. Therefore, as Stanley Grenz points out, while Pannenberg emphatically limits Christian political actions, he sharply articulates the limits of Christian fellowship.³⁶ In his *What is Man?*, while Pannenberg supports the responsibility of a government to protect the boundaries of freedom, he does not take into serious account that there are at times the need for active reforms to be made in favor of the marginalized and the oppressed.³⁷

32 Ibid., 280.

33 Ibid., 20.

34 Stanley Grenz, *Reason for Hope* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005), 247.

35 Pannenberg, *ST III*, 42-6.

36 Ibid., 247-48.

37 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, trans. Duane Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 103.

Rather, for Pannenberg the Church serves this role primarily through celebrating the proleptic presence of the future rule of God by means of the pure proclamation of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments – especially the Eucharist.³⁸ To put it differently, the Church “can only try to fulfill its function as a sign pointing to God’s kingdom . . . in its liturgical life.”³⁹ The Church becomes a messianic fellowship by means of “the celebration of the proleptic presence of the future rule of God in [its] worship life.”⁴⁰ In this liturgical life, the Church as a messianic fellowship becomes inherently missionary as the people of God that turns the world toward the anticipation of a renewed humanity as the witness to the kingdom of God.⁴¹

Pannenberg’s view diverges from Moltmann’s understanding of the messianic identity of the Church. For Moltmann, Article VII of the Augsburg Confession and Article III of the Barmen Declaration is right to affirm that the presence of the Church is “not restricted merely to the pure preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.”⁴² Rather, the Church is to be seen as present where creation is liberated from the powers of sin and death through Christ’s on-going saving presence in *creatio continua* through the presence of the Spirit.

IV. MOLTMANN AND PANNENBERG IN DIVERGENCE ON THE SPIRIT’S PRESENCE IN CREATION

In my analysis, Moltmann’s and Pannenberg’s discrete understandings of a messianic fellowship consist in their different perspectives of the presence of the Spirit in creation. To be specific, Moltmann believes the Incarnation is “an event of the past which opens up the divine future in

38 Pannenberg, *ST III*, 101.

39 *Ibid.*, xv.

40 Grenz, *Reason for Hope*, 247.

41 *Ibid.*

42 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 65.

an eschatological sense."⁴³ The Incarnation constitutes the ground of our understanding of God's "holistic" redemption of God's creation from all the powers of sin, death, and evil.

This redemptive history of God in creation is inherently the Triune God's standing in co-suffering solidarity with creatures suffering from the dominating powers of sin, death, and evil. When the Son was crucified, the Father himself experienced "abandonment in the form of this death and this rejection."⁴⁴ Yet this is not to be regarded as representing a form of *patripassianism*. The Father and the Son suffer on the cross but in different manners. "When the Son suffers the pain and death of the cross, the Father gives up and suffers the loss of the Son."⁴⁵ Also, the Spirit, who binds the Father and the Son in love, suffers the pain that the Father and the Son shares on the cross.⁴⁶ In that sense, Moltmann sees the cross as the locus of the Trinitarian suffering.

The cross as the Trinitarian suffering is central to the mode of the Trinitarian involvement in the world in the interpretive light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.⁴⁷ While Jesus' resurrection corresponds to the eschatological new creation of the world, Christ's suffering on the cross corresponds to the suffering of creation like a birth pang for the new creation.⁴⁸ Likewise, in the light of the resurrection of Jesus in the power of the Spirit (Rom. 8:11), the co-suffering presence of the Spirit on the cross means the Spirit's liberating presence in *creatio continua*.⁴⁹ As the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit's presence is to be regarded as compassionate yet liberative. The Spirit becomes "most concrete and deepest in the midst of our suffering,"⁵⁰ just as Jesus enjoyed heart-to-heart table fellowship

43 Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 212.

44 Ibid.

45 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. Magaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 54.

46 Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 210.

47 Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, 184.

48 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 172.

49 Richard Baucham, *Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (NY: T&T Clarke, 1995), 187-9.

50 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 336.

(Mark 2:13-7) with the poor and sinners, and he suffered on the cross so they could be redeemed from the power of sin and death. In that co-suffering presence, the Spirit carries on the messianic liberation of creation towards the fulfillment of the eschatological new creation. In that vein, Moltmann writes, “God does not desire to find rest without the new creation of man and the world with the Spirit.”⁵¹ This is the Triune God’s own history of overcoming of the present sinful states that contradict the kingdom of God.⁵²

For Pannenberg, on the other hand, while actualizing the Trinitarian life in the history of creation, God rarely co-suffers with creatures in *creatio continua*. Pannenberg identifies the Spirit as “the force field of God’s mighty presence,”⁵³ which is analogous to the notion of the energy-time-force field advanced by Michael Faraday. The Spirit as the all-embracing field works in all creatures as “the vitalizing principle, the lure of independent creatures to self-transcendence as the power of ecstasy.”⁵⁴ The Spirit brings into being “independent creatures,” and lures them toward harmony in self-transcendence. This lure toward harmony is the lure to the eschatological future in that the perfect unity among creatures only lies in the eschatological kingdom of God.⁵⁵

Here, the principle of creation can be seen as the Logos, while the Spirit is regarded as the source of the movement and life of creatures.⁵⁶ The historical ground of this affirmation is Christ’s “self-distinction” from the Father in his life and cross, and his unity with the Father in the Spirit that reaches the climax at his resurrection.⁵⁷ The work of the Logos and

51 Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 63.

52 Timothy Harvie, “Living the Future: The Kingdom of God in The Theologies of Jürgen Moltmann and Wolfhart Pannenberg,” in *International Journal of Systematic Theology* vol.10 No.2 (Apr. 2008), 153-6.

53 Pannenberg, *ST I*, 382.

54 Wolfhart Pannenberg, “The Working of the Spirit in the Creation and in the People of God,” in *Spirit, Faith, and Church*, ed. W. Pannenberg, A. Dulles, & E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 23 [13-31].

55 Pannenberg, *ST II*, 144-6.

56 Pannenberg, *ST III*, 4.

57 Pannenberg *ST II*, 183.

the Spirit finds expression in “the ecstatic nature” of independent organic lives.⁵⁸ However, the creatures’ free responses to the Spirit’s ecstatic lure toward the eschatological unity are subject to fail. Their final judgment is hidden until the eschatological consummation of history when the Son as the principle of creation becomes the judge.⁵⁹

I think Pannenberg focuses on the creative and revelatory dimensions of *creatio continua* whereas Moltmann does not. For Pannenberg, the Spirit is the pledge of the eschaton that gives the existence and meaning to the past and the present. Yet he does not emphasize the co-suffering solidarity of Christ and the Spirit in creation. Ironically, while Pannenberg regards the transcendent immanence of the Son and the Spirit as the ground of the genuine contingency of creatures, he tends to ignore the transformative conflict between the present and the future of God in the latter’s inbreaking into the former. Rather, Pannenberg claims that “the absence of God is the negative side of his futurity. In Jesus’ message, it is only as future that God is present.”⁶⁰ In this statement, Pannenberg even speaks of the sinful state of the present creation as God’s absence rather than God’s compassionate overcoming of the power of death and sin through co-suffering with creatures.

Accordingly, Moltmann contends that Pannenberg’s political ethics follows from “his emphasis on the anticipatory character of the message and resurrection of Jesus and from his neglect of the contradictory character of Jesus’ message and resurrection.”⁶¹ Timothy Harvey concurs with Moltmann’s assertion writing that “Pannenberg views the kingdom present only in expectation aroused from proclamation, rather than materially present in Christ’s person and acts in a penultimate sense.”

58 Pannenberg, “The Spirit in Creation and the People of God,” in *Spirit, Faith, and Church*, eds. W. Pannenberg, A. Dulles, and C.E. Braaten (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 36.

59 Pannenberg, *ST III*, 608-20.

60 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 68.

61 Jürgen Moltmann, *On Human Dignity*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 112.

⁶² Accordingly, Pannenberg seems to focus on the cognitively revelatory dimension of the Trinitarian creation and the all-embracing aspect of the eschatological kingdom of God, while not interpreting the gap between the present and the kingdom of God as the suffering presence of God in the world.

Like Pannenberg, Moltmann also affirms that since God reveals Godself proleptically in the Christ event, our knowledge of the kingdom of God has the character of anticipation of the end of history. Nevertheless, Moltmann differentiates himself from Pannenberg by holding that Christian proclamation is not to be centered on offering total interpretations of the world and seeking the harmonization among the sundry pieces of history.⁶³ Rather, the Christian proclamation of the gospel is to be heard as “the language of liberation.”⁶⁴ In other words, what connects the past and the present to the future is not a substance that penetrates the whole of history, but rather the hope that points beyond any given moment, which is transformative, healing, and renewing.

V.

TOWARD A MORE HOLISTIC VIEW OF THE SPIRIT: THE CO-SUFFERING AND LIBERATIVE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST

Pannenberg believes that God reveals God-self indirectly through historical events by making promises and fulfilling them. In the same vein, Robert Jenson contends that God, according to the gospel, is the God of the future who is not the God of atemporal eternity. For Jenson, it is problematic to see God as an atemporal one, because that kind of notion makes God as “a God of the past,”⁶⁵ which contradicts the gospel’s portrayal of God as the One who comes from the future of God opening

62 Timothy Harvie, “Living the Future,” 154.

63 Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 215.

64 Ibid.

65 Robert W. Jenson, *God after God* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1969), 22.

up the horizons of hope for the future. However, as discussed above, Pannenberg rarely discusses the co-suffering presence of Jesus Christ in the development of history as Moltmann does.

Against Pannenberg, I affirm that the lack of awareness of Christ's co-suffering and liberating presence in the world should be problematic, since such a view is not faithful to the way in which the Trinitarian God is involved in the world as the Creator and the Redeemer. The Triune God is to be seen as present in history as the One who suffers with those who suffer and redeem what God created. To be specific, the Spirit, "the Spirit of God," is also the "Spirit of Jesus" (Acts 16:7) and "the Spirit of Christ" (Rom. 8:9; 1 Pet. 1:11). The New Testament's (NT) images of the Spirit are "thoroughly Christological, as its Christology is thoroughly Trinitarian."⁶⁶ If so, the Spirit is the One who continues to be not only revelatory but also renewing co-suffering in *creatio continua*. That is, "rather than a neutral observer of world events, [the Spirit] is to be seen as pathetic."⁶⁷

According to C.F.D. Moule, the concept of "wisdom" in the OT breaks down into the Logos and the Spirit in the NT; thus, both the Logos and the Spirit has a "cosmic" dimension just like the OT notion of wisdom. Jesus Christ was empowered by the Spirit as the breath of life for the whole of creation, and after the cross and resurrection, the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. It is the Spirit who makes universal not only the scope of the work of Christ but also the work of Christians for the world. Even though in the NT the Spirit is more often used to describe the work of Christ in the believers in Christ, its matrix is the presence of the Spirit who effects the work of Christ in creation in general.⁶⁸

Likewise, one may also find the universality of both the concept of the Logos and wisdom in the writings of the church fathers like Theophilus

66 Anselm Kyongsuk Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World* (New York; London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 95.

67 Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, 349.

68 C.F.D. Moule, *The Holy Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 19-21.

of Antioch and Irenaeus.⁶⁹ Ted Peters writes, “Like wisdom, the Logos organizes the creation, and like wisdom the Spirit as the life-giving power . . . Both are universal in scope.”⁷⁰ That is, according to 1 Peter 3:19, in the body, Jesus was put to death and brought back to life by the power of the Spirit. In Romans 8:11, Jesus Christ became the first fruit of the general resurrection, and in Romans 8:18-22, the whole of creation awaits the renewal in the Spirit in whose power Jesus rose from the dead.

Accordingly, first, I think that the presence of the Spirit of Christ is to be regarded as redemptive in creation in a holistic way.⁷¹ Jesus Christ’s continuous compassionate ministry in the world through the presence of the Spirit liberates the whole of the world from the power of death, sin, and evil. As 2 Cor. 3:17 says, “Where there is the Spirit of the Lord, there is freedom.” Just as the Spirit empowered the messianic life of Jesus of Nazareth, “the Spirit acts in the world to incorporate all humanity and creation into the Sonship of Christ and reconcile them with God the Father, so that God will be all in all.”⁷² This transformation entails the overcoming of all alienating, oppressive, and ungodly divisions in the community of God’s good creation. The ultimate triumph over the power of death and sin is promised in the “bodily” resurrection of Jesus. As Gustavo Gutierrez writes, “the eschatological promise is a historical promise”⁷³ which affirms “the renewal of this-worldly realities in the coming of the new creation as part of the coming of the new creation.”⁷⁴

Second, this liberating presence of the Spirit entails divine co-suffering in the process of renewing God’s loved creatures including their physical, psychological, and political dimensions. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen writes,

69 Theophilus of Antioch, *Autoclycus*, 2:15; *Irenaeus of Lyons, Heresies*, 4.7.4. (Accessible at <http://www.ccel.org>)

70 Ted Peters, *God – The World’s Future* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 253.

71 In that vein, the Spirit is universally present in creation, in that “God’s ruach is the life force immanent in all the living, in body, sexuality, ecology, and politics” (Job 33:4, 13ff.; Ps. 104:29ff.). Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 225-6.

72 Min, *The Solidarity of Others in a Divided World*, 98.

73 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Theology of Liberation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 153.

74 Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, 374.

“[Jesus’] healings are the signs of profound sympathy and of co-suffering (Matt. 14:14), similar to giving leadership to confused people (Mark 6:34; Matt. 9:36) or providing food for the hungry (Mark 8:2; Matt. 15:32).”⁷⁵ Likewise, Moltmann argues that Jesus’ healing of the sick signifies the coming of the kingdom of God as it represents the liberation of people from the bondage of sin and death that oppresses their minds and bodies.⁷⁶

All in all, the healing ministry of Jesus signifies his compassionate participation in the suffering of the poor and the oppressed as well as his liberation of those people from the powers of sin and death.⁷⁷ Likewise, the Spirit of Christ carries out the messianic ministry of Christ for the oppressed and the poor in his earthly life. In that vein, Justo Gonzalez contends that Scripture is to be read in the grammar of politics.⁷⁸ The stories of Scripture speak of God’s liberation of the oppressed and need to be translated into the life of the people who are suffering in a particular type of oppression.⁷⁹

VI. CONSIDERING COMPATIBLE MEATAPHORS FOR THE SPIRIT

Accordingly, I affirm that Pannenberg’s pneumatology needs to more robustly correspond to Jesus Christ’s messianic life for the poor and the oppressed. While Denis Edwards agrees with Pannenberg’s description

75 Ibid., 66.

76 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 108.

77 Jesus was born into the group of the people of Israel who were suffering from the oppression by their religious leaders and the Roman Empire. In the Incarnation, God made himself known in their history by becoming Incarnate as one of them. Jesus was one of the oppressed as we can see in the fact that at his birth, Joseph and Mary had to flee with the baby Jesus to avoid the King Herod’s killing (Matt. 2:13-23). In that vein, James Cone maintains that it is crucial to see Jesus Christ as the Son who became “the Oppressed One” to liberate all people suffering from oppression. James Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1970), 116.

78 Justo González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 83-6.

79 Ibid., 89.

of the Spirit as “the power of the future that gives creatures their present and duration,” he goes beyond this idea. Edwards maintains that “the Spirit is far more than an impersonal life-giving power.”⁸⁰ The Spirit is the personal presence of the loving Creator. Above all, the Spirit’s presence is “the faithful companion with every creature, accompanying each with love, delighting in each, suffering with each in its suffering, and promising its future in God.”⁸¹

I think Pannenberg needs to seriously consider the “co-suffering” and “liberating” presence of the Spirit in the world. Thereby, his view of the Church as a messianic fellowship can include the Church’s response to the divine call to actively get involved in the Trinitarian history of liberation through standing in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed. In so doing, Pannenberg’s view of the Church as a messianic fellowship could bear a more transformative character amidst the unsettled conflict between the eschatological promise and the situations of suffering at present.

Pannenberg understands the Spirit as the Spirit of unity since he writes that “in the Eucharistic feast, believers feast with one another in their anticipation of their fellowship with God in the eschatological kingdom of God.”⁸² Yet what his idea of the Spirit lacks is “the self-sacrificial, persistent, and caring love of a mother”⁸³ that was revealed in the life, ministry, and passion of Jesus Christ. If this aspect of the Spirit were considered, his notion of the Church as a messianic fellowship would embrace the Church’s participation in Christ’s persistent messianic liberation of the world in the presence of the Spirit. Langdon Gilkey argues that Pannenberg’s theological tendency that moves God to the future seems to inevitably weaken the motivation of the Church to take political action.⁸⁴

80 Denis Edwards, *Breath of Life* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2004), 83.

81 Ibid.

82 Pannenberg, *ST III*, 107.

83 Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, 349.

84 Langdon Gilkey, *Reaping the Whirlwind* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 234-6.

While holding on to the concept of the Spirit as the creative and life-giving field, Pannenberg would be able to conceive of other metaphors of the Spirit, since the Spirit is not bound to one metaphor. Pannenberg would be able to take into consideration a “more interpersonal analogy” that appositely expresses the Spirit’s self-sacrificial, persistent, and caring love” which resembles that of a mother.⁸⁵ Like Pannenberg argues, I think the doctrine of the Spirit generally speaks of “how God creates and recreates the world so as to unite all things with himself in the intimacy of his own divine life, so that God may be ‘all in all’ (1 Cor. 15:28).”⁸⁶

Nevertheless, we should also notice that the biblical images of the Spirit are rich in content. For instance, with regard to the activity of the Spirit, Scripture speaks not only of his making choices (1 Cor. 12:11), guiding (John 16:13), and teaching (John 14:26), but also of being resisted (Acts 7:51), being grieved (Eph. 4:30), being quenched (1 Thess. 5:19), and even being blasphemed (Matt. 12:31). In Romans 8:26, it is said, “In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.” In all these, the Spirit gently empowers creatures in love like a dove (Matt. 3:16) and clothing (Acts 1:8). As is seen in these examples, the notions of the Spirit are comprehensive since the work and the attributes of the Spirit are comprehensive.

When considering this comprehensive nature of the Spirit, Sallie McFague’s notion of religious language as a metaphor can help extend the horizons of Pannenberg’s perspective of the Spirit. McFague points out that human language is creative, in the sense that it constructs our worldviews including religious perspectives. Yet when considering the limitations of human language, on the one hand, we should notice that there is not one exclusively valid construction.⁸⁷ Any theological concept or language has both continuity and discontinuity with the real identity

85 Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, 349.

86 Min, *The Solidarity of Others*, 100.

87 Sallie McFague, *Models of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 21-8.

of God due to its inherent limitations. McFague argues that viewing theological language as “metaphorical” is adequate. The rationale behind the view of theological language as metaphors is to “refuse to identify human constructions with divine reality.”⁸⁸

Thus, the Spirit of Christ finds expression in multiple concepts and terms so it can be more fully comprehended. Pannenberg’s understanding of the Spirit reflects significant aspects of the nature of the Spirit’s presence in creation. Nonetheless, I think Pannenberg needs to consider other dimensions of the Spirit too. Pannenberg’s notion of the Spirit as the creative life-giving field does not necessarily have to be given up while including the redemptive co-suffering of the Spirit in his pneumatology. In the light of the promise of the new creation manifested in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the suffering is to be seen as a birth pang or an apocalyptic birth pang for the eschatological new creation.

VII. THE MESSIANIC FELLOWSHIP THAT BEARS JESUS CHRIST’S CROSS FOR THE WORLD

All in all, the immanence of the Spirit is not only creative and revelatory but also co-suffering as well as liberative. Christ is in steadfast solidarity with the suffering world through the presence of the Spirit. As Pannenberg affirms, it is theologically proper to contend that in the apostolic proclamation of the gospel and in the right administration of the sacraments, one can have hope for the eschatological kingdom of God that is promised in the resurrection of Christ.⁸⁹ Moltmann also finds the distinctiveness of the Church as a messianic fellowship in its being a foretaste of the world’s future. In that sense, the kerygma of Jesus Christ and the sacraments represent the

88 Ibid., 22. McFague attempts re-mythologization of theological language in the contemporary context, rather than stopping at a deconstruction or demythologization process as many Western deconstructionist philosophers do. For McFague, we cannot directly know the nature of God, but only indirectly and in a mediated way because “God-language can refer [to its referent] only through the detour of a description that probably belongs elsewhere.” Ibid., 34.

89 Pannenberg, *ST III*, 99-110.

eschatological hope for the kingdom of God revealed in the life, message, cross, and resurrection of Christ. In the Spirit they represent the liberating presence of Christ.⁹⁰

I agree with Moltmann that the presence of the Church as a messianic fellowship should not be limited to the truthful proclamation of the pure gospel and the right administration of the sacraments.⁹¹ Rather, the Church is called to participate in the on-going transformative work of Christ in today's world because the Church is living in "*eschatologia crucis*" in which the Spirit is in redemptive co-suffering in and with creation to faithfully fulfill the new creation.⁹² If so, I believe that the church is called to participate in the messianic call of the Spirit in the world. The Church is founded on "a twofold divine economy: the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit."

According to the legacy of the Eastern tradition, while the Church is the body of Christ, the Spirit is the fullness of the Church.⁹³ This is because, like I discussed as to the inextricable relationship between logos Christology and spirit or wisdom Christology, there is a mutual relationship between Christ and the Spirit.⁹⁴ That is, while the Son become incarnate and works in the power of the cosmic Spirit (Eph. 1:23), the same Spirit is sent by the Son (John 15:26) and reveals the Son (John 16:14). In the same vein, Basil claimed that "Christ comes, the Spirit goes before. [Christ] is in the flesh, and the Spirit is inseparable from him."⁹⁵

I notice that Pannenberg also contends that it is improper for the Church to be disinterested in the political issues because the Church is the sign of the kingdom of God that will be the eschatological reality of this world. Nevertheless, Pannenberg sharply articulates the limits of a Christian

90 Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 200-60.

91 Ibid., 65.

92 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 154.

93 Vladimir Lossky, *The Mythical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1991), 157, 174.

94 Ibid., 158-9.

95 Basil, *De Spiritu Santo*, 19:49. Cited by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academics, 2002), 71-2.

political action. Furthermore, the Church's active political action in solidarity with the oppressed of society does not constitute the kernel of the Church as a messianic fellowship as I discussed in the previous sections.

Unlike Moltmann, Pannenberg does not see the coming of the kingdom of God as a process that involves the co-suffering solidarity of the Triune God. Accordingly, Pannenberg does not see the divine call for the Church to work with God who suffers with the world and keeps liberating the world in its birth pang for the new creation. Rather, Pannenberg does not go beyond the emphasis of the Church's function as a witness to the incomplete nature of any human political structure through the proclamation of the gospel and the administration of the sacraments. Here Moltmann certainly contributes to Pannenberg's ecclesiology.

VIII. COMPASSIONATE SOLIDARITY THROUGH NON- VIOLENT RESISTANCE

I think that a way in which the Church can stand in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed is non-violent resistance. In his book, *I Have a Dream*, Martin Luther King, Jr. writes, "When I went to Montgomery as a pastor. . . , I simply responded to the call of the people for a spokesman. When the protest began, my mind, consciously or unconsciously, was driven back to the Sermon on the Mount, with its sublime teachings on love, and to the Gandhian method of non-violent resistance."⁹⁶ King writes that the motivation of his engagement in nonviolent resistance was the teaching of Jesus on the love of God and neighbors. For King, based on the teaching of Jesus, nonviolent resistance to injustice is inseparable from following the command of Christ to love God and neighbors.

I agree with King that the life of Christ according to the gospel is a clear indication that the peace of the kingdom of God is realized through

96 Martin Luther King Jr., *I Have a Dream*, ed., James Washington (New York: Harper One, 1992), 59.

nonviolence. However, with King, I also believe that nonviolence is not to be translated into nonresistance. Jesus' passion shows "nonviolent resistance" to the power of death and sin. On the cross, Christ stands in solidarity with the sinful world in order to redeem it. Christ's suffering "with us" also mean Christ's suffering "for us" (Rom. 5:8). As Kärkkäinen contends, "it is difficult to deny the importance of the need for atonement in terms of [particular] divine intervention and overcoming of the severe effects of the Fall."⁹⁷ In that vein, Romans 4:25 speaks of the need of the Messiah's suffering and death for the sake of vanquishing the power of sin and death to justify us. Christ's dying for us means his dying for our sins in our place, therefore, with us.

Moltmann also claims that the fulfillment of the messianic peace is to be carried out by Christ's followers only through the messianic peace characterized as non-violence.⁹⁸ Non-violent resistance against the unjust patterns of society is a responsibility of the followers of Christ because only in this way can they participate in the messianic mission of the Spirit through breaking the vicious cycle of victimization through an oppressive system by dying to its requirements and rewards.⁹⁹

IX. THE IRREDUCIBLE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BEARER OF THE GOSPEL: ANTICIPATING AND PARTICIPATING IN THE FULFILLMENT OF THE MESSIANIC REIGN

I find helpful Pannenberg's view of the importance of Christ in the final judgment and its implication for the missionary role for the Church. According to Ephesians 1:10, God unites all things in Christ, not only the things on the Earth but also in heaven. In the same vein, in Colossians

97 Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, 331.

98 Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 127-36

99 *Ibid.*, 130-1. Also, see Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 140-41.

1:20, it is said that Christ will reconcile all things to himself.¹⁰⁰ However, at the same time, according to the same Pauline letter, there will be neither fornicators nor impure and greedy persons will enter the kingdom of God (Eph. 5:5). Accordingly, just like Calvinistic determinism, I think a universalism does not honor the free choice of people in receiving the gospel like Jerry Walls contends.¹⁰¹

Therefore, a prayerful hope for the salvation of all seems to be a proper stance to take while respecting the outcome of creaturely free choices. As Kallistos Ware writes, “Our belief in human freedom means that we have no right to categorically affirm, ‘All must be saved.’ But our faith in God’s love makes us dare to *hope* that all will be saved...Hell exists as a possibility because free will exists. Yet, trusting in the inexhaustible attractiveness of God’s love, we venture to express the hope. . . that in the end...we shall find that there is nobody there.”¹⁰²

I think that Pannenberg does justice to this hope without abandoning the final judgment of Christ through purification in fulfilling the kingdom of God.¹⁰³ That is, unlike Moltmann, Pannenberg also considers that there can be certain pieces of history that will persistently resist the truth of God to the point where they cannot be part of the eschatological kingdom of God. This is because creatures are granted genuine contingency. Moltmann also does not trump the freedom of human choices but affirms that God’s grace is greater than human sinfulness to the extent that God has the desire and power to convince even sinners by having “confidence in God: what God wants to do he can do, and will do.”¹⁰⁴

Yet I agree with Ware that we do not have the right to assert that all “must” be saved due to our finite understanding of the mystery of God’s

100 Moltmann cites these verses as well as Colossians 1:20 and Philippians 2:10-11 in support of his idea of the universal salvation in his *The Coming of God*, 240-1.

101 Jerry Walls, *Hell: The Logic of Damnation* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Notre Dame Press, 1992), 58-87.

102 Kallistos Ware, “Dare We Hope for the Salvation of All?,” in *The Inner Kingdom* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Press, 2000), 215 [193-215].

103 Pannenberg, *ST III*, 608-20

104 Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 243-46 [244].

salvation. We only prayerfully hope for the salvation of all. In the final judgment, since the gospel of Christ serves as the standard to judge their lives, Christians are called to concretely embody the gospel of Christ in their lives in every dimension by “relating their lives to Jesus Christ in baptism and faith.”¹⁰⁵ In faith, they are “sure already of future participation in salvation.”¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, I believe that without the preaching of the gospel and the right administration of the sacraments there cannot be genuine hope for the kingdom of God. At the same time, the Church has to live out the hope in the world by bringing the messianic liberation to the sinful world by participating in the call of the liberating Spirit of Christ.

X. CONCLUSION

In this article, I discussed that the Spirit is not only creative and revelatory but also co-suffering and liberative in creation toward the fulfillment of the eschatological new creation. As the church belongs to Christ the Messiah, it is to be called to be messianic in the world. I argued that the Church lives out its calling when it participates in the eschatological ministry of the Spirit through co-suffering with and liberating the world from the powers of death, sin, and evil. The Church is to exist for others in solidarity with the oppressed and the poor suffering in the sinful world. In arguing this, I discussed how Pannenberg’s and Moltmann’s pneumatology and ecclesiology can complement each other in pursuit of a holistic public ecclesiology. Through this comparative work, I demonstrated how the Church is called to serve as the sign of the eschatological reign of God in continuity and discontinuity with the rest of the world.

105 Pannenberg, *ST III*, 616

106 *Ibid.* For the similar idea according to Joseph Ratzinger, see his *Eschatology* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America Press, 2007), 206. Also, see Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Hope and Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 199-202.



“The Tree lies where it Falls:”
A Simpsons’ Eschatology—Towards a
Lewisian Understanding
of Eternal Life and Human Rebellion

P.H. Brazier

KEYWORDS:

Eschaton	*Telos*	Forgiveness		
Determinism	Nihilism	Evil	Contradiction	Judgment
The Fall	Righteousness	Heaven & Hell		

ABSTRACT:

This paper is an exercise in theological media studies, examining the *telos* of humanity. *Postmortem status purgatus*: the ancient Greeks and Romans held to a truism—what we do in the here-and-now echoes through eternity. What we are, what we make of our life, determines our outcome. Christ’s judgment on us then merely reflects, ontologically, what we have become (this raises questions about Determinism, Compatibilism, and an unhindered free will). This article is a serious, though humorous, examination of heaven and hell, in the form of *purgation*. We are not necessarily positing a third “place” (purgatory): “The tree lies where it falls” (Eccl 11:3). Postmortem, the person either gets used to being in hell, sinking deeper and deeper into its own evolving demonic depravity; or—as it is shriven in its repentance and regret—it becomes more and more acclimatized to facing God and being in heaven. This is all to be seen in the light of the judgment we will all be resurrected to: *de statu hominis post mortem*. Therefore this will involve—in the spirit of C.S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*—a

light-hearted consideration of the *eschaton* in *The Simpsons* and what this can illustrate about the human condition issuing from the *Fall* into original sin, balanced by the loving purposes of God’s forgiving judgment. Popular culture may seem an academic irrelevance, but millions of people (along with national and local governments and councils) absorb the religious ideas this popular culture promotes, . . . yet how seriously should we take all of this? What value is there in facing evil with humour, hell as the *absurd* contradiction of God’s Word: a *surd*-like evil, a nihilistic *alogos*?

INTRODUCTION

*The twenty-four elders fall down before Christ
who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever.
They lay their crowns before the throne and say:
“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power,
for you created all things, and by your will they were created
and have their being.”*

REV 4:10–11

Where are we going? The scriptural witness is that the *telos* of all creation is in its transformation, through the *eschaton*, into the eternal heavenly kingdom of Christ. From the forging of God’s chosen people, the ancient Hebrew witness, through Mary’s “yes,” through the Incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth, through the Crucifixion-Resurrection, through the triune realization and witness (the church), through into eternity, this kingdom is God’s will for humanity, it is what we are created for. But there is human freedom. We are responsible for what we become through our exercise of free will. When we come before the judgment of God we cannot escape what we have become. It is clear from the Gospels that we cannot avoid the reality of what we have made of ourselves, or more pertinently what we no longer are: “Hell is really about and best defined by a negative, a loss, and not a positive. The damned are defined by what they are not—or are no longer—rather than by what they are.”¹

1 Weems, “Universalism Denied: C. S. Lewis’s Unpublished Letters to Alan Fairhurst,”

What we no longer are is a denial of our God-given humanity, the *imago Dei* in us. We may not like it but we define our existence, we are responsible for our *status postmortem*. We hold on to that responsibility with a vice-like grip and yet throw our hands up in horror at the consequences, yelling (in consort with one Bart Simpson), “I didn’t do it!”² This then leads to humanity inventing its own religious justification. How so? For thousands of years humanity has invented “gods” and “goddesses,” pagan divines, heavens and hells, and developed religious speculation as to the ontology of eternal life, but also beliefs and ethics to justify human actions in this world. This has led to innumerable human-generated ideas on how we should behave and what we should believe, but also as to the nature of eternal life, reflecting the nature of the human and its teleology. These ideas vary widely from the Valhalla (heaven) of the Vikings (which in all honesty was a region of hell!) and the neo-agnostic beliefs of some Western liberal neo-Buddhists (desperately seeking *postmortem annihilation*?) to the salvation of all—regardless of sin or goodness—in a self-generated, self-reverential, paradisaical heaven for modern Western liberals of various religious/irreligious persuasions. Few of these religious ideas give credit to or acknowledge the universal divine right of God to judge people and to decide the fate of creation. But then do not many of these religions do away with God, or the “gods,” anyway, leaving their exponents mild-manneredly to proffer, apologetically, a vague unknowable, but friendly and accommodating, divine substance of sorts, which is usually a projection of their sexual desire?

When speaking of the universal right of God we are acknowledging the primacy of Almighty God, the Lord—*El Shaddai*, *Yahweh*—revealed in His purposes and dealings over thousands of years with the ancient Hebrews, finally culminating and made manifest in *Yeshua*—Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ—which leads to the atonement and salvation wrought on the cross: open to all, but realized by few. Further, God elects

87–98, quote 96.

2 *The Simpsons*, “Bart Gets Famous,” 5.12.

to be obedient to the God-given natural law humanity is subject to (where a right is a freedom enshrined in law): thus we are all open to a forgiving judgment, if we are prepared to face such a sentence, such a ruling, such a rigour. A sentence, as a legal term, is highly appropriate. In summing-up a trial the judge accurately portrays not just what the accused has done but also, pertinently, what the accused has become. Judgment and sentence is then a pro-active command that simply reflects what the person “is,” and is guilty of. A human trial may sometimes—often?—be flawed, but God’s judgment is not.

A commonly understood assertion within Greco-Roman religion—indeed in life generally—was that what we *are*, what we have become, what we do in the here-and-now, echoes through eternity. This is not far from the intimations of eternal life given by Jesus Christ, that the righteous abide in heaven while the unrighteous languish in hell, further, that we cannot escape responsibility for our decisions and actions in this life. This philosophically-derived Greco-Roman understanding realized that we are to a very great degree responsible for our lives, our actions, and our beliefs. But the revelation from the Christ indicates that all are subject to the loving judgment of God, that God can pneumatologically change us—if we are capable and able through our own empire-building to face that change. Can we reconcile these two approaches to the *telos* of human life: if what we do in the here-and-now dictates what we are after death does this do away with the eschatological judgment of God in Christ, or are they both complementary? If there is an organic relationship between our self-willed, self-creation—what we in our rebellion make of ourselves—and the judgment of God to forgive us and change us, does this give rise to a persistent concept in parts of the Christian tradition: purgatory?—or more pertinently, *purgation*, a purging, a changing

When speaking of the *eschaton* here, we are speaking of the traditional *eschaton* of death, judgment, heaven, and hell; not the modernist-liberal *eschaton* of death followed by heaven. Various modernist academics and clerics—depending on their acceptance of the supernatural and numinous

. . . or not—often reduced the *eschaton* to just two concepts: death and heaven. This conformed, in a related manner, to popular religion. Many who might best be described as conforming to a contemporary Western form of faith, may subscribe to a *postmortem* nothingness (though defining nothing, or “no-thing,” or “no *particular* thing” is fraught with difficulties), or they may subscribe to a more conventional belief, though still flawed, whereby when the individual dies he or she automatically finds him or herself in a pleasant and warm embracing, non-threatening and inclusive, heaven, indeed a republic of heaven. However, there are two certainties in life. One is that we will die; the second is that we cannot escape God’s judgment. This latter is the one absolute point of ontic inclusivity, which mocks the Western liberal obsession with identity politics and inclusivity (which is in many ways veiled exclusive tribalism): no one can escape, or delay, facing God, whatever their religious beliefs. We do not necessarily have control over the manner or time of our death; we cannot forestall or dictate the terms of God’s judgment on us, we cannot plea bargain, however much we may desire favour and acceptance: but God’s judgment is a forgiving judgment, if we can face it in uninhibited terms, stripped of all condition and pretence on our part. To do otherwise is to embrace hell in preference to heaven.

From the Gospels it is clear: all people are moving through this life either towards heaven or towards hell. Although the movement may not always be smooth, there will be sudden jumps! The obvious one being a deathbed conversion, but also being born again (John 3), sudden acts of untold generosity at great risk to ourselves, a faith confession that costs us dearly. And at the point of judgement each person is in heaven or hell.³ But what of resurrection? The unique revelation of the Gospel is that we are all to be resurrected. When? Do the righteous rest in paradise until the general resurrection? Or is resurrection immediate? Is it what

3 A pertinent point that I do not intend to discuss here at any length as it bears little impact on the central thesis of this paper is this: do the dead await judgement at the end of time, all humanity resurrected together, judged together with the initiation of the *eschaton*, or is each individual judged and assigned at the point of death?

the apostle Paul describes as a spiritual resurrection? These are some of the questions that we may explore briefly in this paper examining the concepts of *postmortem status purgatus* in relation to the loving purposes of God’s judgment. To this end, we will examine the American cartoon series *The Simpsons*.

II. OH, HELL! . . .

But first, what of hell? Is hell no more than an exclamation, an evocative provocative? Or is there something real, an actuality? Ross Douthat critically tackles the perennial modern belief that hell must not exist . . . must not be allowed to exist (!).⁴ Hell, he says, is an essential by-product of human freedom and judgment. Douthat notes how hell’s weakening grip on the religious imagination is a consequence of pluralism, also, that this hellish scepticism issues from the delusions, we might say, of modernity:

As our lives have grown longer and more comfortable, our sense of outrage at human suffering—its scope, and its apparent randomness—has grown sharper as well. The argument that a good deity couldn’t have made a world so rife with cruelty is a staple of atheist polemic, and every natural disaster inspires a round of soul-searching over how to reconcile God’s omnipotence with human anguish. . . . Doing away with hell, then, is a natural way for pastors and theologians to make their God seem more humane.⁵

Douthat continues, that to believe in God, but not in hell, is to deny the reality of human choices: if there’s no possibility of saying no to paradise then none of our “noes” have any real meaning. Hell makes our decisions real: “The miser can become his greed, the murderer can lose himself inside his violence, and their freedom to turn and be forgiven is inseparable

4 Douthat, “A Case for Hell.” See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/25/opinion/25douthat.html?emc=eta1>
Accessed April 25, 2011

5 Douthat, “A Case for Hell.”

from their freedom not to do so.”⁶ *Postmortem* judgment, heaven or hell. It may appear dualistic to liberal sensitivities, but the either-or is the key to the *eschaton* from which no one can escape. But what *is* hell?

There are as many definitions of hell as there are religious perspectives, often confusing and seemingly contradictory. Hell is separation from God, with all that is implied in this state of existence: from the corrosive feeling of regret that will overwhelm the individual through to the torment and agonies, tortures and pain, traditionally involved in this *status*, without hope. Perhaps we may assert that hell is nihilistic. Given that hell is so very nearly nothing (both as no particular thing, as well as being a contradiction of all that is good and real, holy and healthy, righteous and alive), it is of no surprise that hell is riven with legion contradictions, confusion and sheer hellishness. Like an astronomical black hole, hell perhaps can only be proved in the negative. Hell may be difficult to conceptualize or even—because of its ontology⁷—to prove, but pertinently, we should ask, what *is* purgation, and how does it relate to heaven and hell?

III. POSTMORTEM STATUS PURGATUS

A growing number of theologians and philosophers in the early twenty-first century are realizing that hell may be defined by a doctrine of *infernal voluntarism*, with the alternative being voluntary purgation: the damned opt, in accordance with the will of God, for hell, that is, God wills that they have the freedom to opt for hell, though he would prefer their salvation.⁸ But does God want them to opt for hell? Is this

6 Douthat, “A Case for Hell.”

7 Astronomical Black holes can only be proved by observing what happens around them: i.e. by studying a black hole’s event horizon. See, http://hubblesite.org/reference_desk/faq/answer.php.id=64&cat=exotichttps://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2018/06/180618141834.htm

Also

<https://www.skyandtelescope.com/astronomy-news/black-holes/best-evidence-yet-that-black-holes-really-exist-0505201523/>

8 Coates, D. Justin; McKenna, Michael. “Compatibilism.” *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. See also, Podgorski, “Free Will Twice Defined: On the Linguistic Conflict

an example of Compatibilism whereby free will and Determinism are mutually compatible? Compatibilists define free will as freedom to act according to willed motives without seemingly random hindrance from individuals or institutions or from a god/gods/idols. This takes no account of original sin. In most Western legal systems—though essentially in the UK and USA—courts of law make judgments, without reference to God or revelation, asking whether a person acted of their own free will, or were they swayed consciously or sub-consciously by circumstances. “It is assumed in a court of law that someone could have acted otherwise than in reality. Otherwise, no crime would have been committed.”⁹ How will we be judged by God? And not just by the evil we opted to do, but also by the good we failed to do. What causes us to make decisions? Are free will decisions still possible, *postlapsarian*? Again, hell is defined by confusion and contradiction.

The saved by comparison are subject, in varying degrees, to *purgation*—a shriven changing, healing—as part of their journey *into* heaven. The saved who need change, a purging, are subject to a voluntary agreement (a promise, a settlement, and a covenant) that constitutes a relinquishing of their rebellion; the damned continue in their rebellion. The damned have therefore freely chosen hell before heaven. All who genuinely desire heaven, all who can genuinely *perceive* heaven and not mistake their own pagan rebellion for a projected heaven of sorts, will be invited into heaven. This thinking is rooted in the work of a mid-twentieth-century apologist, philosopher, and theologian: C. S. Lewis.¹⁰ Lewis subscribed to a doctrine of purgatory, or more pertinently, *purgation*. This is one of his more Catholic beliefs, which most evangelical readers of his work are puzzled by, though he held to the doctrine for sound reasons.

of Compatibilism and Incompatibilism.” See also, Salles, “Compatibilism: Stoic and modern,” 1-23. Compatibilism was a proposition endorsed by the Stoics, medieval scholastics (e.g. Thomas Aquinas), and by Enlightenment philosophers (e.g. David Hume, Thomas Hobbes)

9 See, *Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, “Theories of Criminal Law” <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/criminal-law/>

10 See Buenting, *The Problem of Hell...*

So what is purgatory? Purgatory is not hell; though for many being in a state of *purgation* will be hellish. According to traditional doctrine, people in hell are not saved: “abandon hope all you who enter here,” is the sign Dante placed over the entrance to hell.¹¹ By contrast the people in purgatory are saved, redeemed by Christ, more pertinently they have accepted Christ’s forgiveness, wrought on the cross on their behalf, and in accepting they take the consequences of their actions and beliefs, and the consequence is a cleansing, an emptying: in a word, purgation: they are defined by hope. Traditionally this is seen as an image of the spiritual cleansing of a soul in purgatory. In Roman Catholic doctrine, purgatory is a *place* or *state of suffering* inhabited by the souls of sinners who are “expiating their sins before going to heaven” (OED), whereas hell is a place regarded in various religions as a spiritual realm of evil and suffering, often depicted as a place of perpetual fire beneath the earth to which the wicked are consigned after death. Both hell and purgatory may traditionally be regarded as places: physical, geographic (in the sense of relating to the arrangement of places and physical features), to a greater or lesser degree, with widely differing concepts throughout the world’s religions, and even within the Christian tradition. Or hell generally, purgatory specifically, may be seen as a *state* of mental anguish, a condition of apparent physical suffering, indeed of great torment reflecting the justice and goodness of God. The differences are the degree of mental anguish and suffering experienced by individuals, and that those in purgatory will eventually find their suffering eases as they are translated to heaven. The assumption is that even the redeemed can sin (i.e., wilfully make bad, wrong, decisions in relation to natural law and the will of God) and will still need a degree of change, of purging, after death: having resisted being truly washed in the blood of the Lamb during life.

So, is purgatory a place, or is it a state, a condition, or is it a form of noetic torture? A working definition we may postulate for this

11 Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Vol. 1 Inferno*. Canto 3.9, 89.

paper is *postmortem status purgatus*,¹² that is, after death some may find themselves in a state of purging, cleansing, a state of purgation characterized by regret and doubt, of having to face the responsibility they held for their decisions, what they made of their life, wrestling to come to terms with what their life had been. This condition is imposed by the will of God, a state not unlike, yet different from, what they had become in this life, which should lead to repentance and cleansing. This state, condition, position may be characterized by some as an intensely burning (remorse, repentance) for life’s mistakes. But is this state real? And what do we mean by “real”? Does purgatory geographically exist? Probably not, though such geography is ultimately about perception and generating mental spatial concepts. Perhaps these are the wrong questions. The correct question, we will see, is, “How long is a moment?”

IV. PURGATION: “THE TREE LIES WHERE IT FALLS”¹³

The consistent characteristic of *postmortem* existence for the human is twofold: first, the need to be perfect (“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” Matt 5:48), therefore Christ will perfect the human whatever the cost, unless s/he rebels.¹⁴ Second, the primacy of the human will, that is, the wilful decision by the human dictates the human condition after death. The Catholic side of Lewis believed in and asserted not so much purgatory but the need for *purgation*: none of us will be

12 That is, a state or condition of *purgation*, *purification*, after death: from the Latin, *status*: a position, condition, appointed, to stand, remain, to set-up; and, *purgo*, *purgare*, *purgavi*: purge/excuse; or *purgatus*: cleansed/purified/excused; *postmortem*, after death. *Postmortem status purgatus*: literally—“After the death the position purged.”

13 Eccl 11:3

14 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 202.

good enough to face Christ in eternity, we will need to be sanctified and purified—at the very least changed. Many theologians and philosophers (including C. S. Lewis) can appreciate this position but draw the line at postulating a physical-geographic reality named purgatory, separate from heaven and hell. However, Lewis and others are prepared to postulate a state or condition of purgation. The very nature of heaven and hell is that the two are diametrically different; the hellish humans subsist in a near-to-nothingness state that makes them unfit for heaven, where heaven is too strong and painful for the self-centred near-to-nothingness of the damned to enter.¹⁵ If purgation is a purification, the spiritual cleansing and strengthening of the human,¹⁶ the washing away of the effects of sin in the human, “washed by the blood of the Lamb,”¹⁷ does this imply that salvation is fluid after death? Yes, but this is one-way, those who are translated, after purging, to heaven cannot back-track (1 Cor 15:50–53; Rev 4:10–11). Does this imply that certain theologians may be marginalizing and relativizing the judgment of God? To this extent C. S. Lewis, for example, is strictly Protestant: “The tree lies where it falls” (Eccl 11:3), its place is assured—there is no purgatory, only heaven and hell. Yet the human can be changed. For Lewis, those who submit to a purifying purgation and are translated to heaven, have in fact been in the “fringes” of heaven all the time: those who do accept the change and move into deep heaven were in heaven all along, though the pains of purgation felt like hell to them, for a *period of time*. Those who refuse to let go of their wilful possessiveness, who cannot stand the pain of change, are in hell all along, and stay there: “I think earth, if chosen instead of heaven, will turn out to have been, all

15 From the Middle English, derived from Old French *purgacion*, from Latin *purgatio(n)-*, from *purgare*, to *purge*.

16 A basic ontic principle established and illustrated by Lewis in *The Great Divorce*.

17 In terms of the blood of the Lamb: 1 Cor 10:16; 1 Cor 11:27; 1 John 1:6–9; 5:6; 1 Pet 1:1–2; Acts 5:28; 20:28; Col 1:19–20, 22; Eph 1:7; 2:13; Heb 9:11–15 (specifically 12–14); 10:3–14, 19–22, 28–31; 12:24; 13:11–12, 20; John 6:53–57; 19:33–34; Luke 22:20; 22:44; Mark 14:23–24; Matt 26:27–28; Rev 1:5–6; 5:9–10; 7:14–17; 12:10–11; Rom 3:25–26; 5:9. In terms of a cleansing: 1 Cor 6:11; 1 John 1:7, 9; 1 Pet 1:22; 2 Pet 1:9; Eph 5:26; Ezek 20:38; 22:15; 36:25, 29, 33; 37:23; Heb 1:3; 9:14; 10:22; Isa 4:4; Jer 33:8; John 15:3; Lev 16:30; Num 8:21; 19:9; Ps 51:2, 10; Titus 2:14; 3:5; Zech 13:1.

along, only a region in hell: and earth, if put second to heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of heaven itself.”¹⁸

V. PURGATION:
HOLD ON, A MOMENT . . .
WE WILL ALL BE CHANGED

Is there a biblical precedent for this, and for *purgation*? The apostle Paul, speaking of the righteous, asserts that we shall be changed:

What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I will tell you a mystery! *We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

1 Cor 15:50–53 (My emphasis.)

So, how long is “a moment,” what duration is “the twinkling of an eye?” Has a period of time elapsed? It cannot be no time at all, for if there is no time at all then, logically, there would appear to be no change. For there is time and space in heaven but such eternal temporality must be seen as different to our perception of earthly time and space. But is our perception of time changed by our circumstances? For a prisoner waiting for sentence to be pronounced, as the fear wells up in his throat, how long are the moments it takes for the judge to be ready? A child in the dentist’s chair sees the hypodermic needle move ever closer, slowly towards its mouth, unhurriedly in the hand of the dentist, the dentist pulls at the lips, a single drop of the anaesthetic liquid hangs from the point of the needle,

18 Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, chp. 13.

the dentist pulls at the gums to select the best spot to inject: all this seems hours of agony to the child who has a deep-seated phobia about the dentist and particularly the anaesthetic injection. This moment, of no more than a few seconds, may seem an eternity of anguish. To the unrighteous who still hold back, the impure holding onto their precious sins, still mired in their little empires, their being changed in the twinkling of an eye may seem an eternity of “time,” in varying degrees! However, to the righteous whatever change Christ demands will seem but a moment’s discomfort, so brief as to be almost imperceptible, like “the twinkling of an eye.” The Greek used by the apostle Paul for “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor 15:52) is *atomos* (usually translated as an instant, a moment, indivisible, uncut, an “atom” of time); and, *rhipe* (*hree-pay*: a jerk of the eye, in an instant, sudden almost imperceptible, but noticeable). Something happens, there is change, but for the righteous in Christ this will seem but momentary, perhaps like the instantaneous, momentary, mild electric shock from static on a sweater. For the less righteous, this change may appear to drag out—painfully—for a long “time,” a very long “time.” Whatever it takes, if we are prepared to submit to God *He* will change us, purify us:

See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the LORD whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap; he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow, and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.

(Mal 3:1–7a)

The day of God’s appearing brings judgment and hope, cleansing and salvation. This may happen while we are alive—a form of realized eschatology—some will even be acceptable from the point of death without the need for *postmortem* change (or at the very least, little). But if we refuse—as we have the will to do so—then we condemn ourselves before the judgment seat of Christ.

VI. AN INFERNAL ANALOGY?

C. S. Lewis excelled at presenting complex doctrinal issues in story form—analogue and symbolic narratives—parable-like accounts which narrate an event in real time rather than trying to freeze reality into a doctrinal proposition. Using the genre of analogue narrative Lewis presented complex theological propositions about heaven and hell, faith and grace, predestination and Determinism in the form of stories: *The Screwtape Letters*, *The Great Divorce*, *The Four Loves*, and to a degree, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. To an older generation (whose grandparents were born—along with C. S. Lewis—in the late nineteenth century) many of these hell-bent characters are so readily identifiable; but not necessarily so with a younger generation or in contemporary society, which is so diametrically different to the Western mid-twentieth-century society, the time when C. S. Lewis wrote. Perhaps there is a popular television series that inadvertently illustrates humanity’s blind ignorance of its fate as it generates its own little socio-political-religious empires, preparing themselves for an eternity in hell?

Hell is not a problem for the redeemed,¹⁹ indeed, in the Parable of

19 See Rev 14:9–12; also Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, chp. 13.

Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31) the saved exhibit no concern for the damned. Hell is not a problem for Satan, or for demons: they have got what they wanted. Hell is a problem for philosophers, and for those—following Lewis’s supposal—who subsist in hell, but are often unaware either of their death or their damnation. If most of the humans presented by Lewis in “hell” do not realize or acknowledge their state then perhaps a latter-day representation, subconsciously in the spirit of Lewis’s *The Great Divorce*, is the American cartoon series *The Simpsons*. At variance to the aims and expectations of the writers and producers, *The Simpsons* is, hypothetically, a vision of hell . . . or is it *postmortem status purgatus*? None of the characters in *The Simpsons* know that they are dead, but they appear fixed for eternity never to grow up or grow old, never to change, never to leave where they live: they subsist in a shallow, meaningless, nihilistic existence where nothing alters, subject to the vicissitudes and vagaries of the life and the person they created (though some characters—a very small number—do appear to move away, leave, die, cease: i.e., translated to heaven . . . or sink in their depravity into a deeper level of the hell they so love and cherish).

Homer Simpson often gets a new job (from a variety of different occupations) but he always ends up back in his fixed *status* working at the nuclear power plant. At the end of an early episode, when Homer returns to his job at the power plant, Mr. Burns has a notice placed on the wall above Homer’s work station, which defines the ontology of hell: “Don’t forget you’re here forever!”²⁰ No matter what happens to people they cannot escape their condition; yet they all try to move on (they try to develop through their own *willpower*, they have ambitions, but they are in a fixed state). It is easy to see how characters such as Homer, Marge, Mr. Burns, Smithers, and the Police Chief are condemned to this purgation: held, as they are, between heaven and hell, locked into a hellish existence caused through the fragmented dysfunctional beliefs that have generated their self-determinism.

20 *The Simpsons*, “And Maggie Makes Three,” 6.13.

Many characters suffer terrible life-threatening injuries and seeming death but they are simply restored to how they were, they cannot escape their self-willed damnation, and are too religiously corrupted to see the way out, through Christ, of this hellish purgation.

So, perhaps theologians and philosophers—such as Lewis—are quite correct: many will simply create the reality, *postmortem*, that they are condemned by the judgment of God to exist in for eternity, not realizing they are in hell, perhaps not even perceiving that they are dead: “All get what they want, they do not always like it.”²¹ Yes, Lewis did assert the traditional, biblical model of hell defined by fire and pain and eternal punishment, but this is at a deeper level than the nihilistic, unchanging, diminished existence represented by the humans in *The Great Divorce* (and, we may speculate, *The Simpsons*). The condemned in the upper level of hell are held above the deeper violent, painful fires of hell (for example the lake of fire²²), by the grace of God. Does this absolve God of the responsibility? The jury is still out—but not forever! Whatever decisions we make, we will be in heaven, or in hell, eternally: what we do in the here-and-now echoes through eternity.

VII. THE SIMPSONS: INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY: AN ALLEGORY OF PURGATION

Let us consider *The Simpsons* further.

If the traditional understanding of purgatory/purgation is characterized by change leading to the completion of redemption (as distinct to the utter damnation of those in hell), is this so for all? Perhaps for some this might seem, in our temporal reality, to be the experience of a million years of

21 Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 162.

22 Rev 19:20, 20:10, 20:14-15, 21:8

confusion and suffering? And will there be regression and relapsing? And what of frustration, inertia, and rebellion that may lead to some never being redeemed, that is being *moved* (a temporal concept?) or *translated*, heavenward? Some may simply stay as they are and refuse to change, to be redeemed, drawn out of themselves by the graceful love of God?

Are the episodic tales in the (in)famous cartoon series *The Simpsons*, seen by millions on a daily basis, an analogy of this sort of purgation being undertaken by people held by the grace of God above hell’s jaws. Do these lost souls find it impossible to understand the need for repentance. And if they do begin to repent, do they understand what to repent of? And, pertinently, would this regret lead to change in the right direction—that is, change in their beliefs about God (doctrine) and about their behaviour (ethics) and themselves (theological anthropology). If they try to escape the existential crisis they are locked into, they are constantly reset (like rebooting a computer) to be as they were: this we may consider to be the condition, divinely imposed, of absolute *apokatastasis* (!).²³

Do the characters illustrate something of the power of sin to entrap and lock people into themselves?—*homo incurvatus in se*? Perhaps some of the characters are a reversal of their lives in this reality; perhaps others are as they were in this life but worse, diabolically worse, as they refuse to move in their mind and heart towards Christ (a move still possible even if their religious and cultural heritage excluded any knowledge of Christian revelation), for this is the only valid change possible; other characters are a thin grey shadow of what they were when alive because they failed to commit in this life or to truly love, or take seriously the *nature* of choices, and the *responsibility* that went with decisions?

23 Apokatastasis (from the Greek: ἀποκατάστασις) refers to the return, perfectly, to the original state, that is, reconstitution, restitution, or restoration to the original or primordial condition. In this instance, I am referring to, postulating, *eschatological apokatastasis*, that is return to the status at the point of death immediately after death from which the individual cannot, through his or her own efforts, escape.

VIII. THE SIMPSONS:
INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY:
CHILDREN/CHILDISH

So, humanity’s self-willed beliefs and actions dictate the nature of the experience of this hellish purgation, but what of the ontic nature of the human, imprisoned, as it is, by an open-ended sentence, in an open prison, with no divinely imposed fences, walls, watchtowers, or guards? (C. S. Lewis postulated that the gates of hell are locked and triple-bolted from the inside by the inmates, whereas the gates of heaven are wide open.)²⁴ What of children? The cloying sentimentality of a Western definition of childhood as perfect innocence will lead modern liberals to exclude the possibility of children falling foul of the righteous judgment of God. (Does not childhood in many Western societies now appear to be a period of absolute self-centred indulgence where every child is to be feted as a prince or princess?) But in reality children are small adults, with all the strengths and flaws of adults. Well, there are three possibilities for the appearance of children in *The Simpsons*: First, “children as children”: some children in this life on earth appear in this *postmortem status purgatus* as children; this constitutes a contradiction of a Pelagianist position regarding childhood. These are they who were corrupted in their immaturity by the adults who were supposed to care for them (these corrupting adults, family members, or simply friends, or strangers, are most likely in a much deeper level of actual hell: note, Mark 9:42; Matt 8:16; Luke 17:2). Second, “children as adults”: some of the children from this life may appear in this Simpsonian *status purgatus* as childish and immature adults, these are those who, as children in the here-and-now, may have taken to themselves an adult-like superiority and power/authority over others, so here they are presented as incompetent and foolish, but domineering, adults, and can see no way out of their *status purgatus*. Third, “adults as children”: some adults from our life appear as children in this *status purgatus*, because they suffered

24 See Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, 20–21.

from a self-inflicted psychological condition we may call, can't-grow-up-won't-grow-up-syndrome (!), they refused to take responsibility for their life and their actions and their decisions when alive.

IX. THE SIMPSONS: DEATH—HELL-BOUND

But some appear to escape: there are those who seem to die, an appearance decided upon by those around them because these individuals disappear from sight. Some characters do die, or given that they are all already dead and languishing in this *postmortem status purgatus*, they *appear* to die a second time, and move away in an instant. For example—

Maud Flanders

Maud Flanders, the wife of Ned “diddly” Flanders, the evangelical(ish) neighbour to the Simpsons, is killed at a race track, but perhaps in this *postmortem status purgatus* reality she simply slides further and deeper into hell. In life she was a judgmental gossip, someone who saw and decried fault in everyone—except herself; this is the sin of self-righteous judgementalism writ large, when we are warned by Jesus, “Judge not, lest you be judged” (Matt 7:1–3). Far from repenting and turning (because of her religion she believes she does not need to change, she has done the repenting already) she becomes worse and worse, showing no true love of her neighbour or humility before the Lord. On one occasion she states, “That’s right, I was at Bible Camp, I was learning how to be more judgmental.”²⁵ Her religion shields her from God’s loving forgiveness. The idea that she has simply descended deeper into hell is perhaps confirmed by the writer of a later episode where she makes an appearance, after this apparent death, as Satan’s lover.²⁶

25 *The Simpsons*, “Bart of Darkness,” 6.1.

26 *The Simpsons*, “Treehouse of Horror XXII,” 23.3.

Frank Grimes

Frank’s story—in this *postmortem status purgatus*—is that he had it tough as a boy, really tough; crippled by illness, he achieves a moderate High School Certificate and a degree in nuclear physics by correspondence from his sick-bed. In our reality before his death Frank had probably been a healthy ambitious child of successful parents; as an adult, a high-flier, a great achiever, wealthy, but selfish: a Gordon Gekko!²⁷ In the Simpson purgatory, through struggle, sweat, and tears, he achieves a lowly job at the same nuclear power plant that Homer works at, and is therefore driven and possessed by irrational anger and rage, envy and jealousy. He hates Homer because Homer seems to have everything easy when he has struggled for so little. In a rage of mimicry and hatred of Homer he accidentally kills himself, electrocuted, or so we are led to believe; in reality he has simply disappeared from sight and has been translated deeper into hell. We may postulate that Frank Grimes when alive in our world had been a wealthy businessman, politician, opinion-former, even with a touch of celebrity status, if then such a person had been a wealthy, successful, high-flier in our world, then what happens to “old Grimey” is reminiscent of a Gospel inversion, evident from the parables: “Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony” (Luke 16:25). This should have taught him what was wrong with his life, and opened the way for such a person to turn and glimpse salvation, this should have opened his heart to Christ . . . but it did not, because he held out.

27 Gordon Gekko, a fictional character in the 1987 film *Wall Street* and its 2010 sequel *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*, became a symbol in popular culture for unrestrained greed, characterized by a line he repeated, “Greed, for lack of a better word, is good.” See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gordon_Gekko.

Dr Marvin Monroe

Marvin Monroe is the resident psychiatrist and therapist, an eccentric yet atypical character who died: we see his grave stone . . . but then he reappears in later episodes. Why?—what happened? Perhaps he sank deeper into hell, but began to repent? In later episodes it is stated he had been ill, very ill, thus he had disappeared from their sight. (But then all in this hellish state are ill at ease, dis-eased.)

X. THE SIMPSONS:
THE SAVED—HEAVENWARD

Bleeding Gums Murphy

The character Bleeding Gums Murphy is perhaps an example of purgation and translation into heaven. A musician, a saxophonist, he is a loner—to his benefit—he is not corrupted further by those around him. As a young man he would have been gregarious, influencing others, and being influenced to their bad effect. But no longer. Perhaps he has been in this purgatory for what seems to be an inordinately long “time,” but he has now come to the point of exhaustion where he can see his own unworthiness, he now knows and understands his own un-righteousness, as he lays down his crown (Rev 4:10–11). There is no hint of judgementalism left in him; or the moral corruption that characterized him, and his music, as a young man. At this point he appears to “die,” ill in hospital; but is in reality, perhaps, translated to heaven: the movement as such is that they, the other residents of this purgatorial state, no longer see him. Lisa can see the light of Christ in him, but mistakes this for fashionable liberalism. So, out of the hundreds of characters in *The Simpsons*, is only one saved and translated to heaven? Does this compare to humanity in the here-and-now—only one in potentially thousands?

XI. THE SIMPSONS:
THOSE WHO SUBSIST—
PURGATORIAL

Ned Flanders

Ned Flanders was, perhaps, a Richard Dawkins type sceptic and atheist in this life, and in purgatory is reversed. But still, like his wife Maud, cannot get beyond human-centred religion: when alive he was an evangelical atheist; dead, an evangelical religionist? He represents all he mocked in this life, but fails to enact the Christian life in humility and repentance, while casually appearing to help others. Superficially he seems the archetypal nice American Evangelical Christian? The answer came in an episode where Bart and Milhouse break into the basement of Ned's house and find a shrine—a religious temple—to the 1960s pop group, The Beatles.²⁸ The room is full of icons and memorabilia, pseudo-religious artefacts, all in praise of The Beatles: Ned's Christian faith is shallow and is subservient to this pagan cult. When Homer asks Ned, "I never knew you were such a Beatles' fan?" Ned shouts back at him, "Of course I am. They were bigger than Jesus!"²⁹ The door to this pagan shrine has a poster on the door—Beware of God. But which "god" is represented and worshiped by Ned's Beatles memorabilia? This demonstrates how our religious egotism may be at odds with the will of God, even if we claim to be Christian (Matt 7:21–23). Ned Flanders is an example, a warning, of

28 *The Simpsons*, "The Bart of War," 14.21.

29 The writers here are invoking a statement by John Lennon made to the media that they (The Beatles) were more famous than Jesus. (Lennon had originally made the remark in March 1966, published, in the *London Evening Standard* newspaper.) Ironically, Ringo Star (one of the surviving members of the group) commented recently on *BBC News 24* that now, as an old man, when he walks along a pavement in London people sort of recognize him, but cannot name him, or sometimes attribute him to The Beatles—or they identify him as one of the other Beatles (*BBC News Channel*, Wednesday June 12, 2013). John Lennon was murdered in 1980 by one of his fans: he inadvertently created the conditions of his own demise. The Beatles are clearly no longer more famous than Jesus.

the dangers of religion, self-generated, self-centred religion.

Ned is actually unmasked early on. When Homer trades (a Faustian pact?) his soul for a doughnut, the devil appears to conduct the transaction, appearing as Ned Flanders, with goat’s legs, saying “It’s always the one you least suspect.”³⁰ So Ned is Satan pretending to be a Christian so as to lull the damned into believing they are right with God and give them false hope that they may one day be saved, though none of them realize they are in fact dead (!), and are lost souls. Ned is for some viewers an archetypal Christian, however, he has clearly been seduced by Satan. But his character has as many dis-analogies with Satan as analogies.³¹ Ned is characterized by confusion and contradiction and is we may postulate one simple realization and repentance away from moving towards heaven? But Ned fails.

Maggie Simpson

The Simpson baby, Maggie, was a young woman in this life who exercised enormous power over people, for little good. She suffered from can’t-grow-up-won’t-grow-up-syndrome, corrupting other young women through an advice column, and so now is mute, and an infant, having acted as an irresponsible infant-like young woman in this life. As a baby she retains her IQ of 167 (shown on several occasions), likewise, as this one-year-old infant she shoots Mr. Burns—a reflection of how she destroyed people with words in this life. Perhaps this powerful twenty-something intellect trapped in a one-year-old infant is the one person in this *postmortem status purgatus* that understands what is going on, that this divinely imposed condition of absolute *apokatastasis* leads to a running sequence they cannot through their own strength escape from: at the end of *The Simpsons Movie* Maggie speaks for the first time: one word spoken at the end of the film, which also defines the ontology of hell:

30 *The Simpsons*, “Treehouse of Horror IV,” 5.5.

31 Satan is real and a singular and personified, but is also legion; hence Ned is Satan, but equally is not. This reflects the confused nihilism of hell.

“sequel”—that is, hell as an endless sequel, a sequence of living out their own religious empire, *ad infinitum*.

Lisa Simpson

Lisa Simpson (IQ of only 159; less than baby Maggie) would have been a forty-year-old fashionably liberal academic with an equally indulgent myopic liberal lifestyle grounded in sexual freedom and abortion, power, status, and authority. Lisa, the precocious politically correct eight-year-old, exhibits all the arrogance she did as a middle-aged professor-turned-politician in our reality; she tries but fails to control people for her own interest in the way she did with such Machiavellian skill as a senator before she died, shot by a fanatic, obsessed-dead or alive-by her own self-righteousness. In this state of hellish purgation she still fantasizes about being President of the United States,³² of flirting with alternative religions: as a Buddhist (which she refers to as a godless religion: “no creator God, just the pursuit of enlightenment”³³), flirting with pagan ideas (inventing earth deities and the like), and then becoming a Wicca (the religious cult of modern witchcraft), joining a coven of three Wiccans, learning to cast spells.³⁴ Throughout all of her neo-gnostic ramblings and noetic wanderings she is insufferably precocious and judgmental, while convincing herself that she is nice, kind, and considerate, the perfect liberal.

Apu Nahasapeemapetilon

Lisa is in this *postmortem status purgatus* not for being a Buddhist but because her being a Buddhist is motivated by a desire to reject Christ (in addition to her many sins as an influential academic and politician). Apu Nahasapeemapetilon is Indian/Hindu; he is the workaholic proprietor

32 *The Simpsons*, “Bart to the Future,” 11.17.

33 *The Simpsons*, “She of Little Faith,” 13.6.

34 *The Simpsons*, “Rednecks and Broomsticks,” 21.7.

of the Kwik-E-Mart, a popular convenience store in Springfield, but contrary to the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats he offers no charity—where charity would be a cost to himself—nor love of his neighbour. His store-keeping is corrupt, changing the sell-by dates on expired goods, profiteering to unacceptable limits, exploiting his customers to their detriment: all this places him fairly and squarely in this *postmortem status purgatus*, not primarily or necessarily because he is a Hindu, but because he is a bad, self-centred, adulterous, exploitative person! If he changed his behaviour and attitude to his neighbours and customers, loving them at considerable cost to himself, then he might find himself drawn heavenward, being deemed acceptable to the resurrected and ascended Christ (Matt 25:31–46).

Marge Simpson

Marge Simpson failed to commit in this life or to truly love, or take seriously the nature of choice, or see moral realities: she constantly says, “Ah, my little boy,” to her son Bart, regarding him as a misunderstood angel, and is blind or dismissive—consistently—to Homer’s many faults and his abuse of other people, outside the home. She made fundamental mistakes in her youth, particularly in marrying Homer, but she can’t face that single truth and thus hides from the truth that is Jesus Christ: the Way, the Truth, and the Life. This hiding from the truth reflects the person she was in our reality, before she died, and thus she continues to live the lie in this hellish state.

Bart Simpson

Bart died as a fifty-six-year-old in our reality from decades of substance abuse, shielded behind childish irresponsibility, he had drifted from relationship to relationship, from job to job, never becoming anything in particular, never committing to anything or anyone and hence he is represented by a ten-year-old child suffering from chronic-attention-

seeking behavioural deficit syndrome, trying to be different all the time, taunting others, revelling in trying to escape the reality he is in. Bart as a drifter and wastrel acted out his years on earth with *childish* (not childlike) irresponsibility and thus is living in such a state of childish powerlessness in hell simply because he rejected the love of God in Christ, and thus is responsible for his beliefs and actions. So some “children” in *The Simpsons* were actually adults in our reality, our life. In attempting to regain their adult status we see Bart and Lisa in some episodes where they have grown up: but they are both as bad as when they were alive, as adults, in the here-and-now, our reality.³⁵

Ralph Wiggum

Ralph Wiggum is a strange little boy characterized by nonsensical sentences and bizarre behaviour, yet he can come out with profound statements, he is simple-minded and apparently good natured, however, he claims to see little leprechauns who tell him to burn things. When the Simpson family are nice to him and praise him, a leprechaun appears on his shoulder and orders, “Now you know what you have to do, burn the house down, burn them all”: thus speaks one of the few explicit appearance of a demon of hell who Ralph courts as his friend. Ralph nods in agreement.³⁶ So, was Ralph—when alive in our world—a twenty-five-year-old arsonist who committed suicide rather than be caught by the police? A young man who flunked school, was in and out of care, who could not commit to any job or relationship, developed from petty crime to arson as a way of getting back at society, once he developed the habit of burning he could not stop, he was addicted, indeed, possessed demonically.

35 *The Simpsons*, “Holidays of Future Passed,” 23.9; *The Simpsons*, “Bart to the Future,” 11.17; *The Simpsons*, “Lisa’s Wedding,” 6.19.

36 *The Simpsons*, “This Little Wiggy,” 9.18.

Waylon Smithers

Waylon is Montgomery Burns’ personal assistant—factotum—who through his infatuation (disordered love) for the old man is simply looking in the wrong direction: hell ward rather than heavenward, therefore he simply does not want to be saved, does not want the glory offered by Christ for eternity. An extreme example of this turning away from heaven and salvation was seen in serial fornicators through the ages: perhaps the most recent being the case of the British TV/radio and pop-culture celebrity Jimmy Saville, who was obsessively possessed with fornicating with any kind of person of whatever age or identity (though specializing in children), numbering hundreds if not thousands? Waylon Smithers seems mild by comparison, but is not his focusing on inordinate attraction sufficient for his self-generated placement in this *postmortem status purgatus*? Yet does he not have the chance to turn and repent, and accept a purging that will draw him into heaven?

Sex and Love in the Simpsonian Postmortem Status Purgatus?

Waylon Smithers—as with virtually all the characters—is an example of the demonic corruption of sexual attraction (*eros*); but also the virtual non-existence of true love, real love, that is, God-given *agape* in its various guises from pure charity to genuine selflessness, to actual self-sacrifice (John 15:13) amongst the inhabitants of this hell bound Springfield. (Likewise *agape* is extremely rare in human society here on earth.) Waylon is clearly presented as a closeted homosexual, which leads him to focus on the debasement of love: yes, in terms of general human sin, a debasement of love regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity—that is a debasement to the exclusion of heaven and his salvation (as is the case amongst almost all of the inhabitants of this Simpsonian *postmortem status purgatus*). The best they can manage is a cloying sentimental attachment (essentially related to *storgē* and *philia*), which leads to

argument, fractiousness, and ultimately domestic violence within families, or gossiping, back-stabbing, and hate-filled self-justifying vanity-driven jealousy in the work place and in social interactions generally. All this issues from debased sexual relations, and an abuse of their reproductive plumbing (!). How was it Shakespeare put it: “knotting and gendering like toads in a barrel?”³⁷ Or when separated from the love of God, that is love, the only true love, what, we may ask, is the end game in this exercise of *philia* and *storgē*, issuing as it does from *eros*?—

... wooing, wedding, and repenting, is as a Scotch jig,
a measure, and a cinque pace: the first suit is hot
and hasty, like a Scotch jig, and full as
fantastical; the wedding, mannerly-modest, as a
measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes
repentance and, with his bad legs, falls into the
cinque pace faster and faster, till he sink into his grave.³⁸

Without the graceful heavenward turn in life keeping sex in its place (that is, *not* at the heart of a relationship), then there is only the grave and hell to beckon. What is missing is selfless gift-love, giving even when it costs everything: the New Testament Greek word *agape*, and in the Hebrew for love, *ahava*, and in the Latin, *charitas*, the love of God.

XII. THE SIMPSONS: THE TAUNTS OF DEMONS

There are many faces of Satan in *The Simpsons*—not just old Ned (Flanders): evil is legion. Montgomery Burns, along with many other characters might just be demonic (he alludes, on several occasions, to being Satan, though this might just be hopeful longings on his part). That is, are there, we may ask, really demons from hell masquerading as humans to

37 “. . . as a cistern for foul toads to knot and gender in! . . .” (Shakespeare, *Othello*, 4/2)

38 Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, 2/1.

taunt those in purgatory, with jibes and comments and temptations, but they cannot immediately and intimately harm without the individual's willed permission? The local minister, The Revd Lovejoy, is really a demon masquerading as a Christian minister. Superficially he appears to be a cynical religious professional who has lost all sense of vocation and love for God and lives out eternity in the hell of nihilistic pseudo-religion, but on a deeper level he is a demon of hell who through mimicking a Christian minister should alert those around him to where they have gone wrong—but these assorted humans fail to realize the truth about themselves and their situation. His wife likewise is a demon who persuades Maud Flanders to become like her, to join with her gossiping, back-stabbing, back-biting mission, which ensures Maud's ultimate damnation (her further translation into deeper hell). Lovejoy though his corrupted ministry mocks the very Gospel he claims to represent and thus ensures his congregation fails simply to turn to the Light of the World and accept the change in them facilitated by the blood of the Lamb, which would seal their redemption.

XIII. THE SIMPSONS: WHERE IS IT?

From what we have established, the question, “Where is the place of existence for these characters?” might seem spurious? Existence may seem actual and genuine, physical and tangible, material, even factual, painful, frustrating, destructive, inescapable, in a word “real” (a word fraught with grammatical and etymological difficulty and ontic paradox). We are duty-bound to ask the question, “Does hell, or this state of purgation, actually exist, in the same sense that we take the reality we inhabit, while alive, to be real, corporeal, geographic? Is *The Simpsons'* Springfield, as a place of residence, “hell” or “purgatory”? Well, it is certainly not heaven, though it is important to remember that for many what they desire to be heaven is in fact hell: to 1970s liberal Anglicans and the Vikings³⁹

39 For example, the Viking hall of the dead that the Danes, the Norsemen, took to be heaven, where they were to spend all their time feasting and whoring, drunken revelries

hell will seem like heaven to their confused way of thinking, hell is their deepest desire, although they see this hell as a fulfilment of the desire for heaven! The problem with a traditional concept of purgatory is that it seems to be a real place, geographically located. C. S. Lewis’s solution was to posit that purgatory does not exist, as such, but if our ultimate goal is heaven, “time” spent in purgation, would be in heaven all along; however, by contrast, if we refuse the blood of the Lamb, the “bleeding charity,”⁴⁰ then any experience of purgation was hell all along.⁴¹ However, there is another salient point to consider, the physicality of this purgatory-hell is important to acknowledge because it indicates, it contrasts, *a real resurrection*, it posits a real spiritual-physical resurrection (1 Cor 15:35–58, in particular v. 44). If we marginalize, if we downplay, the physicality of purgation, this form of spiritual cleansing, looking back from a position of modern, enlightened superiority, dismissing it as a mediaeval myth, are we also marginalizing the actual and real resurrection? By contrast many religions posit a postmortem disembodied existence, of romantic souls immune from harm drifting in their own self-generated God-less fantasy world? Most of the inhabitants of *The Simpsons* appear to subscribe to this belief, this false hope.

XIV. RELIGION IN THE SIMPSONS

When C. S. Lewis wrote *The Great Divorce*, a speculative account of damned souls from hell visiting the fringes of heaven with the opportunity

and fighting, raping and killing, is in point of actuality a region in hell! But there were those amongst the Vikings who will love it because feasting, whoring, drunken, sadistic paraphilia, slaughtering, defined them utterly by the point of their death, at the utter loss of the *imago Dei* in them.

40 In a speculative conversation, with a hell-bound unrepentant sinner, Lewis posits that the Crucifixion constitutes, quite literally, “bleeding charity.” See Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, chp. 4, 19–23, specifically 21.

41 Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, chp. 9, 51–57, see specifically, 55. Also, see Sauter, *What Dare We Hope?*

to change and progress further into salvation and deep heaven,⁴² he was working in the context of a nation that still, for better or for worse, rightly or wrongly, saw itself as Christian. However, *The Simpsons* is written against the backdrop of decades of religious syncretism in the West where officially there must be nothing contradictory or threatening to other religious tribes in any individual's religious practices and beliefs. All religions must get on with each other, and there must be no threatening truth, especially from Christianity! *The Simpsons* is obligingly obedient to this syncretistic apologetic mish-mash of religious sensibilities, though it singles out Christianity for especial veiled criticism.

Religion issues from the *Fall*. Before humanity gorged its way into original sin it had a right relationship with God. Eating, metaphorically, of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil meant that afterwards humanity invented this relationship in its own image, its own terms, its own interests: which is why most religion falls short of divine revelation, humanity constantly reinvented religion in its own image. This is an insight that we can also read from *The Simpsons*!

The main religion in *The Simpsons* is named as The Western Branch of American Reform Presbyteranism;⁴³ as such it is Protestant, though all the world's main faiths make an appearance in one form or another. (Though any reference to Islam is veiled, probably for fear of jihadist death threats.) Religion in *The Simpsons* is almost comical: the nation of Israel has turned Judaism into a theme-park,⁴⁴ Bart claims that the tooth fairy is God's daughter,⁴⁵ Ned continues to debunk religion by inventing a religious theme park named “Praiseland”⁴⁶ (perhaps pointing out how much pop culture is inherently religious, or is it that much religion is

42 All but one of the visitors refuse the chance of heavenward salvation, and return to the hell they know and are so fond of.

43 See, http://simpsons.wikia.com/wiki/Western_Branch_of_American_Reform_Presbyteranism; also, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_The_Simpsons

44 *The Simpsons*, “The Greatest Story Ever D’ohed,” 21.16.

45 *The Simpsons*, “Fat Man and Little Boy,” 16.5.

46 *The Simpsons*, “I’m Goin’ to Praiseland,” 12.19.

no more than trivial popular culture?). Homer and Bart nearly become Roman Catholics,⁴⁷ but are pulled back by demonic *apokatastasis* (!); Bart sells his soul and then mystically regrets it: he cannot identify a soul in himself, but is lost without it.⁴⁸ It is not so much religion *per se* that is criticized but Western/American attitudes towards religion. So does this reflect the approach to religion of lost souls in purgatory/hell? After his failed attempt to become a Roman Catholic, Bart demands love and peace from everyone, claiming he is founding a new religion; however, his followers then go on—generations later—to wage religious wars over exactly what Bart’s teaching was: “love and tolerance,” or “understanding and peace!”⁴⁹

Marge Simpson is the one who cajoles her family into going to church, and behaving according to what she considers to be good Christian morality, but this is superficial. When it came to singing carols in a communal setting she comments, “Christmas carols only have one verse. I know there are more, but the second verse is where they get all weird and religious.”⁵⁰

Bart gets Principal Skinner sacked; Ned Flanders takes over as temporary head teacher, Inspector Chalmers visits: Ned utters a brief mention of God over the intercom to all classrooms, Chalmers immediately fires Ned for reciting a school prayer—

Flanders: “...Let’s thank the Lord for another beautiful school day.”

Chalmers: “Thank the Lord ... that sounded like a prayer ... a prayer in a public school?! God has no place within these walls!”⁵¹

However, when God could be of use to advance his career Superintendent Chalmers demands the children intercede for success in a national test

47 *The Simpsons*, “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star,” 16.21.

48 *The Simpsons*, “Bart Sells His Soul,” Series 7, Episode 4, first broadcast October 8, 1995.

49 *The Simpsons*, “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Guest Star,” 16.21.

50 *The Simpsons*, “White Christmas Blues,” 25.8.

51 *The Simpsons*, “Sweet Seymour Skinner’s Baadasssss Song,” 5.19. [SiC]

fearful of poor results affecting him personally. He comments, “Get down on your knees, pray to your god, and ask him—no demand—he tell you the answer, and if he won’t, he is no ‘god’ of yours”⁵² So a “god-in-the-pocket” is acceptable in these purgatorial schools, a “god” firmly tethered on a leash?

Lisa, sceptic, Buddhist, Pagan, Witan, intellectual atheist, suddenly decides to believe in God when demons whisper into her mind, ideas that flatter and compliment her vanity and ego. She comments: “It all adds up. I am the gem that will bring world peace. How brilliant of God to remove my scepticism by making me the Chosen One!”⁵³ So, Lisa is held in hell-purgatory, we may say, by her messianic pretentions.

Homer Simpson’s misunderstanding of atonement is partly why he is in hell-purgatory. He believed that if Jesus had fought back all would have been well: “If Jesus had had a gun he’d be alive today!” So, Jesus should have defended himself, gun’s/weapons blazing to defeat those who sought his death!⁵⁴

The Simpsons mirrors the meaningless serendipity that in some quarters is seen to characterize Western popular religion since the 1960s: this is, in effect, what we may in humour call “A Beatles’ Doctrine of Religion,” and is found in *The Simpsons*. A Beatles’ Doctrine of Religion (BDR) was implicitly founded by the popular music group The Beatles in 1967. Through their actions and witness, though their holidaying, they proposed and founded—directly in contradiction to the prevailing Christian religion and culture in Britain at the time—a lifestyle fantasy religion where each individual, could invent its own religious mindscape and lifestyle to suit each heart’s desire. The four members of The Beatles went on an open-ended, extended holiday (a latter day version of the Grand Tour for wealthy aristocrats?) to India where they stayed in an Ashram. This was at the height of their global fame, adoration, and worship (so-

52 *The Simpsons*, “How the Test Was Won,” 20.11.

53 *The Simpsons*, “Gone, Maggie, Gone,” 20.13.

54 *The Simpsons*, “Home goes to Prep School,” 20.13.

called “Beatlemania”). They spent the time taking mind-bending drugs and claiming they were meditating (though does not meditation involve a heightened consciousness, a clarity of mind, and a passivity not induced through chemical contamination?). Developing from the enormously successful pop-culture that The Beatles had championed, characterized by superficial trite little songs extoling romantic delusions, this so-called Beatles’ doctrine of religion developed so that everyone could be as religious as they wanted to be (or not, as was each heart’s desire!). But this had to be an inward, self-reverential religion that contradicted no one else, or—pertinently—did not threaten or contradict the nation state and the beliefs, practices, and legislation of the government. Travelling abroad was an essential component of a Beatles’ doctrine of religion. For example, the Bacchanalian annual (then twice-annual, etc.) “religious” holiday to the Mediterranean for sun worship, fornication with multiple partners, and drunken revelries, then as the “gods” blessed them with wealth (in the form of credit: debt) to Florida. However, this was for the labouring classes, the bourgeois, liberal, educated middle-classes gently meandering in their travelling’s to various Middle Eastern destinations, then to Thailand *et al.* Furthermore, according to a BDR, all religions are equal and must be regarded as of equal value, yet simultaneously they are equally of no value to the extent that any contradicting elements in world religions must be elided while simultaneously asserting no truth—that is the absolute truth of no absolute truth—so as to justify the tyranny of absolute relativism (!?). Ironically adherents, often twenty-something graduates suffering from “can’t-grow-up-won’t-grow-up syndrome” or thirty-somethings of independent financial means, would travel, say, to the Far East and expect the local populace to fully accommodate their (pseudo-)religious whims and practices, and not object, even if the BDR threatened and contradicted or insulted their centuries-old local religious practices.⁵⁵ We can see all of this in modern Western liberalism; we can

55 In 2015, in the spirit of Western pseudo-religious neo-colonialism, four graduates, from Canada and Britain, stripped naked atop of Mount Kinabalu in Malaysia, much to the disgust of the locals who regarded the mountain as sacred.

also see it in *The Simpsons*.

When Homer’s life appears threatened, he screams out to this panoply of BDR-constrained gods and goddesses, “Who’s out there? Oh, I’m gonna die! Jesus, Allah, Buddha, I love you all!”⁵⁶ Various assorted, imagined divines (did Homer really understand to whom he was appealing to when he invoked the name of Jesus?), the non-existent gods and goddesses of *The Simpsons*, are all defined by the Uncle Albert Model of the Divine: that is, Uncle Albert, from the worldwide popular BBC television comedy *Only Fools and Horses*. Del Boy and Rodney can do whatever they like, Uncle Albert holds no restraints and constraints on his nephews’ beliefs and behaviour provided they listen to his interminable stories about his time as a merchant seaman during the World War Two. So, pay attention to the god/goddess of your own invention, listen to its stories, be religious in varying degrees, giving due attention to this divine Feuerbachian projection, and you can do what you like. This is the Uncle Albert Model of the Divine (UAMD), which underpins The Beatles’ Doctrine of Religion. To demonstrate, the (surviving) Beatles dropped in occasionally on *The Simpsons*, just to make sure all was conforming to this BDR-UAMD?⁵⁷

Although there is, superficially, a concept of equality/equal opportunities and accommodation of all in this Beatles-founded religion, Christianity must implicitly be regarded as less than equal by the proponents of a BDR because of its claim to superior revelation and to provide a systematic roadmap of life and death. Furthermore, a BDR has provided an official religious position for many Western nation states and governments: a politicized Beatles Doctrine of Religion, underpins the British government, and is in effect to be labelled *neo-pagan secular-*

56 *The Simpsons*, “Screaming Yellow Honkers,” 10.15.

57 There are mentions of The Beatles in various episodes, however in terms of visitations, see: appearance by Ringo Star in, “Brush with Greatness,” 2.18; appearance by George Harrison in, “Homer’s Barbershop Quartet,” 5.1 (a visitation reprised in “All Singing, All Dancing” 9.11); appearance by Paul and Linda McCartney in, “Lisa the Vegetarian,” 7.5; appearance by John Lennon (who appears and comments from a fantasy pseudo-“heaven,” in, “Treehouse of Horror XIX,” 20.4.

liberal humanism. If the “gods” are to be an optional add-on: invent one or claim to have discovered one, if you so desire; however, the one God of the Judeo-Christian tradition must go to be replaced by “gods” where each divinity is self-defined and of no threat to other people’s “gods.” The founding of a Beatles’ Doctrine of Religion occurred in 1967, the same year as the 1967 abortion act in Britain (and the liberalization/legitimization of homosexuality): sexual freedom raised to something of an intense emotional religious high was an essential component. And love?—love was a warm cosy feeling , essentially a cloying sentimental attachment issuing from the sexual freedoms: this form of love (reminiscent of the ancient Greek loves of *philia* and *storgē*, issuing from *eros*?), if generated, in turn legitimized the ever more bizarre forms of copulation and fornication that had generated this cloying sentimental attachment in the first place.

After their drug-fuelled religious “grand tour” of an Indian Ashram, most of The Beatles abandoned what they took to be Hindu meditation, but continued with a tacit promotion of a Beatles Doctrine of Religion, which was intimately intertwined with lifestyle pop culture. George Harrison, The Beatles’ lead guitarist, continued as a Hindu, patronizing the development of Hindu temples in Britain, but—in contradiction to the multi-faith neutrality that appeared to underpin a BDR—financed the Monty Python film, *The Life of Brian* centred on the song “Always look on the bright side of life,” which trivialized and dismissed the cross and echoed a central tenet of a neo-pagan secular-liberal humanist dismissal of Christianity generally, the Gospel specifically: just sit back and enjoy life while it lasts, hide in a pseudo-religious fantasy world. No wonder these people are hell bound. So why do people not perceive the warning in and of *The Simpsons* ?

XV. DIFFICULTIES & PROBLEMS WITH A DOCTRINE OF PURGATORY

Though intentionally humorous (a cutting and critical satire?), and drawing on the trivia of popular culture, this essay suggests that it is somewhat ironical that *The Simpsons* offers a similar analogous insight into humanity’s teleology—the human’s ultimate end, and the dangers of eschatology that people seek to hide from in self-generated fantasy worlds—that C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien warned of in the mid-years of the twentieth century through their analogical narratives. This is a form of sub-creation (a term coined by Tolkien). Rhetorically we may ask, how does God use us as sub-creators to give intimations of what is to come?—and to *interpret* from others something of the nature of what is to come, that is, the pictures placed in the mind, given to a baptized imagination, of how our lives and actions will echo through eternity.⁵⁸

Despite liberal sensitivities over judgment and eternal damnation, hell is an acceptable concept from an orthodox Christian perspective. However, asserting the need, soteriologically, of purgatory, or at least purgation, is considered for many a step beyond orthodoxy. James Sauer (writing from a Reformed perspective) notes: “I think the answers lie in the fact that the purgatorial idea, though doctrinally a heresy, contains a spiritual truth when applied to the human situation. There is something in this false doctrine which reminds us of life. And there’s the key.”⁵⁹ Concerns are generally seen in four areas: ontological, biblical, theological and that of grace.

58 It is these pictures that formed the basis of much of the work of the Inklings, for example, the picture of evil in J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* (1954 & 1955) and Charles Williams’, *All Hallows’ Eve* (1945) and *Descent into Hell* (1937), but especially C. S. Lewis’s *The Great Divorce* (1945) and the dangers of damnation in *The Screwtape Letters* (1942), and the consequences of our decisions before God in *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–56).

59 Sauer, “Purging a Problem,” published online, Centre for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, <http://www.reformed.org/index.html>. See, http://www.reformed.org/webfiles/antithesis/index.html?mainframe=/webfiles/antithesis/v2n1/ant_v2n1_purging.html. Accessed May 29 2011.

First, ontological: is it real? And what do we mean by real? The problem with the traditional concept of purgatory is that it seems to be a real place, geographically located. This raises questions of location and geography. Purgation does not: we can assert a biblical precedent and justification for *postmortem* change (1 Cor 15:50–53), though purgation still raises paradoxical questions of time, of temporality.

Second, biblical: put simply, however much we can assert purgation, a place called purgatory is not biblical in the strict sense of the word, according to a traditional Protestant reading of the Bible, but, what about the witness of Maccabees?

On the next day, as had now become necessary, Judas and his men went to take up the bodies of the fallen and to bring them back to lie with their kindred in the sepulchres of their ancestors. Then under the tunic of each one of the dead they found sacred tokens of the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. And it became clear to all that this was the reason these men had fallen. So they all blessed the ways of the Lord, the righteous judge, who reveals the things that are hidden; and they turned to supplication, praying that the sin that had been committed might be wholly blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened as the result of the sin of those who had fallen. He also took up a collection, man by man, to the amount of two thousand drachmas of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to provide for a sin-offering. In doing this he acted very well and honourably, taking account of the resurrection. For if he were not expecting that those who had fallen would rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. But if he was looking to the splendid reward that is laid up for those who fall asleep in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. Therefore he made atonement for the dead, so that they might be delivered from their sin.

(2 Macc 2:39–46)

Third, theological: what is the ontic nature of *postmortem* life? We scarce know little, save the threat of judgment, juxtaposed with the promise of Jesus' forgiveness: but what does the promise entail—salvation

or damnation (we can glean clues from scripture, thankfully). The Resurrection appearances make the question tantalizingly unanswerable, the precise nature of resurrection is unknowable, unquantifiable, but clues and hints are spread widely through scripture. We cannot know, we can only begin to glean intimations and understanding of the eschatological reality that we will inevitably face, by analogy, by word pictures, from the parables and sayings of Jesus: “The kingdom of heaven is like” Also, there is the: does not death leads to resurrection?—not disembodied souls wafting around in some pagan Elysium? Or is there a delay before the general resurrection?

Fourth, grace: the relationship between grace, the cross, sin, and salvation is focused onto one episode in the Gospel, one moment of recognition: the good thief. We know not what this man’s life has been; we know not of his relationship with God prior to his execution as a criminal, though he admits that his punishment is just, he has broken human law; yet, in a moment of recognition he is saved. In his rebellion, the thief on the other side—the so-called, bad thief—is damned. Grace does not need time (or does not *appear* to take time?). How do we regard the so-called good thief executed next to Jesus, and for that matter, the so-called bad thief? What soteriology is represented by deathbed conversions? What do these accounts tell us of the relationship between grace and the process of salvation? Is there a need for growth, sanctification, when even hardline Reformed Puritans, who regard purgatory as heretical, do not deny the need for sanctification. But does not the “either-or” problem remain?⁶⁰

60 What we have not considered within this paper, as it is two doctrines that are considered somewhat outside of the Christian mainstream, though they would warrant consideration if this subject was taken further, is a *doctrine of annihilationism* and a *doctrine of universalism*. Annihilationists (or supporters of extinctionism/destructionism), will argue that after the final judgment some human beings and all the damned will be destroyed, they will cease to exist; universalists will argue that everyone will be saved, reconciled.

XVI. A PERSONIFICATION?

Professor Frink, the eccentric and bizarre scientist in *The Simpsons*, declared that he had discovered and could prove the existence of hell, further that everyone went there.⁶¹ Well, all he did was hold a mirror up to himself and realize what had happened to him, and everyone in “Springfield”: but he had totally lost sight of the beauty and wonder, the possibility and existence of heaven! More, that there are people in heaven.

There is one character from *The Simpsons* that perhaps is the personification and embodiment of postmodern Western humanity—the so-called “Crazy Cat Lady.” Eleanor Abernathy is presented as a deranged middle-aged woman surrounded by a large number of cats, her home is jam-packed full of hoarded junk, items she simply cannot throw away. Isolated from normal social interaction and intercourse, she appears to have lost the power of reason, and of coherent speech seen in her inability to communicate, except by throwing cats at other people: she simply mutters and screams gibberish, more pertinently, and in the biblical context, babble: “So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That is why it was called Babel, because there *the Lord confused the language* of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth” (Gen 11:8–9; *my emphasis*).

When eight-years-of-age Eleanor Abernathy was clever and ambitious, the precocious, perfectly behaved school pupil who expressed the desire and ambition to be a lawyer and a doctor when she grew up, because, according to the feminist dictum, “a woman can do anything.”⁶² At sixteen she was studying for law school; at twenty-four years, an M.D. from Harvard Medical School and a J.D. from Yale Law School. However, by thirty-two years of age she is shown suffering from stress and tension, exhaustion, despite her successful career and her multi-million-dollar apartment: she is presented suffering from classic burnout. She turned to alcohol and

61 *The Simpsons*, “How I Wet Your Mother,” 23.16.

62 *The Simpsons*, “Springfield Up,” 18.13

became obsessed with her pet cat (presumably having exhausted several relationships that had been subordinate to her ambitions). By the time she turned forty, she had assumed her present state as a psychologically disturbed alcoholic, with what appears to be an unlimited supply of cats. There do appear to be moments of lucidity and intelligence, of “reason,” in Abernathy—if she can get beyond herself and her sins.

When Mayor Quimby is recalled, she runs for the mayor’s office. During a candidate debate, she is asked what public-policy issues are important to her. Unlike the other candidates (who act as stereotypical dishonest politicians), Abernathy discusses issues such as healthcare, economy, and public education in between her screams and gibberish (and a call for cats “in every-one’s pants”).⁶³

After taking psychoactive medication there appears to be an improvement in her sanity and her ability to relate to other people. However, all is lost when Marge Simpson informs her that the medication is just sweets: Reese’s Pieces (Peanut Butter Candy). Her medication helps her speak intelligibly, and is in effect a placebo, but once the ruse is exposed she reverts to her usual gibberish—so her problems are wilful and psychological (?). Eleanor Abernathy is a lost soul, beyond redemption, beyond reason, and has placed herself outside of the love of God in Christ; as such she epitomizes many in this life in the West who hang by a thread above hell, who refuse to change, losing themselves in identity politics, that is, the identity they have made for themselves (defined by multiple “demons”: work and ambition, sex and drugs, consumerism, music, relationships and homes . . . and social media) to bolster their delusions. Yet at the last moment they may turn to Christ and be forgiven (a deathbed conversion?), but this will require a clarity in their minds that will require them to relinquish the consumer-led lifestyle and delusions. Eleanor Abernathy is defined by a loss of reason, the loss of the ability to reflect on and stand outside herself.⁶⁴ That is the

63 See, https://simpsonswiki.com/wiki/Crazy_Cat_Lady#cite_note-Springfield_Up-1

64 For key episodic appearances of Eleanor Abernathy see: *The Simpsons*, “Girly

God-given ability to reason where reason, as C. S. Lewis noted, predates creation: “Reason is given before nature and on reason our concept of nature depends”;⁶⁵ also, “Neither will nor Reason is the product of nature, . . . such Reason and Goodness as we can attain must be derived from a self-evident Reason and Goodness outside ourselves, in fact, a Supernatural.”⁶⁶ Therefore, for Lewis, religion is rational; reason is religious. Reason is of Christ, the Logos (John 1:1f.), the Word is reason: reasoning, reasoned. Eleanor Abernathy has wilfully misused and then abandoned this reason and thus she has rejected Christ, her forgiving judge and her salvation. She appears to be truly a lost soul: lost of her own making.

XVII. UNIVERSAL SALVATION?

Perhaps the only doctrine to reconcile what we have described and asserted is a form of universalism. That is, not a liberal doctrine of universalism whereby all go to heaven, but post-resurrection all get to be in eternity where they wish to be, where each life has lead: for example, the Vikings in Valhalla, which they called heaven—the Viking hall of the dead that the Danes, the Norsemen, took to be heaven—where they were to spend all their time, postmortem, in feasting and whoring, drunken revelries and fighting, mutilating, raping, and killing. But is this in point of actuality a region in hell? But there were those amongst the Vikings who will love it because feasting, whoring, drinking, sadistic paraphilia, mutilation, and

Edition” 9.21; *The Simpsons*, “‘I, (Annoyed Grunt)-bot’ or, ‘I, D’oh-bot’” 15.9; *The Simpsons*, “Treehouse of Horror XV” 16.1; *The Simpsons*, “Homer and Ned’s Hail Mary Pass,” 16.8; *The Simpsons*, “Springfield Up,” 18.13; *The Simpsons*, “Home Away from Homer,” 16.20; *The Simpsons*, “See Homer Run” is the 17.6; *The Simpsons*, “The Last of the Red Hat Mamas,” 17.7. See also: *The Simpsons*, “Eeny Teeny Maya, Moe” 2.16; and, *The Simpsons*, “The Blue and the Gray,” 22.13. For a compilation of the cat lady, showing her teleological descent into hellish madness, see: YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXLmeE2jrl>.

65 Lewis, *Miracles* (2nd ed. 1960), 23.

66 Lewis, “Bulverism,” 227. Note Lewis capitalizes “Reason,” “Goodness,” and a “Supernatural.”

slaughter defined them utterly by the point of their death, to the severe degradation of the *imago Dei* in them. This is about the individual defining God’s righteousness in its own image and desiring the consequences, but not fully appreciating precisely what those consequences are to be.

If this seems a little bizarre and beyond rational and civilized thought, then consider: recently a senior Anglican cleric (with an impressive record of widely reported “good works”), one who could fairly be described as a religious celebrity, who stated publically on a radio chat show that if he arrived at heaven and found God was “homophobic,”⁶⁷ he would prefer to go to the other place: hell. And he repeated and stressed this desire. Is this not the sin of Lucifer?⁶⁸—claiming to know better than God? This person yearned for heaven yet refused to lay down her/his crown of religious pride. If someone is so confused, even deluded (one might even consider, deranged), in his/her use of language and simply neither believes or refutes anything, then despite people not necessarily being psychologically responsible for their sayings and beliefs, we may ask just how fit for heaven they are? This cleric actually used the word “homophobic,” but whatever we think about the merits and demerits of that word, it seems absurd to speak of God having an irrational fear of anything.⁶⁹ Despite a lifetime of theological study and discourse at

67 Archbishop Desmond Tutu stated this on several occasions in defence of his daughter’s identity politics. The daughter is ordained a priestess (in the Anglican communion), is a lesbian, who claims to be married to another woman. What was said as a public declaration, openly before YHWH the Lord, was heard—witnessed—by thousands. The exact broadcast words from the radio program and from the very public address to thousands were: “I would refuse to go to a homophobic heaven. No, I would say sorry, I mean I would much rather go to the other place. I would not worship a God who is homophobic.” Quote from a radio interview with the BBC (British Broadcasting Company) 26 July 2013. See: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-23464694>.

68 See Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14; Sin originated in the free will of Lucifer in which—with full understanding of the issues involved—he chose to rebel against the Creator.

69 This use of the word homophobic betrays this contemporary debased use of language in Western liberal democracies to express politicized beliefs/disbeliefs. The word homo is from the Greek for “same” (ὁμός); a phobia (from the Greek Phobos (Φόβος), the personification of fear) is a psychological reaction to a given situation: an extreme irrational fear of something, accompanied by physical symptoms (sweating and revulsion, even sickness, blushing, changes in heart-lung rate, dilation-dilution of eye pupils, skin rashes, and so forth). So is homophobia a specific psychological reaction (e.g., blushing)

a senior level does this person believe that irrational fears are part of the attributes of God?!—Or was the meaning, that if God regarded homosexual activity as a sin... ? What this person said was questionable, ambiguous and confusing—inaccurate—ultimately meaningless, but it was characterized by spiritual pride, which led him to declare for *infernal voluntarism* ... even if on reflection he claims he didn't mean it. How far does this linguistic irresponsibility go, how far does the “well, I didn't really mean it,” excuse go, before God must take us seriously in what we say, we believe, we do?

So, how do we define heaven? Simple: we don't. God created heaven and the conditions for being there. Most people have a twisted and distorted concept of heaven whereby they simply get to be and do whatever they feel most comfortable and satisfied doing: but is this not the precise nature of original sin repeated over and over again, ad infinitum?

Prior to the Crucifixion-Resurrection the default position was that all were lost (with rare exceptions such as Elijah); now all are saved, all get what they want: hence the Simpsons languishing in purgation in the fringes of hell. All are saved—but to what existence? Perhaps all can claim to be saved—but some to heaven and some to hell. Such *postmortem status*, will seem to be hellish to many.

Perhaps the final word on salvation, universalism, and responsibility, lies with C. S. Lewis:

Some will not be redeemed. There is no doctrine which I would more willingly remove from Christianity than this, if it lay in my power. But it has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of Our Lord's own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason. If a game is played, it must be possible to lose it. If the happiness of a creature lies in self-surrender, no one can make that surrender but himself (though many can help him to make it) and he may refuse. I would pay any price to be able to say

to sameness? Wiktionary notes, “In the 1990s, behavioural scientists William O'Donohue and Christine Caselles argued that the term homophobia was pejorative. In 2012, *The Associated Press Stylebook* was revised to advise against using -phobia words in non-clinical ways.” <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/homophobia#English>

truthfully “All will be saved.” But my reason retorts “Without their will, or with it?” If I say “Without their will” I at once perceive a contradiction; how can the supreme voluntary act of self-surrender be involuntary? If I say “With their will,” my reason replies “How if they will not give in?”⁷⁰

XVIII. CONCLUSION

This article illustrates characteristics of humanity’s condition after death (*de statu hominis post mortem*), in many cases a disorder that may appear painful, agonizing, bewildering, lost, even though it is scripturally endorsed “change;” however, salvation may beckon (*Si purgatio fit, post mortem*): hence, *postmortem status purgatus*, that is the state, fixed within the context of purgation following issuing from the *eschaton*—death, judgement, heaven, hell. As such this conforms to the soteriology and eschatology of C.S. Lewis. Though by visiting the Simpsons we have an early twenty-first perspective! Some viewers regard *The Simpsons* almost like a soap opera—the program reflects humanity’s public and private concerns, lifestyle issues. *The Simpsons* presents—for some—how people should live. In this, the comic element is played down and regarded as innocent. However, the comic element is important, indeed the absurd is very important. A general theme running through Dante’s hell in *The Divine Comedy*, is that demons, and the evil that governs them, are absurd and comical, and should be laughed at rather than feared . . . or followed! To be absurd is to be illogical and irrational, bizarre, silly, strange, a contradiction in many ways of the reasoned and sound nature of creation, which God declared was good (Gen 1): evil is *absurd*, a contradiction—*alogos*. This is the path Lucifer set himself upon, rebelling against *El Shaddai, Yahweh*, descending out of heaven into a hell, forming hell around him, welcoming those like “him” who rebel against the Lord and do not repent.

70 Lewis, *Problem of Pain*, 96–7.

It may seem an exaggeration to label the inhabitants of Springfield and their ilk here on earth as evil, but they are a contradiction of God's will for their lives; they persist in their rebellion—however respectful and fashionable this mutiny may seem to some—and if evil is the surd-like contradiction of God then they are evil and reside *postmortem* where they are most suited. The *surd* in creation is the irrational element in the created order, the negative and destructive; essentially, today and historically (e.g., for the Greeks), a mathematical concept. But *surd* was invoked by theologians and philosophers in the patristic and mediaeval church for the irrational and contradictory, that which is destructive in the created order and in humanity—a use to complement its mathematical meaning. The *surd* issues not directly at the command of God but exists as a possibility, as a consequence of creation: creation has the freedom to go its own way, to develop in ways contrary to the will of God. Yet, there is freedom to return, to haul down one's flag of tribal rebellion, to lay down one's crown before the throne (Rev 4:10f), to honour and acknowledge the Lord of creation, to recognize and admit then repent of one's own silly little empire.

An irreconcilable dialectic stands between heaven and hell. Perhaps the occasional saved soul needs some change (1 Cor 15:50–53) to fully “move” into heaven, but it was already, from the point of death-judgment, in heaven, and perhaps our prayers will help its full translation. The lost souls in hell might look longingly at heaven, and wonder if they might change, even attempt through their own strength to “move” heavenward (Luke 16:19–31), but they are all along in hell from the point of death-judgment . . . and they will soon lose the ability to perceive and desire heaven as they sink deeper into their own depravity in their own hell. Any attempt to force a heavenward change will, as a *self-willed* thrust, not conform to the will of God. And like looking in a mirror, any move that appears, forwards, is contradicted because you are looking at a reflection and really moving backwards, and deeper into the self-generated hell of your own de-humanized corruption. Those who get it right are already in

heaven; those who get it wrong are already in hell. Hell is, by definition, inconsistent and unintelligible.

Let go and let God.

This is the simplest thing to do; yet in reality the hardest and most seemingly impossible to do. *The Simpsons* adequately illustrates this—as Lewis did in *The Great Divorce*—and the very real danger, *postmortem*, that humanity faces.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”

GAL 6:7-9 (KJV)

*“All get what they want,
they do not always like it.”*

C.S. LEWIS, *THE MAGICIAN’S NEPHEW*

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‘Bereft of the Soul’:
Biblical and Augustinian Views of Death
as they pertain to Measuring
the Existential Threat of
Transhumanist Anthropological Destiny

Robb Torseth

KEYWORDS:

| Transhumanism | Technology | Existential Threat |
| *imago Dei* / Image of God | Death | Human Destiny |

ABSTRACT:

Proponents of the movement known as transhumanism have attempted to view the biological human form as something inherently flawed and therefore something that will inevitably be transcended via a process of technological evolution. As an emergent worldview, a theological interaction and response to transhumanism should be carefully articulated. This study will attempt to first identify the essential elements of transhumanist anthropological destiny, surveying the history and beliefs of prominent transhumanist figures; it will then respond by resourcing the biblical and Augustinian understanding of anthropology and the *imago Dei*, with particular attention given to their respective categories of death as states of separation as they pertain to measuring transhumanism’s existential threat to humankind..

INTRODUCTION

Beginning in the 1980's, transhumanism started as a fringe movement, the result of the exponentially-booming computer technologies industry whose flame had just been sparked and where the boundaries thereof seemed to have been endless. Transhumanism thus sought to answer a question concerning the potentiality of technology for the human race, prognosticating about the extent to which technology could further human connectivity on the most essential level, which is precisely the theme expounded upon by Vernor Vinge in his 1983 article, 'First Word.' Therein Vinge posits what can generally be considered the far extent of technological possibility: a 'singularity event' wherein humankind's existential state will be dramatically altered via its direct encounter with computational capabilities and artificial intelligence (AI), which he believed would outpace and transcend human intelligence altogether.¹ Vinge's consideration attempted to fuse technological progress with evolutionary progress; in a later article, he posed at once the possibility of existential threat through the supersession or annihilation of the human race by technology altogether and a sort of infinite existential gain via superhuman 'immortality,' usually construed as some sort of augmentation or fusion with technology.² His apprehensions, however, took the form of a direct philosophical question concerning what such an indefinite digitized immortality would look like for a personal humanity: would an indefinite extension of existence feel more like infinite torture if growth and variety was not also emulated in this state?³

For many decades it has been difficult to take the grand claims of the transhumanist movement seriously, which seems to give the immediate impression of good science fiction writing rather than good philosophical

1 Vernor Vinge, 'First Word,' *Omni*, Vol. 5 No. 4 (January, 1983), pp. 10-15.

2 Vinge, 'The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era,' *San Diego State University*, web, <https://edoras.sdsu.edu/~vinge/misc/singularity.html> (accessed 24 November 2018).

3 Vinge, 'The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era.'

or technological forecasting. Indeed, Vernor Vinge's own implementation of transhumanist concepts in a series of science fiction novels has not lent itself to legitimizing the movement. Even Oxford University's Nick Bostrom, professor of philosophy and director of the Future of Humanity Institute, dismissed the singularity movement as 'millenarian' and 'techno-utopian.'⁴ Nevertheless, the movement has gained considerable traction in recent years, garnering attention by way of popular publications like Yuval Noah Harari's *Homo Deus*, its consideration as a serious threat by SpaceX entrepreneur Elon Musk, Stephen Hawking, and others in the scientific community, and the growing interest in such possibilities as personified in the Singularity University in the Silicon Valley.⁵ Indicatively, the 2017 report on AI released by the Gallup organization demonstrates a generally optimistic outlook by the American people in relation to the hopes that advanced computing technology will aid and improve human life, the hopes that such superintelligence will improve standard of living (76% of those polled) being balanced out by what seems to be an underlying cognizance of the threat of functional supersessionism (73% of those polled)—both statistics indicating an implicit certainty that technology will continue to progress in this exponential fashion.⁶ Even religious organizations such as Christopher Beneke's Christian Transhumanist Association or the Church of Perpetual Life have attempted to find a middle way between Christian theology and transhumanism, with the latter serving as a means to further

4 Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 4. The sensationalistic nature of the language and hopes of some proponents of transhumanism will be discussed in a separate section below.

5 Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2017); Matthew Sparks, 'Top scientists call for caution over artificial intelligence,' *The Telegraph* (13 February 2013); Singularity Educational Group, 'Singularity University,' web, <https://su.org/> (accessed 28 February 2019).

6 Gallup, Inc., 'Optimism and Anxiety: Views on the Impact of Artificial Intelligence and Higher Education's Response,' January 2017. Cf. also the mixed emotions and responses involved in the February 2019 debate between Harish Natarajan and IBM's 'Miss Debator' technology; although 'Miss Debator' lost, the fact that a sustained 25-minute dialogue between a computer and a human being was possible is symbolic of both hopes and concerns for the future capabilities of AI. Olivia Carville and Jeremy Kahn, 'A Human Just Triumphed Over IBM's Six-Year-Old AI Debater,' Bloomberg.com, web, <https://www.bloomberg.com/technology> (accessed 14 February 2019).

an eschatological agenda.⁷ Considering the actual potentiality of achieving such a state of transhumanist singularity is outside both the capabilities and intent of this essay; instead, the growing interest in transhumanism poses a very important question concerning not only what it means to be human, but also the inherent value thereof; subsequently, it raises the importance of assessing what technologists refer to as ‘existential threat’ to the human race, which will be evaluated here via the implementation of salient theological categories.⁸

DEFINING TRANSHUMANIST ANTHROPOLOGY

Actually solidifying positions within transhumanism as an emerging philosophy can prove to be a challenge.⁹ In order to accurately diagnose and respond to any philosophy generally requires an adequate understanding of certain common denominators therein; thus, what is required is a broad analysis of the various voices in play in relation to transhumanist philosophy. This section will thus attempt to find the most basic principles that define transhumanist anthropology.

The transhumanist movement was largely launched by Vernor Vinge in an article written in 1983 for *Omni* magazine entitled, ‘First

7 ‘Christian Transhumanist Association,’ web, <https://www.christiantranshumanism.org/> (accessed 13 February 2019); ‘Church of Perpetual Life,’ web, <https://www.churchofperpetuallife.org/> (accessed 28 March 2019).

8 For an overview of critical objections to the singularity hypothesis, see Toby Walsh, ‘The Singularity May Never Be Near,’ *AI Magazine*, Vol 38 No 3 (Fall 2017), pp. 58-62. The issue will largely devolve into a discussion of the extent of computational abilities to emulate human empathy; for the classic treatment of this, see John R. Searle, ‘Minds, Brains, and Programs,’ *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 3 (1980), pp. 417-457; for the concept of mirror neurons and the shared manifold hypothesis, which is seen as a possible inroad to machine emulation of human empathy, see Vittorio Gallese, ‘“Being Like Me”: Self–Other Identity, Mirror Neurons, and Empathy,’ in Hurley, Susan and Nick Chater eds., *Perspectives on Imitation: From Neuroscience to Social Science, Vol. 1, Mechanisms of Imitation and Imitation in Animal* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005), pp. 101-118.

9 The problem is discussed by Max More, ‘The Philosophy of Transhumanism,’ in Max more and Natasha Vita-More eds., *The Transhumanist Reader* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013), p. 3.

Word.¹⁰ In this article Vinge proffered for his readers the concept of a singularity event wherein technology would come into full-orbed and irrevocable contact with humanity; however, it was not until the 1990's that the so-called singularity movement would begin to emerge in the public discourse, Vinge offering a more extensive consideration of the simultaneous problems and prospects posed by computational advancement. Therein Vinge outlines four potential varieties in which a singularity event may occur: the development of variegated computational sentience; the development of a network of computational sentiences; the collapse of the communicative barrier between computer and user; and a significant bio-technological advancement.¹¹ Importantly, in this consideration Vinge notes the possibility of limitations to the first three processes built inherently into the capability of material means; however, he still holds out hope that the event in question—which he defines as ‘a point where our models must be discarded and a new reality rules’—will occur in the 21st century.¹² ‘...[I]f the technological Singularity can happen,’ he states, ‘it will.’¹³ Although Vinge speaks of superintelligent computers as ‘benevolent gods,’ he also considers in tension the perils such machines could pose on the level of existential threat, noting the very real possibility of ‘physical extinction.’¹⁴ Ultimately, for Vinge, the reward of a singularity event may outweigh the existential risk, where the reward amounts to the immortality and transcendence of the human mind.¹⁵

Vinge's forecasting sowed the seeds for the writings of technological

10 The key term here is ‘largely’; Max More attempts to trace the movement's origins all the way from Dante and into the Enlightenment, but this is unconvincing. At most, one sees a prototypical formulation of the term ‘transhumanism’ in the 1960's works of cryonicist Robert Ettinger, but the sort of direct formulation in the modern technological sense in relation to digitization does not occur till the 1980's. The parallel movement spearheaded by Natasha Vita-More will be considered below. More, *The Transhumanist Reader*, pp. 8-12.

11 Vinge, ‘The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era.’

12 Vinge, ‘The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era.’

13 Vinge, ‘The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era.’

14 Vinge, ‘The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era.’

15 Vinge, ‘The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era.’

entrepreneur Ray Kurzweil, author of the 1999 book, *The Age of Spiritual Machines* and its younger, more tractate-like sister, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (2005).¹⁶ In the former, Kurzweil advocates a theory of technological evolution, positing a model of exponential growth in time that fuses together the three essential advancements in the capabilities of computing hardware, the knowledge of the human brain, and the advent of so-called ‘strong’ AI.¹⁷ Therein Kurzweil projects the convergence of technology with the human mind, stating, ‘We will become software, not hardware,’ which he believes will be able to correct any conceivable problems incumbent on humankind’s present state.¹⁸ In his later work, *The Singularity is Near*, Kurzweil attempts to both sketch his meta-evolutionary scheme of six epochs—the present being the fourth—as well as devote considerable time to rebutting his critics.¹⁹ In both works Kurzweil is clear that a transcendence of biological limitations is the desired and inevitable goal: through a purely data-driven worldview he calls ‘patternism,’ humankind will transcend its humanity both biologically and intellectually, ceasing to be human for the better and diffusing its intelligence throughout the universe via nanotechnology until the entire universe is ‘intelligized,’ where his concept of ‘evolution moves inexorably toward this concept of God’ as ‘infinite knowledge, infinite intelligence, infinite beauty, infinite creativity, infinite love, and so on’; ‘an essentially spiritual undertaking.’²⁰

Vinge and Kurzweil can be joined by Natasha Vita-More and Max More, the former writing the Transhuman Manifesto directly contemporaneously

16 Kurzweil notes the influence of Vinge directly in the introduction to *The Singularity is Near*. Ray Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006.), p. 23.

17 Ray Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), pp. 9-39.

18 Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines*, p. 129.

19 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, pp. 14-21, 427-484.

20 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, pp. 388-389. It is important to note the intensely emotional aspect of Kurzweil’s beliefs, where he is driven by the hope that, someday, his father will be technologically reincarnated. See Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together* (New York: Basic Books, 2017), p. 66.

with Vinge's Omni essay in 1982/3 and later developing a Transhuman Art Manifesto (1992) focusing on aesthetics, which laid the groundwork for her 2002 Primo Posthuman design for a body that is ageless, gender fluid, upgradeable, without error, and superintelligent.²¹ Max More is known for formally delineating the Principles of Extropy (2003) in conjunction with the Extropy Institute.²² More defines the Principles of Extropy as consisting in 'the principles of perpetual progress, self-transformation, practical optimism, intelligent technology, open society, self-direction, and rational thinking.'²³ Important to this formulation is the concept of perpetual progress, where the transhuman state is in an ever-growing dynamic state of becoming, More distinguishing sharply between 'extropia' and 'utopia.'²⁴

From the above survey certain commonalities begin to emerge which are definitive of the most dominant strain of transhumanist beliefs. Helpful in this section will be the abbreviated definition of transhumanism given by Max More as 'a class of philosophies that seeks the continued evolution of human life beyond its current human form as a result of science and technology guided by life-promoting principles and values.'²⁵ This definition, a consolidation of the elements delineated in the prior sections, will thus be expounded upon here for further clarity.

One particularly recurrent theme is the inadequacy of humanity's biological finitude, apparent from the given definition's emphasis on the bypassing of the human form; elsewhere More describes the transhumanist anthropology as one that 'champions morphological freedom,' giving the human mind the ability to circumvent 'aging, damage, and disease,' as well

21 More, p. 12; Natasha Vita-More, 'Radical body design 'Primo Posthuman,' Kurzweil Network, 2019, web, <http://www.kurzweilai.net/radical-body-design-primo-posthuman> (accessed 21 February, 2019). This focus on the capability of technology to circumvent the social problems of gender and sex is the focus of the 1991 article by Donna Haraway, 'A Cyborg Manifesto,' in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991).

22 'Extropy Institute,' web, <http://www.extropy.org> (accessed 4 March 2019).

23 More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 5.

24 More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 6.

25 More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 1.

as improve and enhance sensory capabilities.²⁶ More dislikes the portrayal of transhumanist as ‘loathing’ the human body, showing bewilderment as to how this impression is made; yet it is Ray Kurzweil, whose work More is seen advocating as an accurate depiction of transhumanist sentiments, who often implements language that directly militates against any view of the human body that makes it essential to the human person, stating the necessity for humankind to become ‘non-biological’ and implementing the term ‘plastic’ in relation thereto.²⁷ It would certainly seem as though an aversion to the finitude of human physiology and a desire to literally transcend this biological finitude is one of the basic commonalities of the transhuman philosophy, related fundamentally to a modified psychological view of the person, where linear consciousness is the only element of personhood and can be emulated or transferred onto a digital medium.²⁸

This leads to a second element: an emphasis on non-biology and a circumvention of epistemic questions concerning the mind, what More calls ‘science and technology guided by life-promoting principles and values.’²⁹

26 More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 15.

27 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, pp. 9, 310, 369-390.

28 James Hughes in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 230; see the treatment of this element of transhumanism by Celia Deane-Drummond, ‘Taking Leave of the Animal? The Theological and Ethical Implications of Transhuman Projects,’ in Ronald Cole-Turner ed., *Transhumanism and Transcendence : Christian Hope in an Age of Technological Enhancement* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2011), pp. 115-130. Cf. Susan Grove Eastman, *Paul and the Person* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2017), pp. 63-79, who notes the insufficiency of the singular and independent psychological person inherent in Cartesian anthropology, which sociologists and psychologists are tending away from. Likewise, a critique of reductionistic dangers of over-emphasis on linear self-consciousness is provided by Rowan Williams, ‘What is Consciousness?’ in *Being Human: Bodies, Minds, and Persons* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), pp. 1-27.

29 More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 1. Later he goes on to explain that transhumanists ‘... believe that our thinking, feeling selves are essentially physical processes. While a few transhumanists believe that the self is tied to the current, human physical form, most accept some form of functionalism, meaning that the self has to be instantiated in some physical medium but not necessarily one that is biologically human – or biological at all. If one’s biological neurons were gradually replaced, for example, with synthetic parts that supported the same level of cognitive function, the same mind and personality might persist despite being ‘in’ a non-biological substrate...’ More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p.7.

This is what Harari interprets as a new transhumanist metaphysic, that of Dataism, i.e. Kurzweil's 'patternism,' where the quintessential element is algorithmic information itself.³⁰ Within this framework, everything can be distilled to an algorithmic logic—even human emotion and the senses.³¹ This means that patterns, knowledge, algorithms, and information are the transcendental element above and beyond anything in the material world. Importantly, this relates directly to the prior anthropology: if human personhood is only that which is distillable to patterns and algorithms, this means that personhood essentially remains the same if a single linear psychological consciousness is preserved.³² Simultaneously, within this general assumption of patternism transhumanism suffers from a lack of definition in relation to its own epistemology, attempting to promote life within algorithmic consciousness, yet without adopting any concrete way of knowing or measuring personhood itself; thus Kurzweil ends his considerations on human personhood by stating two seemingly contrary positions, i.e. that, on the one hand, personhood in continued consciousness is not knowable, yet, '[d]espite these dilemmas,' 'losing a person is the ultimate loss.'³³

A final element that becomes apparent is that of an hopeful optimism in the progression of technology through an upward trajectory of technological evolution.³⁴ One key assumption is that a theory of

30 Harari, pp. 83-90, 356, 393-402.

31 Harari, pp. 83-90; Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, p. 388.

32 'In *The Singularity is Near* (2005), Kurzweil advocates for ... 'Patternism,' and this is the dominant view among transhumanists in general. Patternism permits radical changes to the body and brain so long as the sense of continuity, the memory of a flow of mental states leading to the present, is maintained. Even something as radical as the recording of a personality in a brain and its reinstatement in a computer would count as personal identity if the mind in the computer remembered the process leading to the change and identified with the prior biological person.' Hughes, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 230.

33 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, p. 386. More also writes of this epistemic confusion: '...It would not be accurate to speak of a universally accepted 'transhumanist epistemology' ...' More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 6.

34 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, pp. 7-22; Vinge, 'The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era'; 'An optimistic flavor necessarily permeates transhumanism. Someone cannot believe that radical transformations of the human condition are both possible and desirable while also believing that we are doomed

biological evolution directly segues into the realm of technology and data, ‘where humans direct their own evolution to their benefit.’³⁵ That is to say, for the transhumanist, ‘Evolution is not a closed system,’ pulling even on human consciousness to bring order out of chaos.³⁶ This had led Kurzweil to envisioning his sextuple epochal system revolving around the Singularity event in Epoch Five, ‘a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed.’³⁷ This upward evolution assumes that there will be no retrogression, disruption, or stagnation of technological development into the near future, as well as the fact that the synthetic process of evolution, generally considered as a biological phenomenon, can be adequately mapped onto technological and ideological development via a model of exponential growth based on Moore’s law, the law that states that ‘...each new generation of computer chip ... provides twice as many components per unit cost...’³⁸ This optimism lends itself to a cynical dismissal of any critical interaction with transhumanist futurism in relation to existential threat, where technological progress is seen as a *Deus ex machina* in and of itself—a reward that exponentially outweighs the potential threat.³⁹

to failure or disaster.’ More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 13.

35 More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 11.

36 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, p. 41.

37 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, p. 7.

38 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, p. 41; cf. pp. 13, 56-71. The potentiality of an actual stagnation of technological growth due to limitations in physics is beyond the scope of the present endeavor; for an example, see Max Schulz, ‘The end of the road for silicon?’ *Nature*, Vol. 399, Iss. 6738 (Jun 24, 1999), pp. 729-730; with regards to Moore’s Law, see Rob Aitken, ‘Moore’s Law Ending? No Problem,’ *EETimes*, 27 March 2019, web, https://www.eetimes.com/author.asp?section_id=36&doc_id=1334474 (accessed 27 March 2019); for the topic of technological disruption, see Joseph A. Coates, ‘Historical lessons from technological disruptions: Will the storm always pass?’ *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, Vol 113 Part A (December 2016), pp. 85-88. It is notable that both Kurzweil and Vinge had made what must now be considered exaggerated prognostications of the ‘Singularity Event’ as occurring in the early 21st century, with Vinge’s date having expired and Kurzweil’s fast approaching without sight of near fruition; nonetheless, More asserts that future forecasting of such a specific chronological manner, although ubiquitous, is not a definitive element of transhumanism. More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, pp. 14-15.

39 Note the hypothetical conversation with an interlocutor posed by Kurzweil, *The*

Considering the above, the central tenets of transhumanist anthropology can be distilled into three primary elements: 1. the person as distinctly psychological / non-biological and consisting in linear self-consciousness with human suffering as thus related to biological limitation, 2. the assumption of a non-material 'Dataist' / 'patternist' metaphysic consisting in information, knowledge, and algorithms, and 3. a virtually unmitigated hope in the upward synthetic progression of technological evolution as the solution to the problems inherent within human finitude. It is with this understanding that the study will move forward.

IMAGO DEI AS BODY AND SOUL, AND DEATH

One of the great theological debates that has persisted throughout Judeo-Christian history is the nature and extent of the image of God in humankind. This has been generally considered along either partitive or holistic trajectories, the former considering the *imago Dei* as rooted either in a single element or function that is *borne* by humanity, and the latter considering the image as pertaining directly to and thus encompassing the entire person of the human being—that is, directly definitive of humanity within a biblical and theological anthropology.⁴⁰ Integral to this essay's

Singularity is Near, pp. 310-312; his discussion of existential risk on pp. 400-408; the somewhat cavalier dismissal of objections by Eric Dietrich, 'Homo sapiens 2.0: why we should build the better robots of our nature,' *Journal of Experimental & Theoretical Artificial Intelligence*, 13 (2001), p. 328; More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, pp. 13-14, who notes that some transhumanists have actually shifted to a view that an overratiocination of risks will actually lead to a great existential threat. For a more moderate transhumanist perspective that considers existential risk, see Nick Bostrom, *Superintelligence: Paths, Dangers, Strategies*.

40 The former could be referred to using the term 'accidental' and the latter, 'essential.' However, using the term 'accidental' may seem to imply that these elements are somehow non-essential to humankind's nature or essence, which is not what is meant by proponents of partitive views. Likewise, essences can be analyzed partitively and by individuated qualities and compounds the problem by seeming to imply humanity is the *imago substantialis*—something which is reserved for Christ alone. As such, these terms will be avoided in this study. For a similar approach to theological anthropology as 'holistic,' see John Cooper, *The Body, Soul, and Life Everlasting Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

thesis is the concept that the image of God is A. something essential to humanity, human identity, and human purpose and destiny, and thus B. subject to existential threat if any aspect of humanity were altered, mutated, circumvented, or dispensed with.⁴¹ As such, this essay will attempt to posit a view of the image of God as consisting in an holistic psycho-somatic dualism and thus the dissipation of this union as a state of death, constructed from biblical and Augustinian perspectives.

It is the Genesis account that provides the most salient biblical data for *imago Dei* theology, containing six verses in its opening chapters that detail what it means to be human. This study will consider not only Genesis 1:26-30, but also Genesis 2:7, which is a sort of retrospective commentary intended to supplement the prior with further details about the creation of humanity in God's image, i.e. supplying the how to the what of Genesis 1:26-30.⁴² Humanity is viewed here as the climax of creation, where God immediately interposes himself via a divine soliloquy to create humanity in his own image.⁴³

A great deal of theological weight has been placed on a differentiation between image (בְּצַלְמֵנוּ) and likeness (כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ) in church history.⁴⁴ The Reformation and post-Reformation periods, with their retrieval of exegesis and syntax, have generally observed that the two are used by way of a synonymic emphasis: the singular referent here is Adam (אָדָם), which is patronymic and thus generic for the whole human race.⁴⁵ There

41 It is Wolfhart Pannenberg who notes the integral relationship the doctrine of the image of God and a theological anthropological have in relation to fundamental doctrines of the Christian religion and human destiny. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, Geoffrey W. Bromiley trans., *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), three volumes, p. 2:180.

42 Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1996), pp. 188-191. A canonical and theological interpretive strategy is taken here, which does not regard questions concerning Adam's historicity.

43 This assumes God himself as both subject and object of this discourse. For a critical engagement with the view that this is a divine dialogue between God and angels, see Bryan Murphy, 'The Trinity in Creation,' *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 24 No. 2 (Fall 2013), pp. 167-176.

44 Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 5th edn (West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 348-350; Pannenberg, p. 2:210-211.

45 Cf. Bruce Waltke and Michael O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*

is an immediate equation in the text between the creation of humanity and God's image, as denoted by the matching singular number as well as the prepositions in the phrase **בְּצִלְמִנוּ בְּדְמוּתֵנוּ**, the prepositions carrying an agreement in kind yet also an analogous distance: humanity itself is the image of God, yet analogously, not essentially.⁴⁶ Importantly, it is only after this divine declaration that God assigns function thereto, where humankind is to rule over creation while, at the same time, being a creature itself.

This is expanded upon in 2:7, where the ontology of the image of God is described. Here the uniqueness of the human body as made from the material particular of the earth (**עֹפָר מִן־הָאֲדָמָה**), molded and formed intimately by God (**וַיִּצְרֵהּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים**), is the focus: there is something special about the human body, as God has taken a unique and special care in his creation of humanity's physical form.⁴⁷ God forms Adam's body first, then provides his soul, i.e. the breath of life (**נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים**), which the text says is breathed into his nostrils (**בְּאַפָּיו**); only then, with both body and soul, that humanity becomes a living being (**לְנַפֵּשׁ חַיָּה**).⁴⁸ This

(Winona Lake, IA: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 4.4.1; hereafter, Waltke-O'Connor. In Hebrew, appositions at best function expegetically, further explaining the prepositional word. Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 2.4. Importantly, the words are used interchangeably in Gen 5:3. Cognate usages of these words attests to their general semantic synonymy. Mathews, p. 167. Note also that a prepositional value denoting agreement in kind is native to both **ב** and **כ** prepositions; see 'ב' and 'כ' in Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner eds., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden, Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1994), hereafter, HALOT. For the patronymical and generic nature of **אדם**, see Leonard J. Coppes, 'אדם 25,' in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), hereafter, TWOT; Howard N. Wallace, 'Adam (PERSON) [Heb. *ādām* (אדם)],' in David Noel Freedman ed., *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), six volumes, hereafter, AYBD; 'אדם,' HALOT.

46 The usage of the **ב** may be a 'beth of norm' and denotes the manner; cf. Isaiah 16:9 (Waltke-O'Connor, 11.2.5e). Likewise, the **כ** specifies an agreement in norm and manner (Waltke-O'Connor, 11.2.9b).

47 Cf. the usage of **עֹפָר** in Lev 14:41, 42, 45; **יָצַר** in Isa 29:16; 41:25; Jer 18:4, 6; 1 Chr 4:23; Lam 4:2; Zec 11:13. 'עֹפָר' and 'יָצַר,' in Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs eds., *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977).

48 Note that the word **נְשָׁמַת** is seen as used in synonymous parallel construction with the other word for immaterial spirit, **רוּחַ**, in Job 34:14.

indicates that the union of body and soul to one another is essential to human nature and the human person.

Reflecting upon this creation account is Psalm 8, with its particular interrogative focus on humankind in verse 4. The text does not directly mention the *imago Dei*, yet the poetic language is directly connected to the Genesis creation account and thus roots it to its antecedent theology.⁴⁹ This theological riddle concerning the uniqueness of humanity revolves around humankind's creatureliness, focusing on its frailty (אָנּוּשׁ) as well as its cosmogony in Adam (וּבִן־אָדָם).⁵⁰ The psalm considers humanity's creation as hierarchical, and the hierarchy itself as grounds for its eminence: humanity has been created 1. lower than the angels (אֲלֹהִים), yet 2. higher than the beasts of the earth, which is 3. related to its glory and majesty (וְהַדָּר תִּעֲטָרְהוּ) and its ability to rule (תִּמְשֹׁלְהוּ) spatially and embodied in the terrestrial sphere, 'under his feet' (תַּחַת־רַגְלָיו).⁵¹ Thus Robert Alter notes that this '...sets humankind in an hierarchal ladder: God at the very top, the gods or celestial beings below Him, then man,

49 The focus on natural revelation is an apparent dialogue on Genesis, the psalmist calling immediate attention to the initial work (מַעֲשֵׂי) of creation by invoking God's heavens (יְרֵחַ יְזוּכָבָיִם) in verse 3. Likewise, although not directly present in the creation narrative, the resultative pi'el form of בָּן is distinctly cosmogonical, used also of the creation of the heavens in Prov 3:19 (for the import of the pi'el as resultative, see Walte-O'Connor 24.3). Likewise, the focus on humanity as a son of Adam (בֶּן־אָדָם); note singular number and thus the consideration of humankind in solidarity) and the regency language (e.g. תַּחַת־רַגְלָיו; cf. Jos 10:24; Psa 47:3; 110:1) in relation to the rest of creation in vv. 6b-9 clearly calls attention to the unique nature of humankind as *imago Dei*. Thus Dahood sees parallels to ANE creation myths throughout. Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I: 1-50* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 49-51. Most generally-speaking, the psalter at large may be viewed as a theological and liturgical commentary on Torah and precedent canon; see Nahum Sarna, *On the Book of Psalms: Exploring the Prayers of Ancient Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 1993), p. 17; John H. Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), pp. 219-220; John H. Walton, 'Psalms: A Cantata About the Davidic Covenant,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34/1 (March 1991), pp. 21-31.

50 The root of אָנּוּשׁ means 'to be weak, frail' and can even invoke sickness (Sarna, p. 62).

51 For the rendering of אֲלֹהִים as 'angels,' see Sarna, p. 63; Dahood, p. 51; Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2011), p. 296. Note that this translation breaks with the NASB, 'Yet you have made him a little lower than God.' Such a rendering is supported by the LXX ἀγγέλους and the subsequently dependant citation thereof in Heb 2:6 (UBS 4).

and below man the whole kingdom of other living creatures.⁵² That is to say, it is because of this unique station that humanity bears its relationship to the God who created it so.

In the New Testament, Paul considers the *imago Dei* in an ultimate and glorified sense in 1 Corinthians 15. There, Paul talks about the resurrection of the body in relation to the resurrection of Christ, specifying the uniqueness of human flesh as distinguished from the flesh of beasts or fish. Although it is easy to read a certain Platonism into Paul's language of 'earthly' and 'heavenly,' it is important to realize that, for Paul, 'heavenly' language does not mean immaterial or intangible, but rather, a very real realm that bears proximity to God.⁵³ Thus, in the resurrection, bearing 'the image of the heavenly' is related to the real, physical body of Christ, who is the vouchsafe for bodily resurrection, Paul's comparison being cosmological, with Christ as the second Adam. The focus on Christ as a second Adam is continued in 2 Corinthians 3:18, Romans 8:29, and Colossians 3:10, where Christ, as *imago substantialis*, is viewed as the pattern for the renewal of the *imago Dei* in humanity, a present spiritual reality obtained by the Holy Spirit with a view toward future glorification obtained through renewal into what was lost in Adam's fall, what John Barclay refers to as the 'recreative dynamic' in Pauline anthropology.⁵⁴

Similar concerns are seen in James 3:9, which attempts to draw from Old Testament language concerning the *imago Dei* in order to speak into

52 Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2007), p. 23.

53 '...[T]his phraseology would not mislead a Hebrew, who was accustomed to designate the restored Davidic Kingdom a heavenly Kingdom, and the country enjoying its restoration and Theocratic blessings, a heavenly country. The expression does mean 'the third heaven' ... but something that pertains to, or partakes of, the heavenly, as heavenly vision, body, calling, etc.' George Nathaniel Henry Peters, *The Theocratic Kingdom of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ, as Covenanted in the Old Testament and Presented in the New Testament* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1884), p. 295; cf. Helmut Traub, 'Οὐρανός, Οὐράνιος, Ἐπουράνιος, Οὐρανόθεν,' in TDNT. For Paul's Hebraistic and rabbinic upbringing, see Richard N. Longenecker, *Paul: Apostle of Liberty* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964), pp. 2, 31-32.

54 John M.G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), p. 496.

moral problems of orthopraxy plaguing the nascent church.⁵⁵ Much like Paul, James' argument is distinctly cosmological, his earlier language of comparison with 'every species of beast and bird, of reptiles and creatures of the sea' invoking the creation context of Genesis.⁵⁶ Humanity is thus seen as sitting atop corporeality, yet it is done via a distinctly moral and even bodily envisioning of the *imago Dei*, where the tongue (γλῶσσα) is tied directly to the body as a whole (ὅλον τὸ σῶμα) and thus bears a spiritual value, a sense experience of interpersonal communication that implies a personal and relational distinction.⁵⁷ As such, it can be a tool for good or a tool for evil, the author stating that speech and the tongue are tied to the whole person, as water comes forth from a fountain.⁵⁸ This is reinforced by the prior literary context and the concern for holistically-transformative faith: where he here states that the abuses of the tongue lead to death (μεστὴ ἰοῦ θανατηφόρου) and even bear reference to hell (φλογιζομένη ὑπὸ τῆς γέεννης), in 2:26 he had specified that the consistency of death is the separation of body from soul (τὸ σῶμα χωρὶς πνεύματος νεκρὸν ἐστίν), which launched his discussion of the whole

55 Note that καθ' ὁμοίωσιν in Jas 3:9 is identical to LXX Gen 1:26, which translates אֲנִי־וְאַתָּה.

56 Jas 3:7. The progression of this four-fold classification is intertextually traceable through the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Deut 4:17-18) as it expands on the Genesis account; thus Hartin notes, 'The language of creation is preparatory for the reference to human beings as created in God's likeness in 3:9.' Patrick J. Hartin, *Sacra Pagina: James* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), p. 178.

57 Gordon H. Clark, 'The Image of God in Man,' *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 12:4 (Fall 1969), pp. 215-222. It is Vern Poythress who devotes considerable time to tracing the role of language within the image of God, summarily writing, 'Since man is made in the image of God, his speaking ability images God's speaking ability. When God speaks, there are three aspects similar to [ours]: (1) God has his purposes, (2) he speaks a specific utterance, and (3) he has a system against the background of which he speaks,' i.e. intent, action, and language. Vern S. Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009), p. 265.

58 Jas 3:9-12. By further invoking a sort of reductio by way of the image of trees of certain kinds bearing mismatched fruit (v. 12) James seems to be invoking Christ in the Sermon on the Mount, e.g. Matt 7:16-17, where Christ is drawing a direct spiritual connection between the words of the mouth and the spiritual state of the heart. Hartin, p. 180. For this section as demonstrating cognizance of Jesus' teachings, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Letter of James: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 253-258.

body (ὄλον τὸ σῶμα) in 3:2.⁵⁹ That is to say, James assumes an essential dependency on the body to the soul and vice versa for the conditions of life to proceed, which he then segues into his view of the image of God in the following chapter. As such, James retains a dualistic view of composite parts in psycho-somatic unity.

Proceeding into ecclesiastical theology, the emphasis of the *imago Dei* as encompassing humanity as a holistic dualism is picked up in the writings of Augustine of Hippo. It may initially seem surprising to group Augustine with a holistic and personal view of the image of God; indeed, the popular strain of thought regarding Augustine's view of human destiny is that it is distinctly platonic in nature.⁶⁰ However, a closer analysis of Augustine's language reveals a consideration of the image of God that pertains uniquely to the whole human person, not simply to partitive qualities.⁶¹ Although Augustine may at times over-emphasize the role of the intellect within the image of God, he also extends the image even to the flesh; speaking of the holistic redemption attained by Christ incarnate and the hope in a bodily resurrection to be attained to, Augustine writes of the body in his work, *The Trinity*, 'This too can be called the image of the Son of God in which like him we shall have an immortal body,' going on to draw from Johannine and Pauline literature and observing the parity in biblical theology between Adam and Christ: 'as we have been mortal

59 The word χωρίς is strongly dissociative, entailing the severance or independence of two elements that bear relationship with one another, e.g. Jhn 1:3; 1 Cor 11:11; Eph 2:12; etc. Louw-Nida, '89.120 ἄνευ; ἄτερ; χωρίς'. James may, in turn, be drawing from Christ in Matt 10:28. Considering this strong assertion of a holistic psycho-somatic unity, it is surprising to see James go untreated in the otherwise expansive treatment of New Testament anthropology by John Cooper. Cooper, pp. 121-146.

60 John Cooper notes that, although Augustine's anthropology does have distinctly platonic flavors and an emphasis on the preeminence of the soul in personal identity, his teachings on the whole and especially later in his life reflect a body-soul holism. See Cooper, pp. 10-11; cf. McGrath, p. 349, who holds to the view of Augustine as adopting the *imago intellectualis*.

61 See esp. Augustine, 'Sermon 159B,' *Sermons, III/11: Newly Discovered Sermons* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 1997), ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill, pp.146-166; cf. Gerald P. Boersma, 'The Body and the *Imago Dei*,' in Augustine's *Early Theology of Image: A Study in the Development of Pro-Nicene Theology*, pp. 207-208, 257-258; Cooper, pp. 10-11.

after the manner of Adam, so we truly believe and firmly hope that we are going to be immortal after the manner of Christ.⁶²

Concordantly, as with the considerations from James, Augustine perceives that to be cut-off or separated from this reality is death—depending on extent, a spiritual death in functional moral separation from God as *telos*, a physical death as separation of body from soul, or an ultimate death as separation of both body and soul from God.⁶³ Thus Augustine writes that the first state of death is where ‘the soul is bereft of God’ and the second state of death is when ‘the body is bereft of the soul.’⁶⁴ Where the restoration of the image in Christ implies a sealing of created finitude by the Spirit in ever-increasing participation with God in felicitous life eternal, the opposite would logically imply an increasing retrogression resulting in increasing separation from God—the third state of death he refers to as ‘the last or second death,’ a ‘state where death itself will be deathless’ and where the will and the passions of the flesh are so opposed as to be at a perfect impasse for all eternity, the will forever unable to dispose itself.⁶⁵

62 The context is the immortality of the body in relation to Christ’s ascension. Augustine, *The Trinity*, 14.18 pars. 24, 25. In more specific theological terms, Augustine draws a similitude between Christ as the *imago substantialis* and the renewal to take place of the *imago Dei* in humanity.

63 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, 13.11-12; cf. Eph 2:1; Jas 2:26; Rev 20:14.

64 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, 13.12. This taxonomy bears notable affinities to Lactantius’ earlier two-fold paradigm of the death of the body and the death of the soul. Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, 7.10.

65 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, 6.12; 13.11-12; 19.28. John Bowlin explains, ‘And this endless dying will be nothing but an eternal conflict between will and passion, just as its yield will be nothing but war without end among hell’s inhabitants.’ John Bowlin, ‘Hell and the dilemmas of intractable alienation,’ in James Wetzel ed., *Augustine’s City of God: A Critical Guide* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 191. This, too, bears affinities with Augustine’s predecessor, Lactantius, who likewise considered the insoluble nature of the resurrected bodies of the damned in their relation to the soul. Lactantius, 7.20-21.

EXISTENTIAL THREAT:
AN ASSESSMENT

The most direct and apparent threat that arises between transhumanist anthropology and the holistic view of the *imago Dei* adopted here is that of the importance of enfleshment for human development and the human person, along with its logical corollary, the importance of finitude as a platform for human flourishing. Where the *imago Dei* indicates the peculiar position of humanity within the scheme of God's providence, even ascribing a peculiarity to human flesh itself, transhumanism attempts to say the opposite: the human body is bad and represents a deficiency which needs to be overcome by humanity becoming 'non-biological.'⁶⁶ Where all the woes and plights of humanity are ascribed to human biological finitude and enfleshment, Christian theology has developed the category of self-imposed sin and the resulting guilt incurred before God as a way of distinguishing inherent natural goodness from the unnatural effects of evil thereon. Essentially, then, there is a fundamental failure within the patternist worldview to distinguish between finitude and evil, apparent in the association of certain physical effects of evil—including death—with the human form and thus the need to attain to 'morphological freedom.'⁶⁷

This has led directly to the transhumanist's desire to separate mind from body, uploading the latter into strong AI via whole brain emulation for the sake of indefinite perpetuity of the person.⁶⁸ Herein the claim of the transhumanist assumes the human soul to be a non-entity, analogous to and conflated with the algorithmic capabilities of the human mind within a patternist metaphysic.⁶⁹ Thus one objection to transhumanism's ideal personal state is that, assuming it is possible to upload the electrical and cognitive content of the brain into a computer, it does not follow that the

66 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, p. 9.

67 More, in *The Transhumanist Reader*, p. 15. This failure of distinction is noted by Ronald Cole-Turner, *Transhumanism and Transcendence*, p. 194f.

68 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology*, pp. 316-317.

69 This is noted in Harari's analysis and is a distinct emphasis in Kurzweil's writings. See Harari, pp. 83-89; Kurzweil, p. 388.

soul itself can be uploaded; indeed, the existence of the soul as immaterial and intangible as deduced prior does not fall within scientific measurability and thus would seem to be disparate from the goal of the transhumanist.⁷⁰ At best, it would seem that the entity resultant of such a digitization of cognition would be a crude and impersonal algorithmic reproduction of human data, not identical with the person and thus invoking Masahiro Mori's 'uncanny valley' in terms of epistemic perception, i.e. it is but an eerie resemblance that is too close to the real thing to be deemed a mere endearing caricature, yet not close enough to be accepted by the human mind as a legitimate reproduction.⁷¹

At best, what can be assumed about the state of digitized, super-somatic humanity purported by the transhumanist is the severance of the soul's ability to communicate with the body through the medium of the brain. Here the implementation of the biblical and Augustinian categories of death and hell are alarming in evaluating such a state; if the 'Singularity event' commences as Kurzweil, Vinge, and others desire, the result would be the opposite of what they intend: as opposed to the immortality of the human race, a mass suicide and self-genocide, carried out incognito by the fact that people will appear to be conscious within emulative artificial intelligence, yet essentially dead in reality. This is observable by Kurzweil's circumvention of the discussion of epistemology and self-consciousness: although stating that 'losing a person is the ultimate loss,' Kurzweil also concedes that it is impossible to know for certain whether or not self-consciousness constitutes a person or if a mind or personality actually

70 Harari, pp. 102, 108-111.

71 Masahiro Mori, 'The Uncanny Valley: The Original Essay by Masahiro Mori,' Karl F. MacDorman and Norri Kageki trans., *IEEE Spectrum*, web, <https://spectrum.ieee.org/automaton/robotics/humanoids/the-uncanny-valley> (accessed 23 November 2018). The question concerning the ability of AI to impeccably reproduce human intelligence is beyond the range of this essay; it is debated by John R. Searle and discussants in 'Minds, brains, and computers.' More contemporarily, the so-called 'shared manifold hypothesis' of Vittorio Gallese has attempted to posit a model for reproduction of empathy via mirror neurons; see Vittorio Gallese, 'The 'Shared Manifold' Hypothesis: From Mirror Neurons To Empathy,' *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 8 No. 5-7 (2001), pp. 33-50; the response by Eastman, citing the work of Gallagher and Reddy, in *Paul and the Person*, pp. 65-79.

exists apart from himself, let alone whether—to use his own language—'Ray 1' is the same as 'Ray 2' in the replacing of the biological brain 'with its neuromorphic equivalent.'⁷² Given the theological conclusion above, however, even if one could upload the brain itself to the computer, this would emulate hell rather than heaven: where the soul flourishes when in perfect harmony with the body, the soul divorced from sense-experience and the ability to act is a sort of perfect torment, as Augustine has envisioned.⁷³ In the words of Isaiah, this is a state where 'their worm will not die and their fire will not be quenched.'⁷⁴ This concern is even echoed by Vernor Vinge, who cautions that humanity's transhumanist aspirations could actually result in a state of indefinite inactivity akin to perpetual torture.⁷⁵ The existential threat, then, is not that the human itself could somehow be destroyed, in the annihilationist sense; it is taken for granted that the dead will still be raised in the eschaton. Rather, the threat is that a state of death itself would be perpetrated through a technological means on an astronomical scale.

CONCLUSION

In relation to the biblical and Augustinian criteria for death as separation, transhumanism indicates an existential threat to humanity in relation to both a separation of body and soul in the Augustine's second category, as well as the emulation of the third category of a perpetual impasse of soul-to-body conference. This is related inherently to transhumanism's desire to overstep constituted human biology, thus bifurcating the psychosomatic unity of the *imago Dei* in humanity. According to the biblical and Augustinian model presented above, far from improving or enhancing humanity, the accomplishing of a transhumanist anthropological destiny

72 Kurzweil, *The Singularity is Near*, pp. 384-386.

73 Augustine, *Concerning the City of God Against the Pagans*, 19.28.

74 Isa 66:24.

75 Vinge, 'The Coming Technological Singularity: How to Survive in the Post-Human Era.'

presents a high degree of existential threat to the human race *en toto* via what would amount to a mass self-inflicted technological genocide.

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Review Article
Multidimensional Monism:
Veli-Matti Kärkäinen's Proposal
for a New Theological Anthropology

Viktor J Tóth

KEYWORDS:

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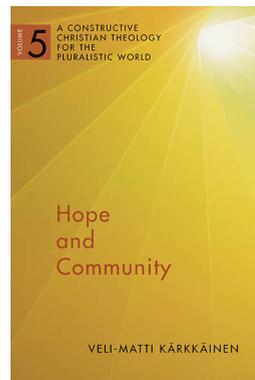
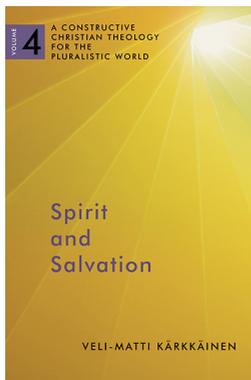
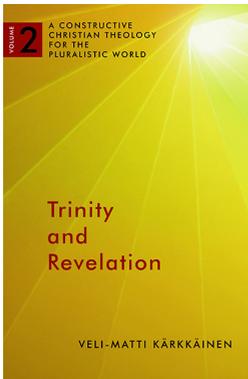
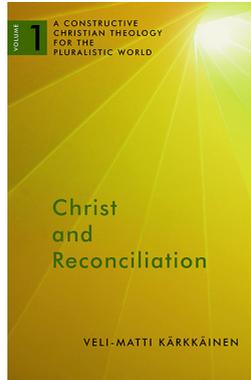
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INTRODUCTION

Multi-volume evangelical systematic theologies are not published everyday, thus Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's *Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* is a most welcomed contribution.¹ The project of the Finnish theologian, both professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, and Docent of Ecumenics in the Faculty of Theology at the University of Helsinki in Finland, is groundbreaking in many ways. The most important is his aim to construct a full-scale presentation of Christian doctrine for the twenty-first century.

1 Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation*, vol. 1 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Church in the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013); id., *Trinity and Revelation*, vol. 2 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); id., *Creation and Humanity*, vol. 3 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015); id., *Spirit and Salvation*, vol. 4 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016); id., *Hope and Community*, vol. 5 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017). Page numbers in parenthesis in the body of my text are from the various volumes. The Arabic numerals from 1 to 5 designate the particular volume separated with a colon from the page number. For example, 3:239 indicates page 239 in the third volume titled *Creation and Humanity*.



What he means by “constructive theology”² is “an integrative discipline that continuously searches for a coherent, balanced understanding of Christian truth and faith in light of Christian tradition (biblical and historical) and in the context of the historical and contemporary thought, cultures, and living faiths” (1:13). He also considers “younger churches” (e.g., free churches of various types and Pentecostal/charismatic groups) as equal conversational partners. Although he has close ties to the Pentecostal church, his work exceeds the growing focus of Pentecostal/charismatic theologians to demonstrating specifically Pentecostal/charismatic contributions to wider systematic theology.³ He believes that the “integrative” nature of systematic theology is its most distinctive feature in the current theological curriculum. Nevertheless, he hopes that at the end of the constructive task his proposal lines up with biblical revelation and with the best of tradition. He regards the canonical Scripture as ultimate authority “not only in the way Scripture is used in the church, but also on the basis of the ‘authorial intention’” (1:11).

My aim here is to highlight some of the important aspects of Kärkkäinen’s anthropology which is presented as an individual topic in the second half of his third volume, but, naturally, surfaces in the other volumes also. He develops his anthropology in his usual constructive pluralistic framework but with an emphasized focus on the interface between theology and science. His approach is clearly indebted to the interaction with his colleagues at Fuller Theological Seminary (most notably the nonreductive materialism of Nancey Murphy, Joel Green, and Warren Brown), but he goes beyond them, incorporating the voices of such scholars as Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Philip Clayton, Ted Peters, John Polkinghorne, Keith Ward, N. T. Wright and others.⁴

2 Kärkkäinen uses the terms “systematic”, “doctrinal”, and “constructive” interchangeably.

3 Kärkkäinen considers himself as “Lutherocostal.” He was first ordained as a Pentecostal minister in Finland, and then recently, as a pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America.

4 The list of cited material is very impressive (the bibliography of volume 3 lists more than 1500 items!).

First, I will give a thematic introduction to his anthropological project, then I will highlight some of its distinctive characteristics, finishing with an attempt to point out some of the advantages, as well as some of the possible liabilities of his proposal.

1. THEMATIC INTRODUCTION

Before he presents his Multidimensional Monism, Kärkkäinen, carefully maps the field of theological anthropology, thereby he “paves the road” for his own proposal. The mapping in itself is “multidimensional” in the sense that it involves time (the historical perspective of theological anthropology), space (surveying diverse living faiths throughout the world), and different cultural dimensions (e.g. church culture, and scientific naturalism).

First, Kärkkäinen accurately points out the shift in biblical scholarship from substance dualism toward a more holistic and monist view of human nature. He also observes that the two creation narratives in the beginning of Genesis signify “a dynamic mutuality, fellowship, and unity-in-diversity among creatures” (3:233). At the same time, he highlights the post-modern turn from individualistic tendencies toward relationality and communion, and from isolation to connectedness within human society and to the rest of creation. Yet his proposal moves beyond both the modern self-affirmed “identity” and the post-modern self-constructed “identity” toward a “robustly God-referential, holistic, and communion-driven account based on trinitarian resources” (3:274). Following John Zizioulas, the Finnish theologian concedes that what gives us identity is our continuous relationship with God. Thus, theologically speaking “identity” is a task.

Although Kärkkäinen deeply engages with sciences (e.g., neuro- and brain science, evolutionary biology, evolutionary epistemology, quantum physics, etc.), he pushes back against the physicalist tendencies of contemporary scholarship of those fields. However, he is able to do

it without “falling back” to the conventional dualist alternative. While emphasizing the importance of physicality, he recognizes that there is a deeper dimension or more-than-physicality in humans. However, according to his claim, this “other dimension” does not signify an ontological otherness. Here he builds on his doctrine of creation where he introduces a view in which creation is not a closed system but fundamentally open to God (i.e., against “physical closure”), and in which emergence is constantly at work (3:104). Creation has a monistic nature which is not characterized by mere physicality or idealism but by a dynamic “pluriformity” (3:345). His anthropological conclusion is “that all views that take the mental as real (existent) and that also therefore assume its causal efficacy, end up being property dualism of some sort” (3:338). However, instead of asserting “dualism” he highlights the “dualistic” tendencies of human life. In his view human beings are psychosomatic unites rather than dual beings (3:337).⁵ Thus, he affirms property dualism and the kind of “no-partism” and “differentiated unity” which is advocated by N. T. Wright. The Finnish theologian seeks to create an account of human nature which can explain all layers of human existence, let it be the physical, biological, psychological, or spiritual.

Although he emphasizes the deep connection between humans and the rest of nature he also provides a “thoughtful critique of the scientific denial of human uniqueness” (3:235).⁶ He sustains that we are more than “advanced mammals” (3:251), and consequently human uniqueness is not a difference in degree but in kind (3:427). He lists some of the conventional markers of this uniqueness (i.e., language, Theory of Mind, episodic memory, conscious top-down agency, future orientation, and emotional modulation [3:248–49]) but then he adds his own “items” to the list: the ability to discern beauty and to have deep feelings (e.g., fall in

5 With reference to John Polkinghorn.

6 “[T]he tasks of constructive theology,” he declares, “is to provide thoughtful critique of the scientific denial of human uniqueness in its linking of humanity with the rest of creation, or of brain study with a reductionistic denial of the whole concept of human intentions and free will” (3:235).

love, or depression), imagination (3:249); (uniquely) human intelligence, self-transcendence/self-reflection, *qualia*, symbolic skills and capacities (3:253–54),⁷ menopause, being born premature (3:255),⁸ and openness beyond time and matter (3:259). He also emphasizes the widespread consensus among the three Abrahamic faiths concerning the unique nature of human beings.

Kärkkäinen describes *H. sapiens* as a “two-natured animal” in whom “genetic and cultural information comes together in an absolute unique way” (3:254).⁹ Creatively combining the scientific and philosophical concepts with Zizioulas’s notions of *extasis* (meaning “standing-outside-of-one’s-self” which emphasizes the openness/transcendence/freedom element) and *hypostasis* (which is the bearer of the totality of human nature [3:290]) he builds his case that human religiosity is, theologically speaking, the “apex of human development” (3:261). It points to the fact that “the concept of God is an essential part for a proper human self-understanding” (3:265).¹⁰

Having been introduced some of the important notions of Kärkkäinen’s theological anthropology let us see how he employs them in his Multidimensional Monism.

2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF MULTIDIMENSIONAL MONISM

Multidimensional Monism intends to provide a terminology which can accurately communicate the “pluriform unity” of the multilayeredness of existence while honoring the monistic nature of reality. Human beings exist in this multilayered reality as psychosomatic pluralistic unities

7 Symbolic skills and capacities are related to language, but Kärkkäinen introduces these concepts in a new light.

8 These two biological traits also underline the fact that human beings are cultural beings by nature.

9 With reference to Philip Hefner.

10 With reference to Wolfhart Pannenberg.

having access to all layers of this complex existence. Accordingly, Kärkkäinen's proposal is characterized by *holistic multilayeredness*, *pluralistic relationality*, and *unified embodiedness*. I will develop the second portion of this article along these concepts.

2.1 Holistic Multilayeredness

On the one hand, Kärkkäinen concedes both the monist and the holistic anthropology of the Tanakh, but on the other, he does not rule out duality or plurality (3:335, 3:373). Following New Testament scholars like Joel Green, he warns against preconceived dualistic notions, but also pushes back against the view (mostly presented by the same scholars) that every “clearly dualistic passages ... could be forced into a monistic hermeneutic” (3:336). In fact, he proposes that “the most sensitive reading of the biblical data points to a multidimensional, elusive, open-ended conception of human nature” (3:336). He also utilizes the holistic nature of the mainstream Buddhist view in his proposal (3:382, 3:385).

He employs the notion of strong emergence to secure his holistic interpretation of human nature. This concept not only highlights the dynamic nature of human personhood but ensures the “realness” and the causal efficacy of the mental “layer” without sinking back into ontological dualism, which would make his enterprise liable from a scientific point of view. This holistic notion of the person is an ever-unfolding narrative. It is true both about the particular individual, and also about the whole of humanity; depicted both in biological and cultural evolution, and also in personal growth. Here, again, he finds support for the uniqueness of human nature but in a way that also ties humans to the rest of creation. Following Pannenberg, he argues for an exocentric, future-driven interpretation of human nature (3:278). He declares with the late German theologian that the human being “has a center not only in itself but also beyond itself” (3:280). And, as the best representative of this notion, Jesus of Nazareth is the original image of God (3:279). With the same breath Kärkkäinen invites the Spirit into the dialog about human nature. He argues that true

existence as self-transcendence can only be cultivated through the Spirit. In this trinitarian framework God's multiplicity is reflected in humans more than in any other creatures.

2.2 Pluralistic Relationality

Kärkkäinen's view is pluralistic in two senses. In the commonplace use of the phrase it signifies his methodological commitment to a pluralistic approach in constructive theology. But even more importantly it is pluralistic in the sense that it is neither dualist nor physicalist. Although he advocates for the dual-aspect nature of the world, this "duality" goes beyond material versus mental (3:340). Claiming that dual-aspect monism can lead to a view in which mental is "less than real" he advocates for ontological pluralism (3:340). This pluralism supposed to guarantee that "partism" does not get back through the back door.

His turn to relationality helps theological anthropology to see human beings as persons rather than as individuals (3:290), or "world-mastering rational" selves (3:272).¹¹ Kärkkäinen regards the *imago Dei* concept as Christian theology's most significant anthropological concept which claims to provide an account of human nature in relation to its Creator, other creatures, the whole cosmos, and to oneself (3:269, 3:290). By combining creation theology's stewardship principle with the equal value of each human being based on their relationship to God as *imagines Dei*, and the communion of humanity to the rest of creation he even sets the basic requirements for a fair economic system (3:460).¹² The same concept secures human dignity for the disabled and the sick (4:384).

2.3 Unified Embodiedness

Contrary to the traditional tendency to emphasize the difference between human beings and the rest of the creation, Kärkkäinen aims to establish

11 With reference to Stanley Grenz.

12 The three basic principles are: [1] "freedom and dignity of individuals; [2] satisfaction of the basic needs of all people with special reference to the weak; [3] and protection and flourishing of nature" (3:460—with reference to Miroslav Volf).

the unity of the whole of creation. He identifies “the complex unity of the finite world as God’s creation” as a key Christian belief (3:341). Consequently, it is part of the divine mandate “to seek a lifestyle facilitating the flourishing of creation” (3:430–31). As I pointed out above, he proposes a unified picture of creation (“unity of nature”) in which all creation share a common nature. So, it becomes necessary to talk about the “‘composition’ of the human person in light of the ‘composition’ of the whole cosmos. Whatever ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’ there is in the cosmos, small or big, it all has to be integrally connected” (3:344). Thus, even before talking about *imago Dei*, the Finnish theologian wants to talk about *imago mundi*.¹³ With this move he intends to hold fast both to the human capacity for transcendence and the embodiedness of this transcendence.

3. KÄRKKÄINEN’S ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE WIDER CONTEXT OF HIS PROJECT

In the third part of this paper I aim to shed more light on his theological anthropology by using notions from every volumes of his constructive enterprise. This list is in no way comprehensive, I only pick and chose a few examples to show how interconnected Kärkkäinen’s anthropology is.

3.1 Doctrine of Creation

Kärkkäinen’s anthropology is inseparably linked to his work on the doctrine of creation. Thus, it is not an accident that he presents his doctrine of creation alongside with his anthropology in the third volume of is project. I already pointed out several links. Here I only say that after defining nature as creation he affirms that the “personal nature of humanity belongs to the very nature of nature” (3:141).¹⁴ Here, again, he

13 With reference to Jürgen Moltmann.

14 With reference to Thomas F. Torrance.

emphasis the close relationship between us and the rest of creation.

3.2 Christology

Kärkkäinen utilizes many of his anthropological notions in his effort to remain faithful to Chalcedonian Christology. His “Holistic, Pluralistic, and Unified” (chapter title on 3:332) Multidimensional Monism gives him the scope for affirming both the “unity and the duality” of Jesus Christ the “God-man” (1:106). A dynamic view of humanity in which growth and relationality play fundamental roles sets the agenda for his dynamic Christology “From Below to Above” (1:24, 1:237). In this framework Jesus is the “messiah on the way” (1:256).¹⁵ Furthermore, if *theosis* is God’s plan from the beginning, as Kärkkäinen presents it, then Christ’s embodiment is the perfect fulfillment of that plan. It leads to the concluding remark that “authentic humanity is humanity in God” (1:174).¹⁶ He also points out that many of the problems of Chalcedonian Christology “go back to the use of the terms ‘person’ and ‘nature’” (1:112–13). In Kärkkäinen’s view person is a relational term, thus the “personhood” of the eternal Son is played out in his relation to the eternal Father, and thus located in the divine Logos. This concept of personhood gives the necessary “horizon” (1:113) and “boundary” (1:116) to utilize the terms *anhypostasis* and *enhyposstasis* in a creative way.¹⁷

3.3 Revelation

Kärkkäinen maintains that the divine embodiment is the distinctive principle that supports both the idea of revelation and salvation (2:25), and Jesus is the exemplar of “creaturely fellowship” (1:135). Thus, he

15 With reference to Moltmann.

16 With reference to Demetrios Bathrellos.

17 These terms are used by the Second Council of Constantinople to ratify that Jesus’ “personhood” is “located” in (enhyposstasis) the divine Logos rather than in his human nature.

confirms that the humanity of the second person of the Trinity is the revelation of God, but adds that, because of its nature (i.e., assuming “real” human life), it is also revelation about humanity. It leads us “beyond the mere possibility of knowing God to union [i.e., to become one] with God” and “Jesus then, of course, represents the culmination of that union” (2:23–24). The incarnation is transforming a particular human life through the Divine Life “by uniting it to itself ... The particular is taken into God, as a foreshadowing of the destiny that awaits all finite things” (2:25).¹⁸

Revelation is dynamic, multidimensional, contingent, partial, incomplete (in the sense that it is unfolding, 2:53), and it is “given in human form” (2:63).¹⁹ The “anthropological argument” seems to indicate that it “belongs to human nature to be open to inquire into the realities beyond the visible world” (2:223). This openness unfolds in an ever-present “wrestling with God” through which human words become the living Word of God by receiving life from God. Thus, his view on human nature is depicted “in action” in Scriptural revelation as an outcome of the divine-human dynamic (2:62–66).

3.4 Pneumatology and Soteriology

Personhood, which is established through relationality and community, plays an important role in his Pneumatology (4:33). The Finnish theologian makes the edifying claim that God’s charismatic gifting ought to think about in personal terms (i.e., humans receive a “Person” instead of a “power”, 4:242, 4:329). In this relational the term “grace” is happening in the dynamics of a loving relationship between (human and divine) persons. From this point of view election is set into a personal and relational context (4:242). Such a framework also makes the salvation resistible thus creates a space for human responsibly (also for free will,

18 With reference to Keith Ward.

19 Notice the obvious terminological analogy with his anthropology.

which is a major theme in his anthropological volume).²⁰

It also places conversion into a relational context. Here, again, he aims for a wholistic approach and argues against theological reductionism and individualism. The “place of forgiveness” is the Christian community and includes forgiveness “between human persons” (rather than just between the person and God, 4:284); it is a communal act (see subtitle on 4:293). Thus forgiveness “is a manifestation of love for the neighbor” and is a “profound act of hospitality” (4:285, 4:328). Furthermore, the experience of God’s Spirit happens in the “social experience of the self” in the communal perspective of the *imago Dei* which includes the relation between men and women, and their relation to the community of nature (4:190).²¹

Theosis (or deification) is an extremely important term for the Finnish theologian. This concept surfaces in all of the volumes (e.g., 1:174; 2:22–24;²² 3:284, 390, 392; 4:318–321, 356–57; 5:226, etc.). It is not surprising when we consider that it is perfectly in line with his dynamic view of “Humanity in the Becoming” (see subtitle on 3:277). In this framework sanctification is a lifelong progress in praxis of holiness and spirituality in the “earth-grounded” daily life (4:356–59). Based on this idea he proposes a “Trinitarian Form of Salvation as Participation in Divine Life” (see subtitle on 4:344), in which he links the dynamics of salvation with the whole of divine economy and “includes the salvation of communities, and even the whole of creation” (4:346). It is in relation to this concept that he calls to reframe the doctrine of justification as the defining form of soteriology in the West. Although *theosis* is considered as a mainly Eastern Orthodox theological concept, in recent years it became an important topic in ecumenical dialogs. As a professor of ecumenism and one who considers himself as a “Lutherocostal,” Kärkkäinen welcomes

20 See chap. 13 in vol. 3, titled “Freedom and Determinism—Divine and Human,” where he argues for freedom of choice rather than for freedom of will. Ultimately the human being is a “two-natured animal” and therefore both conditioned and free” (3:359).

21 With reference to Moltmann.

22 Here neither “*theosis*” nor “deification” occurs, but the author referring to texts which were crucial to develop this theological notion.

this development. He highlights the findings of Tuomo Mannermaa and his school about Luther's theology of justification and its affinity with the Orthodox notion of *theosis* (4:338ff). From a Pentecostal point of view the underlined focus on the divine-human cooperation in salvation, and thus more openness to the active role of the Holy Spirit in the believers' everyday life is also appreciated (4:320). He also refers to the recently uncovered similarities between Orthodox and Pentecostal pursuit of holiness (4:356).

His "widening" of the horizon of the doctrine of the Spirit by including human capacity for art is especially interesting from an anthropological point of view (4:184ff.). He describes it as an "elevation of the human person from immanence toward transcendence" (4:185).

3.5 Hamartiology

His doctrine of sin is located within his Anthropology and juxtaposed to the idea of human flourishing in this life. He points out that the Hebrew and Eastern Orthodox notion of sin is rooted in human freedom (and not in original sin). In Orthodox theology sin is depicted as woundedness and sickness. However, sin is still an intrusion to human life (3:400), and better described by "misery" as an umbrella term (3:396), to which only the *imago Dei* concept gives meaning (3:397). Accordingly, sin is a turning away from unification with God, and thus missing the will of God and true human destiny (3:406). Human beings are sinful even before they commit an individual sin, because sin is located in a deeper (universal) level of human existence, but guilt is imputed only in light of personal responsibility (3:407, 3:410). Sin is transpiring in concrete acts as something against the will of God (3:411), and it is both a personal and a collective/structural matter (3:407). Nevertheless, "the universality of sin is the presupposition for the universality of redemption in Christ" (3:407).

3.6 Eschatology

Kärkkäinen depicts resurrection as the “Destiny of the Cosmos and Humanity” (see chapter title on 5:110). Building on the presumption that “resurrection” is not re-creation from *ex nihilo*, he utilizes his “personalistic” view of human nature to establish a continuity of personhood (and thus find a solution to the “gap” theory).²³ Here the Finnish theologian voices his reservation about some tenets of nonreductive physicalism. His reluctance lies “in the complex and mutually conditioned continuity versus discontinuity relationship between [one’s] own personal life on Earth and life in the resurrected body as well as between [one’s] own personal eternal destiny and that of the whole cosmos” (3:349). Building on the findings of information theory and complex systems theory he describes the “meaning” of the soul as “almost infinitely complex, information-bearing pattern” (3:348, 5:128),²⁴ in “which both continuity and discontinuity are dynamically present” (5:125). Kärkkäinen agrees with Nancey Murphy that the physical parts of the body provide the substrate for all of the personal attributes, holds one’s memories, and allows one to be recognized by others in this life (5:126), in spite of the fact that the person’s biological constitution changes dramatically during one’s lifetime because of cell replacement (5:121, 5:126). However, for “new creation” the “matter” (body, physicality) must be different from the earthly body, “notwithstanding the continuity to the point that it still makes sense to speak of ‘body’ rather than merely ‘spirit’” (5:127). Nevertheless, since it is our relationship to God that denotes our identity, this “identity” is ultimately safeguarded by the Creator, who exists in eternal present (5:128).

23 I.e., the perceived “gap” in the continuity of personhood between bodily death and bodily resurrection.

24 With reference to John Polkinghorne (also see 3:145ff., with reference to Philip Heffner).

4. ADVANTAGES AND POSSIBLE LIABILITIES

4.1 Effective and Balanced Science-Faith Interaction

It is not just the wide scope of his science-faith interaction which demands recognition, but, and even more importantly, the effectiveness and creativity of its implementation. His anthropology provides a healthy counterbalance in contemporary theological anthropology by pushing back of its (sometimes too) physicalist tendencies (3:235, 3:328–32). He recognizes that too much physicalism might help the theologian to forge alliance with the majority worldview in the science community, but, at the same time, she loses the opportunity for “mutual critical dialogue” (3:342).²⁵ It also could be counterproductive when it comes to interfaith dialogue. He does not only make it clear that scientific reductionism is not an option for Christian theology but also effectively defends his notions against it. For example, he rightly points out that the reductionist approach to neuroscience, or genetic determinism takes away the possibility of free will (3:350). Yet, instead of just pushing back against such notions he recognizes the “two-naturedness” of human beings (both determined and free).

4.2 Re-definition of the Meaning of “Soul”

He does not consider it “wise, let alone necessary, to leave behind the ancient term ‘soul,’ even if traditional dualism is let go” (3:345). He gives several reasons for his assessment: (1) the theologians’ work is not to eliminate, but “to help the faithful to grasp its redefinition, as they have for many other terms whose meaning have changed” (3:345); (2) it is “so widely and frequently used in the biblical canon—and consequently everywhere in Christian tradition—that its dismissal seems to be

25 With reference to Philip Clayton.

totally unfounded and counterproductive as it may cause the rejection of the proposal itself without further investigation” (3:346); (3) it would seriously hinder interreligious dialogue (3:345); and lastly, (4) it is not the term itself to be blamed for causing certain kinds of ills in Christian tradition, but its misuse (3:345).²⁶ As we already saw above, instead of trying to define the ontological base for the soul or spirit of humans he talks about the meaning of the soul as a complex information-bearing pattern.

4.3 Christology

Multidimensional Monism opens new possibilities for a twenty-first century reinterpretation of Chalcedonian Christology. I mentioned above how the personal unity of the Logos with Jesus of Nazareth can be established in this context. Moreover, Jesus’ sinlessness means that he lived in an unbroken dynamic relationship with the Father through the Spirit. Another possibility is about the “perfection” of the God-man. How can a perfect being “develop” (Luke 2:40) or being thirsty or tired (John 4:6–7)? A dynamic, “unfolding” perspective of human nature, which is based on *theosis* and the *imago Dei* principles, Jesus Christ was perfect because he lived out this dynamic role in perfect accordance with the eternal will of the Father in every aspect. This living, dynamic perfection only can be evaluated from the future, from eschaton, which makes the eschatological relevance of the resurrection even more powerful.

4.4 All-embracing Humanity

Since the most basic tenet about humanity is our relatedness to God as *imagines Dei*, everybody (even the physically or mentally disabled)

26 Physicalists routinely accuse dualists with gnostic tendencies. There are several claims in this line of argument (e.g., diminishing the role of the physicality of human existence, thus encouraging an unhealthy relation to the body; emphasizing individuality over collectivity; one-sided focus on the “afterlife” which leads to negligence of the issues regarding to everyday life, etc.).

bears the image. It is this relation, established and depending on the Creator, which secures the dignity of all human life (3:285). Kärkkäinen also makes it clear that it does not mean that Christian theology should not support human attempts to establish and protect human dignity. Following this principle, racism, for example, is a threefold sin. It is a sin against another human being, it denies the permanent value of the Creator's work of humanity, and divides humanity. Being faithful to his trinitarian approach he says that "[d]iversifying unity, loving and accepting embrace of the other, and peace are ontologically founded in the triune God" (3:454). A page later he adds: "Acting on the basis of hospitality rather than violence, Christians should therefore be guided by the spirit of openness, inclusion, and welcoming the other" (3:455). These are very apprehending notions, but they seem to be a rather utopian, and thus somewhat unrealistic. With this note, I turn to some of the perceived liabilities of Kärkkäinen's anthropology.

4.5 Monism or Something Else?

Kärkkäinen insists that his notion of human nature is a strongly monist one. Yet it is neither idealist nor merely physicalist. On the one hand, he puts much emphasis on the physical or bodily dimension of human existence, but on the other, he claims that a truly Christian anthropology must embrace the spiritual dimension(s) of existence. He thinks that "any authentic physicalism ultimately leads to 'ontological physicalism,' according to which all there is physical" (3:341). He refrains the classic idea of "inner life" as an experience of God in the social dimension of the self and the personal experience of sociality and not as a mystical experience (3:292).²⁷ He also maintains that it is the unparalleled complexity of the human brain that allows us to do certain thing which only make sense "in terms of activities that transcend matter" (3:256). Following Nancey Murphy and Warren Brown, he describes the brain

27 Referring to Moltmann.

as “a nested, hierarchic action loop in constant interaction with the surroundings” (3:256). These abilities are “responsible” for all openness toward the future and beyond the physical. Thus, human intelligence is not determined by genes, but developed in the “complex interaction of genetic, psychological, cultural factors” (3:254). His strong emphasis on the notion of emergence also fits into the nonreductionist agenda. Still, other times he warns against a too strong physicalism. It seems that the only thing we can safely say about his attempt to find a “radical middle” is that there is only one kind of stuff that underlines human existence. What is this stuff? He does not (cannot?) say. But maybe it is more important for him to affirm that this stuff becomes human not on its own capacity, but because its manifold relatedness to the manifold God. A related question is how the “information bearing pattern” (i.e., the redefined “soul”) is related to this stuff? Or is it the stuff itself?

4.6 Distorted View of Greco-Roman Anthropology

One of the advantages of Kärkkäinen’s methodology, which marks all of his volumes, is that he always provides a careful historical background for his topics. His anthropology is not an exception. However, here (following Pannenberg and mostly nonreductive physicalist scholars) he somewhat oversimplifies the process of how “dualism” won the day in early Christian anthropology. This view communicates that Christian theology was “corrupted” by the “mainstream” Neoplatonist dualism of the Greco-Roman world. However, more recent scholarship pushes back against this notion. First, it seems that what is called “Neoplatonism” today was much more a harmonization of Platonist-Aristotelian philosophy.²⁸ Second, while it distinguished itself with its dualist ontology it was far from being the only anthropological option of the time.²⁹ What made

28 Phillip Cary, *Augustine’s Invention of the Inner Self: The Legacy of a Christian Platonist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 22. Also in Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 84.

29 Recent publications on the issue are: Paul L. Gavrilyuk, “The Incorporeality of

“dualism” commonplace in Western thought was the fact that the late Church Fathers choose this view as the base of their anthropology, and later, as Christianity became the leading intellectual force of Western thought, so did its preferred dualism.

These final remarks are by no means intend to lessen the merits of Kärkkäinen’s anthropological achievement. They are only attempting to point towards additional “dimensions” in the manifold life of human existence. As stated in my subtitle, I regard Multidimensional Monism as a new framework for theological anthropology, and very much looking forward how it is going to be utilized in future theological initiatives. I make the claim that there is no parallel to Kärkkäinen’s anthropological enterprise in contemporary theological anthropology. Although he confesses that for many years he did not feel competent to “handle” creation and anthropology (3:465) the scope and creativity of his work proves his competence.

the Soul in Patristic Thought” in R. Keith Loftin and Joshua R. Farris, eds., *Christian Physicalism?: Philosophical Theological Criticisms* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018) and Paul L. Williamson, *Death and the Afterlife: Biblical Perspectives on the Ultimate Questions*, vol. 44 in *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (London: InterVarsity Press, 2018).

Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics
Reviews

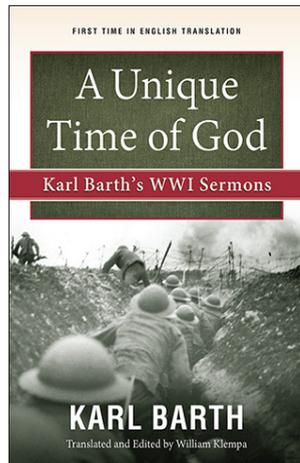


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Book Reviews

Karl Barth.
*A Unique Time of God: Karl Barth's
WWI Sermons.*
Translated and edited by
William Klempa
Louisville: Westminster John
Knox Press, 2016.
224 pages. \$35.00 ISBN:
9780664262662.

Reviewed by, Daniel L. Stevenson, Jr.,
Fuller Theological Seminary



Before Karl Barth was the most prolific writer of the 20th century he was a pastor and preacher to a small reformed church in the quaint village of Safenville, Switzerland. Preaching and the theology of preaching is a foundation of Barth's later theological work, particularly the *Church Dogmatics* and his lectures translated as *Homiletics*. While publishing these works, Barth put forth his own sermons to the English-speaking world. With preaching as such a

hallmark of Barth's theological journey, seeing it as a necessity to the church, it is a wonder why there are so few works focused on Barth's homiletics and practice of preaching or so few collections of his sermons in English.

William Kempla's curation, *A Unique Time of God: Karl Barth's WWI Sermons*, will prove itself to be a timeless and valuable resource in understanding early Barth, both as a theological preacher and political commentator.

A Unique Time of God is divided into two sections. The first is Kempla's beneficial introduction of Karl Barth's influences from birth until the outbreak of the Great War in 1914. Kempla places emphasis on Barth's pastorate in Safenville, particularly his engagement with the union movement, his early break with Liberal Protestantism, and the general historical and cultural situation in Europe pre-1914. Kempla's thesis counters previous notions that WWI was the sudden turn for Karl Barth and his relationship with Liberal Protestantism. While the Great War certainly had a dramatic impact on Barth and others at the turn of the century, it should not be seen Barth's Pauline-like repentance from liberalism. Rather, Barth experienced a gradual turn which started years before WWI, with his work within the social fabric in Safenville, and developed during the course of the Great War. Kempla's introduction sets us up to see Barth as a social and theological preacher who is struggling, with a Bible in one hand and a newspaper in the other, to say something and allow the Word of God to speak anew in a war-torn Europe; a Europe thoroughly Christianized, yet deaf to the Word of God.

The second half of *A Unique Time of God* consists of Barth's sermons previously unpublished in English. Unlike the collection of sermons Barth published in English during his lifetime, these thirteen sermons are sequential. They begin the week before the Great War commences on August 1, 1914 and end on Reformation Sunday, November 1, 1914. If one is looking for an example of Barth's sermons that follows his advice and teachings in *Homiletics*, they will be hard-pressed to find them here.

The sermons reveal a Barth baptized in Liberal Protestant theology and homiletical practices, yet confronted with the atrocious Great War, which cost not only young men their lives, but also the reputations of notable theologians, including Barth's teachers, Hermann and Harnack. As fear and anxiety grip his congregation, we see a Barth guiding them towards a renewed understanding of God's 'otherness'. He thoroughly rejects the modernist packaging of God as the god of *Deutschland*, the god of militarism, or the god of comfort, and delivers to them the Creator God, the God of peace, the God of forgiveness by way of repentance. He takes headlines from the local newspapers and speaking to both comfort the congregation (that God is near) and to challenge the congregation (that God is near). These sermons indeed invite preachers today to reflect on what it means to preach during a time of crisis.

Kempla provides helpful footnotes regarding pertinent and relevant historical information Barth's congregation would have been well aware of. Included is a timeline providing each week's major events, the sermon's text and theme, and Barth's simultaneous literary activity. Having this necessary information assists us to understand the fear and void the congregation fears and the impact of Barth's continuous reminder that "We belong to God, God does not abandon us to sin or guilt."

Kempla tasked himself "to explore these sermons' themes of... irregular dogmatics, noting where Barth retains elements of his liberal teachings...and where he has shed some of his liberal presuppositions." His introduction sets us up to engage and interact with Barth's preaching in its cultural and historical context. He provides us with a well translated and well noted work that does just that, bringing to light a "Barth in Transition," a Barth turning from trust in culture of humanity, one obsessed with militarism and power, to a Barth who only places faith in the God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. *A Unique Time of God* is a necessary addition to anyone wanting to know early Barth and will prove itself worthy to stand next to other volumes of Barth's preaching.

The strength of Klempla's methodology is its unique successive

nature. Unlike any other collection of Barth's sermons, Barth can be seen addressing the same congregation week after week. This allows one to see how Barth carries his themes from week over week, how in a short period he can both comfort and challenge the same congregation, while allowing God to remain unchanged during this tumultuous time. By the same token, Klempa's choice of 13 successive sermons hinders an English reader's ability to gauge just how much Barth had changed during the course of the war. If there are going to be any critiques made concerning Klempa's curation it is that it does not cover enough of Barth's sermons. Perhaps this would be suggested for another collection in the near future.

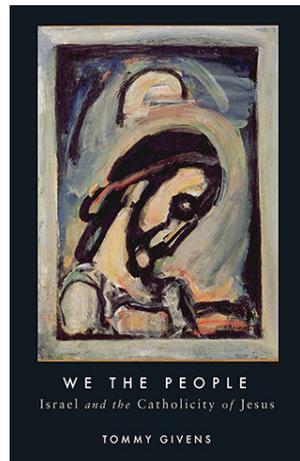
Klempa's translation of some of Barth's earliest sermons is a positive step forward towards understanding Barth as a preacher and for considering preaching place not only in engaging with the reality of God, but political realities and situations. This work causes preachers to consider how the sermon functions to reorient the church towards a posture to engage crises.

Tommy Givens.
*We the People: Israel and the
Catholicity of Jesus*
Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press,
2014.
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978-1-4514-7203-5.

Reviewed by, Esteban Miranda,
Fuller Theological Seminary

Before earning his ThD from Duke University in 2012, Dr. Givens served as

missionary in Spain for several years teaching courses in Theology at Centro Teológico Al-Ándalus. Currently, he is Associate Professor of New Testament Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary, also teaching



Christian Ethics and nonviolence. Dr. Givens is a member of the Society of Christian Ethics, Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana, and the Society of Scriptural Reasoning. *We the People* is the product of the research done toward Givens' doctoral dissertation, research that continued after earning his ThD.

The book seeks to answer one question, which becomes the fulcrum of Givens' work: What does it mean to be the people of God? This raises a second question of almost equal importance: How does the election of Israel as the people of God determine what it means to be Christian? (20) The author understands that these questions cannot be addressed without a clear definition of "peoplehood" and its relationship to God's election of a people. Through the years religion and politics have become two completely different spheres in which the Christian life is lived, nevertheless Givens explains that John Howard Yoder debunks such paradigm by proposing that to be Christian is to be called to follow Jesus politically as a people (4). Givens explains that the modern idea of peoplehood promotes that "the people has the ability to decide who is and who is not the people." (7) However, Yoder's understanding proposes that the peoplehood of Christians is not ruled by the norms or "general currents of wherever it lives" but by a partnership with Jesus, embracing his Jewishness. (34)

Givens develops his first two chapters introducing and critiquing Yoder's understanding of the politics of the Christian life and the effect this had in how the church viewed and acted toward the Jewish people and their story. According to Givens, Yoder proposes that if Christians are to read Jesus in a more theological and historically sensitive way they must embrace Jesus' Jewishness and the political struggle being Jewish meant during his lifetime. (23) Jesus' pacifism was not a novelty but rather

a reflection of Jewish pacifism. With Yoder again, Givens states that when using violence to protect peoplehood is justified, Jesus responds not with a politics that avoids peoplehood, but to the peoplehood of violence Jesus responds with a peoplehood of his own, of his people. (24)

The answer to the fulcrum question Givens responds, “The people of Israel progressively embodied the ethos whereby God brings peace to the world and faithful Christianity has never ceased to be Israel. God has never abandoned the historical process and Jesus came to fulfill it. There is no faithful Christianity without this process.” (70) This statement raises a key question, “What can history tell us about what it is to be the people of Israel, or to be Christian?” (74) Pursuing an answer to this question, Givens provides us with a sincere critique of Yoder’s eagerness to decide how and why Israel is the people of God. Yoder understood the need to address the issues of the church’s past but saw the Christian-Jewish schism as a more urgent matter, because to him this schism had significant influence in the development of Christianity’s self-understanding, away from Judaism. (80) Yoder insisted that Christianity must not forget that Israel is the people of God and that that is not negotiable, nor changeable. But Givens questions Yoder’s lack of addressing God’s election of Israel as his people. To Yoder Israel remained as the people of God based on their faithfulness. If God elected Israel, Givens proposes, then Yoder’s theory cannot stand, since being his people would have been God’s choice and not Israel’s commitment to abide by his commands. (88) Givens poignantly defines Yoder’s approach to describing the “true” people of God as remaining “captive to the modern discourse of peoplehood” (111) the very discourse he is trying to subvert.

Chapter three continues the discussion. The modern account of peoplehood is what Yoder and others had fought against. Nevertheless, by placing peoplehood as a people’s self-definition, and by making it their

choice to become God's people, it becomes a vicious cycle fueled by man-made ideas of identity. Givens redirects the readers' attention from Yoder to Étienne Balibar who helps dissect the history of the modern concept of peoplehood and its violent roots. Givens writes, "Under the emerging and colonizing powers of the modern West, to be a people-to belong to a people-was to be not Jewish. In some cases it would come to mean the eradication of Jewishness." (133).

Givens turns to Karl Barth in chapter four, which aims to "substantiate and develop" the understanding of the people of God as elect and not as being people of their choosing, in response to the supersessionist people of modernity, "whose theologically derived racism and nationalism have been the source of such diabolical violence." (178) The author shows his affinity with Barth sharing the idea that God's election of Israel is irrevocable and thus Christianity cannot tear Jewish flesh away from the people of God, so as to retain a "pure" or "spiritual" constituency. (228)

Nevertheless, Givens finds in Barth the same dead-end as in Yoder. He sees Barth's accounts of God's election of the people as eclipsed by the "formal categories of his Christology." (231) There is a whole history of a people which was elected by God, a history that cannot be ignored or encased in theological terminology. Givens emphatically states, "Thus, by God's election the people is not determined by the way it lives in time, but by the time in which it lives." (282) The author ends chapter five by providing a more theologically refined answer to the second question at the core of the book's argument. Givens proposes that to be a Christian is to be adopted by the God of Israel into the community of the elected people of God. (294)

The book ends with chapters six and seven developing a careful exegesis of the book of Matthew and Paul's letter to the Romans. Givens sees the result of his work through the first gospel as opposing Yoder's idea

of what it is to be people of God. Matthew shows that the people of God is not marked by the difference between faithfulness and unfaithfulness, but rather the people of God are those whom God has formed by election over time.” (341) Likewise, in his exegesis of Romans 9-11, Givens argues that Paul is not, at any moment speaking in terms of ethnicity, or an ethnic Israel of any sort. (407) He explains that all the apostle is doing is telling the story of the elect people of God in the flesh and in the promise. (409)

Givens concludes his book reflecting on the need for repentance for pretending to decide who is the true people of God, and all that implies. Such an arrogant attitude has only served to divide, not only the Christian church, but humanity at large. He invites the readers to read the Bible -more carefully, as to tell the gospel as a story of solidarity and not of oppression. (418).

In *We the People: Israel and the Catholicity of Jesus*, the challenge Givens proposes from the very beginning is surprisingly easy to follow throughout the book, and clearly defined in the end. The answers to the questions at the core of Givens’ work are carefully developed from chapter to chapter. Givens accomplishes this by not losing sight of the issues at hand and by repeatedly addressing what it is to be the people of God (7, 10, 20, 86, 93, 110, 115, 120, 122, 173, 177, 210, 234, 401). This is relevant if we are to consider the complexity of the task, the dense theoretical framework, the grade of difficulty to decipher the main sources utilized (Yoder, Barth, Balibar), and the size of the book. Givens does an outstanding job resisting the temptation to be sidetracked by other equally challenging issues. By doing this he allows the reader to follow along without feeling intimidated by the vast amount of philosophical, theological, and theoretical terminology.

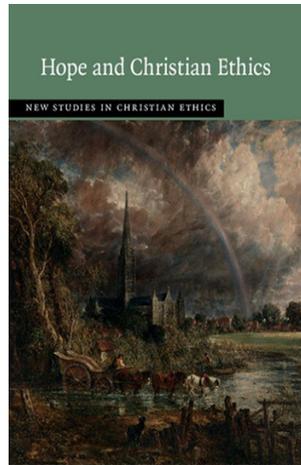
Givens accomplishes his goal, although noticeably laboriously, with ease by stating his agenda with clarity from the opening chapters. Israel is

the people God elected as his people. Israel did not do anything to deserve it, God chose them. To be a Christian is to be part of the elected people of God by “adoption” through Jesus. Nevertheless, Givens’ argument falls in the same trap he claims Yoder and Barth did, that is to define who is the people of God while not mentioning key factors in the election history of Israel. Givens proposes Jesus’ pacifism as “the political continuation—the fulfillment—of what had long characterized Israel in exile.” (64) Yet, Israel’s election as the people of God is filled with language of justified violence, such as Deuteronomy 7:1-2. Givens does not address God-sanctioned or God-performed violence against other nations for the sake of his people. A brief survey of Old Testament ethics on the dynamics between Israel’s election and violence would have provided the book with much-needed context. Such context would have challenged Givens’ view of pacifism and its status within the people of God but would have provided a more balanced framework.

Political theory, supersessionism, and election theology are not appealing subjects for the common reader, yet Givens succeeds at managing the complexity of the subject and the tedious language. This allows readers to engage the subject even if intimidated by the terminology. Books of this nature usually land in the hands of those who already manage the subject well; books of this nature are discussed in academic circles, and among scholars who would write more books and articles on similar topics. *We the People: Israel and the Catholicity of Jesus* may be the book that breaks that trend and opens the discussion to scholars in other fields as well as Christian leaders who struggle with the ideas Givens tackles. If supersessionism did not stay in academic circles but became part of Christian thought and culture, then Givens’ work should not stay in academic circles but become a part of a movement that changes Christian thought and culture.

David Elliot
Hope and Christian Ethics
(New Studies in Christian Ethics)
Cambridge University Press:
New York, 2017
ISBN-13: 978-1107156173

Reviewed by, Agnes Chiu, Ph.D. 趙李秀
珍博士
Assistant Professor 助理教授 / Director
of Development 拓展部主任
China Evangelical Seminary North
America 北美中華福音神學院



In the book of *Hope and Christian Ethics*, David Elliot proposes the virtue of hope as an answer to the age-old question of finding happiness while addressing the urgent contemporary problems of despair and demoralization. Elliot denotes happiness as *eudaimonia*. In the pursuit of happiness, there exists an *eudemonic* gap between what we want and what we cannot achieve. To find *eudemonia* or happiness, Elliot proposes the virtue of hope which leads to a “good” life and contributing to social goods. Hope also prevents demoralization and despair which are caused by sloth and “presumption”. Presumption is defined by Elliot as a wrongful assumption. After rejecting attempts to bridge the gap by different philosophers and other theologians, Elliot proposes Aquinas’ hope concept which enables humans to seek after the perfect happiness and wait for its completion at the eschaton.

Elliot first makes an important distinction between natural beatitude and theological beatitude. The former is the regular type of joy rested on earthly goods and the latter is a virtuous life with God as the object of happiness. This distinction is vital in contrasting the type of happiness

sought by philosophers and utilitarianists. Aristotle, neo-Aristotelian theologians, and Utilitarianists all acknowledge and attempt to provide a solution to the *eudaimonic* gap. Elliot criticizes them to have failed because they eventually conclude that one has no choice but to forego happiness when disasters strike, focus merely on superficial earthly pleasures, or set a standard too high causing people to give up. The result is melancholy and despair. On the contrary, theological beatitude proposed by Aquinas seeks the fullest sense of God as the object of happiness on a personal level and social justice on a corporate level. While earthly pleasures can provide some satisfaction, God, as the object of our happiness, can sustain us during the pursuit. Elliot skillfully argues that the pursuit of happiness, though arduous, is still enjoyable. Happiness or beatitude thus is not limited by the temporary lack earthly goods. Therefore, theological hope avoids the pitfalls of other philosophical theories of becoming vulnerable to earthly misfortune and foregoing happiness.

Elliot then defines hope and its activities. He again distinguishes theological hope from natural hope. Natural hope refers to the regular desires for earthly goods which is linked to the subsequent chapter on worldliness. Theological hope refers to a life of virtuous pursuit. Hope as a virtue requires a lifetime of activities. It is not stagnant. Human agency is a crucial component in the pursuit of this hope virtue and the exercise of hope involves the “will” of the human agency. This volition process integrates all human’s desires and passions. It aims over a lifetime’s endurance and perseverance. The process itself is enjoyable because it seeks God and relies on God’s assistance. The ultimate happiness will not be achieved within this lifetime, but in the future eschaton. With this futuristic perspective, hope can fight against the temptation of demoralization and despair. Elliot acknowledges that “fortune” which is more appropriately referred as “misfortune”, threatens us with demoralization and despair. But theological hope sustains and helps us focus on the transcendent God and the forthcoming perfect beatitude. Thus, hope anchors on the fruition of the eschatological perfect happiness. Interestingly, this eschatological

perspective rings a similar tune of Kant's "afterlife" theory which Elliot criticizes. Kant argues that happiness can only be achieved in an afterlife in which the moral conduct during the present lifetime can be rewarded. It would have been beneficial if Elliot could further explain the difference in the two approaches in the book.

Jürgen Moltmann's theology of hope was influential in the last century. It is just appropriate for Elliot to give an assessment on Moltmann. Elliot did a good job in summarizing Moltmann's theology and pointing out its inadequacy. He first challenges Moltmann's theological orientations on the denial of God's pre-existence and insistence on God's need to work with humans. He then perceptively points out that Moltmann's concept of hope is burdened with Hegelian and Marxist's type of baggage and deflates the power of hope. Under Moltmann's concept of social reform, hope is the impetus to social reforms. Yet, those who need hope the most are the ones who are incapable to practice hope. Thus, there is a need to find an alternative which is found in Aquinas' concept of hope. Aquinas' hope concept empowers life by focusing on the final life with God and reliance on God's help throughout this life journey. Human is "*homo viator*" or "wayfarer," who is on the way but has not reached the destination of the heavenly homeland (*patria*). Indeed, Moltmann's concept of hope relies on human's work with God and the social reform envisioned is human-oriented. In contrast, Aquinas' concept of hope anchors on a humble dependence on God and the practical social reform is based on charity. The orientation of the two concepts cannot be more different.

The discussion on hope then turns to grace, specifically *auxilium* which is defined as "helping grace." Although Elliot briefly mentions other types of grace such as habitual grace, healing grace, it is *auxilium* which enables humans to hope and to endure. Elliot also devotes a section to discuss hope's relationship to faith and charity. Elliot introduces other terminologies such as "unformed faith," "unformed hope," self-love (*amor concupiscentiae*) and charity love (*amor benevolentiae*). Unfortunately, Elliot does not clearly define the terms, delineate the necessity for these

terminologies, or explain how they contribute to the discussion of hope.

In Chapter 3, Elliot discusses the Rejoicing Action of Hope. This section explains more fully on the meaning of true happiness with a focus on its connection with God. Elliot refers the desire of the perfect or ideal happiness as *desiderium*. This desire causes humans to trust in God's grace and with hope, humans can confidently look forward to the perfect beatitude and the lasting grace. Through a lack of earthly materials, humans are reminded that the ideal happiness is yet to come, and the need of material goods stimulates people to hope. Again, hope requires "*considerio*" which is the exercise of hope.

The most succulent section of the book is Chapter Four on "Presumption and Moral Reform." In this chapter, Elliot discusses the vices of despair and presumption. Elliot accurately points out today's problems of indifference. Sloth and acedia which is bitterness lead to despair. Humans no longer desire fellowship with God but resent the costly demand of discipleship. Instead, they are content with mediocrity. "Presumption" is defined as "a bloated likeness or parody of hope." Complacency and downplay of the need for God's grace are serious problems among Christians. Elliot rejects Jeffrey Stout's "Emersonian piety" which is grounded on self-reliance and self-sufficient presumption. Per Elliot, Stout secularizes the virtue of hope and replaces hope in God with self-reliance. This complacent presumption contradicts the Christian concept of grace. It is superfluous, unworthy and pathological. On the opposite extreme, there are those who lean too much on grace. Elliot insightfully cites Aquinas' "glory without merits" analysis. This "glory without merits" presumption assumes forgiveness without repentance. Christians with this view leans on God's mercy and shirks accountability and moral work. This type of hope is false hope. They treat hope as a bribe for rewards in the afterlife. Even worse, sometimes complacency leads to apathy for those who are suffering. To counter such apathy, charity is crucial.

In chapter 5, Elliot discusses despair and consolation. This chapter is an elaboration of the earlier discussion on humans' vulnerability to

demoralization and despair due to misfortune and trials. Elliot cautions the need to be sensitive to those who suffer from earthly pains. Hope which anchors on the perfect beatitude to come, motivates humans to overcome the imperfections in this life. Citing Aquinas' correspondence of the seven fruits of the Holy Spirit to the final beatitude, Elliot points to the "poverty in spirit" as the fruit corresponding to hope. Yet, before giving a more in-depth discussion on this collaboration, Elliot turns the discussion to Bowlin's Stoic hope which he rejects as risking in falling into self-blame. The discussion on Stoic hope resembles points made earlier in the book.

The promising section on the Holy Spirit's fruits and hope occurs in the final two chapters. Elliot refers to the dual citizenship of this world and of heaven. He defines worldliness as an excessive attachment to external earthly goods. Here, Elliot injects more terms such as "*ge*", "*kosmos*", and "*aion*" but the connection between these term and theological hope is a bit unclear. The discussion on the "blessed are the poor in spirit" finally occurs in the latter part of the chapter. The brief discussion makes a brilliant argument that being "poor in spirit" provides a correct recognition of human conditions being vulnerable, limited, needy and dependent on God. This connection ties the entire discussion back to the humility and dependence on God. (p. 172) This poverty frees humans from the vice of worldliness. Regrettably, the discussion is surprisingly short and brief, leaving readers to desire more elaboration.

Hope is threatened by worldliness. Elliot briefly points out that worldliness leads to greed which prevents humility, a pre-requisite to theological hope. In fact, worldliness is a stumbling block to the entire Christian walk. It would have been better if Elliot had elaborated more on this threat particularly as to hope. Thus, the connection between hope and "poverty in spirit" could have been a lot fuller. As humans are citizens of society, they are called to labor for the common good and appreciate their community. Hope enables the beatific vision which is to be consummated in the eschaton. In the meantime, hope helps us believe that situation

can get better, but not necessary will get better during this lifetime. Thus, hope provides concrete and practical assistance to overcome despair and melancholy.

In summary, this book provides a good exposition on hope in its analysis of today's problems with complacency and self-reliance. Hope is a virtue that requires a life time of activities. The eschatological perspective is also important. Yet, the book tries to address too many issues and utilizes too many terminologies. At times, the connection between these terms and the hope discussion is unclear. Overall, the discussion on hope as a virtue is instructive and is much needed.

Barna Group,
*Barna Trends 2018:
What's New and What's Next
at the Intersection of Faith and
Culture.*
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
2017.

Reviewed by, Joyce del Rosario,
Fuller Theological Seminary, PhD
Candidate

Barna Trends 2018 is a sociological glimpse of the thoughts of Americans, analyzed through a Christian lens that leans toward Evangelical. It is a survey of what the respondents think about in three general categories of culture, life and faith. The section on culture includes a look at media, politics, and perspectives. The Life section includes vocation and education, habits, relationships, and community. The last section is Faith and it covers practices, church, beliefs, leadership, global religion, and then ends on the State of the Church in 2018.



These are wide topics that span the church, community, family life, and national concerns.

The look and the feel of the book is designed in a way that welcomes readers who may not often find themselves reading social research data. However, this is not an esoteric, data-heavy book of percentages and graphs. This is meant to be used by a wider audience of readers. The layout and content are designed to tell a larger story beyond the numbers. Sprinkled within the statistics and infographs are stories and narratives from ministers, professors, and other church leaders such as Latasha Morrison, John Perkins and Andy Crouch. Their thoughts and pictures remind the reader that the trends are made up of individuals and that the numbers represented have human implications behind them and humans who respond to these trends in their own contexts.

The Barna Group's mission is to provide information for who they call "spiritual influencers" with knowledge of the trends happening amongst Christians in the U.S. The term "spiritual influencers" evokes the social media term "social influencers", indicating someone with a large social media following and the ability to shape their thoughts and presumably purchasing habits. In the case of Barna, it seems that "spiritual influencers" indicates church leaders who may be pastors, but could also be small group leaders, Sunday school teachers, youth pastors, professors or other people in similar teaching or leading positions. It also serves as a macro-level survey for those considering church planting. Church planters and start-up organizations could use the national data as a source of comparison to local community findings. It is a book with soundbites of thoughts and opinions, meant to provoke conversations around the topics at hand.

As with other statistical data, the temptation might be to search for data that supports something the reader has already formed an opinion around. Barna Trends may be helpful in this situation, however it can also be useful in contemplating the larger social issues that the study represents. For instance, in the opinions around President Trump, it might be helpful to look at the data from new perspectives that involve deeper questions

around what it means to be evangelical or white or a person of color, rather than simply plugging in statistics that support political party line rhetoric. The methodology used for gathering data strove to be diverse and balanced in its reporting. If the reader can trust the methods used for this study, then using the book's analysis as a tool to ask questions behind the questions might be one approach for how to use this book in creative and conversation generating ways.

The study is a survey of what people think about things. This is different from other kinds statistical data. For instance, there is a survey about what people think about police brutality. This is distinctly different from statistics about the number of incidents related to police brutality. The methodology for gathering data is just as important as the methodology in which the data is used. There is a fine line between discussing what people think about an issue and discussing the issue itself. The book lends itself to laying the groundwork for discussions and thoughts about the issues themselves because the statistics gathered are people's opinions about the topics. Small groups discussing current events or social issues can use the polls as starter points.

Barna does some of this work for the reader by taking their data a little deeper. For example, the Editor in Chief, Roxanne Stone, takes the data on women in leadership (73) and pushes the conversation toward an examination of not only Evangelicals, but all Americans and their views on gender parity. The book also has Q&A sections where Church thinkers (pastors, practitioners, professors) take the Barna data and weave them into practical thoughts on what that means for the church. In one of these Q&A sections, Sharon Galgay Ketcham, associate professor of theology and Christian ministries, shares her thoughts on the data about what parents of teens are concerned about today. In another Q&A, Mark DeYmaz, founding pastor of Mosaic church in Arkansas, shares his thoughts on multicultural ministry as a gospel mandate.

The topics of multiculturalism, tribalism, race relations, and immigration are all represented in this book, but it still seems like more

could be said in further volumes or studies about each topic individually, given the national rhetoric around these issues. It leaves the reader wanting more information, which may be a part of the function of the way the data is presented. For some of the topics, there are pages that direct the reader to further studies online at the Barna website.

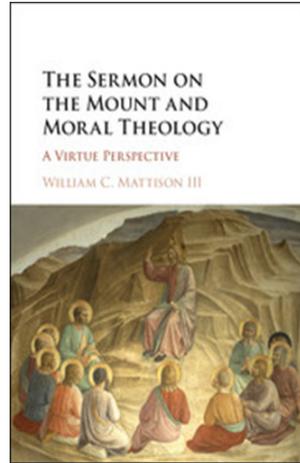
Another area that could use more focus in the coming editions could be a look at the widening gap between the two-party political system in the U.S. and the effects of that gap between evangelical and progressive churches. Research in the area of the political divides and the correlation among American church people might help bring better understanding across the party lines.

The book is similar to other social science research such as the studies done by Pew Research Institute, but the Barna Trends books seems to be packaged in a way that most church laypeople and clergy can use in a compact, all-in-one, and readily accessible way. The statistics are shaped within narratives and packaged into brief bites of useful information.

Barna Trends provides information for today's spiritual influencers, but also serves as a time-capsule because of its focus on current events and trends. Years from now, a reader will be able to see a sample picture of the political and cultural climate in the United States in 2018. While the book is situated in a particular time frame, its use spans past, present, and future. The book helps future researchers understand the climate of 2018 when looking to the past, helps the church consider the issues the church faces in the present, and informs church leaders to cast visions for the future.

Mattison III, William C.
*The Sermon on the Mount
 and Moral Theology:
 A Virtue Perspective.*
 Cambridge:
 Cambridge University Press.
 2017
 978-1-107-17148 vii-279
 including indices.

Reviewed by, Stephen M. Vantassel,
 King's Evangelical Divinity School



Dr. Mattison is Associate Professor of Theology at the University of Notre Dame (Back cover). His research centers on ethics, particularly those of Aquinas. So, it should come as little surprise to know that Mattison investigates the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) from the perspective of the seven cardinal virtues.

He begins by discussing the goals and methodology for the work. Mattison believes that the centrality of the Sermon on the Mount (SoM) for grounding Christian ethical thinking needs to be restored (p.1). Interestingly, his secondary goal is to demonstrate that virtue-based ethics is not only compatible with Scripture but also reveals connections between the SoM and ethics in general. His method for showing this is quite simple. Rather than delve into the intricacies of exegesis, Mattison summarizes the interpretations of Church Fathers and contemporary theologians to reveal how earlier Christian thought on SoM accords with a virtue ethics perspective. In this regard, Mattison unashamedly writes from a Christian, specifically Roman Catholic, faith-based perspective. Mattison's faith should not be understood as an abrogation of profound intellectual thought, as the book amply demonstrates. Rather, Mattison's epistemological foundation

allows him to accept the authority and integrity of the Scriptural material thereby avoiding the needless and often fruitless distraction of defending the source material.

In Chapter 1, Mattison begins with the Beatitudes (Matt 5:1-16). He contends that happiness is the attainment of the highest good, namely God (he uses the term Kingdom of God p.23) and that the state of blessedness is intrinsically (rather than extrinsically) connected with the eternal rewards mentioned in the section. What he means by “intrinsic” is that the actions of being merciful, or persecuted, or poor in spirit are essential actions in being happy in this life on the way to the obtaining ultimate happiness in heaven rather than simply means to the reward that cease upon the reward’s achievement which characterizes an extrinsic relationship. He then systematically works his way through each beatitude to show how they confirm his claim.

Chapter 2 engages Matthew 5:17-48 and the thorny question of how virtues relate to the law. Mattison argues that virtues meet the law’s expectations and surpass them. He spends his effort showing how the virtues of temperance and fortitude control the vices of desire and aggression. His thoughts here are extremely helpful for those struggling with how to live out Christ’s commands listed here. Where Mattison stumbled was in his discussion of supercessionism as he seemed to have forgotten the testimony of Hebrews about the status of the ceremonial law (pp. 93ff) as well as being too wedded to Catholic sacramental theology (p.113).

In Chapter 3, Mattison shows how Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18 underscore the role that intentions play in moral behavior, development of virtue and love. Using concepts of immediate goal and further goal as stand ins for intention and object, Mattison argues that while two actions may look identical from the outside, further investigation at the intentional level will show that the two actions are not identical. Thus, the reasons behind performance of an action are essential to the “goodness” of that action even if the same action done for personal reward is itself deemed good by onlookers. The connection between intention and act leads us to the

principle that how we act influences who we are in an endless spiraling reciprocal cycle.

Chapter 4 shows how Matthew 6:19-7:12 discusses the importance of ultimate ends, our relationships with others and money. The virtue grounding this section is prudence. This reviewer found Mattison's approach to be very helpful in understanding the practical implications of Christ's words, particularly in how to understand our relationship with money. In addition, Mattison correctly rebukes the modern notion that life is a series of punctuated activities rather than an integrated whole from the beginning to end (p. 166).

Chapter 5, Matthew 7:13-29, reviews the role that hope, and prudence have in the life of a follower of Christ. Mattison pays special attention to the vice of presumption as he believes this section of Scripture is meant for believers and not outsiders. He argues that the vice of presumption usually takes one of two forms. The first form is the idea that a Christian can fulfill God's requirements on his/her own efforts. The second form is that God's grace is so secure that one's behavior does not need to change (p. 225).

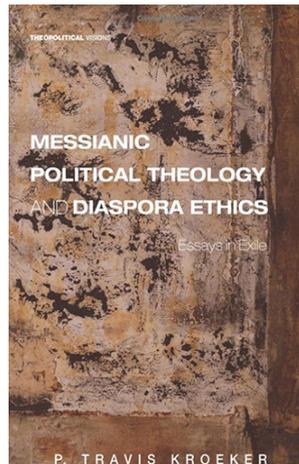
The final chapter takes up the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:7-15). Mattison contends that the seven petitions of the prayer align with the seven virtues. He openly asserts that his comments are not the last word on the subject. But he believes he has provided enough evidence to substantiate his perspective and to encourage other scholars to investigate this idea for themselves. This reviewer was fascinated with this perspective as it provides another meaningful way to unpack the riches of this most beautiful prayer.

Mattison deserves much praise for this work. First, he does a superb job showing that a virtue approach to the SoM has merit. Merit in not only showing an inner coherence to the Sermon but also a way to resolve apparent conflicts with other portions of Scripture and common sense. Mattison's methodology offers a fine demonstration that theological analysis of scripture has much to commend for itself and should be encouraged amongst bible-centered Christians. In this way, Mattison's work is a corrective to hyper-analytical exegesis that fails to account for the unity

of thought undergirding Scriptural teaching. Second, Mattison has written a work that combines intellectual rigor but one that also enriches one's faith in Christian doctrine. Repeatedly throughout the book, this reviewer found himself encouraged and strengthened in the faith. Dry theology is a moniker that does not apply to this book. Though Mattison's adherence to Roman Catholic teaching on saints and sacraments was an unfortunate example of his failure to let Scripture fully inform faith and practice, this reviewer was grateful to be challenged by a Catholic theologian who still believed in the historic teachings held by all faithful Christians. His respect for, and insight in, the sacred Scripture was a profound blessing and an experience that other readers will certainly benefit from.

P. Travis Kroeker.
*Messianic Political Theology and
Diaspora Ethics: Essays in Exile.*
Eugene, OR: Cascade Books,
2017.
pp. xi, 268, \$33.
ISBN: 978-1-62032-987-0..

Reviewed by, Aaron Perry, Associate
Professor of Pastoral Theology and
Leadership, Wesley Seminary at
Indiana Wesleyan University,
Marion, IN.



By combining over twenty years of published theological reflection, P. Travis Kroeker has produced a monograph that compiles a total of fifteen articles and essays on political theology from a Mennonite perspective. As a Professor of Religious Studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, a medical-doctoral university, Kroeker has a unique position not only to make the claims of his

book but to embody them by using the resources of the university appropriately and, though being a stranger to the world of the university, by investing in its life generously in service to his Messiah and as an act of worship to God. That's quite a mouthful, but it is a fair summary of Kroeker's claim in *Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics: Faithful Christians in service to Jesus will use the world's goods and invest in the life of the world while modeling a different way of life as a community of strangers.*

The book's title is a helpful starting point. Kroeker is after a politics formed in following the Messiah, Jesus (1). Christianity does not merge with politics; Christian faith is a politics. Moreover, it is a politics that provides normative discourse. So, there is a distinct way of living for people following Jesus. But this way of living, this politics, is not what has been called "sectarian." The follower of Christ remains concerned with the world in a way that is revealing or apocalyptic. Note the book's subtitle: "Essays in Exile." The follower of Christ is one who follows the One whose life is normative for political reflection and whose followers display the future of political life, but they also do so before the world and in secular (i.e., temporary) communities as pilgrims and exiles.

Yet Kroeker advocates that 21st c. followers of the Messiah not find an identity as exiles, but to develop a consistent life together in response to the leadership of Jesus (2). This life together is a mystical, not invisible, kind of community that witnesses to the world God's intended way of life. The church is able to use the goods of the world, but with a posture of worship to God, offering these goods back to God, and a posture of respect to the local cultures it lives alongside (76). Kroeker develops these postures by critically appropriating such surprising figures as Augustine and Nietzsche. While Kroeker is critical of Augustine's support of political authority, which allows a kind of civic ethics that are different from the ethics of one's faith (Ch. 14), Kroeker places the Mennonite tradition within an Augustinianism that affirms the church as a mystical yet visible

body. The church is in the world—including temporary communities, reflects their Christ in the world visibly, and yet remains distinct from the world. Likewise, while Kroeker is critical of Nietzsche’s genealogy of morals, he appreciates the Nietzschean critique that Christianity may deploy subtle power grabs in the guise of following a crucified Lord. Thus, all displays of the Christ in temporary communities by Christians must maintain a cruciform posture. All political acts must be acts of service because the life of Jesus is a life of service that culminates on the cross.

Perhaps I can model Kroeker’s own desire with this review: While I am not of the Mennonite tradition, I can “use” (and enjoy!) much of what Kroeker has shared and offer my own commendations and critiques in service to a kind of mutual life together under the Lordship of Christ. The strongest contribution of this work is its engagement with the pressing discussion of technology. Of course, writing and printing themselves are technologies, so it is not that Kroeker presents as anti-technology, but his discussion of the danger of technology to undermine the value of embodiedness, and the result a devaluing of vibrant community, is necessary. A close second value is Kroeker’s engagement with literature, including that of Dostoevsky and Wendell Berry, consistently throughout the book.

To strengthen this publication I would encourage two actions. First, Kroeker should update some of his previously published material by engaging the newer publications of his interlocutors. For example, Kroeker’s essay considering John Howard Yoder and Oliver O’Donovan would be better served with an updated engagement with (1) O’Donovan’s, *The Ways of Judgment* (Eerdmans, 2005), which at least tries to answer Kroeker’s question about what it means for secular authority to mediate God’s judgment, though not God’s rule (*Messianic Political Theology*, 122), and (2) “What Kind of Community is the Church” (*Ecclesiology* 3:2, 2007), which corrects Kroeker’s errant claim that “O’Donovan refuses to allow that the church constitutes a new political order or alternative society, since it serves a hidden Lord whose rule cannot yet be made visibly public”

(129). O'Donovan, in "What Kind of Community," claims that the church is a moral community marked by the sharing of material, intellectual, and spiritual goods (182), which may even be a comprehensive sharing ("like a state," 181). Related, a more careful read of O'Donovan's *Desire of the Nations* is necessary. Kroeker claims that O'Donovan believes the church needs secular authority for its mission: "But the servant [church] can only properly function within a social space presided over by the secular authority" (121). This is not O'Donovan's claim. For O'Donovan, the church is always authorized in mission by the universal reign of Christ; the secular authority, re-authorized by Christ in a limited way, *may* appropriately discharge its role by providing a social space for the church, but this provision is not *necessary* for the church: "The kingly rule of Christ is God's own rule exercised over the whole world. It is visible in the life of the church. ... The description of secular authority in the New Testament follows from the understanding that the authority of the risen Christ is present in the church's mission" (*Desire of the Nations*, 146).

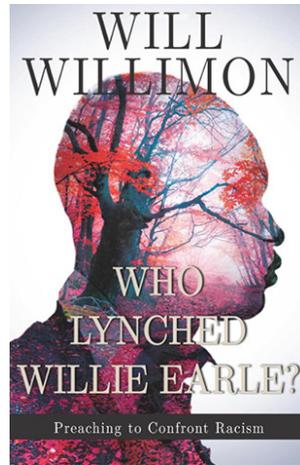
Second, an engagement with Aquinas, specifically questions 94-98 of II.I. of the *Summa Theologica*, could clarify the tension Kroeker consistently raises between church and world. The reader wonders if the world ceases to be the world if it repents and turns to the new model of life in the church, or if the world remains the context of good cultures whose languages can be learned and whose ways of life can be respected even upon repentance. Aquinas' category of *good but imperfect* might be helpful—both for cultures not yet under the confessed reign of Christ and for forms of secular authority.

Messianic Political Theology and Diaspora Ethics will be a key text for those of the Mennonite tradition who are interested in developing their own political theology or for those engaged in political theology who would like a creative, consistent voice from the Mennonite tradition published over a career of teaching and reflection. May this book be, as is its very moving chapter on Mennonite and Métis history (Ch. 12), a thick, difficult conversation about and practice of living alongside one another.

William Willimon.
*Who Lynched Willie Earle?:
Preaching to Confront Racism*
Abingdon: 2017. 138 pages.
\$17.99.

Reviewed by, Daniel L. Stevenson, Jr.
Fuller Theological Seminary,
Pasadena, California

Racism is deeply imbedded in American history and culture. To proclaim it as a Christian nation, or at least a Christian nation once upon a time, is somberly ironic as professing Christians stole Willie Earle, a fellow Christian, out of jail and killed him in February 1947.



Will Willimon's work *Who Lynched Willie Earle: Preaching to Confront Racism*, brings together the fields of history, sociology, and homiletics with the hope of encouraging white preachers to preach prophetically against the demon of racism. In an expertly crafted narrative, Willimon uses a case study approach to a 1947 sermon preached by Hawley Lynn, a young Methodist preacher, two Sundays after the infamous lynching of Willie Earle in Greenville, South Carolina. He then moves from this particular sermon towards general prophetic homiletical practices that confront the sin of racism. The first chapter of the book tells the tale of Willie Earle's murder, using eyewitness accounts, personal interviews, and court room records. The second chapter provides a brief look at Hawley Lynn's life immediately before the sermon and analyzes his sermonic preparation. The third chapter is Lynn's powerful sermon, interlaced with brief comments by Willimon. The fourth chapter provides a multifaceted assessment of Hawley's sermon, leaving the reader in awe that Hawley, a white preacher could say this sermon to a white congregation; As Willimon says, "The most remarkable aspect of Hawley's sermon...is that

it was preached... When a white preacher like Hawley Lynn...stands up and preaches on race before a white congregation, it is an act of faith that God is able” (37, 54). The fifth chapter offers a preliminary exploration into Christian prophetic rhetoric in regard to race, racial identity, racial reconciliation, and racial equality; Willimon works with the realities that “race is a fiction” and “racism is a fact” (55). This exploration includes a discussion about the creation of race and whiteness, engaging a myriad of voices. Here, one would profit from tracking footnotes closely. He stands biblical theology next to numerous, contemporary examples of violence perpetrated in the name of racism and religion, squarely putting racism as specifically a Christian problem. The sixth chapter capstones the book with specific homiletical practices to engage racism, including what White preachers can learn from Black preachers.

Who Lynched Willie Earle is a fine case study documenting how one sermon was so uniquely and boldly preached that we have much to learn from it today. Willimon crafts together detailed and diligent research in this readable and impactful, yet brief, book. The narrative Willimon tells is captivating and prompts the preacher to preach, to preach boldly, and to preach now. This book makes it clear that the same devil of racism which caused a group of Christians to murder Willie Earle is alive today. Pedagogically, homiletics instructors would do well to include this book as a standalone exemplar of prophetic preaching in their foundational homiletics course.

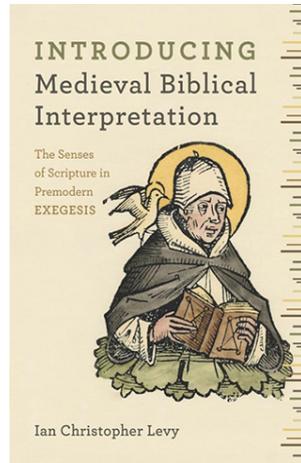
The work’s relevance is limited by the the author’s background, “older, white Southern male” from a mainline church (xiii), and his intended audience white preachers. Preachers of color may find encouragement from this work, however their homiletical practices will not benefit much. Likewise, Willimon’s exploration would only be marginally helpful for preachers who are African, Arab, Asian, or Latinx among others. To preach prophetically against racism from a different social location would yield a different set of homiletical practices than the ones described in Willimon’s final chapter (126).

Another weakness is Willimon's case study methodology. First, it limits the conversation of race to black and white. The history of racism perpetrated against other ethnicities and the manifestation of that racism is as varied as the cultures themselves. While some guidance is provided from the taxonomy provided on page 126 of what "preaching that confronts racism" is, it limits the conversations to racism that is white against black. Particularly, in a culture where racial rhetoric is especially detrimental against those from Latin America and the Middle East, additional projects are needed. The second set of limitations calls for further exploration of prophetic preaching against racism by cataloging more sermons delivered during other historical events when racism was perpetrated. While this fine work may be used as an example project, sermon examples from the additional perspectives of social location and racial issues are needed.

For now, Willimon's book breaks the silence for white preachers. Something ought to be said and it needs to be said now. Much of the majority church has too long left justice up to the American justice system or has been too afraid to talk about justice, fearing that it may be seen as too radical, liberal, or outside the Gospel. Worst, many preachers have remained silent out of privileged ignorance. Willimon awakens white consciousness to the systemic racism many do not see, yet benefit from, and calls for the white voice to preach, to preach boldly, and to preach now.

Ian Christopher Levy.
*Introducing Medieval Biblical
Interpretation:
The Senses of Scripture in
Premodern Exegesis.*
Grand Rapids, MI:
BakerAcademic, 2018.
306 pages. \$29.99. ISBN:
9780810148807.

Reviewed by, Emily Buck. Fuller
Theological Seminary



Throughout the twentieth century, and now in the twenty-first century, the growing field of the history of biblical interpretation has been gaining attention by both biblical scholars and students of history. While patristic interpretation has been a perennial interest among scholars, medieval interpretation gained recognition through Beryl Smalley's and Henri de Lubac's inaugural studies.

Ian Christopher Levy, professor of historical theology at Providence College, contributes to this field by providing an accessible overview of medieval biblical interpreters and their methods in *Introducing Medieval Biblical Interpretation*. Levy accomplishes no small task in examining interpreters spanning one-thousand years, from the patristic-era Origen to Jean Gerson in the dawn of the Reformation. Following an introduction, the book is divided into seven chapters that cover individual interpreters. An eighth chapter provides a case study by examining medieval interpretations of the papacy. The conclusion reflects on the contributions of medieval exegetical methods for the

church today. The book has a helpful index of quotations from biblical, ancient, and medieval sources, as well as an index of modern authors.

To set the stage for examining medieval interpretation, Levy's opening chapter provides key background material by providing an overview of the patristic interpreters, including Origen, Diodore, Theodore, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Cassian, Jerome, and Isidore of Seville. Levy also pays particular attention to Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* and the four senses, both of which are important for understanding medieval exegesis. For each interpreter, Levy helpfully first provides the interpreter's exegetical theory, followed by examples from their actual exegesis. Levy continues this pattern of introducing the interpreter then providing examples of their interpretation through the book.

In the second chapter, Levy introduces interpreters in the early Middle Ages. He reviews the exegesis of the Venerable Bede, Rabanus Maurus, Claude of Turin, Sedulius Scottus, Haimo of Auxerre and Heiric of Auxerre. The bulk of the chapter is devoted to Bede and Haimo. In the third chapter Levy engages the interpreters of eleventh-century cathedral schools. A few pages introduce Lanfranc of Bec, while the majority of the chapter is dedicated to Bruno the Carthusian and his commentaries on the Psalter and Pauline epistles.

Levy devotes the following three chapters to twelfth-century biblical interpretation. Chapter four examines the monastic interpretation of Benedictine monks Robert of Tomberlain, Bruno of Segni, Honorius Augustodunensis, Rupert of Deutz, and Hildegard of Bingen. Next, Levy explores the exegesis of the Cistercian monks Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St. Thierry. For each monk, Levy provides brief background material and highlights of interpretative method, then provides examples of exegesis drawn from the Song of Songs. The fifth chapter is devoted to the interpreters Hugh, Andrew, and Richard of the Victorine school, paying particular attention to their

view of history and the senses, as well as their interaction with Jewish scholars. Chapter six, covering the cathedral schools at Leon and Paris, introduces the methods and writings of four Peters – Peter Abelard, Peter Lombard, Peter Comestor, and Peter Chanter. The *Glossa Ordinaria* is also treated in this chapter.

Levy moves his discussion into the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by examining the exegesis coming out of the universities in his seventh chapter. Along with providing background material on late medieval universities, Levy introduces the major interpretative players of this era: Stephen Langton, Thomas de Chobham, Robert Grosseteste, Hugh of St Cher, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, Peter Olivi, Henry of Ghent, Nicholas of Lyra, John Wycliffe, Jean Gerson, and Paul of Sainte-Marie. In reviewing each author's biblical interpretations, Levy pays particular attention to their understanding of the senses of scripture.

In chapter eight, Levy departs from the pattern of introducing interpreters and instead turns to how a particular topic – the papacy – was variously interpreted among medieval interpreters. This helpful chapter provides a good example of diverse ways in which exegesis was applied, and how different interpreters arrived at diverse conclusions surrounding the nature of the papacy. Along with illuminating views of the papacy, Levy helpfully shows that medieval interpreters were not one monolithic block in their interpretations of Matthew 16, they exhibited a range of understandings.

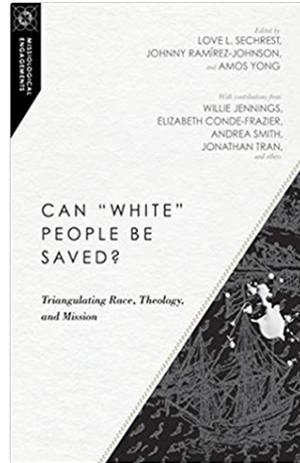
In his insightful concluding chapter, Levy takes up the questions he posed in his introductory chapter, namely in a modern world of interpretation focused on the historical-grammatical method, what role does pre-critical exegesis play? What can these medieval interpreters contribute to contemporary dialogue? Levy builds on David Steinmetz's lament that the historical-critical method's focus on the human author sacrifices the insights of medieval interpretation drawn from multiple meanings of the divine author. Evangelicals concerned

with aspects of the historical-critical method will particularly welcome this discussion. Arguing for the relevance of medieval methods for today's readers, Levy proposes Hans-Georg Gadamer as a guide. To Gadamer, readers are participants in a text's meaning, as their own experiences and views shape their reading of the text, while the text simultaneously shapes their experiences and views, fostering new understandings. Levy argues that this cyclical process finds antecedents among medieval interpreters' reading of the text. In keeping with the early church's guide of the rule of faith, today's interpreters read the text from within parameters. The framework of tradition frees the interpreter to understand the text as part of a *living* tradition. While this conclusion is helpful in providing an introductory contribution of medieval exegesis, it would have been strengthened by devoting more than five pages to the topic. A more expanded treatment of this good conclusion would be welcomed.

Overall, Levy's *Introducing Medieval Biblical Interpretation* is an excellent contribution to the fields of historical and biblical studies. Levy's study is useful to both lay and professional students of history who seek a better understanding of how various medieval interpreters approached reading the Bible. The work can also serve as a reference handbook for the scholar who desires a resource that can provide a quick refresher on a particular interpreter from the medieval era.

Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, Amos Yong (eds).
*Can White People Be Saved?
 Triangulating Race,
 Theology, and Mission
 (Missiological Engagements)*
 Inter Varsity Press, 2019. ISBN
 978-0-8308-5104-1. \$30.

Reviewed by, Dr. Craig Hendrickson,
 Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL



Can White People be Saved? While some will scoff, and others take offense at this provocative question in the title of a compilation of essays from the Fuller Missiology Lectures (2017), it would be a grave mistake to write this book off as the product liberal theologians trying to discredit the church. On the contrary, the authors provide a significant theological and theoretical contribution toward deconstructing “whiteness” from the theological and missiological enterprise. Those unfamiliar with the conversation may take this as an attack on white people, but this would misunderstand the nature of the argument being put forth. Instead, the authors explore centuries of an unholy marriage between colonialism, racism, and Christian mission, and how that marriage has normalized white values, beliefs, and practices in a church that exists within a multicultural world. This normalization, and often prioritization of white, Eurocentric values, beliefs, and practices within various organizations and institutions—in this case the evangelical church—is what the authors are seeking to highlight, and ultimately, deconstruct. Through detailed historical, critical, and theological analysis, they challenge the evangelical church to reflect more critically and theologically about the intersection of

race and racism, migration, theologizing, and mission in light of 21st century realities.

The eleven essays presented in the book are organized into five sections, with each exploring a particular aspect of the nature of race and mission in light of distinct historical and contextual realities that have, or, continue to shape the mission praxis of the church. The first section, consisting of essays by Willie Jennings and Andrea Smith, explores the topic of race and place at the dawn of modernity. Together, they suggest that the project of whiteness has been inextricably linked with Christian mission, and propose a pathway forward centered on the church revising her relationship to place and the land. In section two, Daniel Jeyaraj, and Akintunde Akinade and Clifton Clark examine the relationship between race and colonialism in India and Africa, while Elizabeth Conde-Frazier and Angel Santiago-Vendrell do the same in section three in Latin America and the Caribbean. Each essay presents a nuanced look at the impact of colonialism, race, and mission in the context being addressed, and explore possible pathways forward that give consideration to relevant contextual factors.

Section four brings the discussion to North America, with three essays exploring what it means for an evangelical church that has been so shaped by racialization and centered in whiteness to live missionally in its context. Andrew Draper, for example, explores what it would look like for white Christians to develop an anti-racist identity by de-centering white identity and entering vulnerably into uncomfortable cultural spaces. Hak Joon Lee then challenges the reader to look beyond the Black-White binary, suggesting Martin Luther King's "beloved community" as the goal of the *missio dei*, while Jonathan Tran challenges Asian American Christians to live missionally by rejecting the pursuit of whiteness, and instead living toward mutuality through dispossessive empowerment. Finally, section five includes two essays by Johnny Ramirez-Johnson and Love Sechrest that suggest an ethno-racial hermeneutic shaped by narratives in the New Testament centered on encounters with the "other." Ramirez-Johnson begins by constructing a model of intercultural communication built on

a God-centered model of anthropology based in the Genesis creation account, while Sechrest uses Jesus' interaction with the Canaanite woman in Matthew 15 to suggest that all missionary activity moving forward should be carried out in humility informed by the understanding that Christians of all races have been included into a group from which we were formerly excluded.

Overall, I find this to be an extremely timely and valuable book for those interested in exploring not just the history of colonialism and race in Christian mission, but the enduring legacy of this unholy relationship in the church's mission praxis today. While some essays are stronger than others—as is the case with most edited compilations—the overall body of work is highly beneficial in at least two ways relating to the church's mission in an increasingly intercultural and interconnected world. First, by drawing on the wisdom and insight of several scholars of color, this book provides a much needed vantage point from the margins. For far too long, white western male voices have been prioritized in theological and missiological discussions surrounding the *missio dei*, resulting in Eurocentric, and, often paternalistic views and approaches toward mission that endure even today. Collectively, these essays demonstrate the harm that many of these views and approaches have caused on communities of color around the globe, and provide a necessary corrective to the “White man's burden” that still subtly and insidiously informs a great deal of what we call urban mission today. By providing a theoretically and theologically grounded critique of white normativity within the church and the academy, they challenge white evangelical and mainline assumptions in ways that invite us toward critical and biblical reflection on our praxis. Accordingly, while this book may not fit as the primary text in a course on missiology, it will be an extremely valuable supplemental reading for professors of mission and missiologists seeking to learn from diverse voices in the field, and who wish for their students to do the same.

Second, for those of us willing to listen, these essays invite many in the white evangelical church to consider our posture in the world, especially

one that is increasingly less white and more globally interconnected. Several essays are helpful here, but Jennings' and Draper's are particularly beneficial. Jennings suggests that whiteness is not so much about color, but about providing a telos for humanity that posits European and white North American norms and standards as the ideal for all to aspire to. He then traces how this led to the enmeshment of modern colonialism and Christian mission in ways that centered whiteness in the theological enterprise, and that still endure today. With this understanding, Draper then suggests several ways to de-center white identity and instead construct an anti-racist identity that reshapes our mission praxis. In summary, he highlights the importance of learning from and submitting to the leadership of people from ethno-racial backgrounds not our own, who will introduce us to cultural and theological resources that can expand our view of God and how He is at work in the world. This requires that we immerse ourselves in places and structures where we will be learners so that we can recognize and repent from our complicity in systemic sin as we learn how to give up power and control and move toward interdependency.

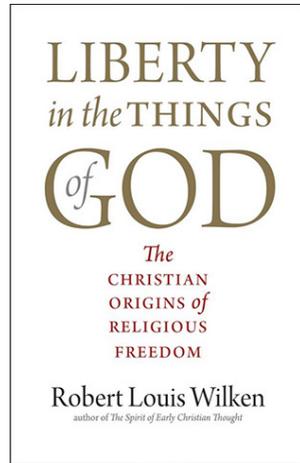
Finally, it is important to note that the message contained within the pages of this book will be incredibly challenging and difficult for many to hear, especially those of us in the white evangelical church. Because of this, we may be tempted to minimize this work in at least two distinct ways. First, we may be tempted to look around for examples where whiteness is not dominating or influencing our churches. This is a natural tendency when one is receiving criticism, especially when that criticism feels outdated or biased. And, if we look hard enough, we might certainly find instances that seem to contradict the assertions put forward in this book. We might look to the recent example of the United Methodist Church, for example, where the delegates from the Global South stopped what they perceived to be a liberalizing of the UMC by the White, Western delegates. Or, we might look at the recent rise in missionaries sent to the West from Africa or Korea as further evidence of the waning influence

of whiteness in the church. What the authors would point out, however, is that these (and possibly other) isolated instances have not yet had a sustained, significant effect on deconstructing the ideology of whiteness that is still prevalent among many theologians and missiologists in the West. Consider, for example, that the ethno-racial composition of the faculty in the majority of evangelical seminaries in the United States is still overwhelmingly White. Or, that the everyday vernacular of the majority of (white) North American and European theologians within evangelicalism still refers to African, African American, Latino, and Asian theologies as contextual theologies, and our own simply as theology. The authors would contend that this use of language and the lack of ethno-racial diversity within the evangelical scholarly community continues to normalize White Western theology, and marginalize others.

Second, many of us will be tempted to see the contents within as an attack on our race, on our churches, and maybe even on our faith. I encourage the reader to resist this temptation, however, for if we listen closely to the voices within, what we may actually hear instead is an invitation from our brothers and sisters of color. An invitation to partner with them in God's redemptive mission as co-laborers. An invitation to enter into relationships of mutuality and solidarity rather than marginalization and domination. An invitation to live into a purer form of Christian faith and mission, characterized not by the ideology of whiteness, but instead by the eschatological reality of the already and still coming Kingdom of God in all of its multicultural splendor.

Robert Louis Wilken.
*Liberty in the Things of God:
The Christian Origins
of Religious Freedom*
New Haven, CT: Yale University
Press, 2019.
pp. 236, \$26.00. ISBN 978-
0300226638.

Reviewed by Brendon Michael Norton,
Hamilton, MA



In his thoroughly researched new work, Wilken advances a thesis on the origins of religious freedom which is at odds with the received explanation. Rather than being the creation of Enlightenment thinkers rejecting the Christian religious wars of the 16th and 17th centuries, Wilken argues that religious liberty originates with Christians themselves. The building blocks of religious liberty, Wilken argues, can be traced back to the early Christian writers Tertullian and Lactantius, who advanced a constellation of ideas to argue against Roman persecution of Christians. In the following centuries, these ideas would continue to be used and refined by Christian thinkers, up to the point at which it influenced Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke.

Wilken's argument is undergirded by three historical themes. First, is the concept of conscience as an inward disposition, answerable to God, which cannot be coerced. Second, conscience carries with it a responsibility to act on its dictates, and third that the world is governed by two separate authorities, one spiritual, the other civil. In addition, Wilken aims to show that arguments for religious freedom were not focused primarily on the

individual but were construed such that communities would be able to organize and act on conscience's demands to publicly worship (2-3).

The first chapter outlines Tertullian and Lactantius' early arguments for liberty of conscience in the face of Roman persecution. Tertullian was novel in his arguments by advocating for liberty of conscience as a moral necessity based off of the correct order of nature. This moral argument was predicated upon the doctrine of the *imago dei*. Lactantius added to these arguments by noting the futility of using violence to change an inner conviction. The writings of these two theologians are cited by most of the later figures to which the reader is introduced.

Chapter 2 covers the period from the 4th century to just prior to the Reformation. In this grand sweep Wilken shows that the ideas of Tertullian and Lactantius did not fall into complete disuse in the age of Christendom. In fact, this idea of liberty of conscience was extended to provide limited protections for Jews, argue against coercing heretics, and advocate against the forced conversions of Amerindians. Here Wilken also introduces the doctrine of the two swords which was the medieval formulation of the two authorities which govern Christian life.

Chapters 3-4 introduce the Reformation and how liberty of conscience was used not only by Protestants to defend their newly embraced doctrines, but also Catholics in the face of state-sanctioned pressure to convert. Wilken notes that while both Luther and Calvin spoke of conscience and the two kingdoms or realms, both were committed to the notion of religion as the bond of society, and as such still gave room for secular power to ensure uniformity in faith. This tension between idea and practice in their thought reminds the reader that sin affects even the greatest of minds, and that ideas develop over time.

Chapters 5-6 address the post-Reformation reality that two confessions often existed in the same territory. For French thinkers such as Jean Bodin this situation meant that secular power could not coerce religious communities to adhere to the dominant faith of the country. France could and should tolerate two creeds within its borders. In the Netherlands,

liberty as a natural right, in the modern sense, was first articulated. Additionally, a number of thinkers argued that because one must act on their conscience, religious communities must be allowed to gather and perform acts of worship. Something that Wilken brings up, which is often missed in contemporary appeals to rights, is that the Dutch thinkers did not freedom of worship as an act of self-restraint on the part of government, but as something fundamental to human nature as rooted in the *imago dei*. A rights language continues to expand, Christians can look to their ancestor's arguments in ensuring that such rights are grounded in something intrinsic to our nature as humans, not simply as a prerogative of government to create.

In chapters 6-8, the Christian ideas of religious freedom underwent more change and were as the oscillating faith of the English Monarchy gave both Catholics and Protestants opportunities to further refine the inherited wisdom of their forebearers. In detailing the Separatist contribution, we see the arguments for religious liberty reach their zenith. Through the writings of individuals such as Thomas Helwys and Roger Williams, the Christian argument for religious liberty as grounded in the *imago dei*, finally and without reservation was applied not only to Christians, but Muslims, Jews, and all other religious adherents.

In his final chapter, Wilken described the intellectual milieu of John Locke and how he was influenced by contemporaries such as John Owen and William Penn, and how his views evolved to become more in line with the modern conception of religious freedom through their influence. Locke, while receiving the credit, truly stood on centuries of Christian tradition in advocating for religious liberty.

This work demonstrates that Christians have long thought deeply about issues of religious liberty. Wilken's argument is supported by copious references to primary sources and a firm grasp of the historical settings of each thinker. He is careful to distinguish between what a writer is saying in their own context, lest the reader interpret an idea or phrase according to contemporary usage.

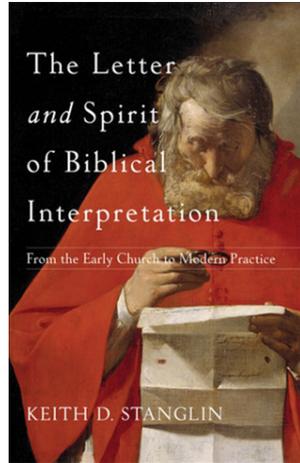
As a credit to his scholarship, Wilken does not try to whitewash the history of Christian initiated persecution. This is no hagiographical account of Christian actions, but one which seeks to show a very present, if lightly used, path of Christian thought which eventually culminated in the central value of the liberal order. This realistic approach both reminds the reader of the sinfulness even within the Christian, but also provides concrete examples of Christians who opposed the worst inclinations of the human heart. Perhaps my favorite surprise in this vein was to find that Alcuin, the great cleric to Charlemagne, challenged the king on his forced conversion of the Saxon's to Christianity. This balanced scholarship, as well as the thesis it advances, can serve an apologetic purpose in demonstrating the historical value and impact of Christian thought to an increasingly hostile culture.

In speaking to Christians, themselves, this work can help us address contemporary concerns related to pluralism by pointing us to a wealth of resources for theological retrieval. As an example, we live in a time in which the commitment of European and American Christians to religious pluralism is declining. There are many today arguing that we must reassert Christian hegemony in the public square and even restrict the entrance of certain religious groups into the country if we are to preserve our society. However, a Christian thinker such as Roger Williams attacked this very notion that religion must be the bond of society. Multiple faiths can exist in a given society, because the bond is the common safety of persons and property, not a shared religion (150-51).

It is hoped that this work can serve as a gateway to renewed arguments and applications of religious freedom, not only for Christians, but for all made in the image of God.

Keith D. Stanglin.
*The Letter and Spirit of Biblical
Interpretation:
From the Early Church to Modern
Practice.*
Grand Rapids, MI: Baker
Academic, 2018.
pp. 274, \$26.99. ISBN:
9780801049682

Reviewed by, Emily Buck. Fuller
Theological Seminary



Keith D. Stanglin, professor of Scripture and historical theology at Austin Graduate School of Theology, joins a growing field of scholars in the field of history of biblical interpretation with his book *The Letter and Spirit of Biblical Interpretation: From the Early Church to Modern Practice*. Stanglin's goal is to build on the work of David Steinmetz, in showing how the premodern exegesis of the past can inform the church today. While covering academic topics, Stanglin's work is not directed at specialists within the field, but rather is aimed at students, ministers, and scholars not well-versed in the field of the history of interpretation. As such, this book serves as a primer on the history of interpretation. At the same time, Stanglin is not only aiming to teach the history of interpreting the Bible, he also desires to set forth an alternative to the pure historical-critical method.

Stanglin admits that past voices *have* been brought to the table. For example, the recent publications of the Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, The Church's Bible, and other selections of premodern interpretation, have made the interpretations of past readers more accessible to modern readers. What is missing, Stanglin argues, is an *understanding* of these past voices.

For example, while we may be able to read the interpretations of Origen and Augustine, we may not understand *why* these theologians wrote as they did. Stanglin aims to help the reader better understand the context and mindset of premodern readers, and also to explain the reasoning behind the shift to modern exegesis.

The book is divided into two major parts. The first—and lengthiest—part of the book gives an overview of the history of exegesis, from the New Testament writings through the rise of the historical-critical method. This first half is divided into six chronological chapters, each treating biblical interpretation in a particular time era. The second part of the book examines the application for today, with a chapter diagnosing the problem, and a second chapter proposing a way forward.

After his opening introductory chapter, Stanglin's second chapter provides an overview of the earliest Christian exegesis—focusing on the New Testament, Epistle of Barnabas, Irenaeus, as well as the formation of the Christian canon. The third chapter is devoted to later patristic exegesis, with the bulk of attention paid to Origen. Here, Stanglin follows the typical Alexandria-Antioch division of interpretation, while admitting the complexities involved in each school of interpretation.

Stanglin gives an overview of medieval exegesis in the fourth chapter. He begins with Augustine, then moves on to John Cassian, Gregory the Great, Thomas Aquinas, and Nicholas of Lyra. Along with highlighting the interpretative methods of these individuals, Stanglin also examines scholasticism and the quadriga. In the fifth chapter, on early modern interpretation, Stanglin focuses on humanism, Erasmus, Luther, and Calvin, also noting the key place of the perspicuity of Scripture in the eyes of the Reformers.

In his sixth chapter, Stanglin concludes his overview of the history of interpretation, by examining the rise of historical-critical exegesis. Particular attention is paid to the abuses of spiritual interpretation, namely the problem of allegory—and how an *overreaction* to extremes of allegory is also problematic. Stanglin aims to “describe the underlying assumptions of modern exegesis to

explain how they came to be, and ultimately to contrast these assumptions with premodern exegesis.” (155-156) Stanglin accomplishes this goal by discussing the contributions of major players in the rise of historical-critical exegesis, such as Spinoza, Lessing, Jewett, Baur, Wellhausen, and Strauss. Notably absent from this list of shapers of modern-interpretation is any discussion of Friedrich Schleiermacher. Along with an overview of the key figures in the rise of the historical-critical method, Stanglin also covers the role of the Enlightenment, the division of biblical and theological studies, and a shift from the *Scriptural* Bible to the *academic* Bible. Stanglin concludes this chapter by listing principles of historical-critical exegesis, and responses to the method by conservative and postmodern approaches.

Stanglin’s shorter second half of the book moves from describing the past to prescribing a way forward. Here, Stanglin aims to show that both the premodern and modern methods in their extreme forms are incompatible, but if they are brought together with the proper controls, the two can work together. Stanglin argues that abuses and extremes of both the literal and spiritual senses should be avoided, but that neither should be dismissed. Both allegory and historical criticism should be maintained, within proper limits. In his call for retrieval exegesis, Stanglin is not calling us to replicate past methods, but instead “to learn from history” and “to take the best of the past and allow it to inform Christian faith and practice today.” (212)

In his final chapter, Stanglin closes the book with examples of his proposal at work. This aspect of the book is particularly appreciated. Stanglin does not merely set forth a theory for interpretative practice, he also gives practical examples of this theory by giving exegetical cases from Genesis 1-11, Psalm 137, Isaiah 7 and Matthew 1, and finally, a sample sermon on 1 Peter 3. In these examples, Stanglin furnishes examples of the principles of both the letter *and* the spirit at work in interpretation.

Overall, Stanglin provides an excellent introduction to the history of biblical interpretation. He also makes a strong case for ways in which to retain the best practices and impulses of past interpreters, without adopting unhelpful abuses or extremes. Stanglin’s audience is the non-specialist, and

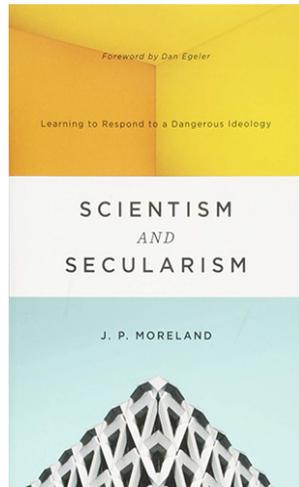
this audience will be pleased with the helpful summative sections at the end of each chapter, along with his footnoting of English translations. Evangelicals can welcome this book, particularly Stanglin's alternative to the extremes and abuses of both the historical-critical method and premodern interpreters. Particularly appreciated is Stanglin's view that the interpreter should be a person of virtue, indwelt by the Spirit, informed and regulated by the rule of faith, and that interpretation should lead a person to faith and obedience. The book also has a useful bibliography of the key primary and secondary works on the history of interpretation, as well as useful Scripture, name, and subject indexes.

This book is recommended to three groups of readers. First, those who wish to grasp a general overview of the key players, movements, and turning points in the history of interpretation. Second, those struggling to embrace certain modern principles, wondering if there are other paths. Last, those who value past readers of the Bible and wonder how they can contribute to present-day readings.

J. P. Moreland.
*Scientism and Secularism:
Learning to Respond to a
Dangerous Ideology*
Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books,
2018. pp. 224.
ISBN 978-1-4335-5690-6.

Reviewed by, Kenneth R. Marple,
Director/Founder of C2U Ministries

Dr. Moreland is a distinguished professor of Philosophy at Biola University. His research has been primarily focused on the mind and how religion/ philosophy and science interact. Having studied science as an undergraduate and philosophy at the graduate



level, Moreland has a unique perspective of relating these difficult concepts in an easy and understandable way.

Dr. Moreland opens with a brief history of how his personal interest in science formed and his life path up to his conversion to Christianity. What is interesting is how the book topic flows necessarily from the combination of his love for science and his newfound Lord. The book seeks to answer whether scientism can hold its weight when critiqued. Moreland contends, “scientism is not a doctrine of science; rather, it is a doctrine of philosophy (p. 23).”

In chapter one, Moreland defines scientism as the belief that only science provides genuine knowledge of reality. Moreland distinguishes between weak scientism, which allows for knowledge from other disciplines, and strong scientism which only accepts knowledge from science as legitimate. Chapter two brings the subject to a more pragmatic side where the layperson is focused on the intellectual impact of this philosophical system within the laity (non-science persons). Moreland argues that scientism places religious faith outside of society’s “plausibility structure.” His contention is a sharp one because as can be seen within the structure of society lies the idea that science can and will answer all things. The remainder of the chapter discusses several effects scientism has had on religious belief in general, and Christian belief specifically, with which this reviewer agrees. For example, scientism has led to more hostility towards Christianity which can be seen in how religious knowledge is regarded as personal and not objective.

Chapter three covers how this philosophical system altered the arbiter of our intellectual communities, the universities. Moreland notes there is a “fact/ value distinction” that has revised what our view of knowledge is (p. 45). Moreland bases this distinction on the view that only the hard sciences contain knowledge and all others, especially religious and ethical claims, are matters of personal feelings. The shift in our epistemological understanding has drastically affected the bounds of what mankind can truly know.

Chapter four reveals how scientism is self-refuting. Moreland points out the belief that science is the only producer of knowledge does not fulfill its own criteria of validation. There is no empirical test that can demonstrate the truthfulness of science as the only way to know. In keeping with this train of thought Moreland, in chapter five, goes over how scientism is an enemy of science. Scientism has several presuppositions that it takes as brute fact however, in order for science to show the plausibility of these presuppositions, it needs philosophy. The previous statement is something missed in the current empirically centric culture which is so pervasive today.

As mentioned previously, Moreland distinguishes between strong and weak scientism. Moreland circles back around (chapter six) to showcase why the weaker version is no better than the strong version. The main argument for this conclusion is the weak version causes the observer to only look to the authority of science (a presupposition) rather than looking at its arguments. His point is valid; however, the section could have dealt more extensively with other reasons to disregard the weak version. With that said, the few details falling under this main point do provide ample reasons for not giving the weak version much weight. Chapter seven addresses what we can know outside of science and to know with a great deal of certainty. Logic and mathematics are both forms of knowledge we can know, and Moreland properly showcases why we can know this with a great deal of certainty. Probably the most convincing points made in chapter seven are personal conscious states and moral knowledge (p. 78-80). Scientism has a difficult time showing why certain brain states do not match with conscious states. It also has a difficult time understanding ethical knowledge which cannot be known via empirical testing. The distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* truth claims are made which help show the validity of the points.

Chapter eight covers a case study which involves looking at mental and brain states. Moreland points out science has no answer for the existence of mental states. Neuroscience seeks to correlate mental and brain states,

but it cannot do so without a personal observer informing about the current mental state being experienced; an interesting fact underpinning this epistemic endeavor. In chapter nine Moreland seeks to show how science is not based on first philosophy. Essentially, it is first philosophy which grounds all other knowledge pursuits in basic and fundamental knowledge. Without a strong first philosophy, science cannot even begin. Part of the problem for scientism is it has rejected first philosophy and has sought out a different path which is part of the reason there is such a disconnect between what counts as knowledge and what does not.

Moreland, in chapter ten, provides a brief examination of the kalam cosmological argument and provides scientific evidence to support his argument. The chapter is brief but is sufficient for an introduction to the argument. Chapter eleven seeks to show how we explain things. Moreland gives a succinct presentation of how science seeks to know things and how old theories are replaced with new ones. After perusing how science seeks to know things, Moreland exposes five things science cannot in principle explain. Briefly, those things are: the origin of the universe, the origin of the fundamental laws of nature, the fine-tuning of the universe, the origin of consciousness, and the existence of moral/ rational/ or aesthetic objective laws and intrinsically valuable properties (p. 135-155). Under each of these subheadings, Moreland provides reasons for the inability of science to be able to adequately explain these things. At a basic level, these things either go beyond our ken to know through empirical investigation alone or they are things we cannot know outrightly through empirical investigation.

Chapter thirteen brings about a slight change of pace. Here, Moreland discusses naturalism, theistic evolution, and intelligent design. During the discussion, he concludes naturalism and theistic evolution fall short in being able to adequately explain how everything exists or how it fails to adequately adhere to a biblical worldview. One point made is the former two accuse the latter of the God-of-the-gaps fallacy. Moreland shows the appeal to this fallacy is false and only applies when there is something

that is not known however, for the intelligent design case, it is rather what better explains what we do know.

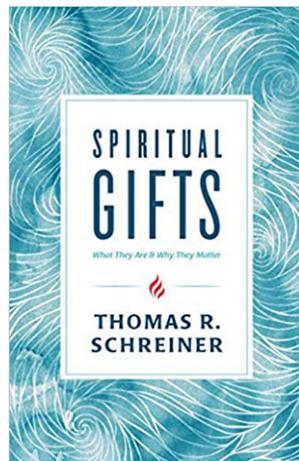
The final two chapters (fourteen and fifteen) go over the importance of integrating science and Christian belief and a plan on how to do so. There needs to be a conceptual and personal integration of science and Christian faith into a coherent whole. Moreland suggests a direct interaction model is best. In this model, everything about personal Christian faith (e.g. theology, philosophy, etc.) must meet science and its claims head-on and exchange information to form a coherent and cognitively acceptable position and view of reality. The direct interaction model suggested by Moreland is a good model to follow for it allows the Christian to see scientific knowledge as a useful tool provided by God.

Overall, the book is intended for college-aged adults to show the conflict scientism raises in the current culture. Moreland remains fully committed to the biblical worldview and provides the layperson with valuable information which can help defend against solely empirical claims. It would be a valuable asset for the current cultural climate to have a more in-depth study done on this topic so all Christians may be adequately and fully equipped to defend Christian belief and to make evangelism more effective.

Thomas R. Schreiner.
*Spiritual Gifts: What they are &
why they matter*
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Reviewed by, Mark Anderson

Thomas Schreiner is the James Harrison
Buchanan Professor of New Testament



Interpretation at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. In addition to his academic role, he pastors at Clifton Baptist Church in Louisville. He draws on both roles in tackling an issue which is central to the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements, namely the supernatural gifts of the Spirit. At the outset, Schreiner is gracious and respectful to his colleagues who hold differing views to his own, as demonstrated by his mentioning Wayne Grudem, John Piper and Sam Storms. Furthermore, he states his reluctance to write the book for concern that it might be polemical and divisive.

Schreiner's book begins with a theological sketch of Spiritual gifts, culminating in his support for a position called 'cessationism' (p.1). He defines cessationism as 'the belief that certain spiritual gifts in the New Testament – namely the more miraculous gifts – have ceased' (p.1). However, Schreiner holds to a 'kind of cessationism' suggesting a nuance with the more concise definition. He wasn't always cessationist' explaining he was a 'continuationist' due to Donald Carson's book on the subject (p.4). In eleven chapters, each with 'discussion questions', Schreiner presents a brief defence of his cessationist view.

Chapter one explores the strengths and weaknesses of the Charismatic movement with Schreiner expanding on J.I. Packer's observations in this regard. He cites seven positive strengths and ten negative weaknesses. Undoubtedly many Charismatics would argue that not all of them subscribe to such 'weaknesses'. In chapter two, Schreiner defines spiritual gifts by drawing from Romans, 1 Corinthians and Ephesians. His understanding of a 'message of wisdom' and 'message of knowledge' is insightful differing from traditional Pentecostalism and many non-Pentecostals. Chapters three and four each explore five truths about spiritual gifts encapsulating both the Scriptural and practical and encourage the reader to discover and exercise his gift.

Given the controversies around spiritual gifts, Schreiner wisely reminds the reader that God gives gifts not to divide but unite. Schreiner demonstrates

practical wisdom by exhorting readers to concentrate on their gift and to use gifts of giving, leadership and showing mercy. By concentrating on one's gift should inspire the individual to pour energy into his gift while guarding against overreactions such as declining to serve in another capacity simply because it isn't one's gift. Towards the end of the chapter, he addresses 'baptism of the Spirit' as referenced in 1 Corinthians 12:13 and other texts in Acts, and concludes that it occurs at conversion.

Chapter five addresses six pertinent questions about spiritual gifts. He tellingly remarks that 'we can't rule out the idea that someone might speak in tongues or do a miracle only once or on rare occasions' (p.89). This remark might be an academic concession, but some might see it as weakening his position. Perhaps this statement alludes to Schreiner being a 'kind of cessationist'. Chapter six asks 'What is the gift of prophecy?' while chapter seven asks if New Testament prophecy is mixed with error? This chapter is significant in that the book's premise rests on whether New Testament prophecy is for today. He argues that New Testament prophecy is not mixed with error and therefore is infallible putting it on par with Old Testament prophecy. He appeals to and challenges Wayne Grudem's interpretation of Ephesians 2:20 regarding prophecy's foundational role. For Schreiner, the test of New Testament prophecy is that it must come to pass. Citing Scriptures that call for the evaluation of prophecies, he states that the burden of proof is on those who claim that New Testament prophecy is different from Old Testament prophecy. Furthermore, he says that if New Testament prophecy is mixed with error, then it is difficult to identify false prophets.

He disagrees with continuationists regarding the revelatory component of prophecy. While continuationists understand prophecy to be the communicating of a revelation, Schreiner considers it to be the sharing of impressions (p.118). He acknowledges that 'God may speak to His people through impressions' (p.119) and admits there have been occasions when such were 'startlingly accurate' (p.119). Some might consider this remark to be a manifestation of prophecy as in 1Corinthians 14:24-25.

Schreiner devotes chapters eight and nine to the gift of tongues in Acts

and 1 Corinthians and argues that tongues here refer to human languages (p.123), while in chapter ten he considers the significance of the gift itself. In the remaining two chapters, he presents both unconvincing arguments for cessationism, and what he considers to be a convincing argument, respectively.

While his rejection of continuationism is gracious and articulate, he undoubtedly will not convince everyone. Under the subheading 'Edification through understanding', he correctly states that tongues edify if interpreted, but does not elaborate that speaking in tongues in a personal capacity also brings edification without the need for interpretation. His exegesis of 1 Corinthians 14:1-5 concludes that 'tongues are equivalent to prophecy if interpreted' (p.128). This is ambiguous and perhaps could have been expanded to demonstrate that interpreted tongues are directed towards God, whereas prophecy is directed towards man, and that it is intelligibility which constitutes the equivalence. Furthermore, his comment that tongues in Acts 2 constitute prophecy again needs clarification (p.128, 163).

Schreiner agrees with continuationists' interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:8-12. He remarks that 'if this was the only relevant text on the subject' (p.155), then he would accept that all the gifts continue until Jesus returns. The lynchpin for his case is Ephesians 2:20, where the definition of New Testament prophecy is crucial. Schreiner posits that New Testament prophecy is inerrant. He argues that if New Testament prophecy is mixed with error then it becomes hard to determine which prophets are true and which are false. In addressing this issue, Schreiner does not avoid continuationist arguments, but his interpretation of Agabus' prophecy is unconvincing. Furthermore, he equates 'new revelation' with prophecy which contradicts 1 Corinthians 14:3.

Schreiner avoids strawmen arguments and does not sidestep texts that continuationists use to counter. He achieves his intention in presenting a case for a nuanced cessationism. However, while stating that apostles and prophets are no longer functioning, he does admit that it is difficult to 'discern whether gifts like tongues, healing and miracles exist today'

(p.168), adding that his 'perspective could be mistaken' (p.171). Keener's two-volume scholarly work on miracles would reinforce the argument for miracles today. One might argue that Schreiner's interpretation of prophecy comes down to semantics (a communicated impression or revelation?). Although Schreiner is a 'kind of cessationist', he acknowledges that one can have and must not disregard 'powerful experiences of his presence' (p.30). He adds that it is possible that 'God would grant gifts of miracles, healings and signs and wonders in a cutting edge missionary situation' (p.31) reflecting nuanced cessationism.

Overall, this is a balanced and open-minded nontechnical view of a controversial subject and is a welcome addition to the debate.

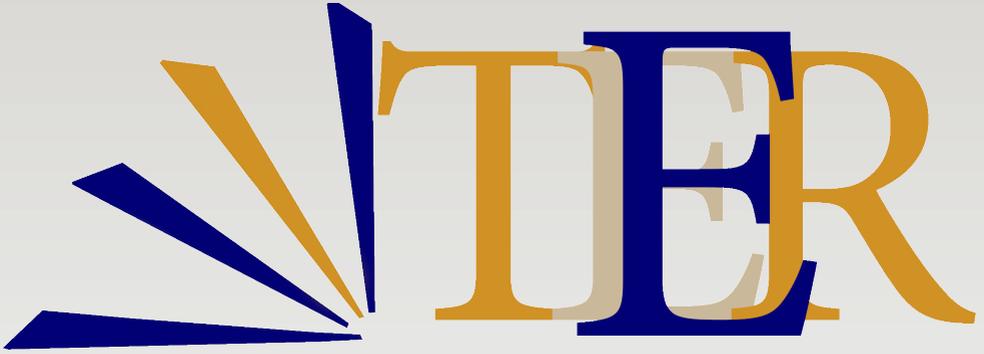
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