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of Theology and Politics

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The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics

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Edited by
Stephen M. Vantassel
& P. H. Brazier

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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.

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(Published : August 10, 2021)

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Introduction

Stephen M. Vantassel

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The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics is a peer-reviewed,

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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 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.

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





Theosis in the Thought of Herman Bavinck?: Thomas F. Torrance’s Reconstruction of the Doctrine and its Promise for Bavinck’s Theology

Dennis Greeson

KEYWORDS:

| Herman Bavinck | Thomas F. Torrance | *Theosis* |
| Nature and Grace | Union with Christ |

ABSTRACT:

Central to understanding Herman Bavinck’s creation ontology is the dictum “grace restores and perfects nature.” The second half of this, namely that God’s work of grace aims to lead creation towards its perfection, is often neglected in articulations of Bavinck’s theology. To help underscore the importance of this perfecting work, with its soteriological and eschatological dimensions, this essay proposes that there is a fundamental similarity between this element of Bavinck’s thought and the doctrine of *theosis*. To that end, this essay examines Thomas F. Torrance’s doctrine of *theosis*, as a facet of his broader trinitarian theology, to highlight that not only do Bavinck and Torrance bear some surprising similarities, but also Torrance provides language helpful to reexamine Bavinck’s eschatological anthropology in light of the category of *theosis*.

INTRODUCTION

Central to Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck’s theological system is the formula that “grace restores nature.” This is Bavinck’s shorthand for understanding the unity of the biblical narrative and drawing out its implications for understanding the Creator-creature relationship. Given the fact of sin in God’s creation, God does not abandon what he has made, but rather works throughout history to restore it. This leads Bavinck to affirm the enduring goodness of creation and God’s care for it. Additionally, because it is in the scope of God’s redemptive work through Christ, Christians too ought to be concerned with facets of life in this world, and not merely their spiritual lives or heavenly future.

However, as several authors have pointed out, to conclude that grace merely restores nature to its original integrity misses Bavinck’s emphasis on the way the economy of grace leads to a unique development of creation not otherwise possible. As Bavinck stresses, one must affirm that “grace repairs and *perfects* nature.”¹ Bavinck’s understanding of the relation of God’s work of redemption from sin to the material creation includes the notion that the cosmos from the beginning was always designed to be developed beyond its protological state into higher forms of glorification and revelation of God. Such a goal for creation was not meant to be attained by some *donum superadditum* of grace in the Roman Catholic sense. That is, through the provision of something external to nature’s ontology which serves to elevate it into something new. Rather, grace leads creation forward and upward towards its goal by working in organic relation with creation’s already-present latencies.² God does this through the economy of supernatural grace, by providing special revelation, filling human beings with his Spirit to be equipped for their task, and also in light of the fall providing redemption from sin. For Bavinck, it is the

1 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MN: Baker Academic, 2006), III:226. Emphasis added.

2 Bavinck, *RD*, III:577; cf. Sydney Jacob Hielema, “Herman Bavinck’s Eschatological Understanding of Redemption” (Th.D. Thesis, Wycliffe College, 1998), 255.

role of grace, to lead creation to its eschatological *telos*.³

As Brian Mattson argues, this has important implications for Bavinck's anthropology, and specifically his understanding of the nature of the eschatological destiny of humanity.⁴ The *imago Dei* restored in humanity by the supreme image of God, the Person of Christ, and is elevated in the eschaton through unity with Christ. Through this union between God and man, human nature in its perfected and glorified state to fulfill the functions for which God made humanity in the first place: knowing and loving God in the entirety of one's being. It is important to stress, however, that this takes place only on the basis of being united to God through spiritual participation in life, death, resurrection, and glorification of the incarnate Son.⁵ Hielema rightly recognizes the central role this union with Christ plays in Bavinck's thought. This also has important implications for Bavinck's Christology, for union with Christ purpose for which the whole creation was prepared.⁶

These themes of perfection, union with Christ, and the necessity of the incarnation point to the fact that Bavinck's theology is profoundly ripe for the incorporation of the summative theme of *theosis*. This is the notion that humanity is meant to be united to and participate in the trinitarian life of God. Bavinck is admittedly antagonistic towards the doctrine of *theosis* in the Eastern tradition, and even faults inroads of such a doctrine into the Western tradition in Roman Catholic and Lutheran theology as a source of dualistic mysticism.⁷ This essay will argue, however, that despite his protestations, Bavinck articulates something of a mature Reformed doctrine of *theosis*, and that the category of *theosis*

3 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), IV:685. Cf. Hielema, "Herman Bavinck's Eschatological Understanding of Redemption," 222.

4 For a summary of Mattson's argument, see his conclusion in *Restored to Our Destiny: Eschatology and the Image of God in Herman Bavinck's Reformed Dogmatics* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 237–43.

5 Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 201.

6 Hielema, "Herman Bavinck's Eschatological Understanding of Redemption," 201.

7 Bavinck, *RD*, III:255–56.

is helpful for understanding Bavinck's foundational construal of the nature-grace relationship. As a basic axiom for Bavinck's theological system, this relationship in turn forms an important framework for his anthropology, Christology, and eschatology. In line with Bavinck, the Reformed tradition has been quite hesitant to utilize the notion of *theosis*, opting instead to emphasize union with Christ as the goal of redemption. However, several authors have recently conducted efforts in reclaiming *theosis* in the Reformed tradition.⁸ This essay sees fruit especially in the clarity provided by Scottish Presbyterian Thomas F. Torrance, particularly as examined by Myk Habets.

This essay will argue that Torrance's clarity on how we should understand *theosis*, especially in light of the Creator-creature distinction, provides a way to revisit the relationship between union with Christ and the notion of grace perfecting nature in Bavinck's thought. These clarifications regarding *theosis* then provide a way to overcome Bavinck's hesitations towards theotic language in order to show how his thought is actually quite friendly to it. The benefit in such reexamination of Bavinck's theology in light of Torrance's contribution is that it helps hold together both the restorative and developmental-teleological works of grace in nature. Though grace perfecting nature is too often neglected in contemporary articulations of Bavinck's theology, the full picture of Bavinck's nature-grace dialectic is arguably incomplete without it. It will be posed therefore that *theosis* provides a helpful category to hold together what many have seen forms the heart of Bavinck's entire system.⁹

8 See for example, Joanna Leidenhag, "Demarcating Deification and the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit in Reformed Theology," *Perichoresis* 18.1 (2020): 77–98; Robert Letham, *Union with Christ: In Scripture, History, and Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2011), 91–102; Michael McClymond, "Salvation as Divinization: Jonathan Edwards, Gregory Palamas and the Theological Uses of Neoplatonism," in *Jonathan Edwards: Philosophical Theologian*, ed. Oliver Crisp and Paul Helm (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004) 142–55; Carl Mosser, "Recovering the Reformation's Ecumenical Vision of Redemption as Deification and Beatific Vision," *Perichoresis* 18.1 (2020): 3–24; and Kyle Strobel, "Jonathan Edwards's Reformed Doctrine of Theosis," *Harvard Theological Review* 109, no. 3 (July 2016): 371–99.

9 John Bolt, Brian Mattson, and Sydney Hielema all see the "plus" in the work of Christ in relation to creation as pivotal in Bavinck's thought. That is, what grace brings

THEOSIS
IN THE PATRISTIC FATHERS
AND THE REFORMED TRADITION

Ever careful to guard against the mysticism he believed was inherent in the Eastern notion of *theosis* in which the finite participates or is united to the infinite, Bavinck rejects *theosis*. And to be fair, he has good reason in doing so. Much of the discussion surrounding *theosis* through the ages has been mired in imprecise language, misunderstandings, and even misconstruals of the Creator-creature relationship. As Zоргdrager points out, most contemporary Protestants hold that the term, and its associated English translation of “divinization,” implies humans having the ability to “become the sort of being that the one true God is”—a claim the early church fathers never intended to make.¹⁰ In fact, the early church fathers rarely used the term *theosis*, and its cognate *theopoiesis*, which literally mean “becoming god,” and “making into a god” respectively.¹¹ Even though the ideas inherent in the category of *theosis* play an important but not definitive role for the patristic fathers¹², it was not until the 6th and 7th centuries with the works of Pseudo-Dionysius and Maximus the Confessor that *theosis* received more systematic treatment.¹³ Despite this, for the early church fathers, *theosis* was never meant in a literal sense, that is, human beings were never understood to undergo *ontological* union with the divine, as

to nature is certainly a restoration of its integrity, but also an organic development beyond its initial form. See John A. Bolt, *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck’s Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2013), 182; Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 4–9; Hielema, “Herman Bavinck’s Eschatological Understanding of Redemption,” 215–16.

10 Heleen E. Zоргdrager, “On the Fullness of Salvation: Tracking *Theosis* in Reformed Theology,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 8.4 (2014): 358.

11 Myk Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies (New York: Routledge, 2016), 5.

12 Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, “Introduction,” in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), 4.

13 Vladimir Kharlamov, “*Theosis* in Patristic Thought,” *Theology Today* 65.2 (2008): 163–65.

the term implies.¹⁴ Much contemporary hesitance towards the term, especially in the Reformed tradition, owes more to the central role *theosis* plays in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, which can be oriented towards dualistic mysticism, and difficulties in translating the term, than the actual legacy of the patristic fathers who are said to have laid the foundations for the doctrine.¹⁵

The classic biblical text which utilizes language reminiscent of the notion of *theosis* is 2 Peter 1:4: “By these he has given us very great and precious promises, so that through them you may share [*koinōnoi*] in the divine nature, escaping the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire” (CSB).¹⁶ Many non-Eastern Orthodox theologians see this text as referring not to participation in the divine nature as implied by the term “divinization,” becoming God-like in one’s being, but rather as sharing in God’s immortality, characterized by eschatological life-unending.¹⁷ Indeed, such was the regard or understanding/interpretation in the writings of the first century Apostolic Fathers such as Clement of Rome, Epistle of Barnabas, Didache, and Ignatius of Antioch: “The Apostolic Fathers saw immortality as a gift of God, not

14 Kharlamov, “*Theosis* in Patristic Thought,” 165–66.

15 As Habets explains, Eastern Orthodoxy has “consistently asserted the doctrine of ‘deification’. With Pseudo-Dionysius, Maximus the Confessor, John of Damascus, Symeon the New Theologian, Nicholas Cabasilas, and finally Gregory Palamas, the Eastern Orthodox understanding of *theosis* came to mature expression.” Habets, *Theosis in The Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 7. As Finlan and Kharlamov point out, much contemporary animosity towards *theosis* perhaps comes from latent holdovers of Adolf von Harnack’s Hellenization thesis, which held that *theosis* were pagan credal accretions which corrupted the pure “living faith” of the early church. Finlan and Kharlamov, “Introduction,” 8–9.

16 Other texts used to develop a doctrine of *theosis* include Jn. 10:34, Ps. 82:6, Jn. 17:20-23, and Acts 17:28.

17 Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37 of *New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2003), 294–95; Richard Bauckham, *Jude-2 Peter*, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 50 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1983), 193.

Green is indicative of another take on the “participation” language, arguing that rather than immortality, the context indicates what Peter has in mind is the acquisition of moral character. Gene L. Green, *Jude and 2 Peter*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert Stein, *Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 186–87.

a natural property of the human soul... Their language of deification is metaphoric, not metaphysical."¹⁸ Despite this, however, the Apostolic Fathers did lay groundwork for the close association of deification themes such as identification with Christ and imitation of him with soteriological categories. Indeed, Ignatius of Antioch writes of union with Christ in his passion and resurrection,¹⁹ and of receiving a "union of flesh and spirit that comes from Jesus Christ."²⁰ Ignatius produces the most mature theology of "deification as christification" among the Apostolic Fathers, anticipating the developments which would be made in the second, third, and fourth centuries.²¹

Among the second century Apologists, the soteriological implications of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ feature prominently in Justin Martyr's thought.²² For Justin, the human soul is not naturally immortal, for it lives "not as being life, but as partaker of life," for if it were immortal by nature it would be equal to God.²³ To gain immortality, one must be made immortal by God who will "raise us up by His Christ and will make us incorruptible, and undisturbed, and immortal."²⁴ These two notions, namely that participation cannot equal "identical status" with the object of participation, and that humans are reliant upon God to make them immortal through Christ, highlight that for Justin, participation in God for immortality "implies a unity-in-diversity" in which humans remain ontologically distinct in such deification.²⁵

18 Vladimir Kharlamov, "Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers," in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), 52–53.

19 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Smyreans*, 5.1 (ANF I:88).

20 *Epistle of Ignatius to the Magnesians*, 1.2 (ANF I:59).

21 Kharlamov, "Emergence of the Deification Theme in the Apostolic Fathers," 65.

22 Vladimir Kharlamov, "Deification in the Apologists of the Second Century," in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), 68.

23 *Dialogue with Trypho*, 6.1 (ANF 1:198).

24 *Dialogue with Trypho*, 46.7 (ANF 1:218).

25 Kharlamov, "Deification in the Apologists of the Second Century," 70.

Later in the second century Irenaeus introduces his famous dictum which would undergird any notion of *theosis* henceforth: “following the only true and steadfast Teacher, the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through His transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.”²⁶ As Finch points out, though Irenaeus never explicitly uses the language of *theosis*, all the characteristic elements are present in his theology.²⁷ Pivotal in this is Irenaeus’ soteriology and eschatology in which divine-human communion figures prominently. He argues that Jesus was made human in order to “join the end to the beginning, that is, man to God.”²⁸ Such a union as envisioned by Irenaeus, however, was bordered by a strict Creator-creature distinction on the one hand, owing to his conflict with Gnosticism, and his insistence on the other that God’s essence and activities are not separable, but rather God is his perfections.²⁹ Bridging the ontological gulf between God and man is the divine Son-made-man in the incarnation, in order that the Son might unite humanity to God. Human participation in the divine life in light of the fact that Irenaeus makes no firm distinction between the ontological and economic Trinity highlights the fact that for Irenaeus, those who “are in God, and receive his splendor,” share in the internal life of God through being united to the Son.³⁰ This is far more than simply the possession of salvific immortality, as earlier writers held, and it is possible, Irenaeus holds, because God has given himself in the incarnation of the Son:

For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we

26 *Against Heresies*, 5.pref (ANF 1:526).

27 Jeffrey Finch, “Irenaeus on the Christological Basis of Human Divinization,” in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), 86.

28 *Against Heresies* 4.20.4 (ANF 1:488).

29 Finch, “Irenaeus on the Christological Basis of Human Divinization,” 91, 94.

30 *Against Heresies* 4.20.5 (ANF 1:489).

have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality.³¹

While Irenaeus never fully works out how it is that God’s eternity and infinity are rendered communicable to humanity through the mediation of the Son, Athanasius’ assertion of humanity’s partaking of the divine Son, and not properties of divinity external to the being of God, makes some advance in explaining what is communicated to human beings in *theosis*. Similar to Irenaeus, Athanasius makes the famous statement that Christ “...has become Man that He might deify us in Himself.”³² This deification is to be understood in light of his conflict with the Arians in which Athanasius argues that the Son is partaker of fullness of the divine essence—were he not, he could not save us—and accordingly, in becoming united to humanity, he is the “mediator of divinity” whereby human nature is capable of sharing in life eternal once again.³³ When the Son, who is consubstantial with the Father and Spirit in their divinity, is made partaker of a human nature ontologically, the possibility of human individuals being made partakers of divinity in the Person of the Son is likewise made available.³⁴ Rather than humanity partaking of the divine essence as a generality, individuals partake of divinity by partaking of the Person of the Son.³⁵ The Son is consubstantial with the Father and the Spirit in the fullness of deity, and has united human nature in its fullness to himself.³⁶ In such condescension by God, the Son unites transcendence with finitude, and in so doing renders communicable the divine ousia itself, albeit only in the *hypostasis* of the Son.³⁷ Were this not the case—that is,

31 *Against Heresies* 3.19.1 (ANF 1:448). Cf. Finch, 98-99.

32 *Letter to Adolphus*, 4 (NPNF2 4:576).

33 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 7.

34 Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 184.

35 John Behr, *The Nicene Faith: Part One: True God of True God*, vol. 2 of *Formation of Christian Theology* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), 232–34.

36 *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, 9-10 (NPNF2 4:156). Cf. Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, 181.

37 Cf. Myk Habets, “‘Reformed Theosis?’: A Response to Gannon Murphy,” *Theology*

were the Son incapable of communicating that which is his in his being, he would be considered less than equal to the Father, giving credence to Arian claims.³⁸ The hypostatic union, therefore, whereby Christ takes to the divine life a human nature, provides to the way for humans to take to themselves divine life in which immortality and incorruptibility become theirs—though without them ceasing to be fully human, just as the Son in the incarnation never lacks the fullness of divinity.³⁹

While the doctrine of *theosis* would grow in maturity in Eastern thought in important ways, what concerns us in this study is its relation to Reformed theology.⁴⁰ While the Eastern Orthodox tradition follows the Palamite distinction between God’s energies and essence, whereby *theosis* means a partaking only of the divine energies external to God’s being, the Reformed tradition following Athanasius and Irenaeus posits such a distinction as unhelpful: “God in his actions *ad extra* is the God who is *in se*,” as Habets argues.⁴¹ The Son as consubstantial with the Father and the Spirit partakes of the divine ousia; he is autotheotic, as John Calvin holds.⁴² Subsequently, as Calvin’s foundational understanding of the divine work of redemption is the unio mystica, union with Christ, Calvin’s theology

Today 65.4 (2009): 493.

38 Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 104.

39 *Defense of the Nicene Definition*, 14 (NPNF2 4:159). Cf. Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 7.

40 This study recognizes that recent advances in Luther studies, specifically by the Finnish School, argue that *theosis* plays a pivotal role in Luther’s understanding of justification, which in turn pushes back against the reception of Luther in much of Protestant thought. While not insignificant, Luther’s thought on the subject is beyond the scope of this study. Myk Habets, “Reforming Theōsis,” in *Theōsis: Deification in Christian Theology*, ed. Stephen Finlan and Vladimir Kharlamov, Princeton Theological Monograph Series (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2006), 147–48.

41 Habets, “Reformed *Theosis*?,” 493.

42 Calvin holds that the hypostasis of the Son is consubstantial with the hypostases of the Father and the Spirit, and each communicates the fullness of God. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 1.13.2, 122–23; Cf. John McClean, “Perichoresis, *Theosis* and Union with Christ in the Thought of John Calvin,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 68.2 (2009): 163.

is subsequently friendly to theosis as articulated in the Nicene tradition.⁴³ For Calvin, union with Christ is mediated by the Spirit, who causes elect humans to be united to Christ—Calvin’s union with Christ is more than humans being united to the impersonal energies of God’s communicable attributes, but with the person himself.⁴⁴ The Reformed distinction between the immanent-economic and the transcendent-ontologic Trinity is crucial here, for humans in their union with Christ are not united to God in his transcendence, yet still in the fullness of his deity in the Person of the Son.⁴⁵ Habets summarizes the significance of this for Reformed thought well:

A Reformed doctrine of *theosis* posits an ontological, not a metaphysical union. A metaphysical union is the underlying idea of a pan(en)theistic concept of union in which the believer becomes dissolved into the essence of the divine nature so that he or she ceases to exist as a distinct entity. Working within a Reformed understanding of *theosis*, we may say that humans can participate in the divine nature, but this is a thoroughly personal and relational experiencing of the triune relations. So the distinction between the economic and ontological aspects of the Trinity is employed with a different nuance than in the Eastern Orthodox use of the *theologia* and *oikonomia*.⁴⁶

THOMAS F. TORRANCE’S CONTRIBUTION

Building on the Patristic doctrinal points outlined above and Calvin’s union with Christ theme, Scottish Presbyterian theologian Thomas F. Torrance’s corpus provides important clarification for articulating a Reformed doctrine of *theosis*. As Habets mentions, Torrance rarely uses the

43 Carl Mosser, “The Greatest Possible Blessing: Calvin and Deification,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55.1 (2002): 42–43.

44 Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.2, 1362.

45 Habets, “Reformed *Theosis*?,” 494–95.

46 Habets, “Reformed *Theosis*?,” 494.

terms *theosis* or *theopoiesis*, and he rejects the languages of divinization outright.⁴⁷ The overarching focus throughout his thought, however, on re-articulating an understanding of the atoning work of Christ in light of a proper understanding of the Incarnation and the ensuing union between God and man in the Person of the Son, renders the concept of *theosis* a “controlling metaphor” for his theological project.⁴⁸ The contribution Torrance makes to this study is greater clarity regarding what is meant by participation in the divine life, which in turn lays the groundwork for understanding how Torrance’s soteriological-eschatological understanding of *theosis* intersects with Bavinck’s theology. Because Torrance nowhere devotes extended focus to the doctrine of *theosis*, with it rather hovering in the background across most of his thought, Habets’ study on *theosis* in Torrance’s corpus will provide a helpful summary of Torrance’s contribution, which will be explored in the following three points.

Theosis is Personal Participation in the Divine Life

An important caveat for Torrance which must be mentioned at the outset is that *theosis* cannot be taken literally. That is, if by *theosis* one means being “‘made divine’ in some non-human way” not in accord with the essence of human nature, then this must be rejected.⁴⁹ For, as Torrance views the foundation of any sense of *theosis* as grounded in the hypostatic union of God and man in the Person of Christ, any understanding of *theosis* must parallel, though in reverse, the nature of such a union. As the divine Son is united with humanity without ceasing to be divine, any union of humans to God must be conceived in like manner. Humans must not be understood to become something other than fully human, nor lose their individual personhood. Torrance summarizes this in a lengthy statement:

47 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 2, 14; Zorgdrager, “On the Fullness of Salvation: Tracking *Theosis* in Reformed Theology,” 368.

48 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, ix.

49 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 44.

The participation [of believers] in Christ must be construed in terms of *koinonia* governed by the Chalcedonian doctrine of the union of two natures in Christ. This is a participation in which the human nature of the participant is not deified but reaffirmed and recreated in its essence as human nature, yet one in which the participant is really united to the Incarnate Son of God partaking in him in his own appropriate mode of the oneness of the Son and the Father and the Father and the Son, through the Holy Spirit.⁵⁰

Torrance goes on to say that the nature of this union cannot be “described in positive language,” similar to the mystery of the hypostatic union.⁵¹ However, what can be said is that such a union formed by the partaking of the divine nature at its core involves a personal knowing of God: “Knowing God requires a cognitive union with him in which our whole being is affected by his love and holiness.”⁵² As Habets summarizes, “This seeing or knowing [God] is a personal participation in the triune relationship of the Father’s love for the Son by the Holy Spirit and the Son’s love for the Father by the Holy Spirit. Knowledge is fundamentally relational, not merely cognitive; it is a *personal* knowing that comes only by *personal* participation.”⁵³ Thus for Torrance, *theosis* at its core is being united to the Son by the work of the Holy Spirit in a personal knowing of the Son *as the Son* through faith, in order that one may know God as he is in himself, which the Son reveals through the hypostatic union with human nature. Knowing God in *theosis* is not just knowing God in his economic relations, but in an ontological sense as he is in himself. However, this is still revelational and accommodated to us in a creaturely way, which leads to the next point.⁵⁴

50 Thomas F. Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 185–86.

51 Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 186.

52 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, Revised ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard Publishers, 1992), 26. This citation comes from Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 96.

53 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 96.

54 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 155.

Theosis is Possible on Account of Humanity's Ontology

For Torrance *theosis* is coming to know God personally as he is through knowing and being united to the Son in love through the Spirit. The question arises, how can one know personally God as he is in his being? Torrance answers this in his language of the ‘onto-relations’ within the Godhead and as constitutive of humanity. “Onto-relations,” says Torrance, “are being-constituting relations,” that is, they are relations “which have to do with what [the parties to the relations] really are.”⁵⁵ Each person of the Godhead “is in himself whole God,” and the distinctions between them are relational: the Son is the Son by being ‘of the Father,’ while the Father is the Father by virtue of his relation to the Son, and the Spirit is the Spirit of God who proceeds from Father and the Son as the bond of love given by each.⁵⁶ These relations are “relations of love inherent to God which allow us to know this God as he is in his inherent relations (onto-relations).”⁵⁷ That is, though humans may not know God in his hidden transcendence, they can know God truly as he is in knowing personally God in his trinitarian relations. Specifically, through knowing the Son, we know God in his fullness, even if we do not know God fully.

Grounding this is the fact that not only does Torrance view the Trinity as onto-relational, but he also sees humanity as onto-relational beings as well. As creatures made *imago Dei*, human beings are what they are by virtue of being the image of God (in addition to being in relation to other persons as well).⁵⁸ It is part of human ontology to be in relation with God, to know him, worship him, and to make him known—such relations are natural in the sense of being part of what it means to be human. In

55 Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, 47.

56 Thomas F. Torrance, *The Christian Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons, Cornerstones* (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016), 157. It should be stressed that for Torrance, the bonds between the persons of the Godhead are not reduced merely to relations. They are relations-in-being which constitute the very “whatness” of what they each are.

57 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 64.

58 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 40–41.

the work of grace at the incarnation, the hypostatic union in the Person of Christ unites divinity with human nature, and in so doing allows for human relations to God to become *personal*, that is knowing God as he is in his internal relations. There is a natural correspondence according to the *analogia relationis* between human and divine onto-relations, and knowledge of the divine onto-relations become personally accessible through the incarnation.⁵⁹ As Habets summarizes, “Torrance believes that the creation can know God personally, not through any *analogia entis* but rather by a ‘created correspondence’ between the creature and Creator.”⁶⁰ This natural correspondence allows for both the incarnation and God’s resulting work of *theosis*, though in crucially different ways: “In the person of Jesus Christ we see true humanity partaking of true Divinity *by nature* in such a way that by union, communion, and *theosis* with Christ by the Spirit we too, *by grace*, can participate in the divine nature... [Christ’s union with humanity] is by nature and substantial; [humanity’s union with God] is by grace and relational.”⁶¹

Theosis is the Eschatological Goal of Humanity

Torrance’s articulation of *theosis* as onto-relational rather than metaphysical highlights the fact that *theosis* is the goal for humanity set at their creation. Their “created correspondence” for knowing God and making him known underlies creational intent. The *imago Dei* for Torrance involves both relational and substantial qualities, which reveal not only humanity’s capacities, but also their destiny.⁶² The fall disrupts the attainment of such destiny, and while the *imago Dei* is not entirely obscured in humanity, it “continues to hang over man as a destiny which he can realise no longer, and as a judgment upon his actual state of

59 Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2004), 210.

60 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 42.

61 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 62.

62 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 31.

perversity.”⁶³ Thus the *imago Dei* “lies ahead of each human person,” as their destiny, though unattainable because of sin, and “can only be realized in the person of the incarnate Son, Jesus Christ.”⁶⁴ Union with Christ, the true image of God, therefore sets creation back on its course again in order to reach its final *telos*. However, this involves more than simply being justified from sin or regenerated by the Spirit, but in being united to Christ, it involves the personal, participatory knowledge of God by grace for which humanity was always intended to achieve.⁶⁵ *Theosis* was therefore the perfection towards which creation was oriented at the beginning, with the incarnation always the intended means of accomplishing the *telos*.

SIMILARITIES WITH BAVINCK

The preceding section on *theosis* as the eschatological goal of humanity, more than anything else, gives warrant to this study’s aim of considering Torrance for the purpose of arguing for benefits of incorporating *theosis* into the thought of Herman Bavinck. The similarities are stark between Bavinck and Torrance on creation bearing an eschatological goal set at the beginning which requires the perfecting work of grace without reference to sin. Before transitioning to considering Bavinck, therefore, and by way of summing up what has been said, it would be helpful to point out these similarities in more detail.

First, Bavinck shares affinity for Torrance’s Trinitarian theology which undergirds a Reformed doctrine of *theosis*. Despite the fact that Bavinck embraces the *analogia entis* as the grounds for asserting knowledge of God in nature via his general revelation, in contrast to Torrance’s embrace of the *analogia relationis*, Bavinck shares with Torrance the notion that all

63 Torrance, *Theology in Reconstruction*, 107; cited in Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 32.

64 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 34.

65 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 22.

knowledge of God is possible on the basis of a correspondence between God and humanity whereby humanity can receive that which God reveals about himself in condescension.⁶⁶ Such knowledge of God is exclusively Christological in its foundation, and for its content, it receives personal knowledge of God as he is.⁶⁷ The ground for this is the Nicene affirmation that each person of the Godhead is in himself “identical with the entire being [of God]...”⁶⁸ By knowing the Son, one knows God as he is, and not merely properties of God external to his being: “The divine nature cannot be conceived as an abstract generic concept, nor does it exist as a substance outside of, above, and behind the divine persons. It exists *in* the divine persons and is totally and quantitatively the same in each person.”⁶⁹ Finally, the distinctions between the persons of the Godhead cannot be rooted in the possession of different substances or properties, but only in the mutual relations shared between each person, similar to Torrance’s idea of onto-relations.⁷⁰

66 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), II:135. Despite this important difference between Bavinck and Torrance, the common ground shared between them is substantial. Accounting for this, perhaps, is a mediating link found in the theology of Karl Barth. As is well-known, Torrance was heavily inspired by Barth’s thought, and worked to strengthen, albeit critically at times, his theological project. Barth, in turn, engaged in his theological project of rearticulating Christian theology for a modern context in the shadow of both theological liberalism and Reformed and Catholic scholasticism. As Vissers demonstrates, Barth draws favorably upon Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics* in an effort to transcend the limitations of the scholastic traditions. Thus, it should come as no surprise that Torrance and Bavinck can find common ground on several pivotal elements of their respective theologies. John A Vissers, “Karl Barth’s Appreciative Use of Herman Bavinck’s *Reformed Dogmatics*,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 45.1 (2010): 79–86.

67 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), I:321.

68 Bavinck, *RD*, II:304.

69 Bavinck, *RD*, II:300; cf., *RD*, III:275.

70 Bavinck, *RD*, II:304–5. One could argue that Bavinck’s “organic” theme corresponds very closely to Torrance’s “onto-relations.” That is, for Bavinck, all things share ontologically in the rest of the cosmos in a way that is mutually influencing, or, one could say, being-determining. Mattson sheds some light on this: “Ontologically, the particulars that make up the whole of the cosmos are diverse, distinct and independent, yet are connected and mutually influencing. This unity and diversity is ‘ectypal’ and therefore analogous to the intratrinitarian unity and diversity; created things do not enjoy perichoretic union, they do not ‘mutually indwell’ each other. Nonetheless, they do, each together, form an ‘organic’ whole.” Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 45.

Second, both Bavinck and Torrance hold that creation is “proleptically conditioned by redemption.”⁷¹ Habets quotes Colyer at length to summarize this point: “...God’s ultimate *telos* for creation from the beginning is revealed and actualized in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, a *telos* in which all creation comes to share in the eternal communion of love that God is. This is the ultimate goal of both redemption and creation. It is actually realized in redemption after the fall, and it is a *telos* that proleptically conditions creation.”⁷² In such an understanding, creation was so crafted by God as to anticipate the achievement of its final goal only through the work of Christ, thus anchoring the unity between creation and redemption not in connection to sin, but posteriorly in the perfection of nature by God’s further work of grace. Creation, and humanity in particular, was designed from the beginning for personal union with God which is accomplished in the person and work of Christ.

Bavinck wholeheartedly agrees, holding to an organic relation between creation and redemption whereby the contours of what redemption accomplishes are set by God’s work of creation.⁷³ Likewise, redemption itself, understood as the eschatological attainment of creation’s perfection, is seen to highlight the interrelations of nature and grace: grace proceeds on the basis of nature, while at the same time nature belies a need for the elevating work of grace in order to achieve its *telos*.⁷⁴ This is seen most clearly in Bavinck’s anthropology, in which humanity is created in a provisional state of integrity and subject to God’s covenant of works, which, if they were to have proceeded in obedience, they would achieve the eschatological blessedness of life everlasting before God.⁷⁵ Humanity

71 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 16, 25ff.

72 Quoted in Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 26; cf. Elmer M. Colyer, *How To Read T. F. Torrance: Understanding His Trinitarian and Scientific Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 164n34.

73 Hielema, “Herman Bavinck’s Eschatological Understanding of Redemption,” 201.

74 This is a central claim of Mattson’s study of Bavinck’s eschatological anthropology. See especially Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 106.

75 Bavinck, *RD*, II:570–74.

failed, but such a failing was not unforeseen, for “[in] Adam’s creation Christ was already in view” as the true *imago Dei* who would lead humanity to its perfection in fulfillment of God’s covenant demands and eschatological expectations.⁷⁶ Thus, “the creation of humanity in God’s image is a supposition and preparation for the incarnation of God.”⁷⁷ In this, nature and grace are organically linked and mutually dependent; redemption cannot be conceived of atomistically and solely in juridical terms, but rather also and more foundationally in cosmic and relational categories: “The Son is not only the mediator of reconciliation...on account of sin, but even apart from sin he is the mediator of union... between God and his creation.”⁷⁸ It is this sense which can be brought to the surface of Bavinck’s thought clearer in the notion of *theosis* as articulated by Torrance.

ADDRESSING BAVINCK’S OBSTACLES TO *THEOSIS*

Several of Bavinck’s interpreters have argued that a controlling theme in Bavinck’s thought is union with Christ. Gleason argues that the “*unio mystica* forms an integral part of the whole of Bavinck’s theology.”⁷⁹ When understood in light of Bavinck’s stress on the unity between creation and redemption, Bolt states that for Bavinck, therefore, “The incarnation... is not a rescue operation, decided upon only after sin had entered into the world. Rather, the coming of Christ fulfills the purpose of God in creating the world. Sanctification, not redemption, is the chief work of

76 Bavinck, *RD*, II:564, 573; cf. Hielema, “Herman Bavinck’s Eschatological Understanding of Redemption,” 201: “...the creation was made through him, the creation prepares for and leads to his Incarnation, and the resurrected Christ leads the entire creation to the fulness of the Kingdom of God.” Cf. Hielema, “Herman Bavinck’s Eschatological Understanding of Redemption,” 202.

77 Bavinck, *RD*, III:277.

78 Bavinck, *RD*, IV:685; cf. *RD*, II:423.

79 Ronald Nelson Gleason, “The Centrality of the *Unio Mystica* in the Theology of Herman Bavinck” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001), 117.

Jesus Christ...”⁸⁰ As this study has aimed to trace, this theme of union with Christ should be assumed as nothing less than a doctrine of *theosis*. For this to qualify as *theosis* in the way Torrance frames the doctrine there must be an onto-relational union brought about by the Spirit in which the believer is united to God as he is through the Person of Christ. Bavinck employs such language in places, arguing that, “There is after all no participation in the benefits of Christ apart from communion with his person.”⁸¹ At the same time, however, Bavinck is explicitly antagonistic towards the notion of *theosis*.⁸² If progress is to be made in arguing that Bavinck’s eschatological anthropology (and soteriology) are best summed up in the category of *theosis*, two objections he raises must be addressed.

The Creator-Creature Distinction

Both of the following points surround the claim that the incarnation was in any way necessary apart from sin.⁸³ Despite the inevitability of the incarnation in order to achieve the eschatological goals of creation, which Bavinck decidedly holds, he repudiates the claim that the incarnation was necessary in the sense that it implies the logical necessity of the incarnation from the divine perspective. Such a view, equated by Bavinck with Gnosticism and pantheism regnant in his day in German Idealism, reads the economy of the incarnation of Christ back into the divine *ousia*, resulting in the idea that the incarnation was required for God to achieve

80 Bolt, *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck’s Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi*, 197.

81 Bavinck, *RD*, IV:250.

82 Bavinck, *RD*, III:277–80, 255–56; cf. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 238: “... all forms of theology that view the *telos* of humanity as an ontic fusion of the divine and human necessarily, in principle, depart from the biblical picture of the God-world relation and move inexorably in the direction of pantheism.”

83 See his discussion on the necessity of the incarnation in Bavinck, *RD*, III:278–79. Bavinck argues that “These considerations [on the necessity of the incarnation] contain so much truth that the agreement elicited by the hypothesis of the incarnation of God apart from sin is not surprising.” Ultimately, however, Bavinck wants to frame the way we speak of the incarnation in terms of “certainty,” and not “necessity” (279).

the full expression of his being.⁸⁴ Says Bavinck, "Ultimately, this train of thought culminates in the theory that the creation is necessary for God himself."⁸⁵

Such a view finds support in the notion that the incarnation unites a human person (becoming) to the divine essence (being), which carries with it the idea that by adding something to his being not there previously, God attains perfection for both human nature and himself.⁸⁶ This, however, gets it entirely the wrong way around. In the incarnation, the Person of the Son is united to an impersonal human nature, adding not a human *person* to the divine community, but a human *nature* as such. Were this the reverse, as God became man, so individual persons may become God, partaking of divine transcendence, and in so doing, blurring the distinction between Creator and creation.⁸⁷ Bavinck's making clear that a proper conception of the incarnation whereby it is strictly the person of the Son and not the divine essence, conceived of apart from the Son, which assumes a human nature, is entirely consonant with Torrance's foundation for a proper understanding of *theosis* as highlighted above. For Bavinck, as for Torrance, while *theosis* is made possible by the incarnation in the Son, establishing an ontological link between God and man, *theosis* is not entirely symmetrical with the incarnation in that it is strictly a personal union, the Son with the believer in relationship in which neither distinct individuals are dissolved.⁸⁸

The Nature-Grace Distinction

Second, Bavinck argues that the Latin understanding of *theosis*, inherited by Roman Catholics in what he sees as the mysticism inherent in Eastern Orthodoxy, presupposes a faulty nature-grace relationship which comes

84 Bavinck, *RD*, III:277, 279–80.

85 Bavinck, *RD*, II:424.

86 Bavinck, *RD*, III:277.

87 Bavinck, *RD*, III:274–77.

88 Bavinck, *RD*, III:305.

to expression in the notion that the incarnation was necessary in order to elevate nature beyond itself.⁸⁹ In such a framing, human nature is understood to be ontologically complete, yet open to the reception of the *imago Dei*, which involves a superadded gift of grace as a mechanical insertion into nature—rather than an organic work from within nature—that leads nature into a higher metaphysical status.⁹⁰

The result of this is the affirmation that grace is required without reference to sin, which is in a certain sense what has been argued regarding Torrance’s understanding of *theosis*, except that this view holds that grace is an infused substance which leads to the attainment of a different human nature not present previously. In contrast to this, Bavinck argues that redemption and God’s work of grace adds no new substance to nature, but rather works within the bounds of the nature of its existence. Any notion therefore of what the incarnation and redemption through union with Christ adds to humanity must be conceived solely in restorative and relational terms.⁹¹ Insistence on grace as a *donum superadditum* results only in a mysticism whereby the heavenly is valued above the earthly. Against this vision of *theosis*, however, stands Torrance’s affirmation that *theosis* understood in onto-relational terms is fundamentally a *personalizing* work which results not in infusion of divine nature into humans, but rather the work of leading human nature to the full revelation of its identity as *imago Dei*.⁹² Says Torrance, *theosis* “is not the process of transcending the confines of human nature but the process and means by which the human can achieve true personhood.”⁹³ Bavinck agrees, arguing that though humans possess the image of God at creation, this is not the full sense of the *imago Dei*, which can only be understood in its proper sense in connection with human destiny, which is nothing less than

89 Bavinck, *RD*, III:255–56.

90 Bavinck, *RD*, III:576–77; II:553–554. Cf. Bolt, *A Theological Analysis of Herman Bavinck’s Two Essays on the Imitatio Christi*, 191.

91 Bavinck, *RD*, IV:92–93.

92 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 39.

93 Habets, *Theosis in the Theology of Thomas Torrance*, 44.

being mystically united to Christ.⁹⁴ Grace for Bavinck leads nature to its restoration and perfection, for the two must be intimately linked. Destiny, that is, eschatology, must be in organic relation with protology.

CONCLUSION: THE PROMISE OF *THEOSIS* IN BAVINCK'S THOUGHT

Union with Christ is a central theme in Bavinck's theology, and coupled with the notion of humanity's eschatological destiny attained through the perfection of nature by God's work of grace in the person and work of Christ, provides a robust and innovative theology of the nexus of creation and redemption which continues to bear fruit. This essay has argued that in light of these themes, and especially given the centrality they play in Bavinck's thought, that the category of *theosis* appears to be not only a helpful summation of all these various interrelated themes, but also one entirely consistent with Bavinck's theological oeuvre. Bavinck clearly is hesitant to use the term, with its association in his context with both Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic mysticism and with modernist pantheism. However, recent developments by Thomas F. Torrance in how one can understand *theosis* within the boundaries of Reformed theology trace an approach to the doctrine entirely consistent with Bavinck's theology despite his protestations. *Theosis* captures what Bavinck means by the eschatological perfection brought to nature by grace.

Why not remain content with the language of "union with Christ," one might ask? Because latent in Bavinck's nature-grace relationship is an eschatological vision for which humanity was created. This latency figures in God's work of creation, and yet is dependent upon God's work of grace for its full consummation, regardless of any consideration of the need for redemption. The economy of grace was always meant to lead to such a vision. *Theosis* conveys this perfection of God's creation into its

94 Bavinck, *RD*, II:564. Cf. Mattson, *Restored to Our Destiny*, 219.

completed goal much more clearly than merely the theme of union with Christ, which can be seen as pursued only in light of sin and the fall.

No doubt this notion will remain controversial in Bavinck scholarship, especially from within the Reformed tradition. The aim of this essay has been to propose a reimagining of *theosis* in a way fully consonant with Bavinck's theology, and in so doing open a pathway to consideration of Bavinck's nature-grace relationship in all its fullness.

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Let the Simple Learn Wisdom: Difficulties in Constructing a Biblical Theology of the Proverbs

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KEYWORDS:

| Biblical Theology | Wisdom Literature |
| New Testament use of the Old Testament |
| Old Testament Theology | Inter-Textuality

ABSTRACT:

This paper argues that a robust Biblical theology of the book of Proverbs is lacking, even amidst the swelling Biblical theology literature of recent decades. A survey of contemporary trends in Biblical theology with respect to the Proverbs reveals two broad approaches, both of which struggle – in distinct ways – to deal precisely with the text of Proverbs as it is situated within the canon. This paper will offer a limited critique of these broader trends before focusing on the foundational issue of how to establish inductively-derived categories in Biblical theology. The paper concludes by outlining the steps towards the construction of a Biblical theology of the Proverbs which is both robustly exegetical and richly inter-textual..

INTRODUCTION

Biblical theology has enjoyed a resurgence in recent decades, with much being built upon the foundations laid by Vos¹ and Childs². The significance of this has been enormous, at both academic and popular levels. What is perhaps less clear is the impact and influence Biblical theology has had upon the study of the wisdom literature. In this paper we will identify and consider two broad contemporary trends in Biblical theology with respect to the book of Proverbs. We will explore the shortcomings of each trend, before outlining the process for constructing a robust Biblical theology of the book of Proverbs. We will revisit the importance of inductively derived categories in the Biblical-theological method, along with by the importance of tracing inter-textual canonical connections. We conclude by summarising further steps in the construction of a robust Biblical theology of the Proverbs.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

The Biblical-theological method, which starts by receiving the canon as a unified and organic³ whole, meets with significant difficulty when it seeks to integrate the book of Proverbs, or indeed 'wisdom literature' in general. Difficult questions are raised: what does this text have to do with the rest of the Bible? Where does it fit in our framework of Biblical theological categories? In what *inductive* way can I demonstrate that this text 'fits' into and develops the storyline?

To some degree these difficulties can be lessened by recourse to key themes which are, without doubt, prominent in the New Testament.

1 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology : Old and New Testaments* (East Peoria, Illinois: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975).

2 Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974).

3 Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology : Old and New Testaments* (East Peoria, Illinois: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975).

Jesus is the 'true Wise Man'; he has become for us wisdom from God (1 Corinthians 1.30), and in him are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Colossians 2.3). We might recognise Lady Wisdom as a type of Christ, as she calls people to turn and receive life—rather than turn in to the counterfeit feast which leads to death (Proverbs 9)⁴.

Nevertheless, much of what follows in Proverbs 10-31 challenges and strains many tidy Biblical theological categories. Immediately after the 'two feasts' of chapter 9, chapter 10 begins,

'A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother. Treasures gained by wickedness do not profit, but righteousness delivers from death' (Proverbs 10.1–2).

How does this relate, for instance, to the in-breaking of the kingdom of God? The Proverbs of chapters 10-31 cannot be absolutised as single verses here and there; not least of all since there is some deliberate juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory phrases (e.g., Proverbs 26.4–5). Drawing a distinction between the situationally absolute (i.e., always holding true, given the right application to a situation) and the universally absolute⁵ simply pushes our problem one logical step back; how are we supposed to know the 'right' situational application of a Proverb?

At a pastoral level, Christians sometimes find themselves frustrated with Proverbs, since it does not fit neatly in the category of 'promises to trust', nor of 'commands to obey', nor of 'examples to follow'. These understandable frustrations stem from the interpretive difficulty of when, how, and if individual Proverbs function in an absolute way. And since it is an interpretive difficulty, it is at root a Biblical-theological issue. Similar difficulties face those attempting to integrate the Proverbs into counselling⁶. The translational uncertainties associated with parts of

4 Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004), p131.

5 For a helpful summary of interpretive approaches, see Richard P. Belcher, *Finding Favour in the Sight of God: A Theology of Wisdom Literature* (IVP Academic, 2018).

6 John W Hilber, "Old Testament Wisdom and the Integration Debate in Christian Counseling Sources of Authoritative Knowledge Wisdom as a Voice of Moral Authority,"

Proverbs⁷ yield further interpretive difficulty at both popular and academic levels⁸.

One response to this is for the Proverbs to be viewed in pragmatic terms, as an ancient collection of broad truisms serving as a kind of buffet for choosing moralistic maxims that seem to ‘make life work’. In consequence, the overriding and unifying theology of the book is ignored, along with its epistemological and covenantal stance, that wisdom and knowledge flow only from the fear of YHWH. Certainly, much helpful material has been written to aid a robust grammatico-historical approach to the Proverbs⁹. In the ‘final analysis’ the book of Proverbs is a ‘book of education’¹⁰; but quite how extensive is this education, and how does this education relate to the rest of the canon? The biblical-theological question is rarely confronted head on. How are we supposed to read the Proverbs, if we are believers in Christ Jesus? And what difference, if any, does it make to have been incorporated into the Lord Jesus Christ for how we receive the Proverbs? How does it ‘fit’ into the categories which the NT gives us? For instance, it is not immediately apparent how—if at all—the New Testament conceives of Proverbs within the eschatological vision of living in the ‘last days’, concurrent with the in-breaking of the life of the age to come and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God. So how seriously should we take the Proverbs?

For these reasons, Kennard calls the wisdom literature the ‘reef’ of Biblical theology¹¹; the reef which wrecks otherwise tidy biblical-

Bibl. Sacra 620.Oct (1998): 411–22.

7 See for example, Ted Hildebrandt, “Proverbs 22:6a : Train Up a Child?,” *Grace Theol. J.* 1.Spring (1988): 3–19.

8 Douglas K Stuart, “‘The Cool of the Day’ (Gen 3:8) and ‘the Way He Should Go’ (Prov 22:6),” *Bibl. Sacra* 171.September (2014); Ronald L Jr Giese, “Dualism in the LXX of Prov 2:17 : A Case Study in the LXX as Revisionary Translation,” *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 36.September (1993): 289–95.

9 Greg W Parsons, “Guidelines for Understanding and Proclaiming the Book of Proverbs,” *Bibl. Sacra* 598.Apr (1993): 151–70.

10 Daniel P Bricker, “The Doctrine Of The ‘ Two Ways ’ In Proverbs I . The Constraints Of Hebrew Poetry,” *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 4.December (1995): 501–17.

11 Douglas Kennard, “The Reef of Biblical Theology: A Method for Doing Biblical Theology That Makes Sense for Wisdom Literature,” *Southwest. J. Theol.* 55.2 (2013):

theological frameworks. The image of the 'reef' implies that the Proverbs are a 'test case' for assessing the rigour of various Biblical theology models and perspectives. Should we conclude with Barr¹² that 'the theology of the Bible, as most modern scholarship has envisaged it, is something that has still to be discovered'?

What Kennard terms a 'reef' is in fact a microcosm of the wider tensions within Biblical-theological methodology¹³. One such tension is between unity and diversity within the canon; has Biblical theology been 'found guilty' of reducing diversity in its quest for unity¹⁴ when it comes to the Proverbs? Another tension is between the historical (or descriptive) and the theological (or prescriptive). Both these tensions are manifested in Proverbs research: does Proverbs represent a unified theology? Are the Proverbs prescriptive for Christians today, or merely of historical and academic interest? Are these tensions insurmountable? Should we arrive at despair?

We can make the preliminary remark that, purely at the level of reception theory, the New Testament writers did not appear to think so. If anything, Proverbs texts appear to be handled by the NT as axiomatic presuppositions from which to exhort the Christian community. This paper will argue that the tensions are not insurmountable, but that it is necessary to construct a Biblical theology of the Proverbs which is yet more exegetically robust and inter-textually rich. Let us begin by surveying contemporary trends in Biblical theology with specific respect to the book of Proverbs.

227–51.

12 James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology : An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 2003).

13 Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology : A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2012).

14 Karl Möller, "The Nature and Genre of Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2004), 56.

1. 'CRITICAL-REALIST' APPROACHES

This approach is characterised by a rejection of the assumption that Proverbs sits squarely within a covenantal or canonical context. Rather, the Proverbs are cast chiefly as 'creation theology'. This has been the approach of Kennard¹⁵, Penchansky¹⁶, and others¹⁷. Kennard, whose 'reef' metaphor has already been highlighted, adopts a 'critical-realist' approach:

'there is one clear passage through this reef and that is with critical realism surfacing creation theology, so this creation theology will be developed to position the wisdom program within.'¹⁸

Indeed, whilst Kennard insists with Childs¹⁹ that it is foundational to the task of Biblical theology that the Biblical text is 'taken seriously in its canonical form', his subsequent outline seems to overlook certain features of the canonical text of Proverbs. We revisit some of these later in this paper.

Kennard makes the point that 'center does not communicate clearly as does the message', arguing that the search for a 'center' continues to prove elusive in part because a word or phrase requires significant investment with meaning before it can be fairly considered, and in part because no scholarly consensus has yet emerged. His preference is to summarise the 'message' of a book or section of books, which (he asserts) can be derived inductively and can then in turn inform the construction of a broader Biblical theology. My chief interest at this point is not to engage directly with Kennard's methodology or conclusions, but to note his position regards a Biblical theology of Proverbs.

15 Kennard, "The Reef of Biblical Theology".

16 David Penchansky, *Understanding Wisdom Literature: Conflict and Dissonance in the Hebrew Text*, vol. 53 (Grand Rapids Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2012).

17 Roland E. Murphy, "Can the Book of Proverbs Be a Player in 'Biblical Theology'?" *Biblic. Theol. Bull.* 31.1 (2001): 4–8.

18 Kennard, "The Reef of Biblical Theology".

19 Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*.

Penchansky²⁰ holds that there are two distinct wisdom traditions preserved in the book of Proverbs, along with a third 'Hokmah' component; the 'Lady Wisdom' texts particularly prominent in chapter nine. Penchansky asserts that Hokmah is a 'Hebrew goddess, the daughter of Yahweh', whilst the distinct wisdom traditions make 'their precarious theological position more certain by avoiding any challenges. One advises trusting God and giving up on figuring things out. The other has everything figured out and imposes a rigid system to understand the messiness of human life...they provide half-baked explanations, and that becomes an offense.' He concludes,

'Is there anything one can say about this entire book without ignoring an important part? Since the largest unit of meaning in Proverbs is the single verse or couplet, is there anything intelligent that one can say about the entire book? ...Therefore I surrender to the formlessness of the book that has successfully resisted my efforts to impose any kind of shape.'²¹

In addition, Penchansky argues that the Proverbs present at most a redefined, 'de-centred' covenant to us, one which contained considerable diversity. Once again, the purpose of this paper is not to offer a detailed critique of Penchansky's methodology and conclusions, but to survey and note the contours of the scholarly perspective he represents.

The work of James Barr, whilst not focused specifically on the Proverbs, remains of huge significance in Biblical theology, and sits in close relation to our first category of consideration. 'Any truly biblical theology must address how to relate the OT and NT without forcing either out of shape;²² Brevard Childs said this was 'the heart of the problem of biblical theology'²³. Barr's insistence was that BT can only really exist

20 Penchansky, *Understanding Wisdom Literature*.

21 Ibid.

22 Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology : A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2012).

23 Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflections on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

when we are looking for a ‘theology that existed back there and then’²⁴. With the wisdom literature in view, one of Barr’s chief critiques appears valid:

‘Barr points to a number of OT theologies that do not include the NT as an integral part of their work. Barr concludes that because such OT theologies have managed to handle accurately the content of OT theology without reference to the NT, this necessarily “points towards the intrinsic separateness of the two fields.” He continues, “I suggest that this should be accepted, rather than that vast amounts of further energy be poured into a task that has proved to be neither necessary nor salutary.” ‘[Old testament theologies]..while insisting on a necessary connection to the NT in practice, fail to engage with the NT or provide evidence of its theological relevance for OT theology. This failure actually proves Barr’s point—even those who claim that the NT is necessary for a full account of OT theology fail to demonstrate this connection.’²⁵

As I will argue in this paper, such critiques are more fair than evangelical scholarship may like to admit when it comes to the Proverbs. A preoccupation with redemptive-historical readings can leave certain texts rather forgotten in practice. A dogmatic insistence on unity may in practice ignore much of the empirical diversity of the canon, especially the wisdom literature. Nevertheless, Barr’s position rests upon assumptions which do not withstand scrutiny: the dogmatic assertion that Biblical theology can and must only be descriptive and historical ignores the Bible’s own assessment of itself to being united, and indeed united with the Proverbs – hence the importance of intertextuality to the Biblical theological method. The New Testament’s reception of the Old Testament – including, for instance, Jesus’ own self-awareness as the ‘wisdom of God’²⁶ - provides ample basis for expecting the product of careful Biblical theology to be robustly prescriptive.

24 James Barr, *The Concept of Biblical Theology : An Old Testament Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 2003).

25 Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology : A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2012).

26 E.g., compare Luke 11.49 with its parallel in Matthew 23.34.

If Biblical theological scholarship has been prone to be, in practice though not in principle, prescriptive with some of the canon, and descriptive with wisdom, then the necessary conclusion is not despair at the entire project, but the construction of a deeper, richer, more textured biblical theology.

Summary of category one

We may summarise 'category one' approaches to Proverbs and Biblical theology as quite simply the rejection of the possibility of a unified Biblical theology which might integrate the Proverbs in all their diversity. An initially evident weakness of this approach is that it begs the question as to how creation has been observed and interpreted in such a way as to produce the theology of the Proverbs. In other words, there is already a *lens of some kind* in place through which ants and leeches are being considered and evaluated. Further, to identify apparent dissonance within the book of Proverbs and attribute this to a diverse – even conflicting – community of sages smacks of hasty post hoc deductive reasoning. Even if we were to limit ourselves to the perspective of reception theory, it is far from clear that the New Testament writers viewed the Proverbs as a mixed bag of non-covenantal sage material. The need for careful inductive reading, along both exegetical and inter-textual lines, is highlighted.

I suggest that this category of approach is both insufficient and unwarranted with regards to the book of Proverbs. Insufficient, since – as this paper will argue – covenantal language is plentiful in the book of Proverbs. And unwarranted since – if it can be demonstrated that the book is built upon covenantal architecture, and that the inter-textual connections within the canon affirm this – then it must be concluded that creation theology is not the whole of the story.

2. STORYLINES AND FRAMEWORKS

Goldsworthy's immense contribution to biblical theology, at both academic²⁷ and popular levels²⁸, must be applauded. His legacy, built upon Vos' methodology and soundly applied within both academy and local church, is inestimable. According to Goldsworthy, wisdom literature is, 'a theology of the redeemed man living in the world under God's rule.'²⁹ His biblical-theological method for the wisdom literature is as follows:

(1) Begin with the Christological clues that surround the person and work of Jesus as Israel's wise man. (2) Move back to the most prominent antecedents to this in the Old Testament, in this case in the messianic narratives of Israel's kingship. (3) Capitalize on the links between Solomon and the wisdom literature in order to gather criteria for identifying the distinctive characteristics of wisdom theology and literature. (4) Identify the antecedents to this in the pre-Solomonic narratives. (5) Move forward to identify wisdom theology in the three main stages of revelation, while also making any lateral thematic connections between wisdom and other aspects of biblical theology. The three stages of revelation are: a) biblical history and especially covenant history from Abraham to its zenith with Solomon; b) prophetic eschatology as it recapitulates salvation history and predicts its future fulfillment in the Day of the Lord; c) the fulfillment in Christ of the typology of the previous two stages... We do not have a wisdom Jesus who is different from a salvation history Jesus.³⁰

The above methodology helps immensely to orientate us within the storyline. But does it help us make sense of the texts themselves? We are alerted to the category that Jesus is the 'One greater than Solomon', but what then are we to do with Solomon's texts? Are they to be archived since

27 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Apollos, 2012).

28 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster Press, 2012)

29 Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Wisdom : Israel's Wisdom Literature in the Christian Life* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1995).

30 Graeme Goldsworthy, "Wisdom and Its Literature in Biblical-Theological Context," *South. Baptist J. Theol.* 15.Fall (2011): 42–55.

one greater is now here? Or, is there a Christological hermeneutic which somehow integrates and even 'unlocks' them? To put it differently, is the treasury of hidden wisdom in Christ (Colossians 2.3) the same wisdom as Solomon's, made more clear; or is it a different wisdom altogether?

Biblical theologians Wellum and Gentry have made a tremendous service to evangelical scholarship in their volume, *Kingdom Through Covenant*³¹. Their respectful critique of Goldsworthy is insightful, noting both an overly hasty dismissal (on Goldsworthy's part) of the possibility of literary unity within the Bible (leading him thus to build his methods upon historical unity); and a covenantal framework which is, in their assessment, not as exegetically robust as it might be³².

In Goldsworthy's Biblical-theological approach to 'wisdom' then, one domain is largely lacking; that of inter-textuality. In other words, textual connections (especially those between the testaments) are confined to 'antecedents' for 'Christ our wisdom'. Whilst as a framework this is satisfying, and no doubt the 'big picture' of orienting the Proverbs within the OT storyline is helpful, this approach does not address the actual textual data available to us as we approach the Proverbs. A very similar criticism can be made of Vos' classic methodology³³; beyond broad historical orientation, we soon reach a limit in how helpful an 'epochal' approach is in constructing a theology of the Proverbs which integrates into the whole canon. As we will consider below, some Proverbs texts at least are directly handled by the NT in categories that are not simply or directly Christological. Conversely, it is far from obvious what the Christological connections are to much of the book.

Kaiser's Biblical theology is refreshing in its explicit structural attention to the wisdom literature³⁴, though this amounts to only a few

31 Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant : A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).

32 Ibid.

33 Vos, *Biblical Theology*.

34 Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God : A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids MI.: Zondervan, 2009).

pages. Particularly helpful are the connections he draws out between the ‘fear of the LORD’ and ‘life’, thus strengthening the continuity between the Mosaic covenant and wisdom on the basis of the invitation of both, ‘do this and you will live’.

However, there remains the question, how are we to read Old Testament wisdom in light of the New Testament, and vice versa? Does Paul have the ‘fear of the LORD’ in mind, when he writes that Jesus has become for us wisdom? Does Kaiser think that the New Testament regards Jesus as the Wise Man who learns, teaches, and does the fear of the LORD, and thus obtains life, honour, and riches? We might say that Kaiser is more helpful in integrating the Proverbs, with the theme of ‘life’, to an Old Testament theology, than to a Biblical theology.

Belcher³⁵ gives much weight to the conception of Jesus as the ‘true wise man’, and argues that ‘wisdom’ thus relates to the Kingdom of God as follows:

Jesus use of proverbs is dependent on his mission to proclaim and establish the kingdom of God. The proverbial sayings of Jesus must be understood in relationship to the character of the kingdom as submission to the rule of God embodied in the person and work of Jesus. They must also be understood in the light of the urgency of the moment of decision that comes with the kingdom. Entering the kingdom must be a person’s highest priority. This parallels the emphasis in Proverbs of seeking wisdom and getting wisdom at all costs, except now it is seeking Jesus and following him at all costs.

We are left with the same unresolved question: is Christ’s wisdom the ‘same but better’ as Solomon’s? Or is it a different kind of wisdom altogether? And how can we know? This seems to be of enormous importance for how we then handle the specific Proverbs texts. Similarly, van Gemenen, in his chapter on Proverbs within van Pelt’s volume³⁶, devotes a few concluding paragraphs summarising the New Testament’s

35 Belcher, *Finding Favour in the Sight of God*.

36 Willem Van Gemenen, “Proverbs,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, ed. Miles Van Pelt (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 2017).

'wisdom' texts, yet without addressing the specifics of how the Proverbs material is therefore to be interpreted by the New Testament. Waltke's magisterial commentary on Proverbs includes a very lucid sub-section on the 'superiority' of Jesus Christ to Solomon's wisdom³⁷ (likening them to five and twenty dollar bills respectively); however, whether this 'superiority' is of type or extent is not elucidated.

We may push the criticism of this second category a tentative step further. Yarborough has suggested that an inadvertent consequence of an 'anti-dogmatic dogmatism' stemming from 'biblical theological reductionism' is a reduced centrality of the cross³⁸. Could it be that biblical-theological exegesis of the Proverbs is one such casualty? In other words, dogmatic biblical-theological frameworks (such as 'Christ the Wise Man') imposed upon the diversity and ambiguity of the Proverbs may have the unintended effect of silencing individual texts, and thus of silencing their wider canonical connections, and thus possibly hindering the task of inductive Biblical theology.

A number of excellent Biblical-theological volumes have been published recently which, broadly, take a 'storyline' approach. These include G.K. Beale's New Testament volume³⁹ and Stephen Dempster's Old Testament volume⁴⁰. There is also a resurgence of 'storyline' volumes at the popular level, such as Crossway's 'Studies in Biblical Theology' series, or Roberts and Wilson's volume on the Exodus theme⁴¹. These 'storyline' approaches make a tremendous contribution to Biblical theology at both scholarly and popular levels. For the purposes of this study, however, it is worthy of remark how little the wisdom literature

37 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, p132.

38 Robert W. Yarborough, "The Practice and Promise of Biblical Theology: A Response to Hamilton and Goldsworthy," *South. Baptist J. Theol.* 12.4 (2008): 78–86.

39 G. K. (Gregory K.) Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology : The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2011).

40 Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty : A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove Ill.: Apollos, 2003).

41 Alastair Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus : Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018).

features, generally, in the framework Beale draws upon in order to demonstrate the numerous points of end-time fulfilment of the Old Testament in the New. Similarly, the space given to the wisdom literature generally in Dempster's theology of the Old Testament is limited, and to the Proverbs in particular extremely short. Christopher Wright's Biblical theology, which endeavoured to encapsulate the ethical texture of the redemptive storyline, gives scant attention to the wisdom literature⁴². Understandably then, some scholars will concur with Kennard that the wisdom literature is indeed a 'reef' on which otherwise robust Biblical theologies are wrecked, the relative silence on Proverbs in recent leading volumes being tacit acknowledgement of this. Seifrid's precise critique of 'storyline' and 'narrative' approaches to Biblical theology merits much reflection. He warns that the construction of whole-Bible narrative theologies 'involves a forgetfulness that we do not speak from above, but from within the ongoing story of God's dealings with the world.'⁴³

Whilst the above survey is by no means exhaustive, it does illustrate the broad tendency of evangelical scholarship to regard redemptive-historical readings as functionally co-extensive with Biblical theology⁴⁴. In contrast, the handling of the Proverbs by the New Testament appears to beg that there is an undistributed middle. The adherence to a redemptive-historical paradigm can mean that texts which do not easily align within a storyline get less attention. If texts 'must be interpreted as a discernible segment of a forward-moving narrative whole'⁴⁵, what happens to texts which don't seem to move the narrative forward, like pedagogical ones?

42 Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2006).

43 Mark A Seifrid, "Story-Lines of Scripture and Footsteps in the Sea," *South. Baptist J. Theol.* (2004): 88–106.

44 Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology : A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids Mich.: Zondervan, 2012).

45 *Ibid.*

Summary of category two

In summary, a characteristic of 'category two' approaches to the wisdom literature is that they are prone to rely too heavily on heuristics and frameworks which 'work' with other categories of the canon, but are less satisfying under scrutiny with the book of Proverbs, in particular when inter-textual relationships are considered. An underlying unresolved question is that of the relation of the New Testament 'wisdom' category to Solomonic wisdom. Are they quantitatively or qualitatively different? A difference of extent or a difference of kind?

Limitations of both categories

What both trends of approach have in common, in this author's opinion, is that they fail to attend in sufficient detail to the inter-textuality of the book of Proverbs. That is, they either overlook the covenantally-loaded language of the Hebrew text, and the way in which the New Testament handles the Proverbs (a shortcoming of trend one in particular), or they rely upon theological models, assumptions, and structures placed upon the text of Proverbs, without being inductively constructed or justified from within the text itself (a particular tendency of the second trend). In addition, the second model may tend to choose one or two New Testament categories of relation to the Proverbs (such as, above, 'Jesus the wise man'), and expand that model so as to be a uniform category for all of the Proverbs text. Thus both methods fail to attend in sufficient detail to the actual Proverbs text and inner-canonical connecting texts of Scripture.

To summarise then; if Biblical theology is whole-Bible theology, then why does Proverbs not feature much within our leading formulations? Or, if Proverbs has little to add to our leading Biblical-theological formulations, why does the New Testament quote and allude to the Proverbs on several instances? We have considered two broad trends of biblical theology in approach to the book of Proverbs. In the first, no hope is held for such whole-Bible theological integration. In the second, trusted

frameworks are found wanting. There remains significant theological reflection and ‘biblical-theologically-oriented exegesis’ to be done in order to tease out the connections between a robust whole-Bible theology and the particularities of the Proverbs.

INITIAL STEPS TOWARDS CONSTRUCTING A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF PROVERBS

We must begin with the canon. Whilst there is a rich sapiential tradition surrounding the Qumran community⁴⁶, ‘the direct evidence for Proverbs is sparse for the most part’⁴⁷ in the Dead Sea Scrolls. The low profile of the Proverbs in the DSS means that our consideration of a Biblical theology of Proverbs must necessarily be conducted along canonical lines. With this in mind, we suggest that the foundational question of categories requires greater precision in order to begin constructing a Biblical theology of Proverbs.

What are our categories?

Since Biblical theology takes the canon as the methodological starting point⁴⁸, axiomatic to the procedure of Biblical theological construction is establishing inductively received categories – i.e., reading the text in light of the categories which the canon gives us⁴⁹. We can consider ‘categories’

46 Géza Xeravits, “Discerning Wisdom: The Sapiential Literature of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *J. Study Jud.* (2009); Charlotte Hempel, Armin Lange, and Hermann Lichtenberger, *The Wisdom Texts from Qumran and the Development of Sapiential Thought* (Leuven; Hadleigh: Uitgeverij Peeters, 2002).

47 Elisa Uusimäki, “The Proverbs Tradition in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *Crossing Imaginary Boundaries: The Dead Sea Scrolls in the Context of Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Mika Pajunen and Hanna Tervanotko (Helsinki: The Finnish Exegetical Society, 2015).

48 Charles H. H. Scobie, “The Challenge Of Biblical Theology,” *Tyndale Bull.* 42.1 (1991): 31–61.

49 Vos, Biblical Theology ; Richard C Barcellos, “Analysis Of Geerhardus Vos’ Nature And Method Of Biblical Theology,” *Reform. Baptist Theol. Rev.* 06.2 (July) (2009):

to include both units of text and theological concepts. Are our received categories basically 'functional' (however thematic), or canonical⁵⁰?

Since we are striving here to do Biblical theology - to trace the Bible's unity according to its own terms and categories-, two theological assumptions will be challenged at the outset. Firstly, this project does not begin by assuming a clearly defined distinction between 'creation' and 'covenant'. Secondly, this project does not begin by assuming the legitimacy of the category of 'wisdom literature'. Categories such as creation, covenant, and wisdom literature may all too readily become subtle assumptions which distort Biblical theological method into a deductive, rather than inductive, endeavour.

1. Covenant or creation, or covenant through creation?

The reason for challenging the first distinction is that, whilst the theological categories of creation and covenant are enormously rich when articulated in atemporal terms ('what does the Bible have to say about creation', 'what does it have to say about covenant' etc), we do not find such a category distinction within Biblical literature itself. Indeed, to insist on creation and covenant as being separate – and separable – is something of a *circulus in probando* when it comes to reading the text of, for instance, Genesis. The words and narratives of covenant come to us fully integrated into the language of creation. Indeed, the Pentateuch as a whole – sometimes called the book of the covenant, and clearly containing the origins of God's covenants - begins with creation itself, and creation language adorns it at key turning points. This is of significance for Proverbs research since – if it is the case that the Bible does not tidily separate creation and covenant, we cannot set them against one another. Scholars in our first category have advocated approaches which effectively argue that Proverbs is about creation, not covenant. Why do we feel we

55–79; Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*.

50 D. A. Carson, "Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective," *Bull. Biblic. Res.* 5.1 (1995): 17–41.

must choose? Where is the warrant for such a distinction, especially for scholars involved in Biblical-theological exegesis? Such an argument reveals an underlying deductive (rather than inductive) approach to the canonical text.

That Proverbs appears to understand creation and covenant as inseparable realities should not surprise us; the Hebrew Bible presents this same worldview at numerous points. Dempster, for instance, points out that in the very structuring of the Psalter we find at one key ‘seam’ - Psalm 89 – the integrated realities of creation and covenant:

[In Psalm 89.3] the solidity of the created order, rooted in God’s love, is the reason for praise. History is then introduced, as well as creation, to make the same point: ‘I have cut a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant. For ever I will establish your seed. For ever I will build your throne’ (89.4). It is no accident that the word ‘establishes’ refers back to God’s faithfulness established in the heavens in v3, and the word ‘build’ refers to the securing of God’s mercy in the same verse. In other words, the pre-historical creation and the historical covenant with David are virtually cut from the same cloth. They are supreme manifestations of God’s mercy.⁵¹

Furthermore, whilst scholarly consensus does not yet exist on the significance of the toledot formula in the book of Genesis, it is apparent from their very form – even if their function is debated – that the creation of the heavens and the earth is inextricably linked to the election and blessing of a covenant people. If we read Genesis on its own terms and through its own categories, we must acknowledge that the toledot form seams which link Joseph, through his fathers, to Noah, Adam, and the created order itself. All this to insist that creation and covenant cannot be hermetically separated, and thus must not be pitted against one another in Biblical theological method. Rather, as we consider the book of Proverbs, the canon gives us covenant within, or through, creation.

51 Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, p197-198.

Covenant through creation in Proverbs

At the very least, those who would dispute the covenantal lens of the book must provide a more robust argument than the mere (apparent) 'absence' of sufficient covenantal terms. Is the problem an absence of evidence (i.e., 'insufficient' covenantal referents - according to whose standard of sufficiency?), or a demonstrable evidence of absence? Furthermore, we might pursue their own suggestion – that the Proverbs are mere creation theology – and ask, is this actually what we would expect if it was mere creation theology? Why does YHWH's name appear at all? Why is the book so robustly monotheistic? Why is there such a consistent moral framework? Why such a view of ultimate future consequences for actions, and so on?

We can go further, and argue that the Proverbs, read carefully and on their own terms, contain plentiful linguistic markers of a deeply 'covenantal' outlook. The very simplest argument for a covenantal perspective in the book of Proverbs – or, at least, a covenantal 'lens' through which observational theology is being carried out – is surely the presence of the name YHWH. In the book of Proverbs, the name of YHWH occurs eighty-seven times. Moreover, the syntagm or compound noun⁵² 'fear of YHWH' is the organising principle of the book⁵³. The 'fear of the LORD' is a construct which occurs twenty-five times in the Old Testament, in several clearly 'covenantal' contexts⁵⁴. Of particular note is Isaiah's prophecy that the 'delight' of the servant of the LORD will be in the 'fear of the LORD' (Isaiah 11.2-3).

In contrast to the 'fear of God' in Scripture, the 'fear of the LORD' refers to "the LORD's special revelation, whether through Moses or through Solomon. By this term Solomon traces his wisdom back to the LORD's

52 Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

53 Henri Blocher, "The Fear Of The Lord As The 'Principle' Of Wisdom," *Tyndale Bull.* 28.1 (1977): 3–28.

54 See the cluster in 2 Chronicles (14.14; 17.10; 19.7; 19.9); also Job 28.28; Psalms 19.9; 34.11; 111.10; Isaiah 33.6.

inspiration.”⁵⁵ The term encapsulates both the objective revelation of the character and works of YHWH, alongside personal, subjective, response to that knowledge. Deuteronomy treats ‘love of the LORD’ and ‘fear of the LORD’ as synonyms⁵⁶. In Proverbs 15.33, ‘humility’ is a parallel term to ‘fear of the LORD’. In further relation to this personal response, ‘fear of the LORD’ is associated with ‘delight’ (Isaiah 11.2-3).

There are no explicit references to the redemptive event of the Exodus in the book of Proverbs. There are, however, clear references to sacrifice and the turning away of guilt. One such example occurs in Proverbs 16.6;

“By steadfast love and faithfulness iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one turns away from evil...”

בְּחֶסֶד וְאֱמִתּוֹת יִכָּפֵר עֲוֹן וּבְיִרְאַת יְהוָה סוּר מֵרָע:

This verse links the covenantally loaded terms ‘steadfast love and faithfulness’; ‘atone for iniquity’; ‘fear of YHWH’, and ‘turn from evil’. Whilst these may be ambiguous in isolation, in that they may be translated variously, our purpose here is simply to articulate that the cumulative weight of loaded words and phrases in the Proverbs, read on their own terms, within the Tanakh’s own framework of the inseparableness of creation and covenant, should persuade us of the underlying covenantal outlook of this book.

Proverbs 3, which features multiple covenantal referents, in addition to the fear of the LORD (3.7), illustrates this well:

1. Linguistic allusions to Deuteronomy, in particular Deuteronomy 4, 6, and 8. The themes of ‘do this and you will live’ (Deuteronomy 4); ‘binding the commandment’ (Deuteronomy 6) are alluded to in verses 2-3, while the charge to ‘keep the commandment’ (v1) alludes to Deuteronomy 8. Furthermore, the theme of ‘blessing and curses’, found in the string of pithy dichotomies in the concluding

55 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, p. 100.

56 Cf. Deuteronomy 5.29 with 6.2, and 6.5 with Joshua 24.14; cf. 10.12, 20; 13.5.

section of Proverbs 3, may be a cryptic distilling of Deuteronomy as a whole.

2. 'Tree of life'; The repeated appearance of the 'tree of life' (3.18, 11.30, 13.12, 15.4) surely roots Proverbs to its covenantal beginnings, in the book of Genesis. In fact, the tree of life is perhaps the canon's earliest, simplest, most irreducible symbol of the inseparability of creation and covenant. In Proverbs 3.18, wisdom is referred to as a 'tree of life'. We must surely count it as significant that the 'tree of life' motif occurs explicitly elsewhere in the canon only in Genesis (2.9, 3.22) and Revelation (2.7, 22.2)⁵⁷. Some time ago Marcus⁵⁸ made the observation that the canon's concept of the 'tree of life' sits in sharp distinction to the 'tree of life' motif found in later Jewish wisdom literature or other ANE (e.g., Akkadian) sources, in that it is eschatological at root, rather than a kind of synonym for 'health'.

3. 'Steadfast love and faithfulness' (3.3) – these are clearly metonymies, though not simply for 'the father's teaching and commandments'⁵⁹, but are 'loaded' referents for loyalty in covenant with the LORD, as passages such as Exodus 34.3-9 make clear. These referents appear together thirty-nine times across the OT.

In summary, we maintain that the categories of 'creation' and 'covenant' must not be deductively viewed as separate and separable. To do so is to sabotage the Biblical-theological method. When considered inductively, the book of Proverbs contains much 'covenantal' material.

57 'Tree of life' features in later Jewish extra-biblical literature; 4 Esdras 8.52.

58 Ralph Marcus, "The Tree of Life in Proverbs," *J. Biblic. Lit.* 62.2 (1943): 117.

59 Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1-15*, p. 241.

2. ‘Wisdom literature’ - a Biblical category?

Secondly, Biblical scholarship has long used the category ‘wisdom literature’ for certain books of the Hebrew Bible – especially, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job. Although a clear rule for inclusion does not exist, it is often argued that some of the Psalms, some or all of the book of James, and some of the gospels should also be included in the category, along with – possibly - the Song of Songs. Some would also then add books from the Apocrypha; Wisdom Ben Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus) and the Wisdom of Solomon. Thus, whilst the central books are agreed upon, there is not a clear agreement upon where the boundary set lies; of how far the actual category ‘wisdom literature’ extends. This difficulty stems from the fact that ‘wisdom literature’ is a functional category – leaving it therefore up to scholars to assess the extent of a ‘wisdom function’ that a given text performs. Clearly at this point we are not doing Biblical theology, by bringing a pre-conceived category (‘wisdom function’) to the canon and seeing what fits.

Rather, the Bible’s own categories of the Old Testament are the ‘law, the prophets, and the writings’⁶⁰ – hence the Hebrew acronym Tanakh. There has been a renewal of interest in the significance of the ordering of the books of the Old Testament, once they are ‘returned’ to their original three categories⁶¹. When the books of the OT are placed in their Hebrew OT sequence, we may find fruitful connections at the ‘seams’ between adjacent books, and also between adjacent categories. One example is the connection between Proverbs 31.10 and Ruth 3.11 (which follows immediately after Proverbs in the Hebrew OT ordering). Our purpose in this study is simply to clarify and establish the Biblical-theological warranted categories within which to orient Proverbs research. The significance for this project, then, is as follows:

60 E.g., Luke 24.44, where ‘Psalms’ is a shorthand for the writings.

61 Miles V. Van Pelt, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament : The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 2017); Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 2018).

1. The book of Proverbs comes to us within the canon as a discrete unit.
2. The canon views the larger unit to which Proverbs belongs to be the 'writings'.
3. The 'seams' of both the book of Proverbs and the writings may hold Biblical-theological significance. These are, specifically, Job (immediately prior to the Proverbs) and Ruth (immediately after); and, for the writings as a whole, Psalm 1 (which opens them) and 2 Chronicles 36 (which closes them).
4. Moreover, in considering 'what are our categories' in Proverbs and Biblical theology, we can add that chapters 1-9 form a discrete unit⁶² within the book, serving both as prologue and hermeneutical lens⁶³ for the entirety of what follows⁶⁴. In addition, there are explicit subsequent sections; the 'Proverbs of Solomon' (chapters 10-24), 'More Proverbs of Solomon' (chapters 25-29), the 'Words of Agur' (chapter 30), and the 'Words of King Lemuel' (chapter 31)'. These internal given categories of text in turn drive the pedagogical function of the book as a whole.⁶⁵

In summary, we argue that the Bible's own categories of 'writings', the book of Proverbs itself, the 'seams' of these categories, and the explicit internal sections of the Proverbs, should provide the interpretive

62 Rick W. Byargeon, "The Structure and Significance of Prov 9:7-12," *J. Evang. Theol. Soc.* 40.3 (1997): 367-75.

63 There is some evidence that Proverbs 1-9, as a unit, formed a basis for sapiential re-interpretation at Qumran. Uusimäki, "The Proverbs Tradition in the Dead Sea Scrolls."

64 Daniel J. Estes, *Hear, My Son : Teaching and Learning in Proverbs 1-9* (Leicester: Eerdmans, 1997).

65 Christopher B. Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad : An Exploration of the Courty Nature of the Book of Proverbs* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

framework from which to construct a canonical Biblical theology. This represents an inductive approach.

CONCLUSION: NEXT STEPS FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGICAL PROVERBS RESEARCH.

This paper has argued that a more robust, exegetically-constructed Biblical theology is needed for the book of Proverbs. After first highlighting the shortcomings of the two broad approaches already in existence, we have outlined the necessity of inductively-derived theological categories. In concluding, we highlight the significance of this project for both church and academy, and outline the next steps of this broader project.

The significance of recovering a Biblical theology of the Proverbs lies in the subsequent capacity for the right application of wisdom within home, church, academy, marketplace, and state. In other words, if a solid foundation can be established for how to read and apply the Proverbs, then wise living can be built upon that foundation. The book of Proverbs claims to hold out wisdom pertinent to all these spheres – home, church, academy, marketplace, state – and more. Axiomatic to constructing this foundation is to arrive at clarity upon how Solomon’s wisdom relates to the Christ and his Kingdom. We have argued in this paper that such a Biblical theology can only be constructed by careful articulation of inductively-derived canonical categories. We can conclude by outlining the subsequent steps as we see them.

1. Systematic study of inter-textual connections between the Proverbs and the rest of the canon, and a subsequent synthesis of this material. This would take as its starting point explicit quotations of the Proverbs in the New Testament (e.g., Proverbs 3.34 and James 4.6, 1 Peter 5.5), and then move onto allusions (e.g., Luke 2.52 and Proverbs 3.4).

2. As an extension of this, studying NT lexical allusions to the LXX text of the Proverbs. For instance, the NT’s use of a term such as παιδεία,

(Ephesians 6.4, Hebrews 12.5-11) appears not as a referent to a Graeco-Roman category, but to the LXX of Proverbs, where it appears 26 times, often translating מִוּסָר ('discipline/instruction'), and also functioning as a 'shorthand' or dominant term for wisdom⁶⁶. Even on this preliminary detail much hangs, since it would appear that Paul has the book of Proverbs in mind when he urges fathers in the church in Ephesians. Thus, further study of NT allusions to the LXX text of Proverbs is merited.

3. This then gives rise to a broader consideration of Jesus' own self-awareness as the 'wisdom of God'. In comparing Luke 11.49 with its parallel in Matthew 23.34, we find an insight into Jesus' self-awareness as 'the wisdom of God', which can serve as the starting point for this consideration. In the former text he refers to 'the Wisdom of God' saying, and in the latter text he says 'I say to you'⁶⁷. Furthermore, earlier in Luke 11, Jesus has referred to himself as 'something greater' than 'the wisdom of Solomon' (Luke 11.21). This would appear to strengthen the case for seeing the inter-textual fabric of the 'fear of the LORD' as leading directly towards the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Isaiah 11.2-3). Recent renewal of interest in Proverbs 8 and its relation to texts such as 1 Corinthians 1.24 and Revelation 3.14, in light of eternal generation⁶⁸, has much relevance to this area of study. Thus, further consideration of the degree to which Jesus conceived of himself as the 'key' or fulfilment of the book of Proverbs, is merited.

4. Whilst reception theory is a field of research distinct to Biblical theology, studying the historical reception of the book of Proverbs would serve as a very useful adjunct to this study. The significance of this may be as follows: if the predominant historical understanding of the book of Proverbs has been pedagogical⁶⁹ (even in part) – i.e., concerned with

66 For instance, Proverbs 25.1 of the LXX renders παιδεία in plural form for 'proverbs' of Solomon.

67 Belcher, *Finding Favour in the Sight of God*.

68 Matthew Y. Emerson, "The Role of Proverbs 8: Eternal Generation and Hermeneutics Ancient and Modern," in *Retrieving Eternal Generation*, ed. Fred Sanders and Scott R. Swain (Zondervan, 2017).

69 Christopher B. Ansberry, *Be Wise, My Son, and Make My Heart Glad: An*

the teaching of axiomatic life-principles, and if the predominant NT use of quotations and allusions is (even in part) pedagogical, then our Biblical theology must be sufficiently deep and rich to integrate both this pedagogical material and its relation to the Kingdom of God inaugurated in Christ the Wise Man.

5. This then gives rise to the final stage of this project, which is extensive reflection and integration with respect to the wider discipline of Biblical theology; in particular relation to dominant themes, such as the Kingdom of God⁷⁰, and union with Christ⁷¹. This final stage will synthesise all the prior material to answer the basic question, how does Proverbs relate to the Kingdom of God? If believers are united to Christ, the true King and Wise Man, what implications does their union hold for how they read Solomon's Proverbs? Do they now have the complete 'lens' through which to read and apply them? Or do the Proverbs not apply to them at all?

Klink and Lockett⁷² outline five distinct Biblical theological methods, distinguished in particular by their assumptions and prior commitments, and represented by a particular scholar; namely, BT1, historical description (James Barr); BT2, history of redemption (D.A. Carson); BT3, worldview-story (N.T. Wright); BT4, canonical approach (Brevard Childs); and BT5, theological construction (Francis Watson). These five, located across a spectrum from 'purely historical' to 'purely theological', provide a helpful heuristic to illustrate, in conclusion, the 'robust exegesis and rich synthesis' which I am advocating for.

Whilst Klink and Lockett's goal was to trace and describe the various contours of Biblical theology, I suggest that these five approaches can in fact map our process for construction, from historical and textual through

Exploration of the Courtly Nature of the Book of Proverbs (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

70 Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *The Kingdom of God* (Wheaton Ill.: Crossway, 2012).

71 Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ : An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, Mich. : Zondervan, 2015).

72 Klink III and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology : A Comparison of Theory and Practice*.

to prescriptive and applied. BT1's great strength lies in its insistence on dealing with the text in its historical setting. This provides the necessary tethering for Biblical-theological construction. BT2 is concerned with redemptive-historical movement. With this perspective solely in view, much of Proverbs can fall into a blind spot, as this paper has shown. Yet without BT2, key interpretive poles may be missed altogether. BT3 is concerned with narrative and meta-narrative, and again the Proverbs may be prone to being overlooked from this exclusive perspective. BT4 is concerned with canon, which yields a significant richness with Proverbs in mind, and BT5 with confession and prescription for the church.

I am advocating for a progression through these 5 perspectives, along the spectrum from descriptive to prescriptive, historical to theological. I suggest that this is the template which the canon itself gives us. In a subsequent paper I intend to demonstrate this at greater length by considering a specific case study of New Testament inter-textuality with the Proverbs. Here, a sketch will surmise. The reader (exegete, scholar, or preacher etc) finds herself puzzling over a particular Proverbs text. She does her best to understand it, taking into account all historical information, and working only with the categories which emerge from the text (BT1). She is well oriented regarding the Bible's redemptive storyline and its coherent narrative framework (BT2 & 3) from her ongoing reading and reflection upon Scripture. Her consideration of the canon (BT4) leads her to trace inter-textual connections, further clarify the trajectory of inductive categories, and thus to receive the New Testament's assumption of the Proverbs as normative for Christian life:

the canon preserves a collection of "tradition shapings", which maintain fidelity to the original material and simultaneously promote the adaptation of the material for a new setting and situation...the canon itself becomes the overarching context for handling history and theology and for determining the meaning of the Bible.⁷³

73 Ibid.

Our reader is now positioned in the locus of BT5 to engage in a reflective exercise where she is able to read her text both ‘forwards’ and ‘backwards’, the product of which is robust and rich theological construction. Forwards, since she conceives of her Proverbs text as landing ultimately in New Testament categories; that is, landing with the ‘mind of Christ’, forming part of the treasure chest of wisdom stored up ‘in Christ’ and available to his people. Understanding Jesus to be the climactic Wise Man gives her warrant to read the Proverbs as his words, authoritative for decisions in real life in real time. And our reader reads backwards, returning to Solomon’s Proverbs and able to receive all of them as earthy, real-life, dynamic wisdom for living. It provides her with the pedagogical toolkit for education and discipleship; a toolkit which Paul appears to have in mind in Ephesians 6.4, from his allusion to the LXX text of Proverbs.

A further tension manifested when we attempt to move from the Proverbs text to theological construction is the existential tension between the application of wisdom in necessarily situated ‘real time and place’, and the abstracted, static nature of written theology. We want to ‘boil down’ the Proverbs to a tidy framework which can be written, integrated and taught, whilst the Proverbs seem to want to be lived in real time. Whilst beyond the scope of this paper, we can in brief note that inherent to the literary style of the Proverbs – the cryptic ambiguities and so on – is the capacity to draw the reader or listener into thoughtful, personal participation in the understanding and application of wisdom. Thus, wisdom’s ‘forms’ promote wisdom’s ‘functions’. This point proves tremendously rich for Biblical theology; Jesus the Wise Man appears, pedagogically, to prefer such forms, in order to draw his listeners and followers into participation in the way of wisdom. This then means that our process, outlined above of moving from historical description to existential prescription, is warranted in so far as we trace both inter-textual content and forms. That is to say, if Jesus, or James, teaches in a ‘wisdom style’, that must be incorporated into our Biblical theology of Proverbs whether or not an explicit allusion or quotation is present.

6. Finally, a related but distinct area for research will be to consider the book of James with regard to Biblical theology, with a similar insistence on inductive categories and intertextuality. It may be that many of the critiques articulated in this paper, with respect to an incomplete integration of the Proverbs into Biblical theologies, can also be seen to parallel with biblical-theological treatments of the book of James. A starting point could be the quotations and allusions to Proverbs within the text of James, thus establishing an inductive (rather than functional) connection.

The resurgence of Biblical theology in recent decades has been tremendously rich and fruitful. Richer and more fruitful still will be the construction of Biblical theologies which robustly integrate the wisdom of Solomon, since 'all that you desire cannot compare with her' (Proverbs 8.11).

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The Role of Personal Integrity in Soulwinning: A Systematic Review of the Theological Literature

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KEYWORDS:

| Evangelism | Church Growth | Christian Character |
| Discipleship | Spiritual Development | Christian Leader |

ABSTRACT:

Soulwinning is amongst the believer's most important responsibilities. Its effectiveness, however, depends on the perceived integrity of the message and the messenger. Understanding this nexus is critical for improving the results of soulwinning and growing the Church locally, nationally, and globally. Using a systematic review of the theological literature, this paper sheds light on this nexus.

Twenty-six articles were selected for review based on their availability, language (English), relevance and year of publication (2010-2020). The thesis offered by these articles were summarized, synthesized, and the results utilized to articulate key insights on the role of personal integrity in soulwinning.

Five components of integrity and seven postulates of the pathways from integrity to soulwinning and Church growth were identified from the systematic review. The study reveals that all five integrity components: namely behavioral, sexual, financial, scriptural, and statistical integrity, are important for soulwinning,

for discipleship and for long-term mentorship. Believers who incorporate these five components into their day-to-day life will be more result oriented soulwinners than those who possess little or none of these characteristics. The seven postulates presented offer valuable insights for further work on the subject.

INTRODUCTION

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Matthew 28:18-20.¹

Popularly referred to as the Great Commission, soulwinning is amongst the most important tasks Christ commissioned for the Church (Matthew 28:18-20). Soulwinning is the act of sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ in communities with the aim of converting the audience into Christianity.² It consists of in- and outside-church components. In-church, soulwinning consists of creating a clean, credible, upright and comfortable environment for parishioners to worship and grow. Outside the church, it consists of presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ to unbelievers and facilitating commitments to Christ by individuals who accept the message. In other words, it is nudging others (unbelievers) to change their opinions, beliefs, and practices, which they have built over time, and embrace newer ones. In both in- and outside-church contexts, the audience must perceive the message and the cues they are receiving authentic, credible, and

1 Unless otherwise stated, all Biblical citations are taken from the New King James Version(R). Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, used by Permission. All rights reserved.

2 A soulwinner is any Christian who shares the Gospel in communities. He/she is also known as evangelist, Christ witness, or Church-volunteer-worker.

believable, that is, as having integrity. In addition, they must also perceive the messenger (soulwinner) and the delivery approach reliable, credible, and respectful. Reliability, credibility, respectability, authenticity are all synonyms for integrity. For example, in an outside-church context, when the soulwinner comes across to an unbeliever as credible, believable, and respectful, the unbeliever is likely to accept the message and make the expected change. This change means the unbeliever has to quit his/her familiar traditions and embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ by becoming a born-again believer. This is akin to a sales representative convincing a customer to buy a new product. The customer must be convinced that the salesperson is credible and the product, authentic, before investing time or money in it. Applied to the in-church context, a church populated with trustworthy persons are more likely to support and encourage new members and visitors to stay on to becoming members than a church that is filled with mendacious individuals.

The argument in this paper is that integrity, which captures the authenticity of a message and the believability, dependability, reliability, trustworthiness of the messenger is a key catalyst in soulwinning. Examining this linkage is important given the rapid declines in congregational size facing the Church in the USA today. Over the last 10 years (2009 to 2019), the proportion of US population self-identifying as Christian declined from 77% (2009) to 65% (2018/19); a decline of 12 percentage points. The proportion identifying as atheist, agnostic or as nothing over the same period grew by 10%, from 16% in 2009 to 26% in 2018/19 (Appendix 1). Not only is the number of Christians in the population declining, participation in religious programs is declining as well. For instance, the proportion reporting that they attend religious services once or twice per month declined from 52% to 45% between 2009 and 2018/19. The number attending religious services a few times a year or never increased from 47% in 2009 to 54% over the period 2018/19 (Appendix 1)³. As a result of these declines, many churches have

3 Pew Research Center: Aggregated Pew Research Center Political Surveys conducted

closed, about to close or functioning at half capacity. These closures and the declining size of the population identifying as Christian is partly due to ineffective soulwinning because soulwinning is a key determinant of church growth. Therefore, any effort to increase church size and growth must focus on it because an increase in its effectiveness will accelerate growth. The thesis of this paper is that a better understanding of the linkage between integrity and soulwinning is likely to yield or strengthen interventions for effectuating church growth at the community, national, and global levels.

The specific objective of this paper is to examine this linkage by reviewing relevant theological literature on the topic and, utilizing the review, discuss:

- current definitions and understanding of the subject matter;
- components and nuances of integrity;
- axioms of the nexus between integrity and soulwinning, and
- venture explanations for filling gaps in our knowledge of the subject.

DATA AND METHOD

The study metadata were obtained from a systematic review of the theological literature. Articles were obtained by a systematic search of theological databases, (the Atla Plus and the Christian Periodicals databases).⁴ These were first accessed in April of 2020. The search was

2009-July 2019 on the telephone. Available at <https://www.pewforum.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2019/11/Detailed-tables-for-upload-11.11.19.pdf>

⁴ Per the description offered by the Falwell Library, Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA., The Atla Religion Database with Atla Serials Plus (Atla Plus) documents full-text journal articles, book reviews, and collections of essays across all fields of religion and theology, including Biblical studies, world religions, church history, and religious perspectives on social issues from 1949 to the present. The Christian Periodical Index (CPI) indexes Christian magazines and journals with strong emphasis on evangelical perspectives, from the mid-1970s to the present. Both of these databases were accessed from the Falwell Library of Liberty University in April, 2020 and between February and

updated between February and April, 2021. The key search terms were: 1) integrity, 2) soulwinning, 3) evangelism, 4) church growth, 5) witnessing [that is the one-on-one preaching of the Word of God at the community level], and 6) integrity and (soulwinning or evangelism or witnessing or church growth) as one term. The following delimiters were set:

- The articles must be published in English
- It must have been published between 2010 and 2020, and must
- include at least one of the keywords in the title

The timeline, 2010 to 2020, was considered long enough to include recent and important publications on the topic as well as a review of others published in earlier periods than the dates specified, which would have historically addressed the topic. It is also narrow enough to permit an analysis of the content of these papers. A broader time-period would make the data wieldy and difficult to articulate into concrete findings.

Table 1 presents the search results by keyword and the number of articles obtained for each keyword. As shown in the Table, there were 104 articles written on integrity between Year 2010 and 2020 per the Alta Plus and CPI databases. Only one of these treated the subject of evangelism, soulwinning, witnessing or Church growth (Table 1, #6). We selected all 104 articles on integrity for manual inspection of their titles and abstracts to find out if there were articles, other than the one in #6 (Table 1), which focused indirectly on soulwinning or witnessing or evangelism or Church growth, but which were omitted by the electronic search. Thirty articles were obtained at this first step, 14 from Atla Plus and 16 from the CPI database. Next, we manually inspected all the titles obtained independently for evangelism, witnessing, soulwinning and Church growth for evidence that they also captured the subject of integrity directly or indirectly. Only one article was identified at this point. This was added to the pile on integrity in step 1, making 105 articles in all. Of these 105 articles, 31

April, 2021.

addressed the issue of evangelism, soulwinning, witnessing and/or church growth (Figure 1). Next, we pulled all 31 articles for more detailed review of their abstracts and, for articles which had no abstract, we skimmed the text to see how much attention was given to the subject matter of interest. Five articles, which appear to contain the relevant key terms but do not treat the subject of integrity in any substantive way or treated it in contexts other than Christian religious practices or settings were dropped (Step 2). This step left us with 26 articles (Figure 1). These 26 articles were studied, summarized, synthesized, and analyzed to identify the general themes emerging from the review as well as the axioms on integrity's role in soulwinning (step 3). The analysis is presented in the results section of this paper. Summarized as postulates, the axioms are important guides for further research on the subject.

All the 26 articles on integrity were published in peer reviewed sources with the exception of the sermon by Pastor E.A. Adeboye, which was secured in electronic form.⁵ This sermon is an authoritative statement on the linkage between integrity and soulwinning and is used as the theoretical base for this work. Four documents, three of which were published in the gray literature were included in the review. Information from these documents were used to illustrate the devastating effects of the lack of integrity on the Church and/or Christian ministers. A listing of the articles is presented in the bibliography.

RESULTS

In this section, definitions and components of integrity per the literature are presented. Based on this metadata, we discuss the axiom of the nexus between integrity and soulwinning. Next, we illustrate how all

⁵ This sermon was first preached at the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) Overcomers House, Bristol, UK, 2014; available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H08H37Vq_vY. It was preached, again, in Nigeria in 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJljjg2l9LU>. Pastor E.A. Adeboye is the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God with Parishes in over 196 Countries.

the integrity components individually and collectively contribute to explaining soulwinning and, ultimately, church growth. The final section, the conclusion, presents the summary of the findings and their implications for further work.

DEFINITION OF INTEGRITY: WHAT EXACTLY DO WE MEAN BY INTEGRITY?

A few definitions of integrity emerge from the literature. Pastor E.A. Adeboye⁶ defines it simply as “...saying what you mean and meaning what you say,” be it in the secret or in the open,⁷ and irrespective of whether doing so brings pleasure or pain. The goal is to please God by living according to biblical standards (see also Matthew 5:37; James 4:1). This lifestyle is described as godly and charitable,⁸ light giving,⁹ honest, not corrupt, hypocritical or dubious.¹⁰ In this view, a person of integrity affirms the tenets of the scripture (see Numbers 23:19, James 5:12, Mathew 5:37). When behavior departs from this standard, the individual comes across as fake.

A second definition offered by Moss¹¹ highlights the missional and charismatic attributes of integrity. In his view, integrity is responsible and purposeful behavior. Informed by past images and experiences, a man of integrity is sacrificial, sincere, candid, with a commitment to producing good in himself and in others. Persons of integrity are true to themselves and loyal to their soul. Again, that loyalty is based on Scriptural learnings.

A third set of definitions place integrity at the institutional or

6 Pastor E. A. Adeboye, “Integrity,” Sermon.

7 Vickie Hughes, “Authentic Leadership: Practices to Promote Integrity,” *Journal of Christian Nursing* 35.2 (2018): E28-E31

8 Heather Thompson, “Integrity & spiritual life,” *The Expository Times* 12 (2010): 403-404.

9 Lanser Scott, “Digging Integrity,” *Bible & Spade* 30.3 (2017):57.

10 Kelebogile Resane, “Servant Leadership and Shepherd Leadership: The Missing Dynamic in Pastoral Integrity in S/A Today,” *HTS Theological Studies* 76.1 (2020): a5608.

11 David M. Moss, “Shadowboxing with integrity,” *Pastoral Psychology* 67 (2018):399.

community level. Dreyer¹² defines it as the ‘Church being Church’, that is, real and charismatic and not a charlatan or materialistic organization. Living with integrity, according to Dreyer, is obeying God and listening to the teachings and Word of Jesus Christ. This view is consistent with that provided by Scott¹³ and Resane.¹⁴ Shambare and Kgatla¹⁵ applies the definition in the context of nation building. They stated that integrity is the Church’s ability to stay relevant, delivering its missional and strategic/contextual objectives without fear of castration, trepidation, or persecution, even when those risks exist. To be a Church of integrity in their view, the Church must be able to embrace opportunities and risks associated with its mission and deliver impact at the societal level. Delivering impact at the societal level is, especially, considered important because the Church is not just a religious organization, but a community-based organization that is uniquely equipped with spiritual power and social intelligence for nation building, including helping a country in crises to heal or engendering neighborly solidarity in periods of political unrest. The ability to do this work without abandoning the traditional role of preaching the Gospel is, according to these authors, integrity.

Based on the foregoing, we define integrity, in this study, as behavior/action that is characteristically truthful, scriptural, charismatic, reliable, coherent, knowledgeable, and charitable. An organization/church is one of integrity in as much as the members display these attributes.

Integrity behavior can be learned because the virtues, which constitute it are measurable, objective, observable, and teachable. Time is, however required for learning the virtues.¹⁶ Individuals and organizations

12 Wim Dreyer, “Church, Mission and Ethics. Being a Church with Integrity,” *HTS Theological Studies*, 72.1 (2016): a3163.

13 Scott, “Digging Integrity,” 57.

14 Resane, “Servant Leadership and Shepherd Leadership,” a5608.

15 Blessing Shambare, and Salaedo T. Kgatla, “Church, Mission and Reconstruction: Being A Church with Integrity in Reconstruction Discourse in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe,” *Hervomde Teologiese Studies* 74.1 (2018):1-12.

16 Griffin, Jerry. “The Integrity of Authority & Identity.” *Chaplaincy Today* 26.2(2010): 36-37.

can improve integrity-worthiness over time.¹⁷ Other factors, such as geography (residence) and 'integrity density,' may influence integrity-worthiness among individuals or institutions. Integrity density refers to the total number of integrity worthy people in an area compared to the total population of the area. Individuals or organizations living in areas saturated with people of integrity may be more likely to learn integrity much faster and deliver more integrity-worthy behavior overtime than those in low integrity areas. If being truthful, coherent, reliable, consistent, knowledgeable and charitable are desired elements of integrity-worthy behavior, then behavior which exhibit these virtues will be a key for soulwinning. Individuals/institutions of integrity are, therefore, more likely successful soulwinners than those of little or no integrity. To produce action integral to church growth, however, the individual must have control over their behavior, value the desired action, have the skill or knowledge to execute the desired action, and be able to monitor, evaluate and learn from the action. Using the lessons learned, he/she must be able to modify or reinforce the behavior to create the desired outcome. This [integrity] framework largely captures the rubric of the social cognitive theory¹⁸ and is efficacious for elaborating how to grow the Church system.

Components of integrity

Integrity is a vital force in church growth. The Church grows by adding new members while retaining the old or by adding new members at a rate much greater than the rate at which it is losing members. Integrity is critical to these processes. Five components of integrity, which emanate from the systematic review are behavioral, sexual, financial, scriptural, and data/statistical integrity. There are four others: personal, organizational,

17 Griffin, "The Integrity of Authority & Identity," 36-37.

18 Wayne W. Lamorte, *The Social Cognitive Theory* (2019), Internet Article, accessed on May 21, 2021, available at <https://sphweb.bumc.bu.edu/otlt/MPH-Modules/SB/BehavioralChangeTheories/BehavioralChangeTheories5.html>.

pastoral, and vocational integrity, which are mentioned in the literature.¹⁹ Structurally, these integrity types are same as the five components identified earlier, but for their labels. For instance, personal integrity encompasses all five components. Organizational/pastoral integrity illustrates the outcomes of all five components at the organization level. Vocational integrity refers to proficiency in the delivery of technical or professional responsibilities, a dimension of behavioral integrity, akin to scriptural or statistical integrity. In the following paragraphs, we present a more detailed description of the five integrity components.

Behavioral integrity is the consistency between what an individual says and do and what the audience think. Since the Bible is the standard for behavior among believers, behavioral integrity deals with the correct application of the Word of God in day-to-day life. This is a key to attracting others to the message of the Cross. The Scripture states that individual Christians are the epistle that others read (2 Corinthians 3:2). Unless the behavior of Christians is consistent with what they profess, they will have difficulty in representing Christ to the World, no matter their oratory skills. Inconsistencies between words and deeds brought down the ministry of Reverend Jim and Tammy Bakker in the late 80s.²⁰ Consistency between words and action is important. This is what is intended when the Bible tells believers to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). To produce the [nine] fruit of the Spirit is to be a person of integrity, that is to meet the expected behavior in the purest sense.

Sexual integrity describes a state of sexual chastity, marked by the complete absence of lust or incontinence in the management of sexual desires. The lack of it produces corruption, immorality, indiscipline and adherence to substandard behavior.

Financial integrity describes the ability to use money wisely, according

19 Brown, J.O. 2015. The Importance of integrity on Christian Leadership: Giftedness + Integrity = Productivity. Dissertation Notices. *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 9.1 (2015): 115

20 <https://abcnews.go.com/US/scandals-brought-bakkers-uss-famous-televangelists/story?id=60389342>

to divine guidance, and with complete absence of any form of infidelity. Financial fraud constituted 15 of the 24 inditements handed to Reverend Jim Bakker in 1988 and for which he was convicted in 1989.²¹

Scriptural integrity is competence in knowing, teaching, sharing and doing the Word of God. Scriptural integrity is a key to growing the Church as the lack of it, in the word of Reverend Billy Graham, promotes sensationalism, excessive emotionalism, anti-intellectualism, and controversy. The Bible says that those who know their God shall be strong and do exploits. Soulwinning is a type of exploit, akin to pulling out those who want to be burnt from the fire (Jude 1:23). It requires power, the type endowed by the knowledge of the Word of God and by the Holy Ghost.

Finally, data/statistical integrity is the readiness to use data correctly with complete absence of intentional falsification or exaggeration.²² Intended or unintended falsification of data is problematic, the former is, however, much more difficult to correct than the latter. While the latter is inadvertent and can be corrected by training and skills building, the former is egoistic and requires a behavioral transformation, which may take months or even years to achieve. It is also potentially the most egregious of the two because people are not likely to recover from its effect in a hurry. Although documented example of intentional use of false data among the clergy are hard to come by, argument presented in the interview with Reverend Billy Graham, published by Martin, 2018, indicates that the *Modesto Manifesto* was developed by the Reverend and his team to avoid this pitfall to which many televangelists have fallen.

Evidence presented in the literature indicates that the lack of integrity can seriously debilitate whole congregations, organizations, and individuals.²³ The experiences of Reverend Jimmy Swaggart present good

21 <https://abcnews.go.com/US/scandals-brought-bakkers-uss-famous-televangelists/story?id=60389342>

22 William Martin, “Lead us Not into Scandal. (Integrity).” *Christianity Today* 62.3 (2018): 81-91.

23 Bill Newton, “Looking for Integrity,” *World* 26 (2011): 48-49.

illustration of this danger.²⁴ He was defrocked in 1988 by the Assembly of God Church Presbytery following an accusation of involvement with a prostitute in 1987. Although the truth of the accusation remains unknown, since the Reverend never confessed to the specific sin, his ministry nevertheless suffered a major blow as a result of the accusation. Following an implication in another accusation of involvement with another prostitute and in same sex relationships in 1991, his nationwide ministry downsized to just one center in one State – the Family Worship Center, based in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. His weekly broadcast, which formally aired on over 250 TV stations in the USA alone, downsized to being broadcast on only one network, the SonLife Broadcasting Network (SBN) nationally. The enrollment at his Bible College declined from roughly 1500 students in 1987 to 350 students by 1991. The Ministry has not yet recovered fully from these shocks. For instance, the Bible College is still trying to obtain accreditation and many of the programs that were canceled in the 90s have not been reinstated.²⁵

The Catholic Church provides another example of a Church that has been rocked by accusations of sexual and financial impropriety, involving members of its Clergy. In 2001 alone, evidence presented by Formicola²⁶ indicates that the Church paid three billion dollars in hush monies to victims of sexual abuse involving the Church's clergy. In several cases, the Church had to sell off Church property, seek loans, or declare bankruptcy to pay off these monies, according to this author. For instance, in Fairbanks, Alaska, Formicola cited data that showed that the Church had to sell its Conference Center and the home of the Bishop of the Diocese to pay victims. Also in Wilmington, Delaware, the Bankruptcy Court held a local parish, the Diocese and a religious order jointly liable for compensations totaling five million (\$5million) Dollars.

24 Wikipedia, "Jimmy Swaggart." Accessed on April 25, 2021. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jimmy_Swaggart, 2021..

25 Prostitute Says Swaggart Had Sex with Her," May 24, 1988. Accessed April 25, 2021 and May 5, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/5729a4678a80264fe7f8c64808e30e53>.

26 Jo R. Formicola, "Recalibrating U.S. Catholic Church – State Relations: The Effects of Clerical Sexual Abuse," *Journal of Church and State* 58.2 (2015): 317-328.

These payments introduced modifications to the Churches administrative structure, which brought untold pains and fears to the church hierarchy at the Diocese's level. These fears, per Formicola, include:

- the fear of losing government assistance for charitable, education and health services;
- the fear that the State judicial apparatus might challenge the Canon law upon which the Church's autonomy rested, permitting greater State intrusion into the Church's ownership and management of property, and
- the fear of the State regulating the Church's use of charitable donations.

These fears appear to have materialized overtime, according to Formicola²⁷. The superiority of civil authorities over the Canon law in matters involving sexual abuse by the clergy has increased. Areas, which were traditionally under ecclesiastical control have now been brought under State oversight. Litigations of cases of sexual abuse, involving the Church's clergy and staff, have also become more aggressive. Victims can now litigate cases in both criminal and civil Courts, something that would have been impossible in the pre-scandal period. Along with these changes, settlements have grown larger and larger, threatening the financial stability of the Church. Sexual scandal is like wildfire; it can take down any organization or individuals. Integrity is, therefore, indispensable for believers who want to run a successful Christian race and for career gospel ministers who wants to finish strong.

Each of the five components has an independent effect on soulwinning and Church growth. The axioms of these effects are elaborated next.

27 Jo R. Formicola, "Recalibrating U.S. Catholic Church – State Relations: The Effects of Clerical Sexual Abuse," 317-328

EXPLAINING THE AXIOM OF THE NEXUS BETWEEN INTEGRITY AND SOULWINNING

In this section, based on the metadata presented, we elaborate the axioms of the nexus between personal integrity and soulwinning. Integrity is explicated by its five components: behavioral, sexual, financial, scriptural and data/statistical integrity. The effects of these components on soulwinning and Church growth is illustrated graphically as shown.

Adapting the thesis presented earlier by Pastor E. A. Adeboye,²⁸ we postulate that integrity has no direct effect on soulwinning, but works indirectly through trust, influence, and followership to effectuate soulwinning, which then leads to church growth. This means that individuals or churches wanting to improve the outcome of soulwinning can work on building their trustworthiness and influence with the result that individuals who find them credible, reliable, and relatable are likely to follow them.

Church growth results in blessings for the Church and for the individual soulwinners. Being in God's will is a blessing for the soulwinner. On top of that, he/she is blessed materially by the prosperity and good success that obedience to God draws into his life. The Church at large is blessed by increasing physical and material resources received from expanding attendance. These blessings further stimulate growth when they are ploughed back into Church development. However, blessings may be received independent of Church growth, such as when individuals, who are not members of the Church, make huge donations to the Church. Such donations can stimulate growth if invested in Church programs. Such growths are, however, sporadic; growth is more sustainable when initiated internally as shown in Figure 1.

Let me illustrate this change by demonstrating how each of the five integrity components work through the intermediate variables to produce converts and church growth.

28 Pastor E. A. Adeboye, "Integrity," Sermon.

Behavioral integrity, which is the attainment of congruence between what one thinks, say and do and how others view those utterances and actions, is critical for soulwinning.²⁹ Those able to achieve this congruence are likely to come across to the target audience as credible, reliable, and worthy of fellowship than those who are incongruent in what they say/do and how others perceive them.

Defined as maturity in the deployment of sexual feelings, sexual integrity is a key measure of Christian character. There is a large role for the Church in reinforcing sexual integrity among the congregation. Soulwinning does not end with getting people into the pews, but includes, for every believer, a guarantee of good spaces to grow, flourish, and develop Christlike character. The lack of an appropriate context can cause believers to develop feelings of rejection and cynicism, which they may compensate by engaging in sexual vices.³⁰ Du Plessis stated that those who will empower others to do the right things must first be empowered themselves. In other words, the would-be soulwinners must be integrated into Christ by possessing the relevant competencies.³¹ Principal among these is the:

- Knowledge of the Word of God;
- Knowledge of human dynamics;
- Knowledge of the scriptures and relevant ecclesiology, and
- Knowledge of both the ecclesiastical and societal environment and dynamics.

Given how rapidly and deep sexual sins can destroy the moral authority of the Church, churches, which facilitate the acquisition of sexual integrity, are likely more effective in retaining converts than their counterparts,

29 Inference based on the definition provided by Pastor E.A. Adeboye's and consistent with the Scriptural definition of personal integrity in Matthew 5:37.

30 Linda A. Du Plessis, "Principles of the Pastoral Guidance Process to Women on Matters Related to Human Vulnerability and Personal Integrity," *HTS Hervormde teologiese Studies* 71, 2(2015):1-6.

31 Du Plessis, "Principles of Pastoral Guidance ...," 1-6.

which ignore it. Similarly, individuals who possess skills in managing their emotions and sexual feelings are likely to be more effective in winning souls and enabling Church growth than their counterparts, who are incontinent in the deployment of sexual feelings.

Financial integrity is defined as possessing credibility in handling and managing money.³² It is an important skill that individuals in the church and the community must have. For Church-based leaders and workers, the types of beliefs they hold about money is important because there are right and wrong beliefs about money. The wrong beliefs, according to Rodin,³³ include:

- Belief that money is detached, amoral and unconnected to spiritual responsibility
- Belief that money is an index of Church and ministerial success just as it is a measure of organizational success in the business world
- Belief that prosperity is synonymous with having a large wealth and financial control
- Belief that ownership rather than stewardship mentality is Christian leadership

Adherence to wrong beliefs can cause individuals in leadership to pursue wealth and ignore spiritual growth. Pursuit of money can cause the Church to grow weak, inconsistent, and ineffective. Rodin advised that the best way for believers wanting to overcome the temptation to idolize money is to die to lusts and pride and see money as a vehicle for expanding Kingdom goals rather than as a weapon of ministerial superiority.

32 Martin, "Lead us Not into Scandal. (Integrity)," 81-91.
Scott Rodin, "In the Service of One God Only: Financial Integrity in Christian Leadership," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 37(2013): 46-56.

33 Rodin, "In the Service of One God Only: Financial Integrity in Christian Leadership," 46-56.

Described as competence in knowing, teaching, and doing the Word of God, scriptural integrity is pivotal for soulwinning and Church growth. Scriptural infidelity can come from intentional manipulation of the Word of God for personal interest or from deficits in the knowledge of, and/or obedience to, the Word. This is why the Scriptures urge all believers to diligently study the Word so that they are competent in it and able to present it confidently to all audiences as well as reap the blessings therein for themselves (2 Tim 2:15, Josh 1:8). An individual who is knowledgeable in the Word of God will be potent in presenting it with simplicity and clarity, which, in turn, will generate trust and commitments in the target population. But the Word poor is brutish and superficial; he is unable to convince even the most sympathetic audience of the relevance of the Word or the actions elicited. Whatever the source, incompetence in presenting the Scripture compromises its potency, undermines its purity, and dilute its ability to convert souls unto Christ (Psalm 19:7).

Closely related to scriptural integrity is the use of honest statistics. Dishonest statistics, which is the intentional deployment of incorrect data in performance reporting, is the enemy of soulwinning and Church strength. Lying about Church statistics creates an atmosphere of suspicion and discomfort around ministerial efforts when the lie is discovered. Those who report inaccurate statistics are likely ineffective, unattractive, and poorly trusted by their constituents. The converts and the church's influence of such individuals will decline over the long haul as illustrated by the examples provided earlier in this paper.

Although these integrity components have independent effects on soulwinning, a soulwinner who combines all five in day-to-day life is at a higher level of readiness to win souls and grow the Church than those who possess little or none of the five attributes. Defined as integrity worthiness, individuals at the highest level of integrity readiness have sharper antennae, with zero tolerance for immorality and indiscipline; they are quick to avoid every appearance of impropriety. An example of

a worker of high integrity worthiness was the biblical Joseph, according to the story told in Genesis 39. He was sold as a slave to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, king of Egypt. In Potiphar's house, he was acclaimed for his diligence and trustworthiness [behavioral integrity], which made Potiphar to appoint him as the manager over his estate. Joseph eschewed the promptings by Potiphar's wife to engage in infidelity with her [sexual integrity]. He did so because of the fear, and the knowledge of the Word, of God he possessed [Scriptural integrity]. As the Prime Minister of Egypt, he managed the resources of the entire nation throughout the seven years of plenty, the seven years of famine, and in the following periods, spanning his entire lifetime, without misreporting stock, sales or flow of resources [financial and statistical integrity]. As a result of his integrity, he was trusted and exalted by those he worked for and was well respected by all peoples, evidencing growth and blessings.

The preceding explanations are articulated as seven postulates of readiness for soulwinning and summarize the key messages of this paper. These postulates are presented here:

1. Integrity has no direct effect on soulwinning, but works indirectly through trust, influence, and followership-building to effectuate soulwinning and, ultimately, church growth.
2. Behavioral integrity, which is the attainment of congruence between what you think/say/do and how others perceive you is critical for soulwinning.
3. Individuals and churches which prioritize sexual integrity are likely to be better soulwinners than those who take a laissez faire attitude towards it.
4. Money and the management of money is an important skill for soulwinners. Leaders who are trustworthy in the management of financial resources are likely strong and effective in soulwinning.
5. Lack of scriptural integrity produces unbelief in the receiving

- population and debilitate the readiness to accept the Word of God or the action elicited.
6. The deployment of dishonest statistics is the enemy of soulwinning. Believers and leaders who falsify performance reports are likely not well trusted and more likely ineffective in soulwinning than those who give honest reports.
 7. Integrity worthiness, which is the amount of the five integrity components possessed by individuals, is a measure of readiness to win souls. Individuals who score high on all five components will be more effective soulwinners than those who score low on all, or score zero on any one, components.

INTEGRITY FACILITATORS

When integrity leads to soulwinning, the church grows. Both the soulwinner and the Church are blessed. For one thing, Christ promised the soulwinner that He will be with him/her to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:20b). As the Scripture states, if God be for us, and we remain on the side of God, no one can be against us (Romans 8:31b). By strengthening integrity worthiness, blessings and the potential to receive it become motivations for soulwinning.

Strengthening personal integrity and accelerating the momentum for soulwinning requires moral and spiritual renewal³⁴. Inconsistencies between profession and action is a manifestation of deeply seated weakness in a Christian's life. Changing this attitude requires a fundamental change in the believer's practice, akin to the Biblical injunction to not conform, but to be transformed by the renewal of thoughts and minds (Romans 12:2). Routine assessment of performance is a key for this type of change.³⁵ Such routine performance assessment requires a constant reflection

34 Vickie Hughes, "Authentic Leadership: Practices to Promote Integrity," E28-E31.

35 Rodin, "In the Service of One God Only: Financial Integrity in Christian Leadership," 46-56

informed by feedbacks from colleagues, from the Scriptures (the standard guideline for Christian action), and any other Bible-based doctrinal guidelines provided to individuals by their church. A good illustration of this type of evaluation is the creation story documented in Genesis 1 & 2. In that story, once God created a thing, He assessed it to see that the result was what He intended before creating another. He moved to create the next item only when He was satisfied with the quality of the previous creature. As His workmanship, believers too ought to learn from their past to organize their future. Obtaining feedback would require connecting/communicating with colleagues and being grounded in the Word of God and the relevant ecclesiastical guidelines. This knowledge will help to drive an already motivated soulwinner towards greater accomplishments.

Sound discipleship training is a facilitator for integrity. Robust Christian leadership must build on formal and informal discipleship training. The formal training, such as training received in Bible colleges, is a key to scriptural integrity, particularly for ministry leaders. Without this education, the use of continuous on-the-job pastoral training to fix integrity gaps will be ineffective. Hence, Reverend Wright³⁶ calls Christian leaders to provide sound discipleship education for their congregation and ensure that ordained ministers obtain good background training. Since disciples are the soulwinners,³⁷ good discipleship education is important to promote integrity both on the altar and in the pews.

The Church must provide congregants with the opportunity to receive good discipleship education and individual believers must make an effort to acquire it. Jesus said "... learn from me ... and you will find rest for your soul" (Matthew 11:29). The Apostle Paul said to his disciple, Timothy, "And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." (2Timothy 2:2). To be effective, discipleship education must be of the right dose and type. Reverend Wright noted that using brief, on-the-job

36 Christopher J. H. Wright, "Humility, Integrity and Simplicity," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 39.14 (2015): 214-218.

37 Orin W. Cummings, "Vocational Integrity," *Source* 57.2 (2018):107-110.

training to fill knowledge gaps among Christians, particularly, Christian leaders who lack the background theological training, is ineffective. He recommends a combination of some formal and informal education for every Christian leader, which includes soulwinners.³⁸ Every believer must know the Word of God sufficiently well to act truthfully, with integrity, and present the gospel with confidence in their communities. To this end, Jesus Christ deployed a variety of people-based approaches, ranging from didactic method (lecture-room type teaching approach), induction, mentoring, story-telling to supportive oversight to orient His disciples in the things of the Kingdom.

He utilized the didactic method to present new ideas or complicated concepts, such as when He taught the principles of the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 3-7). Induction is utilized to build confidence in the disciples. For instance, in Matthew 5:40-41, Jesus told the disciples that whoever receives them receives Him and whoever receives Him receives them. In this way, he tells the disciples that they have same power, same authority as He, God, and that they should see and carry themselves with confidence. Mentoring consists of learning by doing. Jesus deployed this approach many times when He sent the disciples out to the community to preach the gospel while he stayed behind to observe them (see Matthew 10:5-10 & 14-15). Stories are particularly effective means of communication because stories are not easily forgotten. Jesus told the Apostles many parables and stories to ground them in the right way to approach the things of the Kingdom and how they must conduct themselves in private and public spheres. These include the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:18-23), the parable of the wheat and tares (Matthew 13:24-30), the parable of the hidden treasure (Matthew 13:45-46) and so on.

The fifth method, supportive oversight, was deployed by Jesus to supervise the Apostles. For instance, although Jesus knew that Judas was unfaithful, He never exposed him, but prayed for him and extended

38 Wright, "Humility, Integrity and Simplicity," 218.

to him all the privileges the others received (John 13:1-5,12-15). He publicly acknowledged his disciples, went through same experiences with them and never challenged them openly. In this way, the disciples felt comfortable, protected and a part of Him. As a result, when Christ departed from the earth, the disciples were willing to die for His course. These approaches are needed today even more than before to build a Church, whose members are knowledgeable, committed, truthful and integral to the body of Jesus Christ.

A man becomes his thought because the mind is the seat of thoughts. Thoughts are the catalysts for action (Proverb 23:7). The heart is the wellspring of life (Proverbs 4:23). This means that the quality of human action is dependent on the quality of thoughts that propel it. Newton (2011, 49)³⁹ stated that heart issues can only be addressed by heart's solutions, which are words systematically injected into the heart to direct it towards pure, honest, righteous thoughts (2 Pet 2:9). Mentorship and supportive leadership can improve this symbiotic relationship between thoughts and action and catalyze integrity if they succeed in helping congregants to script a correct narrative of themselves and of others. The Church must help their members and leaders to achieve this objective.

INTEGRITY INHIBITORS

The main inhibitor of personal integrity is lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). A study conducted among seminar participants at the Alpha and Omega Institute, Jamaica, revealed that, of the 20 Pastors and lay leaders, who participated in the survey, those who had challenges displaying integrity were those who 1) lacked requisite administrative and technical/tactical skills for the job, and 2) those who lacked the knowledge of the vision and mission of their organizations.⁴⁰

39 Newton, "Looking for Integrity," 48-49.

40 J.O. Brown, "The Importance of Integrity on Christian Leadership: Giftedness +

Lack of knowledge of the consequences of actions is another key element, which can prompt a believer to be inconsistent in what he/she says and does. Inconsistency is sin and the wage of sin is death (John 12:16; Eze 18:20a). Knowledge is critical to whether a person chooses to live, by embracing righteous lifestyle, or dies, by cuddling sin. God instructed Joshua after Moses passed the mantle of leadership to him to not part with the Book of the Law, but to meditate on it day and night and to do according to what is written in it in order to prosper and have good success (Josh 1:8). God knows that knowledge is the precursor for action. For example, pride promotes ego and, to sustain ego, some ministers deploy dishonest statistics to report performance. Others indulge in sexual sins because it is pleasurable. But when they understand, per the Word of God, that wealth (tangible or intangible) gained by dishonest means will be diminished (Prov 13:11), they may be encouraged to opt out of sin. The examples given earlier from the Catholic Church and Reverends Jim/Tammy Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart ministries demonstrate the devastation that immorality and/or dishonesty can bring to a Church-based organization or individuals. A believer that is knowledgeable in the consequences of poor personal integrity will be less likely to be a hypocrite.

As said before, being well grounded in the Word of God and the relevant ecclesiology is not only critical to living a life of integrity, it helps the believer to present the Word to others in simple, clear, articulate manner. Shallow theology and poor knowledge of the relevant literature for ministry debilitates integrity. Hence Lomenick⁴¹ noted that integrity, including scriptural integrity, is essential for every believer, and given the level of pessimism and skepticism that saturate the times, integrity is probably more valuable now than before.

integrity = Productivity. Dissertation Notices. *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 9.1 (2015): 115.

41 Brad Lomenick, "Lead with Integrity," *Outreach* 12 (2014): 120.

CONCLUSION

The main argument of this paper is that there is an effect of integrity on soulwinning and church growth that is not well studied. To understand the status of knowledge on this effect, we conducted a systematic review of twenty-six articles obtained from the theological literature. The study findings reveal that integrity has real implications for soulwinning and church growth. Church organizations interested in building membership, expanding membership, and accelerating growth must consider investing in, and promoting, integrity among the clergy, as well as in the laity. Also, individual believers who want to have a meaningful Christian life must prioritize personal integrity in their public and private lives.

Based on the reviewed metadata, we present seven postulates underlying the axioms of the nexus between integrity and soulwinning. An evaluation of these postulates will be beneficial for further clarifying the nature, patterns, and mechanisms of these effects. Such an evaluation may take the form of a large-scale survey, quasi-experimental studies, or simple qualitative case studies. Whatever its size, the study should be rigorous so that the findings can help to increase the understanding of the linkage between integrity and soulwinning as well as elaborate interventions for improving the outcomes of efforts to win souls and promote church growth.

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Toward a Constructed Theology of Personality: Human Personality Explored in Light of Redemption History

Daniel Kirkpatrick

KEYWORDS:

| Personality | Soul | Theology of Personality |
| Dichotomy and Trichotomy | Redemption History |

ABSTRACT:

Recent interest in human personality (as evidenced by such tests as the Enneagram and MBTI profiles) has been met with relative silence from the theological community. Generally viewed solely as a matter for psychologists, theologians have missed the opportunity to analyze theologically the nature of being in terms of personality. This article attempts to bridge such a gap in literature with view to argue for the inclusion of personality within the Greek terms πνεῦμα and ψυχή. It will further examine how human personality fits within redemption history, exploring its creation, distortion, redemption, and glorification.

INTRODUCTION

There are no real personalities anywhere else (apart from God). Until you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self. Sameness is to be found most among the most ‘natural’ men, not among those who surrender to Christ. How monotonously alike all the great tyrants and conquerors have been: how gloriously different are the saints. ~ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*.¹

While some secular anthropologists such as Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917) dismiss religion as a mistaken inference from experience and reality, Christian theologians likewise dismiss often secular scholarship concerning the complexities of human makeup. Desiring to play solely within one’s academic sandbox, Christian theologians often limit treatment of human nature to Augustinian anthropology, stressing innate moral inability before God, the depravity of human soul, and the corruption of the flesh (matters of little significance to many Post-Enlightenment and Post-Modern scholars). Likewise, matters of great significance to secular scholars rarely draw anything but ire or disinterest from biblical scholars.² Nowhere is this more evident than in the matter of human personality.³

Over the past century, two notable works on theology and personality have been produced, namely *God and Personality* by Clement C. J. Webb (published 2004 and based upon the Gifford Lectures at University of Aberdeen from 1917 to 1919) and *The Theology of Personality* by William S. Bishop in 1926. Webb’s treatment (the more influential of the two) argues that personality (distinct from individuality) must first be understood as it relates to the Trinity, then how it relates to humanity.⁴

1 C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1980), 226.

2 For example, see Evans, C. S., “Doing Psychology as a Christian: A Plea for Wholeness” in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 40, no. 1: 32-36 (2012).

3 See Aleksander S. Santrac, “Towards the Possible Integration of Psychology and Christian Faith; Faculties of Human Personality and the Lordship of Christ” in *In Die Skriflig* 50.1 (2016), 1.

4 Clement C. J. Webb. *God and Personality* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004).

This is a particularly helpful observation that keeps the Christian tradition from resurrecting historic heresies of modalism and patripassionism while simultaneously upholding God's personal and transcendent qualities. Still, might more be said?

Church tradition is well aware that the triune God is united in essence yet distinct in personhood, yet such a comparison can also be made concerning human existence leading to a theology of personality. While the Cappadocian fathers helpfully led the church to distinguish between *ousia* and *hypostasis* (leading to the formulation of Christ being *homoousios* with the Father in the Nicene Creed), they did not formulate (for such was not their concern) how humans can also have the same substances yet be distinguishable subjects. Such is unquestionably true, however. While comprised of similar makeup (a body, mind, will, soul, emotions, and the like), humanity (reflecting the divine image) shares unique qualities that lead to individuality. These unique human qualities (much like the divine qualities) are not absorbed into a homogenous whole, for such would deny the essence and uniqueness of true humanity. They remain distinct features despite common properties. Such is the nature of the human makeup, and such may be analyzed theologically. While treatment of the general qualities of humanity are warranted (and there is no shortage of Christian treatments on the body, mind, soul, and will), theological attention to the specific qualities of humanity (namely personality) are also warranted.

As such, inattention to human personality on the part of Christians is not justifiable on biblical grounds, nor should evangelicals believe they have nothing to contribute concerning this matter.⁵ Indeed, this paper will argue that human personality is a deeply spiritual issue deserving serious theological reflection. Rejecting notions of monism, the Christian

5 See A. C. Tjelveit, "Lost Opportunities, Partial Successes, and Key questions: Some Historical Lessons" in *Journal of Psychology and Theology*, 40.1 (2012), 19 who argues from a psychological perspective that human personality is based not solely upon human intellect and emotion but spiritual aspects as well. For a thoroughly comprehensive understanding of personality, he argues one must look to matters of faith to understand both origins and functions of human personality.

tradition has primarily argued that humans are holistic beings with an immaterial substance.⁶ Regardless of one's position in the trichotomy (the belief a human is composed of a body, soul, and spirit) or dichotomy (being composed of a body and soul/spirit) debate, the Christian tradition recognizes that human beings have a personal substance unique unto themselves that makes them who they are.⁷ People are defined not merely by external appearances but internal attributes, both of which were affected by the Fall of Adam and may be redeemed in Christ. While this paper does not seek to integrate psychology/anthropology with theology, it does argue that such disciplines do not own a monopoly on the subject. Wishing to explore human personality in light of redemption history, this paper will seek to construct a theology of personality.

DEFINING PERSON AND PERSONALITY

Person

Humans as sole material substance (monism) argued in the modern era by Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Thomas Hobbes has a history dating back to early Greek philosophy through the influential works of Anaxagoras, Democritus, and Epicurus.⁸ Not only is there no supernatural or transcendent being governing the universe, there is no immaterial

6 Up until the mid-twentieth century, biblical anthropology (primarily in Pauline studies) concerned dichotomy and trichotomy perspectives. The change is often attributed to Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), 1:194-196. Still, it is argued that the Scriptures and earliest Christians maintained a view of the holistic self with material (body) and immaterial (spiritual) components. See Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt: A Christian Anthropology*, Olive Wyon, transl. (Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 1957), 91-101.

7 See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, Matthew J. O'Connell, transl. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 522-532 who (while arguing from a dichotomist perspective) argues convincingly that the Old and New Testament scriptures point to a bodily and immaterial self.

8 Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, 40-49. Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 375.

substance to the self. While not denying that humans have thoughts and emotions, such materialists view human construction solely in biological terms. Religion is humanity’s attempt to make sense of the reality around them, and given that culture helps shape personality, one’s personality may become (albeit mistakenly) religious in nature according to this view.⁹

Such is not the Christian perspective, though the Christian perspective is vast.¹⁰ While not denying the biological components to the human framework (as in Docetism), the Christian tradition affirms the existence of the soul/spirit giving rise to the dichotomy and trichotomy debate mentioned above.¹¹ Solving such a debate is beyond the scope of this

9 Manning Nash, “Religion Beyond the Functionalist Frontier” in *Personality and the Cultural Construction of Society*, David K. Jordan and Marc J. Swartz eds. (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 246-249.

10 The argument made here, that Christians affirm the spiritual properties of humans, is not exclusive to the Christian faith and is (it is argued) found in most religious traditions. See Vassilis Saroglou, “Studying Religion in Personality and Social Psychology” in *Religion, Personality, and Social Behavior* (New York, NY: Taylor & Francis, 2014), 1-7, 17-19. As it relates to the vastness of the Christian perspective, the Eastern Orthodox notion of *theosis* is particularly insightful. Through the process of deification, the true personhood of a human is restored (in *ecclesial* community). Christ is the model of true personhood, and as one becomes Christ, a person can also reach true selfhood. See Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009), 162-163. See also Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1957), 53 and 121 who argues (from an Eastern Orthodox perspective) the distinction (as argued here) between *individuals* and *persons*. Individuals in this sense refers to the general makeup of humanity whereas *persons* refers to the unique attributes within a person. A perfected person (unique attributes) comes as a result of synergistic activity in becoming god, becoming like the divine, in complete participates with the divine nature. Exhaustion of this perspective is beyond the scope of this study, yet it should be included in mention of the vastness of Christian thought. There, one’s personality is perfected by partaking of the divine nature (yet ultimately lost as it is absorbed into the divine). Another perspective is Christian humanism. In this view, humans are holistic, relational creatures with a natural dimension (biological, psychological, and social components) and existential dimension (spiritual, moral, and historical components). See R. Paul Olson, “Christian Humanism” in *Religious Theories of Personality and Psychotherapy: East Meets West* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2002), 250. While perhaps too secular to the tastes of many evangelicals, this approach nevertheless recognizes the complexity of humanity (with personality belonging to the existential dimension) in a way consistent with church tradition.

11 For a historical and theological examination of the trichotomy and dichotomy debate, see Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 204-210.

study, and recent scholarship has sought to nuance the distinction with simple recognition that the interconnection between all components makes the true self (termed psychosomatic holism).¹² Nevertheless, should one in dichotomic perspective hold to body and soul/spirit or trichotomic perspective (with personality fitting within the soul component), the central point of agreement in the Christian tradition is that a person is composed of material (bodily) and immaterial (spirit, mind, emotions, will, and, it is argued here, personality) substances. Yet what is meant by personality?

Personality

The notion of personality is by no means a modern conception, and its definition in many respects depends upon the culture, language, school of thought, and time period the term is used. As Webb helpfully summarized, the Latin notion of *persona* carries the idea of social interaction, the Greeks understood personality (ὀπόστασις) as true existence beyond mere external appearances, and later Medieval usage (pioneered by Boethius at the beginning of the 6th century) understood personality (*persona*) as the individual subsistence of rational nature.¹³

Just as there are nuances in definition and usage historically, there are also broad understandings of personality in the modern period. Contemporary definitions for personality include: the lasting differences between persons in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors not specific to a given situation,¹⁴ the individual differences in mental mechanisms reacting to particular situations,¹⁵ and “The enduring configuration of characteristics and behavior that comprises an individual’s unique adjustment to life,

12 Horton, *The Christian Faith*, 377.

13 Webb, 35-48.

14 Johan Ormel, Michael VonKorff, Bertus F. Jeronimus, and Harriëtte Riese, “Set-Point Theory and Personality Development” in *Personality Development Across the Lifespan* (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2017), 117.

15 Daniel Nettle, *Personality: What Makes You the Way You Are* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 43.

including major traits, interests, drives, values, self-concept, abilities, and emotional patterns."¹⁶

Despite the spectrum of definitions, one may conceptualize personality as the inner part of a human being (distinct from emotions or the eternal soul) that defines the unique characteristics and behavior of a person. With such a conception in view, it is here argued that this fits well with the Greek term *πνεῦμα*.

Spirit and Soul

The Greek term *πνεῦμα* is most commonly translated as spirit, breath, or wind,¹⁷ and while seemingly sporadic definitions, the term refers to vivifying activity by God (or Greek gods) resulting in life and/or inspiration.¹⁸ One of the less frequent definitions of *πνεῦμα* is, "[A] part of human personality."¹⁹ Aristotle's work serves as an example of this (see particularly *History of Animals* VIII.1, 588a18-b3 and IX.3-49) when he uses *πνεῦμα* referring to lions being courageous, dolphins being mild and gentle, and sheep being stupid (leading modern scholars to argue that Aristotle understood *πνεῦμα* in terms of personality).²⁰ Ancient Greek literature (while recognizing the distinctions between flesh and spirit) did not separate the two and found the inner and outer aspects of a person to be the whole personality.²¹

16 American Psychological Association, "Personality." <https://dictionary.apa.org/personality>

17 Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, William F. Arndt, F. Wilber Gingrich, and Frederick W. Danker eds. and transl. [BDAG], 3rd ed., (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. *πνεῦμα*.

18 Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* [TDNT], vol. VI Πε–Ρ (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), s.v. *πνεῦμα*, 340-344.

19 BDAG, s.v. *πνεῦμα*.

20 Mariska Leunissen, "Aristotle on Natural Character and its Implications for Moral Development" in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 50.4.10 (2012), 508. See also TDNT, s.v. *πνεῦμα*, 355 who describes classical Greek usage of this noun as what brings individuality to things in an inner/spiritual sense that distinguishes a being from lifeless things.

21 BDAG, s.v. *πνεῦμα*, 833.

Such is consistent with New Testament usage, though certainly not every usage of πνεῦμα would correlate to personality. Closely related to ψυχή (for reasons to be argued below), numerous New Testament authors use πνεῦμα to refer to personality.²² Scripture speaks of those who are poor in πνεῦμα (Mt. 5:3, cf. 5:5 “gentle”), John the Baptist was said to be strong in πνεῦμα (Lk. 1:80), and Apollos is described as an eloquent man, mighty in the Scriptures, and fervent in πνεῦμα, speaking boldly to others (Acts 18:24-25). Romans 12:10-11 speaks beyond the fluidity of emotions to a stative sense of being, not being neglectful but fervent in πνεῦμα. 2 Timothy 1:7 tells that God has not given believers a πνεῦμα of timidity but of power, love, and discipline. Peter called his readers to be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in πνεῦμα (1 Pet. 3:8). Being marked as humble, strong, eloquent, fervent, bold, sympathetic, and more as described here fits well with modern understandings of personality.

What is to be said of the relation of ψυχή to πνεῦμα? While most commonly translated as “soul,” ψυχή is also translated as the inner aspects of a human’s life, an entity within one’s personhood.²³ Should a significant enough difference be found between ψυχή and πνεῦμα to distinguish between the two, the most notable difference (it is argued) is that the ψυχή would be the source through which the πνεῦμα is expressed.²⁴ Greek literature (including the New Testament) finds the ψυχή to be the seat and center of a person’s life from which various external expressions are sourced.²⁵ Jesus’ ψυχή was said to be deeply grieved to the point of death

22 Ibid.

23 *BDAG*, s.v. ψυχή, 1099. . See also Moisés Silva, rev. ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), vol. 4, s.v. ψυχή, 729-731.

24 See *TDNT*, s.v. ψυχή, 616-617 for post-classical Greek examples of ψυχή as the bearer of thoughts, wills, and emotions characteristic of human personality. See also Silva, s.v. ψυχή, 731. Justification for trichotomistic perspective especially in light of 1 Thes. 5:23 is not widely accepted. See F. F. Bruce, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 45 (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 130-131.

25 *BDAG*, s.v. ψυχή, 1099. See also Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983), s.v. ψυχή, 501.

(Mt. 26:38/Mk. 14:34), Mary’s ψυχή is said to exalt while her πνεῦμα rejoices (Lk. 1:46-47), and when a ψυχή is pierced, it is said to expose the thoughts and hearts of people (Lk. 2:35). The ψυχή is also viewed as the locus of sorrow (Jn. 12:27). While these outputs of ψυχή are emotions (which fluctuate and are common to all humans), it is not inconceivable to view the ψυχή as the source from which one’s personality flows.²⁶ Such is argued to be the classic Roman Catholic belief.²⁷ In this tradition, the soul is the innermost aspect of a person, and that of greatest value to them. From it, one makes choices that direct the course of life, determining what type of person he or she will be.²⁸ The view that personality derives from the soul is also argued by evangelicals on both a biblical and sociological grounds.²⁹ Again, this assumes there is need to distinguish between ψυχή and πνεῦμα which not all agree is necessary.

With this understanding of personhood, personality, soul and spirit, it may be concluded that humans do have a personality, and such personality corresponds to the notions of πνεῦμα and ψυχή, both firmly biblical terms. Thus, one’s personality should be a matter of significance to those in the Christian faith. For consideration now is how one’s personality fits within redemption history.

PERSONALITY IN REDEMPTION HISTORY

The origins of developing a holistic biblical framework broken into stages or time periods dates at least as early as Augustine in the second half of his

26 See Silva, s.v. ψυχή, 732 who finds occurrences where ψυχή refers to “the whole inner life with its faculties of will, reason, disposition, and emotion.”

27 Terence A. McGoldrick, “The Spirituality of Human Consciousness: A Catholic Evaluation of Some Current Neuro-Scientific Interpretations” in *Science and Engineering Ethics*, 18.3 (2012), 483-486. See Catechism of the Catholic Church, § 363-367.

28 Ibid.

29 Stephen P. Greggo, “Soul Origin: Revisiting Creationist and Traducianist Theological Perspectives in Light of Current Trends in Developmental Psychology” in *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 33.4 (2005): 258-267.

City of God. His framework entailed creation of angels and humans (book 12), the sin and fall of Adam (books 13-14), and redemption/renewal (books 16-22). However, it is likely that N. T. Wright was the first to portray the Scriptures in terms of acts within a play, namely creation, fall, Israel, Jesus, and the rest of the New Testament.³⁰ Others, like Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, break the play into six acts with an intermission.³¹ Some take a four-fold act approach of creation, fall, redemption, and glorification (the approach taken here for simplicity's sake).³² This approach to Scripture is often termed *covenant theology*. Its purpose is to see Scripture as a grand storyline that holds together the plans and purposes of God. Finding one's place in this narrative has become of interest to many scholars, pastors, and lay-persons,³³ yet the aspect of human personality has never been, to-date, fully analyzed in light of this framework.

Creation

The first act within redemption history concerns the design (both construction and purpose) of the created order. As it relates to human personality, the Christian consensus is that it is a created element within humanity (unlike Plato's argument for the eternal existence of the soul). Whether one's personality derives from the soul (and the origin of the soul is a matter of debate) or whether it is one and the same thing has already been addressed and will not be further considered. The point to affirm at this juncture is that the immaterial part of the self which

30 N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica*, 21 (1991), 7-32.

31 Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014). The acts are as follows: Creation, Fall, Redemption Initiated, Interlude (Intertestamental Period), Redemption Accomplished, The Mission of the Church, and Redemption Completed.

32 Nothing significant is lost in how these scholars have broken up the acts to the play.

33 See, for example, Bryan J. Dik, *Redeeming Work: A Guide to Discovering God's Calling for Your Career* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2020) who analyzes the notion of work, calling, and vocation in light of the four acts of redemption history.

defines the qualities and characteristics of a person (defined here as personality) was bestowed upon human beings by act of divine creation (a view differing from that of naturalistic psychologists).

Secular scholarship has long debated whether personality is formed by nature or nurture, and the general consensus is that the answer is both. Yet how is one to understand nature and nurture from a biblical perspective? Is one's personality determined, even to a degree, through genetic transmission from one's parents? If so, how does this correspond to divine creation of human πνεῦμα and ψυχή?

Given the vast psychological research finding affinities between parents and their offspring in terms of character traits and temperament, it is logical (and biblically permissible) to concede that personality is an inherited trait (to a degree). However, this article wishes to propose that human personality development is not solely biological; it is a divine gift. If what was said above holds, human beings are complex creatures with a body and spirit/soul. While creatures owe their existence through natural processes, Scripture readily affirms that life originates in and through God (Gn. 1:1ff, Jn. 1:3, Col. 1:16; cf. Acts 4:24, 14:15, 17:24-25, Heb. 11:3, Rev. 4:11). God may be thought of as the efficient cause of all creation (Deut. 4:35, 39, 1 Kgs. 8:60, Isa. 44:8, 45:5, 14, 22; cf. Neh. 9:6). Colossians 1:16 states: "For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him," (NASB). While one's parents may be thought of as an instrumental cause, all beings owe their existence ultimately to God who has created all things visible and invisible (like human personality).

This includes all aspects of human makeup, body and πνεῦμα (Isa. 42:5, note the πνεῦμα derivative in LXX). It was shown above how πνεῦμα might rightly be understood to refer to personality, and such fits with the traditional understanding of creation. It affirms that God has made human beings who they are; thus, the whole human life owes its

existence and personality to the Lord. In God's sovereignty, he has set human existence to be born when and how he desires (Ps. 139:13-16). Thus, humans were created by God to have the personality they have.

What is to be said of nurture? Does a constructed theology of personality deny the overwhelming body of research supporting environmental influence over personal development? On the contrary, this construction fully affirms the role and significance of nurture (understood as external influences). It simply wishes to affirm that such influences are not random events but sovereign acts of the Triune God to shape a person into whom he desires that person to be.

Personal growth and development, shaped by external means, may be found in numerous biblical examples. One may consider the contentious and furtive personality of Jacob who cunningly stole Esau's birthright only to be humbled throughout his life resulting in a servile stature before his brother in Gen. 33. Such a change in *πνεῦμα* for Jacob came after wrestling with God in Gen. 32.³⁴ Joseph, described in his youth as an obnoxious dreamer (Gn. 37:19-20), became shrewd and wise as leader in Egypt. Throughout this narrative of providence, one sees the sovereign hand of God shaping environments to turn Joseph into whom he was needed to be. Common in biblical literature is the notion that what seems common and ordinary in one's life has behind it divine activity (Ps. 27:23, Pro. 16:9, 20:24; see Gn. 50:20). Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that environmental factors that shape human personality fall under the sovereignty of God leading towards personal growth and development. God has created people to be who they are, and such creation was deemed very good (Gn. 1:31). Such is the beginnings of understanding human personality in light of redemption history.

34 How one understands such wrestling with God is a matter of debate and interpretation; however, the point to be made here is that God was sovereignly involved in the change of spirit and personality brought about in Jacob.

Fall

As the second act within redemption history, the fall refers to the disobedience of Adam in Genesis 3. What was created as very pleasing in God’s sight is now marred with sin resulting in the corruption of the previously discussed created order. As a result of this disobedience, no area of creation is left untouched by the damaging effects of sin.³⁵ Scripture speaks to the inherited corruption of human nature in Psalm 51:1-5, Ephesians 2:1-3, Romans 7:18, and Isaiah 64:6 (cf. Romans 3:9-20). Additionally, it speaks to inherited guilt from Romans 5:12-21, James 2:10-11, and Galatians 3:10.³⁶

Effects of the fall are further evidenced throughout the anti-Pelagian tradition upheld through much of church history.³⁷ Affirmed by Augustine³⁸ and upheld by numerous councils and creeds (such as Orange, Carthage, and article 9 of the Thirty-Nine Articles), humans inherit a sinful ψυχή and πνεῦμα different from that of original design. This view has been upheld and refined throughout church history. Citing Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:12, Exodus 33:3, and Genesis 3:7, Luther argued for the heredity of sin that deeply corrupts human nature beyond human understanding.³⁹ Not

35 For a treatment of the fall in light of redemption history, see Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 53-68.

36 As the doctrine of the fall of humanity is widely accepted and treated in most systematic theology books, its basis and effects will not be exhausted but presumed. It should be noted, though, this presumption assumes a western evangelical view of sin and inherited corruption. Such a position on sin is viewed quite differently from liberal and Eastern Orthodox perspectives. For a critical summary of the Eastern Orthodox perspective, see Danny Kirkpatrick, “An Analysis of Synergistic Theosis and Deification in Light of Monergistic Perspective” in *Southwest Journal of Arts and Sciences*, Spr. 2021, 1.1, 12-36.

37 It should be noted that medieval theology shows virtually no awareness of the councils which condemned Pelagianism and Semi-Pelagianism (a matter of significance during the Protestant Reformation). See Carl R. Trueman, *Grace Alone: Salvation as a Gift of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 87 and Alister E. McGrath *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 97-98.

38 Augustine, *On Nature and Grace*, chs. 10, 44, 46.

39 Martin Luther, “The Smalcald Articles,” pt. 3, art. 1, in *The Book of Concord*, quoted in *A Compend of Luther’s Theology*, ed. Hugh T. Kerr (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster,

believing human beings are as bad as they possibly could be, nor arguing that the *imago Dei* was completely lost, John Calvin argued that humans are corrupted and deformed in ψυχὴ and πνεῦμα because of the fall of Adam.⁴⁰

If human beings are corrupted in spirit and soul as defined here, by implication the personality of the self was affected as well. What was designed to be a good personality has assumed corruption. While not a human being, one may witness the first corruption of personality as early as Genesis 3. Should the serpent of Eden refer to a corporal manifestation of Satan after his fall (distinct from the fall of Adam), one notices that his personality was viewed as עָרָם (transl. cunning, crafty, tricky.)⁴¹ This (as argued above and below) need not be thought of as an innately immoral personality trait, yet it was employed immorally to lead others to sin showing a corruption of character. The origins of self-co-consciousness and the breakdowns between human relations have been attributed to the fall of Genesis 3.⁴²

Such corruption of good design is evidenced throughout the rest of Scripture. One might see jealousy (a divine attribute in Ex. 20:5, 34:14, Deut. 4:24, 5:9) as corrupted in Cain, leading him to murder his brother (Gen. 4:4-8, cf. 1 Jn. 3:11-12). Scripture goes on to describe humans as arrogant (a perversion of good pride), vindictive (a twisted form of justice), lazy and gluttonous (distortions of pure rest and enjoyment of good things), and more. What was once bearing the divine likeness has become corrupted in nature.⁴³

1943), 84.

40 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, I.XV.IV.

41 Koehler & Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, M. E. J. Richardson, ed., vol I (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), s. v. עָרָם.

42 See Bartholomew and Goheen, 43-44 who argues this point, affirming that the fall led to a breakdown (and death) of human relationships between God and fellow human beings.

43 See Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning: The Life of Hope* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), 56-61 where he speaks of the corruption of humans (by choice) resulting in a loss of their true humanity. Such a departure from original design makes one enslaved to sin and evil.

Such is true with modern understandings of personality. Common within current studies in human personality is the matter of introversion (one who is internally focused, being withdrawn of energy around larger groups of people) and extroversion (one with an external focus deriving energy from larger groups of people). Neither trait is inherently bad; it is (as argued here) by God’s design. However, because of the fall, our inward and outward foci have become corrupted. Introverts are described as analytical in thinking, organized, and detailed-oriented; however, because of inherited corruption (it is here argued), they have difficulty working around others, prefer isolation, and are often overtly self-conscious.⁴⁴ Extroverts are found to be assertive, social, and people-focused; however, research has found them to be domineering, poor listeners, and exclusionary.⁴⁵ Comparatively, someone who is task oriented may have a strong work ethic, yet such devotion to work could lead to becoming a workaholic. Those who are more people-oriented enjoy close relationships, yet they could slip into being people pleasers, ready to do anything for the approval of others. One may be critical to a fault, being not just discerning but demeaning. The list could go on.

Human personalities are a divine gift; however, they were corrupted by the fall. While not as bad as they could possibly be, they (given their association to ψυχή /πνεῦμα) fail to be expressed in pure form. In the model of redemption history, humans abuse what God has given them, rebelling against their Creator and design, abusing their identities and abilities leading to violence, fractured relationships, and a distortion of God’s design.⁴⁶ Fortunately, act two is not the end of the story.

44 Dana Stephens-Craig, Matthew Kuofie, and Richard Dool, “Perception of Introverted Leaders by Mid to High-Level Leaders” in *Journal of Marketing and Management* 6.10.05 (2015), 62-75.

45 Adam M. Grant, Francesca Gino, and David A. Hofmann, “Reversing the Extraverted Leadership Advantage: The Role of Employee Proactivity” in *Academy of Management* 54.3.06 (2011).

46 J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 61.

Redemption

The third act in *redemption* history may broadly be defined as redemption but more specifically refers to the work of Jesus Christ to establish the kingdom of God on the earth through his death, burial, resurrection, and glorification thereby restoring creation back to God's purposes.⁴⁷ Central to this act in redemption history is the gospel itself. While the term *gospel* has many definitions and uses, Michael Bird helpfully notes:

The gospel is the announcement that God's kingdom has come in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord and Messiah, in fulfillment of Israel's Scriptures. The gospel evokes faith, repentance, and discipleship; its accompanying effects include salvation and the gift of the Holy Spirit.⁴⁸

While more could be said about the Gospel, nothing less should be said. As Bird helpfully notes, the Gospel is more than going to heaven when one dies. It is the victory of Christ over sin and death here and now, inaugurated through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus who brings the kingdom of God. While Christians live between acts three and four (a tension often called *already and not yet* or *inaugurated eschatology*), the Gospel has every relevance now. Jesus Christ, the true and perfect human being without sin, risen from the dead, is the first fruit of the new creation, and as believers are united by faith to him, they experience liberating effects from sin now (though its fullness is not yet realized).⁴⁹

This view is helpfully developed by Jürgen Moltmann in his classic *Theology of Hope*. Those with faith in Christ have an eschatological hope fixed upon the resurrected Savior enabling the believer to face the difficulties of this life with confidence. The Parousia does not refer to God returning to what he abandoned but an imminent arrival in which

47 Bartholomew and Goheen, 129. Wolters, 69-70. See also Wright, *Surprised by Hope* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008), 147-164, esp. 148-151.

48 Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 37.

49 Middleton, 71-72.

the Christian waits for renewal and restoration.⁵⁰ The first workings of the eschatological kingdom have commenced, leading persons to new life in the here and now based upon the resurrection of the Son of God.⁵¹ The work of transformation (including but not limited to humanity) has begun through the death, burial, resurrection, and glorification of Christ.⁵²

The implications on human personality are numerous. Christ has redeemed the human $\piνεϋμα$ in the here and now, and while it awaits consummation, believers in Christ experience inward renewal in the present. That is to say, the effects of sin upon human personality have begun a process of redemption and renewal. No longer enslaved to sin, believers experience not a new personality but a renewed personality. Through the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the person who seeks the approval of others above all else finds liberation knowing he or she is approved by God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. The workaholics who find their identity in their work are set free to find their identity in the work of Christ. The domineering personality of an autocrat finds freedom under the lordship of Christ through the death of the old nature and the resurrection of the new. Those who succumb to the sin of laziness find the appropriate balance between fruitful labor and sabbath rest.

Thus, Christ came to redeem what sin marred in the human soul, and one has every reason to think that the human personality is incorporated in the redemption of the $\piνεϋμα$. One's personality is not abolished in this recreating act; it is restored. As C. S. Lewis aptly stated,

Christ will indeed give you a real personality: but you must not go to Him for the sake of that. As long as your own personality is what you are bothering about you are not going to Him at all. . . . Your real, new self (which is Christ's and also yours, and yours just

50 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 227. See also 20-32. See also Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 96 where he aptly states, "Redemption doesn't mean scrapping what's there and starting again from a clean slate but rather liberating what has come to be enslaved."

51 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 221.

52 See Richard Bauckham and Trevor Hart, *Hope Against Hope: Christian Eschatology at the Turn of the Millennium* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 36-37, 43.

because it is His) will not come as long as you are looking for it. It will come when you are looking for Him.⁵³

While the believer lives between acts three and four and awaits final consummation of personality, he or she can every hope that what was begun in conversion will result in glorification with all faults, shortcomings, and limitations undone. To this end, one looks towards act four.

Glorification

The final act within redemption history is not so much an end as it is a new beginning. Common perspectives on eschatology entail the annihilation of the world, a destruction of the original design; however, recent scholarship has made significant and convincing strides affirming that creation will be renewed, not annihilated. Much of this credit belongs to N. T. Wright who argued that Paul's eschatology envisions a remaking of heaven and earth that overcomes mortality and corruptibility (cf. Rom. 8:18-27, Rev. 21:1, Isa. 65:17, 66:22), thus affirming the goodness of original creation.⁵⁴ When the Lord returns, and the heavens and earth are renewed, creation will be set free from its bondage to share in the fullness and freedom of God's glory with all residual corruptions in the self laid to rest.⁵⁵ The complete abolishment of the original self is a pagan notion,

53 Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 226. Here one might consider how a believer knows whether an aspect of personality needs changing. In response, one might say that believers (still affected by the Fall) may be impervious to their own personality imperfections, yet the Lord is not. As designer of their personalities, he knows where the deficiencies lay and has promised (through the resurrection of the dead) a glorified humanity without flaw or defect (Rev. 21:5).

54 Wright, "Farewell to the Rapture" in *Bible Review* 17.4 (2001), 8.

55 Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 135-146. See esp. p. 142 where he states that one's "moral, thinking, cognitive, affective selves will also be renewed" through the undoing of all evil, allowing them to live in a fullness yet attained. This has every implication for the liberation of the personality without its abolishment. See also, Wright "Kingdom Come" in *The Christian Century*, 125.12 (2008), 29 where he states that the kingdom of God coming to earth is not dehumanizing to persons but a rescue and restoration of true humanity. While not all agree with Wright's view on justification, he provides a well-reasoned position that eschatology (for Paul) moves towards a goal for the redemption of God's people and

argues Wright, and through Christ humanity may receive (through its resurrection in Christ) authentic selfhood.⁵⁶

Further, act four is not a return back to act one (returning things to their pre-fallen state); it is the beginnings of the glorified state.⁵⁷ Incorruptible at this juncture, though still organic and developing, the final act of redemption history shows an unencumbered eternal existence that eternally develops toward the fullness of Christ. Without flaw or defect, without the burdens of sin, humans become not like the pre-fallen Adam but the preeminent Christ, the better Adam (1 Cor. 15:22-45). In so doing, humans remain who they are but better than they were. This is evidenced by the apostle John who refers to the new song sung by the redeemed, sung by those of every tribe, tongue, people and nation (Rev. 5:9, cf. 13:7, 14:6).⁵⁸ Notice that the unique attributes of persons remain in the eschatological kingdom. The glorified state does not rid one of uniqueness. It celebrates it while renewing, restoring, and glorifying it.

The implications, thus, on human personality are vast. One does not lose his or her personality through the unfolding of redemption history; rather, he or she finds it in its truest form. The introvert may remain an introvert, yet without flaw or defect. Such people, though, will not suffer from social anxieties or despair in isolation but may remain forevermore reflective, innovative, observant members of the glorified human race (who will still likely enjoy listening to others rather than talking about

rescue of the whole created order. Justification, for Wright, refers to the whole process from grace to glory where persons are renewed in humanity, not losing their original design. See Wright, *Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 100-102.

56 Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 135-150. See also Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 32-38.

57 See Ted Peters, *God – The World's Future* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2000), 156-157 who argues this point with what he calls proleptic humanity. Christ, he argues, makes one truly human, and in becoming truly human, one does not resort to a pre-fallen state of grace but becomes a partaker of the new creation.

58 See Middleton, 172-174 who aptly observes that human abstractions are not what is redeemed but people in their communal and cultural realities (reflecting original design but glorified at the return of Christ). If we can assume with Middleton that one's cultural identity is not absolved of its uniqueness but glorified, it is reasonable to assume that one's personal identity (personality) is not absolved but glorified.

themselves). The extrovert will remain an extrovert, yet never perceived as domineering or exclusionary as mentioned above. The task-oriented person may remain a person of detail and diligence yet not fret the temptations of turning work into an idol. The servant-hearted will have perfected natures, still loving and serving others without suffering the negative associations of being a people-pleaser on this earth.

One's personality needs not be thought of as a disease which needs to be cured. Rather, it is the authentic self, longing for liberation, which can only come through Christ. Upon death and the admittance of the soul into heaven, one has every reason to believe that one's *πνεῦμα* (which entails personality) remains intact and distinguishable from the other disembodied spirits. Additionally, upon the return of Christ, such *πνεῦμα* returns to a resurrected body resulting in a population diverse both in ethnicity and personality.

CONCLUSION AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Human personality is a gift from God, not merely a biological or social construct. God has made humanity as diverse in personality as he has in ethnicity, and such was created very good (Gen. 1:31). This article has argued that the notion of personality fits within the Greek notions and terms for *ψυχή* /*πνεῦμα*; however, personality has been marred by the fall leading to numerous types of personality defects. The solution to this dilemma is not the dissolution or homogenization of personality but its liberation through the Gospel of Christ. Upon reception of the Gospel by faith, the believer experiences inward renewal and spiritual resurrection leading to the beginnings of a renewed (not new) personality which will be perfected upon the return of Christ.

This article has attempted to construct a theology of personality in light of redemption history portrayed through four acts: creation, fall, redemption, and glorification. It argues that human personality was

created to glorify God in all of its uniqueness, yet the fall has corrupted its nature resulting in defects. While the primary function of the Gospel is not to restore a person to authentic self in a way argued by existentialists, it does argue that one of the benefits of salvation in Christ is the inward, spiritual renewal of the self. Human personality can, through the Gospel, become what it was designed to be. Ultimately, though, it must await glorification where its uniqueness will be retained though perfected in a way that exalts the Son of God who rules over the glorified kingdom.

For practical consideration, now, is that (as argued at the beginning by C.S. Lewis) true personality can only be found in Jesus Christ. One's personality defects do not need suppression; they need a Savior. To become a true human, one must look to the True Human, Jesus, who was not incumbered by sin. Through union with him by faith, the believer can experience now what will be enjoyed forever at the Eschaton – a renewed sense of the self.

Additionally, one may feel more secure in his or her personality upon viewing it as a gift from God. While people should remember that their personality has been tainted by sin (and may not excuse their behavior by saying, "That's just how God made me"), they need not be ashamed of who they are nor feel they need to be something other than how they are. Areas for personality improvement need not be taken to the extent of changing personalities but to improve upon the personality God has given.

Finally, viewing personality in light of redemption history may lead people not only towards introspection but extrospection. In other words, recognizing that human personality is divinely bestowed may help people become more accepting and less critical of others. Jesus commands his disciples to love their neighbors as themselves (Mt. 19:19, 22:39; Mk. 12:31, Lk. 10:27-28; cf. Lev. 19:18). It is often easy to love ourselves and justify our own personality defects. On the other hand, loving neighbors that same way, with their own personality defects, can make this command difficult to obey. However, the diversity of human personality reflects the

beauty of God’s manifold creation. God looks upon the defects within a person’s soul and finds that the work of Christ is sufficient to overcome them (leading to reconciliation and good standing). It may be, as argued here, that the pathway for a more just and orderly society begins and ends through the Gospel of Jesus Christ which allows for true love of self and neighbor (personality and all).

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Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics
Essays





Essay Series
Homosexuality:
The Case For & Against—Responses

Stephen M. Vantassel

**Responses to the 2020 Essays:
“Introduction”**

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics (ERTP) is dedicated to offering a forum for scholars to debate important issues that impact Christian doctrine and practice. We hope that publishing articles on the biblical warrant for homosexual marriage will garner more critical attention to this topic as well encourage thoughtful and biblically grounded reflection. We are pleased that the authors were willing to write not only the first round on the subject but also rejoinders.

Readers should note that ERTP gave wide editorial latitude to the authors. We wanted them to speak with their own voice as much as possible. In fact, the rejoinders were only edited for form and style, not content. Some may think that our “hands off” approach has undermined

the role peer-review plays in ensuring accuracy and academic rigor. We understand that objection. However, we believe that too often peer-review or fact checking is little more than censorship by another name as Twitter and Facebook so ably have demonstrated. True, those organizations are not members of the academy. However, the academy is not immune to such behavior. Just ask yourself whether scientific journals would publish articles by scientists espousing intelligent design. We believe that scholarship is strengthened by rigorous and public debate, not paternalistic censorship.

Readers should carefully weigh the arguments made by these authors. As you read, consider the question that was raised previously (<https://www.evangelicalreview.net/page53.html>). To paraphrase Dr. James R. White's frequently used cross examination question, (<https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/>), "Could the exegetical method(s) used by these authors to support their view on homosexual marriage be used to support non-controversial Christian doctrine?" Keep in mind the authors were asked to base their view on the Bible. In short, the question the authors had to answer was, "Does the Bible support homosexual marriage?" We hope these rejoinders, along with the original articles, will assist you in your effort to answer this timely question.

Stephen M. Vantassel, Editor.



Essay Series
Homosexuality:
The Case For & Against—Responses

David Martin

Responses to the 2020 Essays:
“A Confutation Humbly Offered”

COUNTERCLAIMS AND CLARIFICATIONS

I would like to congratulate J. Brian Huffling and T.J. Gentry (hereafter referred to as my colleagues) on a well-researched and well-written essay. I applaud their avoidance of negative stereotyping, and their faithful yearning to search for truth in our common scriptures. Which is not to say that I agree with their reasoning or exegesis of the passages. They make a strong argument, yet I believe there to be several holes in their reasoning. It is not that they have deliberately misconstrued what the passages say or mean, but rather that I often found myself disagreeing with the basic

premise upon which their hermeneutic is founded. As I point out in my essay, the interpretations of these passages are largely influenced by our cultural biases. This is not meant as an insult; I too have a cultural bias. I believe that both men are very fine Christians and dearly care about helping folks on their faith walks, which necessarily includes how we read and understand scripture. With that in mind, I will attempt to respectfully point out where I believe they are mistaken. Point by point refutations are tedious and ineffectual, so I will select a few instances which I hope will elucidate my position better, and can be applied to the overall argument as well. And in addition, I will attempt to clarify my positions on the matter of God's love and grace in response to sin.

My opinion on the subject might surprise both sides of this debate. The argument over whether homosexuality is condoned or banned is irrelevant. I believe that what is at stake for Christianity today is the loss of religious authority in guiding moral behaviors, and in helping people find meaning in the living of their lives. I am willing to wager that both of my colleagues would agree. The effects of modernity have been a substitution of society's trust in religious authority with an increase in secular authority.¹ Which is not to say that there has been a loss in religious sentiment, just a loss of trust in traditional religious institutions (hence the many people who identify as spiritual but not religious). If our goal in Christianity is to make disciples for Jesus Christ (Matthew 28:16-20) the church has done a poor job in the last century of accomplishing that objective. I think we all (conservative, moderate, and progressive Christians alike) share in the blame for how we have packaged and communicated the so-called Good News. Christianity is viewed by younger generations as intolerant and bigoted. According to the Pew Research Center, less than 1 in 4 millennials look to religion as a source of moral guidance; they simply don't trust the church.² Hence,

1 James A. Beckford. *Social Theory and Religion*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. 47.

2 2010. "Religious Landscape Study." Pew Research Center. February 10. Accessed April 17, 2021. <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/generational->

what I believe is that a more relevant discussion would be how God’s love and grace responds to the sinner (including homosexuals if one believes it a sin), and what it means to live under Christ’s law of love. This is the only appropriate response to sin, grace alone.

RESPONDING TO OLD TESTAMENT ARGUMENTS

As in my essay, I refute and reject the natural revelation argument in its entirety. There is sufficient evidence and research of the natural world to show that same sex sexual attraction occurs throughout mammalian and avian species as a statistically significant representation of the population.³ Further, my colleagues argued that the binary representations of sex are an expression of *imago dei*. More accurately in their words, “the diversity of sexes as male and female is an expression of God’s intention in imaging himself...” Without too much of a deep dive into broader gender issues, they limit the sexes to two. Clinical geneticist Paul Jones argues that biological sex is more complicated than the determiners of XX and XY chromosomes. His study has evidenced that there is a spectrum of biological variations that places the sex of a person on a continuum between the binary markers. For example, many children born with ovotesticular DSD, a condition that produces ambiguous genitalia and gonads with both ovarian and testicular tissue, undergo gender assignment (not reassignment) surgery.⁴ If my colleagues are arguing for a Biblical model for sexual relationships via *imago dei*, they are unwittingly arguing for pan-sexuality.

Joe Dallas is indeed correct when he argues, “The Genesis account

cohort/younger-millennial/.

3 Bagemihl, Bruce. 1999. *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*. New York: St. Martin’s Press. 265ff.

4 Clair Ainsworth. 2018. “Sex Redefined: The Idea of 2 Sexes Is Overly Simplistic.” *Scientific American*. October 22. Accessed April 18, 2021. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/sex-redefined-the-idea-of-2-sexes-is-overly-simplistic1/>.

does not forbid homosexuality; it simply doesn't refer to it, for obvious reasons."⁵ The most obvious reason is that it is a naturally occurring sexual preference. But, if, as my colleagues believe, the purpose of binary coupling is an expression of God's expression of right relationship and God's desire for us to be fruitful and multiply, then what of sterile couples? Should they forgo marriage if they know they are biologically incapable of having children? Surely, they shouldn't get a divorce! Should the non-sterile partner seek fruitfulness outside the marriage bed (a la Abraham) to have children? You see, this Genesis argument is so fraught with logical fallacies and theological inconsistencies that it has no place in this discussion. As for Genesis 19, I reiterate my argument from the original essay, rape is not sex, it is sexualized violence.

With respect to citing two of Robert Gagnon's arguments against homosexuality, I find these arguments without merit. The first being a list of prohibitions on incest and adultery, etc. The passage offers a comprehensive list of sexual acts and behaviors that we would find problematic today. We agree on that. What Gagnon avoids is the critical placement of verse 22, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination." This and bestiality are placed after the prohibition of child sacrifice and Molech worship. There is a demarcation of behaviors marked by the introduction of Molech worship in both passages. The list does not continue at that point but resolves itself as a condemnation of adopting the practices of foreign religions. There is sufficient counter argument to the conservative view to render a prohibitive use of that passage as problematic. Moreover, all the other vices listed prior to the section of Molech worship can be found in other Old Testament passages, but only in these two Leviticus passages, where Molech is specifically mentioned, do we find the words "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination."

The second of Gagnon's points is also problematic. Labeling a particular act as an abomination neither increases nor decreases the severity

5 Joe Dallas. 2007. *The Gay Gospel?* Eugene: Harvest House. Kindle location 2855

of any act in relation to that passage in which it is embedded. In the Old Testament alone, the word abomination in the singular is used 72 times, 74 times in the plural form, and an additional 20 times as an adverb. Here is a brief list of what else the Old Testament labels an abomination: eating shellfish (Lev 11:10), dishonest weighing by a merchant (Duet 25:13-16), oppressing the poor, being *near* a menstruating woman, refusing to feed the hungry, and charging interest are all abominations (Ezek 18:6-13). Should we stand outside of the Golden Corral restaurant and picket them because the hostess is currently menstruating, they serve meat with fat on it, cheeseburgers, shrimp, wear uniforms made of cotton and polyester blend, and then facilitate payments through interest-charging credit cards? Should we hold up signs that say “God hates shellfish”? Of course not!

We can all agree that cheating people is abhorrent behavior, yet Christians are willing to ignore this behavior. Oppressing the poor is in direct violation of Jesus’ commandment in Matthew 25:31-46. Conservative churches are often silent on the subject, while there are many Christians who actively participate in such behavior. I hope my colleagues do not think I am lumping them in with oppressors, etc., but are able to see this as an illumination of the hypocrisy wherein Bible legalism becomes an excuse to marginalize people whom we find distasteful.

RESPONDING TO NEW TESTAMENT ARGUMENTS

John Wesley wrote, “To begin with the great Creator himself. How astonishingly little do we know of God! - How small a part of his nature do we know! of his essential attributes! What conception can we form of his omnipresence Who is able to comprehend how God is in this and every place...”⁶ My colleagues have exegeted the Romans 1 passage to

6 John Wesley, 2011. “The Imperfection Of Human Knowledge.” *Wesley Center Online*. Accessed April 16, 2021. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-69-the-imperfection-of-human-knowledge/>.

say, “Thus, whoever can know the world can know God. The point is the universal nature of Paul’s language includes all people.” Contrast this argument with John Wesley’s understanding of a God so vast that we hardly know anything about God. If a theological giant like Wesley can admit that we know so little of the nature of God, then any claim of knowing God through natural revelation seems like *hubris*. Anselm’s ontological argument of “a being than which no greater can be conceived” has been the standard baseline (though tweaked and expanded upon by the likes of Hegel and Descartes) for subsequent ontological arguments.⁷ Thomas Aquinas argues for a God who is the Grand Designer, as Prime Mover, and as Absolute Being. If we can agree on these things, then by the very definitions, the subjective cannot truly know or comprehend the objective, or absolute. If we agree that God is the Creative Force and Designer, then when we see the evidence (see Bagemihl) of same sex sexual behavior in species other than humanity, we must also admit that this is without question happening under the direction of God, and that humanity is not an exception in this regard.⁸

How can a being as vast as God, and a universe and world so complex be completely understood in black and white terminology? It simply can’t. Yes, even we who have spent many years studying and reflecting on the nature of God still know so little. It is an unfortunate argument to use natural revelation as an instrument by which one authenticates scripture. The notion of scripture needing some outside support to prove that it is correct is a contrivance of modernity.⁹ Scripture is self-authenticating; which is not to say that it is literal, or factual in a historical sense, but that it is true when it elucidates the nature of God (to the extent that human beings are capable). I have made sufficient arguments against

7 Graham Oppy. 2019. “Ontological Arguments.” *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. February 6. Accessed April 19, 2021. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ontological-arguments/>.

8 Charles Wallis. n.d. “Thomas Aquinas and the Five Ways.” *California State University Long Beach*. Accessed April 19, 2021. <http://web.csulb.edu/~cwallis/100/st2.html>.

9 Robert E. Chiles. 1983. *Theological Transitions in American Methodism*. Lanham: University Press of America. 87-90.

natural revelation in the original essay, and supportive arguments here that natural revelation must be disregarded as a “proof.”

Understanding Paul’s limited understanding of nature, as well as his culture context, God “giving them up” to “unnatural lusts” (those who resist the truth of God) is a punishment meted out by God. Is this merely a case where God gave up on them (reversing word order), or has God seen fit to humiliate them by causing them to engage in same sex behaviors? My colleagues have argued, “Thus, Paul is saying that the exchanging of heterosexual relations for homosexual ones is against the created order. The very passions in view here are said to be degrading.” Following my colleagues’ argument, God has upended creation to teach a few ignorant and willful folks a lesson. It seems unlikely.

Paul’s logic implies that other cultures have had divine revelations in equal quality and quantity as the Hebrew people, and that their rejection of God is born of futility and darkness; thinking they were wise they acted foolishly (Romans 1:21-22). They took up idol worship, exchanging the One God for many gods, and in return, God exchanged in them a right sexual orientation for a wrong one. This lacks a basic sense of rationality and core morality. Would God cause someone to sin? By no means. Would God change the basic nature of a human being out of spite? By no means.

For those who hold a modern inerrancy view (as opposed to the pre-modern point of view) on scripture this conundrum is impossible to parse out. John Wesley reasoned, “Yet when he speaks to us, knowing whereof we are made, knowing the scantiness of our understanding, he lets himself down to our capacity, and speaks of himself after the manner of men. ... But can we possibly imagine that these expressions are to be taken literally? ... Not so: ‘As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than thy ways.’¹⁰ Wesley argued that God used the language of men, which is inadequate to fully express God’s intent. We must accept

10 John Wesley. 2011. “On Predestination.” *Wesley Center Online*. Accessed April 16, 2021. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-58-on-predestination/>.

that Paul was incapable of expressing in human language what God had placed on his heart to write. As Peter wrote of Paul, “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand...” (2 Peter 3:15b-16a NRSV) We must consider this truth in light of the 1 Corinthians 6 and 1 Timothy 1 texts as well. Until a 1st Century Greek dictionary is unearthed, we will have to disagree on the interpretation of those passages.

LOVE AND A RELEVANT RESPONSE TO SIN

I must confess being somewhat taken aback by my colleagues’ writing, “Love or what appears to be the fruit of the Spirit is not enough to justify a homosexual relationship, as the ends do not justify the means.” This was the culmination of a lengthy argument on the nature of love and relationships. Puzzling too was the term “godly love.” I get that it is an adjective and requires no capitalization. Considering their usage of “godly” love, I would ask them to then consider G.F.W. Hegel, who wrote, “unification found in [love], can be called a unification of subject and object, of freedom and nature, of the actual and the possible.”¹¹ Hegel is arguing that nothing determinate exists unconditioned. Or as Hegel wrote, the subject and object “exist in and for [themselves] only on the strength of an external power.”¹² Love cannot exist without the objective condition of God. This supports Roger’s claim to dismiss the cultural conditioning of ancient laws as we respond to Jesus’ command to love our neighbor. Hegel agrees that the identity of the subjective and the objective is reflected in self-consciousness. This, however, is not the absolute manifestation of true identity; love is. Love is, in the truest sense

11 Jon Stewart, ed. 2002. *Miscellaneous Writings of G. W. F. Hegel*. Evanston: Northwest University Press. 119.

12 Hegel, G.F.W. 1971. *Early Theological Writings*. Translated by T.M. Knox. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 304.

(because it is the manifestation of the synthesis of God and human being), the only important (and real) identity we can have.

As we consider identity and relationship, loving one's neighbor as Jesus presents it, was a radical and revolutionary idea. It invited the question in Luke 10:29, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus then proceeds to do the unimaginable. He tells the parable of a good Samaritan. Samaritans and the Jews of Judea were sworn enemies. Not only does he say that a Samaritan can be a good person, but that those listening (Jews) must love them! Outrageous! The command to love finds as its root, an identity with God, hence all love is "godly" love.

I found another objection to my colleagues' argument on the fruits of the Spirit. Straight away, I reject the premise upon which this argument is made. Their argument is that having a desire of the flesh is opposite to fruits of the Spirit. Here is where it becomes problematic. In heterosexual married relationships, sexual desire exists. So, by their reasoning, married heterosexuals (husband and wife) who desire each other must not have the fruits of the Spirit. Their argument fails any basic test of logic; the old maxim applies "what's good for the goose..." Paul does discriminate here. In fact, he offers this, "For you were called to freedom, brothers, and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another." (Gal 5:13 NRSV) Paul's point is that one must not become consumed with desire, nor delight in it; not that one cannot have a desire. If sanctions based on the list of "works of the flesh" were to be applied even-handedly in Christian churches (as they have been towards homosexuals) the pews would be empty on Sunday morning, and the pulpits for that matter too. It is disingenuous to use phrases like "or the presence of attributes similar to the fruit of the Spirit," (emphasis mine) as it is a form of judgement. Moreover, they are reasoning upon the assumption that a homosexual person cannot exhibit actual fruits of the Spirit; an assumption which has been unproven. Jesus commands us to not judge, unless of course we want to be judged ourselves (Mt 7:1). James wrote, "For judgment will be

without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.” (James 2:13 NRSV)

My own clarifications of grace responding to sin necessitate the notion that Christ is indeed the fulfillment of law. This is an orthodox traditional doctrine based on Jesus words (Mt 5:17), and what the apostle Paul wrote, “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Romans 6:14 NRSV). Paul is careful to point out in other Romans passages that being under grace does not relieve us entirely of moral obligations; we are just freed from condemnation and spiritual death. We exchange our slavery to sin for slavery to righteousness (Romans 6:16). Paul means here that power of sin does not own us, but the law of love (righteousness) owns us. We place ourselves, via faith, under the law of Christ, which shifts the emphasis of righteous behavior from careful abstinence of fleshly things, to bearing one another’s burdens (Galatians 6:2). The law of Christ, in the words of Christ himself, are,” I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another” (John 13:34).

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9) Paul wrote in Romans, “if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” (Romans 10:9) There are no preconditions of “right” behavior for forgiveness. Confess, and find forgiveness, because it is by grace through faith that we find salvation. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Eph 2:8-9 NRSV) Yet, we place demands of “righteousness” on homosexuals that we do not demand of heterosexuals. This is unjust, and it ignores the Biblical witness of God’s unending love.

It’s simple, really. “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in

this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us.” (I John 4:16b-19 NRSV) We are called to love, without pre-condition, without judgment.

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Essay Series
Homosexuality:
The Case For & Against—Responses

Brian Huffling & Thomas J. Gentry

Responses to the 2020 Essays:
“A Response to David Martin”

INTRODUCTION

We would like to thank David Martin for his article in which he argues that the Bible does not claim that homosexuality is a sin.¹ In this response, we will examine his overall position and offer a rebuttal. His article examines the same biblical passages we have already examined ourselves, so the reader can see our arguments there for more detail.² This debate topic

1 David Martin, “Unjustified Exclusion: A Lack of Biblical evidence against homosexuality,” *The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics* Vol 8 (2020): ES3-ES19.

2 Brian Huffling and Thomas J. Gentry, “A Biblical Case Against Homosexuality,”

is, “Does the Protestant Bible restrict divine-sanctioned human sexual relations to monogamous male-female relationship’s?” Martin’s article argues, per the title, that there is “A lack of Biblical evidence against homosexuality.”³ It is important to be clear about the parameters of this debate. Thus, the question is, does the Protestant Bible ever restrict sex to monogamous heterosexuals? It is important to note that it never explicitly endorses anything other than such, even though it records behavior such as polygamy (e.g., Gen. 4:23). We are sure that Martin would agree that the Bible further does not openly endorse homosexuality. The question is, does it ever condemn it? Therefore, if there is any biblical evidence that restricts homosexuality from being divinely sanctioned, then the debate question will be answered, at least as it concerns homosexuality. Martin confidently writes: “My contention is that homosexuality as we understand it was never condemned by scripture.”⁴ While we examine all of the six passages that Martin argues do not condemn homosexuality, it is our contention that Martin’s admission in his section on Romans that Paul states homosexuality is unnatural, dehumanizing, and a form of judgement is tantamount to such an admission on its condemnation. However, Martin simply argues that Paul was wrong in saying that homosexuality is unnatural.⁵ Logically, to be successful in this debate, Martin would have to demonstrate that the Bible nowhere condemns homosexuality. To maintain that Paul did not condemn homosexuality raises the question of why he would describe it as unnatural, dehumanizing, and a punishment from God. For Martin to say there is no condemnation of homosexuality in Romans, then, is to deflate God’s judgment as not really being a judgment. Such would be a contradiction.

Martin is then in the awkward position of maintaining a difficult

The Evangelical Review of Theology and Politics Vol 8 (2020): 21-37.

3 Martin, ES3.

4 Ibid., ES4. To be clear, since the debate is about the Bible “sanctioning” certain types of sex and since the word “condemn” is also used, for Scripture to condemn homosexuality would amount to its not sanctioning it. Thus, to say that the Bible condemns homosexuality is to say that it does not sanction it.

5 Cf. Ibid., ES11-ES13.

position: that Paul's letter to the Romans is part of the Bible and it shows homosexuality to be a negative and dehumanizing activity as a judgment of God that does not invoke condemnation. Martin appears to qualify that Paul does not condemn homosexuality "as we understand it today." However, Paul condemns acts of homosexuality, which all homosexual relationships would engage in (unless homosexuals were abstinent); thus, given that the acts themselves are condemned, Paul does not leave the door open to any appropriate contexts for such acts.⁶ Thus, Martin's point fails. In short, if a biblical author, even according to Martin himself, says homosexuality is unnatural and a judgment of God (that is by most accounts a condemnation and is hard to see what a condemnation would be), then the point of debate is over. Having said that, we shall now consider Martin's article.

A WORD ABOUT HERMENEUTICS AND MEANING

In both the abstract to Martin's work as well the final page, Martin questions the very possibility of understanding the text even in principle. In his abstract he states, "Context matters when considering the meaning of a passage, as such there can be *no plain reading of a text that is 2000-3000 years old*, translated from an ancient language into modern contexts."⁷ If this is the case, i.e., that we cannot have a plain reading of the text, then one cannot know the meaning of the biblical text. Why would context even matter? The next sentence states, "This paper looks at the context, word choices, and the placement of words and phrases as an integral part of a whole."⁸ But why? If there cannot be a plain reading, what is the point? If there can be no plain reading, what other kind of reading is there? At the very end of his essay, Martin writes, "Using

6 The response that what was unnatural was for heterosexuals to be given over to homosexuality is completely without textual warrant, and goes against the other prohibitions, such in Leviticus, regarding homosexual behavior.

7 Martin., ES3 (emphasis added).

8 Ibid.

scripture as proof texts to support a predisposed belief, *regardless of what the text does or does not say*, is irresponsible. It relies on plain readings of passages that cannot and should not be read plainly.”⁹ Regardless of what the text says? One cannot use a proof text (a text used to prove something) *regardless of what it says*? Then this entire venture is completely moot. Further, if one cannot or should not read the text plainly, how else should he read it? Martin does not explain that. It seems that Martin thinks that the reader simply cannot know what the Bible really says. But why texts that are 2000-3000 years old? Why not texts that are 20-30 years old, or 2-3? Again, Martin does not explain, other than to insinuate that it is because it is translated from ancient languages. However, if such is the case, one should not care what the Bible says at all, because he could not know what it means anyway. This sort of hermeneutical skepticism is unwarranted and leads to an inability to know what the Bible actually says about anything. However, it is in fact the case that one can know what the text says, which evidently Martin really believes, since he wrote an article about what the Bible does and does not say.

A RESPONSE TO MARTIN’S INTRODUCTION

Martin notes that there are many sins that plague the church, such as lying, Sabbath breaking, and divorce. He further claims that “Christianity, and the church’s response to sin, has changed in response to increased secularism.”¹⁰ This is certainly true; although, it is the case that as a whole, the church has become more open and accepting to homosexuality in the last few decades. Along these lines, Martin asks, “If one operates under the assumption that homosexual behavior is sinful, then why is it worse than divorce?”¹¹ As argued in our previous article, homosexuality has been condemned in all its instances in the Bible and is called an

9 Ibid., ES17 (emphasis added).

10 Ibid., ES4.

11 Ibid.

“abomination” (Lev. 20:13), “unnatural” and “shameless” (Rom. 1:26-27), and a sin that will prohibit one from entering “the kingdom of God” (1 Cor. 6:10).¹² Homosexuality is against nature and that is not the case with divorce.

Martin declares, “Jesus never condemns homosexual behavior, but he does condemn divorce and subsequent remarriage.”¹³ In response, a couple aspects of this claim should be addressed. First, to say that an act is permissible because Jesus never explicitly condemned it would certainly prove too much. For example, Jesus never condemned rape, incest, or bestiality; however, it is agreed by biblical scholars, and by most in general, that such are immoral. Second, it is likely the case that homosexuality was not a prevalent issue among the Jews as divorce was, so Jesus did not need to address it. It is arguably the case that the Jews in Jesus’ day saw homosexuality as an abhorrent sin that was so evil that it was not prevalent in their culture.

Martin’s next point is that according to James 2:10, breaking any sin makes one a sinner. Further, “If grace (and the graciousness of the church) is offered to the remarried divorcé, then why is this grace and hospitality not offered to homosexuals?”¹⁴ To Martin’s point, we agree grace should be offered to homosexuals, *as long as they stop practicing homosexuality*.¹⁵ One cannot stop practicing being divorced; it is a state that one can never change (except for remarriage). However, to his point, it is good for the church to offer grace and forgiveness to divorcés, and the church should offer the same to those who have once been homosexuals; but the latter can stop practicing such lifestyles while one who is divorced must remain

12 Martin may retort that since divorce is said to lead to adultery, it too would be a sin that would keep one out of the kingdom of God. However, not all instances of divorce are equated with adultery since both Moses and Jesus allowed for it in instances of sexual infidelity (Dt. 24:1-4; Mt. 5:31-32). It should also be noted that in Dt. 24:2-4, it was an abomination for women to remarry her first husband after being another man’s wife. In short, divorce per se is not adultery.

13 Martin, ES4.

14 Ibid.

15 As noted, not all instances of divorce are unbiblical. In some instances, repentance or restoration with the church may be necessary for forgiveness.

divorced (again, unless remarriage). Once that has been the case, they should be afforded the same grace as other sinners as homosexuality is not an unforgivable sin. Having said that, Martin’s point about comparing homosexuality to other sins is really irrelevant. The point of the debate between us is whether or not the Bible sanctions homosexual monogamous relationships. If it does, then we are wrong. If it does not, then such is a sin, and comparing it to other sins does not make it any less of a sin.

Martin’s main “contention is that homosexuality as we understand it was never condemned by scripture” is indeed the crux of the debate.¹⁶ At this point, he defines homosexuality as “a sexual orientation where the sexual attraction and romantic attraction is oriented towards members of the same sex.” Further, this “orientation of a person isn’t one of personal choice, but a defining characteristic of behavior and personality.”¹⁷ Homosexuals, according to Martin “enter relationships seeking companionship, love, romance and yes, sex. In this they are no different than heterosexuals ...”¹⁸ Finally, he says, “The bias against homosexuality is a result of cultural ideology, [sic] and is not supported by good exegesis.”¹⁹

Martin’s definition is problematic in that the notion of “orientation” is irrelevant in the Jewish writings. As James De Young states, “Homosexual orientation is not discussed in Scripture, but prohibitions are broad enough to cover the lustful inclination as well as the act.”²⁰ Further, to say such an orientation is not one of choice is wholly without evidence. There is no genetic or biological evidence to date that a person is born homosexual. Even if there were such evidence, if homosexuality is indeed a sin, being born that way would not justify it. Such would commit the is/ought fallacy. So, even if a genetic link were proven for a sin, such as violence,

16 Martin, ES4.

17 Ibid., ES5.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 James B. De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2000), 61.

anger, alcoholism, pedophilia, etc., a genetic link alone would not prove the action to be morally acceptable. It is consistent with original sin that humanity's gene pool has been severely affected over time because of sin. It should be further pointed out that the biblical texts in question never mention *when* homosexual acts are permissible. They also never talk about appropriate homosexual relationships. (As noted, there are in fact acceptable instances of divorce.) The texts simply say that homosexual *acts* are sinful.

The notion that homosexuality is seen in a negative way due to "cultural ideology" is simply not the case. Cultures since the creation of man have taught that homosexual actions are wrong. The biblical texts say they are wrong. Further, Martin offers no defense of his cultural claim.

Let us now examine the specific "clobber verses" that Martin alludes to, which, not incidentally, are the same verses examined in our earlier article.²¹

OLD TESTAMENT PASSAGES

In responding to Martin's argument from the Old Testament, we offer an engagement with his treatment of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18-19, and Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. These represent the Old Testament portion of the so-called "clobber verses" Martin alleges "critical traditionalists have misused and misinterpreted to justify their cultural bias."²² Martin's allegations of misuse, misinterpretation, and cultural bias against us and others notwithstanding, our argument will demonstrate why we conclude that it is Martin who misuses and misinterprets the Genesis narrative and the Levitical Holiness Code based on his own cultural and theological biases. To demonstrate this, we will offer Martin's own summary analysis of the passages and then critique accordingly.

21 Martin, ES5.

22 Ibid.

GENESIS 18-19

Concerning Genesis 18-19 and the account of Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction, Martin concludes (with language that exudes a decided and unhelpful lack of epistemic humility) that, "one *cannot offer a credible argument* that homosexuality was the sin that destroyed Sodom. *No reasonable reading* could lead one to conclude that Sodom was destroyed because of homosexuality, and as such should not be considered as a sanction against consensual same sex relationships."²³ Martin's unwarranted claim notwithstanding, we find that it is both credible and reasonable to draw just such a conclusion. Sadly, rather than making his point from the text of Genesis, Martin errs by importing into his interpretation his guiding presupposition that the text cannot condemn homosexual activity, leading him to ignore any substantive engagement with the homosexual behavior the text actually describes, and other biblical authors identify as the primary sin of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Martin's problem is three-fold on this issue. First, he conflates the context of the sin of Sodom (its decidedly inhospitable response to the visitors which, though the locus of Martin's argument, is not mentioned even once in the text) with the substance of the sin (the homosexual behavior that demonstrated the depth of the depravity of the men of Sodom and gave expression to their willingness to try and rape Lot's guests). For the sake of argument, we will agree with Martin that to attempt the rape of Lot's guests was inhospitable (!), but we do not overlook the sexual perversion associated with the inhospitality, and neither does the broader Old and New Testament discussion of the sin of Sodom. Incredibly, Martin explains the men of Sodom's attempt at the homosexual rape of Lot's guests in what are ultimately unhelpful and dismissive terms, stating that "Genesis 19 is a study of violence, arrogance, selfishness and inhospitalableness. Rape is not sex; it is sexualized violence."²⁴ We respond

23 Ibid. (emphasis added).

24 Martin, ES8.

that rape most certainly is sex, and a violent and reprehensible expression of it—but rape is sexual, nonetheless. Martin appears guilty of obfuscating the issue of the type of the sexual sin of Sodom (homosexuality) with the context of that sin (inhospitalableness magnified by rape), and he falls into the error of special pleading at this point (or he is at least guilty of making a distinction without a difference). Would Martin have found it acceptable and within the limits of his hospitality argument to conclude that if only the men of Sodom had been involved in consensual relationships with their would-be sexual partners all would have been well? This seems to be the case, based on the trajectory of his argument. Along this line, he also offers that “a selfish attitude that prevailed with that community might very well be the motivation behind such repugnant behavior towards guests and travelers.”²⁵ It is at this point precisely, however, that the contradictory implication of this statement in view of Martin’s basic dismissal of the homosexual behavior’s condemnation is difficult to ignore when Martin’s words are taken seriously. To wit, Martin admits that the inhospitality led to “repugnant behavior,” yet he does not acknowledge that the homosexual act is what he is finding repugnant (rather, he wants to isolate the forceable nature of the would-be sexual sin, but not the type of sexual sin – distinctions the text does not make). If inhospitality is the context of the sin (and again, just to be clear, this is nowhere mentioned in the text; our inclusion here is to simply argue from Martin’s perspective), and the homosexual behavior is the substantial sin, then where does Martin find the justification for the conclusion that only the inhospitality is the issue, not the homosexuality? As already noted, his argument is based on eisegesis, whereby he must import the issues of inhospitality and rape into the text; all the while avoiding the particulars about the homosexual perversions that are mentioned in the text and elsewhere in the biblical canon. Our point here is not to diminish the rape, but to speak of it in terms the Bible uses—Sodom acted wickedly in a sexual way, in a homosexual way. The Bible does not limit, or even focus, Sodom’s sin to

25 Ibid., ES6.

inhospitality, but it does (as will be shown in the next point) speak of the sin of Sodom in singularly focused sexual terms based on the homosexual acts themselves.

Second, Martin also errs in his treatment of the Bible's teaching in Ezekiel 16:47-50, where Sodom's sin is described as an "abomination" done before the Lord. Whereas Martin states that an attempt to identify Ezekiel's condemnation with a sexual sin is "thin at best, and still leaves the exegete with the problem of the actual words Ezekiel wrote,"²⁶ it is precisely at the point of the wording in the text that the issue of sexual perversion is made clear. To reiterate what we stated in our original discussion of the text in Ezekiel, "the word for abomination is *toebah*, the same word used in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 to address homosexual sins. As De Young explains, 'Several sins in the Holiness Code of Leviticus are described as abominations, but only this one is singled out by itself as an abomination. The use of *toebah* in Ezekiel, with reference to Sodom's sin, is an echo of Leviticus 18 and 20. Sodom's sins were many: pride, social injustice, and pursuing homosexual behavior.'²⁷ Additionally, Jude 7 speaks of Sodom's sin as sexual perversion: "Likewise, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner as they, indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust, serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire."²⁸ We are surprised that Martin does not reference this passage in his original article, neither in his treatment of the New Testament teaching regarding homosexuality nor in its relationship to his discussion of Gen. 18-19 and the sin of Sodom. Nonetheless, the connection between Sodom and the sin of homosexuality is Jude's primary concern in describing the false teachers of his day against the backdrop of the Old Testament condemnation of homosexuality in the account of Sodom. Jude 7 describes those Jude is

26 Martin, ES6.

27 Huffling and Gentry, ES23. Italics in original. Cf. De Young, *What Does the Bible Really Teach About Homosexuality?*, 35, Kindle).

28 *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989). All Scripture will come from the *NRSV*.

concerned to confront in unequivocal condemnatory language. How could Jude have made the connection any clearer? Sodom's sin was sexual, and the result was eternal judgment. This may not fit with Martin's approach to Genesis 19 and the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, but the Bible connects the two in unambiguous language. As De Young states regarding the plethora of texts about Sodom (many not mentioned here), "Sodom's sin must have been of great variation and enormity—greater than that of practically any other pagan society. Indeed, Sodom's destruction amounts to a microcosm of the utter destruction of the Flood."²⁹

Third, Martin fails to discuss that according to Genesis 18-19 the decision to condemn Sodom and Gomorrah was already made (assuming that the minimum number of righteous men would not be found; cf. v. 32) based on what God tells Abraham was a great outcry and a grave sin (v. 20). (Genesis 13:13 also states, "Now the people of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord.") Once Abraham hears of this, God elaborates further by explaining that he will visit Sodom to "see whether they have done altogether according to the outcry against it" (21). The rest of the narrative reveals Abraham's pleading for mercy on the city, and then God departs from Abraham and makes his visit. The result of the visit is that God's concerns are verified, and he "rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah . . . overthrew those cities, all the plain, all the inhabitants of the cities, and what grew on the ground" (19:24-25). Key points regarding these verses are: (1) Sodom was set to receive divine judgment before what Martin alleges was ultimately a matter of egregious inhospitality expressed in an attempt to rape Lot's guests; and (2) does Martin really want us to accept that such a total judgment was to be attributed to inhospitality? Regarding this latter concern, when considering that the capital crimes in the Old Testament never include inhospitality but certainly include numerous sexual sins, and that the use of both means of capital punishment (stoning and burning) are included in Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction, Martin's claims about hospitality

29 De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims*, 47.

fall into the realm of absurdity (3). On top of this is Jude 7 which directly states that Sodom had “indulged in sexual immorality and pursued unnatural lust.”³⁰ Were the men of Sodom inhospitable? Of course, but the justification for their judgment was something far, far greater than not being gracious to visitors. This much we know from the other biblical texts already discussed that focus on Sodom’s sexual sin, and specifically the practice of homosexuality.

LEVITICUS 18:22 AND 20:13

Martin begins his discussion of the two passages from Leviticus with an interesting presupposition concerning the nature of the texts, stating that “many scholars believe this section of Leviticus was a later ‘P’ source addition that arose in response to behaviors and practices that were adopted during the Babylonian exile.”³¹ Why is this important for Martin’s argument? It is because he is going to try to make the case that after Israel had been in captivity in Babylon, she adopted corrupt practices; so, the later redactors of Leviticus added in the material in the holiness code out of concern for syncretism that has nothing to do with the actual issue of homosexual practice beyond specific religious instances. Aside from the confusion Martin introduces here surrounding a text that was given to Israel after their Egyptian captivity and well before the Babylonian captivity, we see this tactic is an overt attempt to color the debate in a way that reveals a penchant in Martin’s overall argument to move away from the topic at hand and try to reshape the discussion. At this point, we simply note that Martin’s claim about an alleged P source has nothing to do with the parameters of the debate, which is specifically concerning what the Protestant Bible teaches concerning homosexual practices. Martin may think the texts of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 were added later

30 It will not do to simply retort that the sexual immorality and unnatural lust are referring to rape. Rape is not unnatural. Is it egregious sin? Certainly, but the sexual act involved in rape is not unnatural in the sense that homosexual acts are unnatural.

31 Martin, ES6.

and not part of God's actual original words to Moses, but the words are in the Protestant Bible as part of the Levitical corpus, part of the text Martin agreed to engage at face value. Further, and quite ironically, whereas Martin strains to argue that the specific language of homosexuality as he understands it is not present in Genesis 18-19, he appears to switch course in Leviticus by giving significant weight to conjectural sources. This reveals what we suspect is a presuppositional commitment to his position that is the lens by which each text in the discussion is viewed by him, thus his willingness to insist on concreteness in Genesis and then appeal to conjecture in Leviticus. Recognizing this shortcoming in Martin's approach, we can now engage his treatment of the Levitical texts under discussion.

Leviticus 18:22 declares what the holiness code is, stating, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination." Leviticus 20:13 prescribes the consequence for violating the code, stating, "If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them." Aware of the explicit sexual language used in these passages, Martin's approach is two-fold. First, he relegates the passages to an association with the worship of Molech in 18:21, thereby reducing the prohibition to a matter of cultic sexual practice. He states that, "one must conclude that the writer's intent here is to tie the actions that follow this mention to the various acts of Molech worship. It is reasonable to conclude that some form of temple prostitution, or other sexual acts used as religious rites were being referenced here."³² Second, Martin seeks to delimit the language of the passages concerning homosexual behavior to a concern only for "anal intercourse between men" and having nothing to do "other homosexual behaviors. Homosexual sexual acts," Martin argues, "are not strictly defined by this one act.... There is no direct injunction against same sex relationships between women."³³

32 Martin, ES7.

33 Ibid.

To summarize his approach, Martin both isolates the discussed behavior to a cultic aspect, and he concludes that the mention of homosexual acts is not about homosexuality, per se, but about men having anal intercourse with men. According to his presuppositions, therefore, Martin confidently concludes that “none of these Old Testament passages are clear condemnations of same sex sexual relationships as we understand them. . . . This is not to say that there wasn’t a sentiment then that same sex sexual relationship were sinful. It just simply isn’t supported by any clear reading of the text.”³⁴ Oddly, in coming to these conclusions Martin attempts to make significant the LXX’s reading of Leviticus 18:5 as “the Lord your God” rather than “the Lord,” and he looks to translations of 18:22 in German Bibles from the 1800s which render the text as “Man shall not lie with young boys as he does with a woman” as evidence for his claim.³⁵ Frankly, these instances are indicative of the tenuous nature of Martin’s claims and reveal to us both a confusion (once again) of the topic and a reliance upon irrelevant matters. Such choices by Martin weaken his basic argument considerably.

Such oddities and irrelevancies notwithstanding, we offer two responses to Martin concerning his treatment of the Levitical passages. First, and primarily, contrary to Martin’s attempt to isolate the condemnation of homosexual practice to only men and only in corrupted worship scenarios unique to the situation of the Israelites vis-à-vis Egypt and the later Babylonian captivity, the Levitical holiness code cannot be treated in such an atomistic or fractured fashion without introducing a host of other problems for Martin. We observe that the broader context of Leviticus 18 prohibits incest (v. 6), adultery (v. 20), child sacrifice (v. 21), and bestiality (v. 23), as well as homosexuality. Does Martin deny that these other prohibitions “continue to have universal validity in contemporary society,” or are they, too, culturally delimited to Israel’s

34 Ibid., ES8.

35 Ibid., ES7.

past?³⁶ We shudder to think of the type of culture that Martin's approach to these matters would ultimately produce when his position is taken to its logical conclusion.

Second, what Martin attempts by way of drawing sharp distinction between male homosexual intercourse and any other homosexual activities (e.g., lesbianism) is at best an argument from silence that is ultimately baseless. Such an attempted distinction is never made about heterosexual concerns in Scripture. Rather, heterosexual issues are considered generally as a whole, so that when heterosexual matters are addressed the individual concern is reasonably applied to the whole; this is also the rational way to consider the condemnation of homosexual practices in the holiness code. In language that Martin is fond of using, we conclude that no reasonable interpreter of Leviticus 18:22 or 20:13 would force a distinction into the language in the way that Martin does unless there was a presupposition driving the interpretive agenda. Sadly, what Martin does with his handling of the Levitical texts is nothing short of an instance of his attempt to "strain out a gnat and swallow a camel" (Matt. 23:24).

NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES

Martin writes, "There are no restrictions, apophatically speaking, on same sex sexual behaviors in any of the gospels. In other words, The [sic] New Testament passages never address homosexuality as we understand it today."³⁷ It is not clear why Martin makes the fallacious move from "the gospels do not condemn homosexuality" to "the New Testament does not." The New Testament *contains* the gospels, but there is more to the NT than just the gospels. If that is meant to be an argument for his position, then it is incomplete. As already mentioned, the gospels also

36 Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 78, Kindle.

37 Martin, ES8.

do not prohibit rape, incest, or bestiality, so to argue from the absence of a discussion to the conclusion that such is permissible would lead to the logical conclusion that anything that is not mentioned is permissible. Martin admits that Paul's list of sexual vices (which includes homosexual acts) contains "actions or characteristics [that are] *inconsistent* with people of faith."³⁸ Martin notes that "in Romans" homosexual behavior "is not mentioned in a favorable light, but it does not carry the weight of restriction."³⁹ He next mentions that there is a particular word in both 1 Cor. 6:9-11 and 1 Tim 1:9-10 that is integral to this debate: *arsenokoitai*. Martin explains that "this word is a hapax legomena"; however, he then in the next statement states that it is *repeated* one other time "by a deutero-Pauline writer."⁴⁰ The reference to a deutero-Pauline writer is to 1 Timothy. By definition, then, the word is not a hapax legomena. Martin's reason for calling this term a hapax legomenon is because it, according to him, is taken from 1 Corinthians 6. However, even if such were the case, it would not be a hapax legomenon as such means a word that occurs only once in a given corpus.⁴¹ Martin makes a subtle shift in logic from saying that it "is likely" not Paul and "is likely" from 1 Corinthians 6, to "it is 'recycled' material."⁴² He has gone from the realm of possibility (that it "is likely") to the realm of fact ("it is") from one sentence to the next without any argument. It should be noted that it is completely irrelevant for this discussion as to who wrote 1 Timothy since the topic for this debate is whether the "Protestant Bible" allows for anything other than monogamous heterosexual relations. Since 1 Timothy is part of the Protestant Bible, it really does not matter who wrote it, except to say that this word in question may have been borrowed. However, if that were the case, then we have *two* NT authors arguing against homosexuality

38 Ibid. (emphasis added).

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 10.

41 Perhaps Martin means the Pauline corpus and since he does not believe 1 Timothy is written by Paul, then they would be in two separate *corpora*; however, such would be reaching as the NT is seen as the corpus in question.

42 Martin, ES10 (emphasis added).

instead of just one. At this point he looks at 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy separately to examine their context.

1 CORINTHIANS 6:9

The main issue in 1 Corinthians 6, according to Martin, is the meaning of the terms 'malakoi' and 'arsenokoitai'. As Martin notes, the latter is a term seemingly made up by Paul. Martin's first mention of this word says that it "is likely a vulgar slang for men who are having intercourse."⁴³ However, on the following page in his discussion on 1 Corinthians 6, he says that "arsenokoitai would be one who practices pederasty, or who buys young *boys* for sexual slavery."⁴⁴ Martin thus goes from saying it is about "men" to "young boys." Given the admittedly difficult nature of these terms, such seems to beg the question. Since we have already provided a discussion on the definitions and usages of these words in our previous article, such is not necessary here.⁴⁵ However, Martin's point is based on an admittedly difficult and ambiguous set of terms, except for one major point: given the "surely inescapable" link between these words and the Levitical law, Paul is not going to say anything against such law.⁴⁶ This argument was made in our previous essay.⁴⁷ Further, as David E. Garland notes regarding the kind of interpretation Martin makes here: "But this interpretation collapses on itself. Had he wished to limit his critique to pederasty, he could have used the term "pederast" (παιδεράστης, *paidērastēs*)."⁴⁸ Further, BDAG notes, "Paul's strictures against same-sex

43 Ibid., ES9 (emphasis added).

44 Ibid., ES10 (emphasis added).

45 Cf. Huffling and Gentry, ES30-33. The interested reader should consult David F. Wright, "Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of ἀρσενοκόιται (1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10)," *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (Jun 1984): 125-153 for an in-depth discussion of this issue.

46 Wright, 61.

47 Huffling and Gentry, ES32-33.

48 David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 213.

activity cannot be satisfactorily explained on the basis of alleged temple prostitution . . . or limited to contract w. boys for homoerotic service.”⁴⁹

The point that Martin wants to make, that Paul does not condemn homosexuality, would surely be against Paul’s entire training as an orthodox Pharisee. Given the “surely inescapable” connections between his newly coined term and Leviticus, as well as the point made by Garland that Paul could have used a specific word for pederasty, as well as the point made by BDAG, Martin’s point is unlikely.

Martin argues that “Paul is right to condemn” prostitution, “but one should not interpret this to mean that he condemns consensual same sex behavior between two loving, monogamous consenting adults in a committed relationship.”⁵⁰ Even if Martin were right about only prostitution or pederasty being in view here, such a comment in light of Paul’s orthodox training in Levitical law and what he says (and admitted to by Martin himself) in Romans makes such a statement by Martin incredulous. It is important to note that such conditions as loving, monogamous, and being consenting adults are not sufficient conditions for biblical morality. Such can also be the case for heterosexuals and still be sin. Two non-married heterosexuals could be in a loving, monogamous, consensual relationship, and sex between them would be sinful since they would not be married.

1 TIMOTHY 1:10

Martin’s comments on 1 Timothy basically mirror those of 1 Corinthians as the same word (*arsenokoitai*) is the one in question. He argues, however, that this text offers a stronger case for pederasty as it is found between “fornicator” and “followed by slave trader.” However, as mentioned above, BDAG (and other sources) disagree with this. For example, I.

49 William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. ἄρσενokoίτης.

50 Martin, ES11.

Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner state that in classical Greek “it could mean a male prostitute, but this specialised reference is excluded here. ἀρσενοκοίτης . . . is a rare word meaning ‘homosexual’.”⁵¹ Martin states, “Since arsenokoitai is hapax legomena [which is false since it is used twice], and only Paul truly understood what he meant, there is no ‘correct’ translation for this word.”⁵² However, if such is the case, then Martin cannot know what it means, and he has lost his argument for it meaning pederasty (both here and in 1 Corinthians).

ROMANS 1:26-27

Even if one were to grant Martin’s points above, Romans 1 is clear in its condemnation of homosexuality. In fact, this passage is so clear, that Martin admits it is seen as unnatural and a dehumanizing punishment from God: “Paul too believes in natural revelation [sic], and he sees same sex sexual behavior as unnatural.”⁵³ However, Martin is quick to diminish Paul’s view of nature. He opines, “Yet Paul’s sample size of nature is fairly narrow; mostly limited to animal husbandry, and domesticated animals. There is a mountain of research evidence that is contradictory of Paul’s natural revelation.”⁵⁴ In other words, Paul is simply wrong. The content of Martin’s evidence is animal behavior. He claims, “Same sex sexual behavior is quite common in the animal world. And as animals do not have the ability to sin, the behavior cannot be negatively sanctioned nor considered to be unnatural.”⁵⁵ Martin states that “in mammals same sex sexual behavior occurs in 8 to 10% of the total population, and for some species of bird (mallards) it can be as high as 19%.”⁵⁶ He further maintains,

51 I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, International Critical Commentary* (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 380. Again, Wright’s work is pertinent here.

52 Martin, ES11.

53 Ibid., ES12.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid.

““If Paul is making the argument of natural revelation in Romans 1, then he is unwittingly making an argument for same sex sexual behavior, as it is a common occurrence in nature.”⁵⁷

There are a lot of assumptions by Martin here. For one, why does he think Paul’s knowledge of nature is simply based on animal husbandry? On the contrary, Paul demonstrates a knowledge of Greek philosophy (Acts 17) and is a very educated man as a Pharisee (Acts 23:6), and in one way or another “was caught up to the third heaven and given “visions and revelations of the Lord” that he also described as “exceptional . . . revelations” (2 Cor. 12:1; 7). Martin evidently thinks Paul was a rather uneducated man and does not give much weight to these “visions and revelations” that were “exceptional.” However, a good argument can be made, if one believes the Scriptures (admittedly by taking a plain reading), that Paul is in a better position than Martin to discuss nature and how homosexuality fits into it.

Another assumption Martin makes is that animals engage in homosexual acts for the same reasons humans do. In animal biology there are a myriad of hypotheses as to why animals engage in homosexual behavior.⁵⁸ An examination of animal behavior would take this work into a direction that it cannot take; however, it will be stated that Martin’s attempted justification for animal behavior as a foundation for human morality is both unconvincing as there is no argument for it—it is merely stated—and irrational. Even assuming, as Martin does, that animals engage in homosexual behavior for the same reasons as humans, such commits the is/ought fallacy. Just because animals do such things (and even because humans do such things), it does not make them right. One cannot derive a moral *ought* from the fact that something simply *is*.

Martin also confuses teleology with frequency. It is not the frequency

57 Ibid., 12. (emphasis in original).

58 For example, cf. Cyril C. Grueter and Tara S. Stoinski, “Homosexual Behavior in Female Mountain Gorillas: Reflection of Dominance, Affiliation, Reconciliation or Arousal?” *PLoS ONE* (May 2016):1-13 (<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0154185>).

of an act that makes it unnatural; rather, it is the act itself. If a creature were created to mate with a member of its species of the opposite sex and instead mated with a member of its species of the same sex, that would be unnatural in the sense that it goes against the telos of the created being. It would not matter how frequently such acts happened or with how many. For example, bestiality is unnatural regardless of how many times it happens. Martin's logic can easily be reduced to absurdity in at least two ways. First, it appears that Martin wants to maintain that homosexuality in humans is morally permitted, or natural, since other animals engage in such activity. However, other animals eat their young. Yet surely Martin would not advocate humans eating their young; although, the logic he maintains would allow for it. Second, if frequency were all that mattered for an act being natural, then the most heinous acts would be considered natural if they were committed often enough. This commits the is/ought fallacy which says that because something *is* a certain way, that it *ought* to be. Martin commits this fallacy in his argument here. Further, Paul is not talking about nature as such, but the nature of humans. Humans have a decidedly different nature than other mammals or mallards. This point is completely missed by Martin. One cannot base human morality on other animals. Humans are rational animals created in God's image; other animals are not.

At this point Martin admits what cannot be denied given the clarity and force of this passage, viz., that "God allows them to be dehumanized," giving "these people up to degrading sexual behavior (same sex sexual behaviors) and describes it as receiving 'in their own persons the due penalty for their error. (1:27)'"⁵⁹ He adds, "In this context homosexual behaviors are a punishment from God."⁶⁰ Martin explains that awareness of YHWH is what is the real issue. Martin states Paul "assumes" that natural revelation means that all cultures have an awareness of God as

59 Ibid., ES12.

60 Ibid.

well as the moral code he has given them.⁶¹ According to Martin, this premise is “as faulty as the argument of natural revelation itself.”⁶² Again, Paul is simply wrong. However, a basic moral law across cultures has indeed been recognized. For example, the religious teachings in the great world religions teach a similar religious code (such as the Ten Precepts as compared to the Ten Commandments). Cultures across time and geography recognize that murder and rape are wrong (homosexuality is actually in this category as well).⁶³ Further, if there were no moral code or human nature, then such things as the Nuremburg trials would have no objectively right status as it would just be one culture against another saying it is wrong to extinguish races for whatever reason. This is to say nothing of the fact that the very next chapter in Romans talks about such a law; although, this is not likely to affect Martin since he has already said multiple times that Paul is simply wrong about natural law. Thus, it appears for Martin to make his point he must do so at the great cost of human morality as such. He also offers no argument as to why some cultures would not have such a law. The bottom line here regarding natural revelation is that Paul is arguing that all humans have a knowledge of the true God. Martin simply rejects this as “faulty” but does not offer any reasons for it being so.

More than this, Martin castigates Paul’s passage here as being “so problematic in its logic, and assumptions that one cannot readily condemn homosexuality as we understand it today; as between two loving, consenting adults. Arguments like this, gleaned from Paul’s rhetoric, are the fuel which deeply dehumanizes people, in a similar fashion as slavery or prostitution.”⁶⁴ He continues, “It argues that the entire being of a person is defined by the 45 minutes a week they might engage in sexual activity, reducing their humanity to acts, and dismissing the whole of the

61 Ibid., ES13.

62 Ibid.

63 For a defense of natural law, cf. J. Budziszewski, *Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

64 Ibid., ES13.

being.”⁶⁵ What Martin is saying is that Paul is simply being rhetorical and does not take into account loving, monogamous homosexuals. However, Paul has argued, and Martin has admitted that this is what Paul argues, that homosexuality is unnatural. They are not unnatural in certain circumstances; they are unnatural acts as such. Martin’s point about the length of time taken to commit the acts can further be reduced to absurdity by simply changing the act to something else, such as rape or murder. Such acts can take even less time, but they are still condemned. The amount of time is completely irrelevant.

Martin next inquires as to what happens to homosexuals who do not commit idol worship as described in Romans 1. “Does God give them up to same sex sexual behavior,” he asks. He answers, “This is another logical flaw in Paul’s rhetoric. He is operating from too small a sample size to make sweeping claims about divine revelations through nature.”⁶⁶ Once again, Paul is wrong. It appears that Martin does not believe that Paul is inspired by the Holy Spirit when he wrote Romans, since Paul is clearly fallible, according to Martin. Further, Martin does not provide what an adequate sample size would look like or how one would go about discovering this. Also, how does Martin know how Paul based his claim? We are not told by either Paul or Martin, except to hold that Paul is inspired by the Holy Spirit to write his letter to the Romans. He recognizes that “Romans 1 was not written as a sanction, but in context defines particular behaviors as a just punishment for a different offense.”⁶⁷ It appears that the desires *qua* desires are what are unnatural. Why would it be a punishment to give people up to homosexuality if homosexuality is itself not immoral? Why not give them up to a heterosexual sin? If Martin were right, then Paul’s condemnation of it would not make sense. Paul would be saying that God gave them up to something that is in itself completely permissible. What Paul is saying is that when creatures reject the Creator and worship creatures, they are

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

getting the order backwards. Thus, God makes creatures operate in their order in a backward manner, one that is unnatural, viz., homosexual. Paul is saying that homosexuality as such is an unnatural and backward activity mirrored by rejecting the Creator.

Martin's only recourse would be to say that they were given in lust and were not in "loving" and "monogamous" relationships. However, that would seem to go against the very wording of Paul's text, viz., that same sex activity is unnatural as such. Paul is saying, along with the rest of Scripture, that homosexual *acts* are unnatural. There is no mention of any appropriate way for homosexuals to practice homosexuality as the very acts themselves are unnatural.

In short, Martin recognizes, repeatedly, that Romans 1 does not "sanction" homosexual behavior. In his estimation, Paul is simply wrong. However, the debate in question is whether or not the Bible allows for homosexual activity. It clearly does not. Romans is clear about this, and Martin's only way out is to simply say that Paul is wrong. However, Paul being wrong is completely irrelevant to this debate. While the authors of this article believe in divine inspiration and inerrancy, the debate is not about such matters. Romans is a book of the Bible and denounces homosexuality as unnatural. Martin admits this. Thus, the Bible does not sanction homosexual activity. The qualifiers Martin wants to add such as "loving" and "monogamous" are irrelevant since, according to Romans, the acts qua acts are unnatural. No amount of love or monogamy can make that otherwise.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND GRACE

In his section titled "Grace Responds to Sin," Martin attempts to demonstrate how Christians should respond to homosexuality. Before examining what he says, we agree that Christians should show the love and grace of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In our experiences, the authors have known many people who are homosexual. This author in particular

has had many homosexual students and he treated each one exactly the way he treated heterosexual students: with dignity, respect, and love. On that, we agree with Martin. Having said that, does that mean that homosexuality is not a sin, and if it is, how should Christians respond? Let us examine what Martin says and offer a response.

Here, like the opening section, Martin compares homosexuality to divorce.⁶⁸ He again asks why Christians are ok with giving those who are divorced grace but not homosexuals. As mentioned before, there is grace for both; however, being divorced is not something that can be stopped. Once divorced, the two people are divorced (unless they remarry). However, homosexuals can stop being homosexuals. Once they have stopped and repented, they should be granted the same grace and forgiveness as other people, including those who are divorced. However, if homosexuality is a sin, as we have argued, then per church discipline, homosexuals should not be treated as if nothing is wrong. It would be like allowing two unmarried people in church to go on living in sin or allowing adultery to be left unchecked. The church actually has an obligation to practice church discipline.

Martin next quotes Eph. 2:8-9, saying that they are written “so that no one may judge another’s sins.”⁶⁹ There are two problems with this. First, Martin is judging those who are not giving grace to homosexuals (to say otherwise is to make his assertions meaningless). Second, the NT does not teach that one should not judge. It teaches that one should judge righteously (more on this below).

Martin further states, “There are no supporting Biblical verses that teach that one must be perfect in thought word and deed to have salvation, only that one must have faith in Christ.”⁷⁰ Agreed, but that is not what is being debated. There are in fact sins that keep people from the kingdom of God. The list of sins given in 1 Cor. 6:9-10 says just that. Regardless

68 Ibid., ES14.

69 Ibid.

70 Ibid., ES15.

of the meaning of the words in question, there are in fact deeds that will keep one out of the kingdom. Thus, one should strive to avoid doing those things. It has been argued that homosexuality is on that list.

Martin's main point in this section is that one should offer forgiveness to all and not judge. He offers Matthew 7:1-3 as support, which says: "Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. 2 For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. 3 Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye?" However, it is important to notice the next verses: "4 Or how can you say to your neighbor, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' while the log is in your own eye? 5 You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor's eye." Jesus is not condemning judging others. He is condemning hypocrisy. The very next verse iterates this as well: "6 Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you." One has to judge who are the dogs and swine. Further, Jesus' statement about church discipline reinforces the necessity of judgment:

¹⁵ If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶ But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. (Matt. 18:15-17)

Thus, judgment is not condemned, or one could not perform the commands given here by Jesus. What is at stake is hypocritical judgment. The NT is full of places that talk about being against sin. Martin's call to forgive sin without repentance is unfounded. It is more loving to tell a person that he is out of step with the moral and biblical commands of God.

CONCLUSION

In Martin's closing section he states, "There are no 'clear' passages that condemn homosexuality or same sex sexual behaviors as we understand them today."⁷¹ It has been argued here and in our previous article that such is false. It should be pointed out, again, that Martin is right that the NT did not discuss homosexuals "as we understand them today." That is likely because the NT writers already knew that homosexuality is wrong. They knew this both from natural law (Rom 2) and from their Jewish Scriptures. There simply was no need to give examples of when homosexuality was ok and when it was not. The context was not what was at stake—the acts are what are wrong. For the biblical writers, there is no context for the unnatural act of homosexuality. If it is a sin, it would not matter if one did have an orientation to be homosexual. The acts themselves are what are said to be unnatural.

In short, Martin has admitted that Paul is against homosexuality in that Paul sees it as unnatural. Martin's response is that Paul is simply wrong. However, since the debate concerns whether the Bible allows for homosexuality, it should be clear that it does not. Martin evidently sees and admits that Paul does not allow for it in Romans 1. Martin's only recourse is to simply say that Paul is incorrect in his views.

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71 Martin, ES16.

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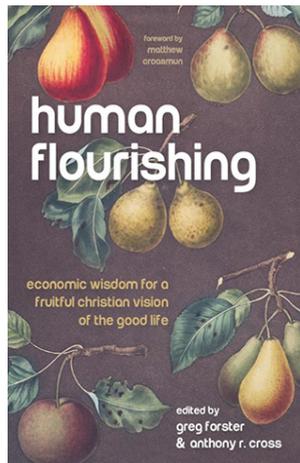
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Book Reviews

Forster, G., & Cross, A. R. (eds).

*Human Flourishing:
Economic Wisdom for a Fruitful
Christian Vision of the Good Life*
Eugene, OR: Pickwick
Publications, 2020.

Stephen M. Vantassel, King's
Evangelical Divinity School



Human Flourishing is a collection of articles from 12 authors from schools ranging from Western Theological Seminary in Michigan to Baylor University in Texas to Georgian College and State University in New Jersey and Biola University in California. The editors desired to create a collaborative document that would move theology from the technical and arcane to the practical and life changing (p. xiii). The book arises from papers submitted to the Oikonomia Network's

January 2019 colloquia at which Miroslav Volf gave a plenary talk on human flourishing (p. xiii).

Matthew Croasmun uses the Foreword to argue that discussions of human flourishing must recognize and contend with two key realities. First, humans are not islands but are subject to a variety of interconnected realities ranging from the public/private, environmental/societal, and macro/microeconomic. Challenges that occur in one sphere impact others and vice versa. The second reality is the problem of hierarchy or put differently, inequality of power amongst humans. Answers to achieving human flourishing should be anchored in the creation mandate which seeks harmony between the human and non-human creation and bridging socialism and capitalism. Ultimately, it is through the reality and experience of the church that God seeks to illustrate and develop a home that impacts nature, society and family, positively. Oikology, the study of the home, is how we can explore our role in experiencing the flourishing that God has designed for humanity. Readers should use Croasmun's understanding of human flourishing as connected to the meaning of "home" as the framework to read and understand the articles in this volume. For without this framework, the articles can appear as a hodgepodge of disconnected ideas.

The editors collected the 12 articles under three headings: faith, hope and love. Articles listed under faith deal with issues of doctrine. Those under hope discuss ways Christians approached public/private life in the past. Finally, articles under love engage questions related to social ethics. Substantively, the articles range in topics from scriptural interpretation to insights from Church history to investigation of the perspective of some leading theologians. The diversity of topics is both a detriment and a blessing. A detriment in that the reader is not given a clear starting point to engage the subject of human flourishing. On the other hand, the diversity can be a blessing in that the reader is presented with a variety of starting points from which to choose.

It is beyond the scope of this review to discuss all 12 chapters. Rather

this review focuses on a few of the chapters of particular interest to the reviewer. J. Michael Thigpen, in his article “Flourishing, Justice and the Gospel as “Subduing” the Earth”, reminds us that the creation mandate includes subduing the earth. He correctly recognizes that the Hebrew verb for subdue cannot be properly softened. However, Thigpen argues that subdue (Genesis 1:28) calls for humans to subjugate not the earth, as traditionalists believe, but the earth’s human inhabitants. With this interpretation, Thigpen can side step the environmentally unpopular application of “subdue” as war on the planet or its ecosystem.

While Thigpen’s idea is certainly creative, it fails to appreciate the immediate context. The simplest way to understand the passage is to identify subdue as referring to the earth and its non-human occupants. Anyone who has farmed or dealt with wildlife damage immediately recognizes the need to subdue organisms that resist the farmer’s designs. The notion that Genesis 1:28 is referring to subduing people is so subtle that one has to wonder if the ancient Israelites would have thought of it. God had to command Adam and Eve to subdue because wildlands have to be pressed into service. Once land is pressed into service, human behavior transitions into care and protect as argued by Calvin Beisner or Stephen M. Vantassel.

Suzanne McDonald’s piece, “Waiting with Eager Longing: The Inseparability of Human Flourishing from the Flourishing of All Creation”, correctly argues that creation is set free to flourish when man’s rebellion against God is resolved (p. 48). I commend her attempt to move beyond the tired platitudes, (e.g. avoid wanton exploitation etc.) and provide concrete examples of proper environmental stewardship (pp. 50f). Readers should be troubled by her rejection of Paul’s statement in 1 Corinthians 9:9 where he contended that God wasn’t concerned about the oxen. Ultimately, her failure to recognize the distinction between the treatment of wilderness (unsubdued land) and subdued land in the interpretation of those passages makes this yet another article that does not help move biblically grounded environmentalism forward.

Greg Forster, in “Nations in the Metanarrative of Redemption: A Gospel for Public Life”, argues that God’s treatment of nations shows that salvation must be understood collectively and not just individually. Forster uses the Tower of Babel, the Day of Pentecost and the New Jerusalem as key events to show how God used nations to suppress sin, spread the gospel and ultimately reconciliation. Unfortunately, his discussion of God’s use of nations neglects to fully appreciate the special and continued status of ethnic Israel. Though God will maintain the status of the gentile nations, Forster, he did not fully appreciate that the nations become the people of God through their adoption as children of Abraham, in other words, by becoming spiritual Israelites. Ultimately Forster’s position leads one towards a supercessionism that is not supported by the testimony of Scripture.

Lynn H. Cohick’s and John Anthony Dunne’s article, ““Better than a Slave:” Paul and the Economics of Slavery-A Rejoinder to Ulrike Roth”, is quite timely given the recent inroads of “woke” theology in Evangelicalism. The authors properly avoid claiming that Paul never used slaves. Instead they highlight some key questions that must be considered before one naively adopts the claim that Paul used slave labor to spread the gospel.

Greg Forster’s second article, “Lamentable Obligation in Augustine’s Political Theology”, uses Augustine to acknowledge the imperfection of politics in a fallen world, while recognizing its importance. By highlighting the tension, Forster reminds idealists that the perfect ultimately awaits Christ’s rule, while simultaneously exhorting realists that they should not be comfortable with the status quo.

Anyone concerned with human flourishing must think about ways to address and correct ills of poverty, illness, addiction etc. “Godly Non-Profits: Extending the Porterfield Thesis” by Robert E. Wright reviews the history of non-profit organizations in the United States to illustrate the uses and limits of non-profit work to further social good. He shows how non-profit organizations addressed societal concerns but that their role was ultimately eclipsed by government programs. The reason for the rise

of government programs and the decline of non-profits stemmed from non-profits failing to properly market themselves, to completely address societal ills and societal support for government expansion.

Poverty certainly plays a key role in whether one is flourishing or not. Daniel J. Estes in his article, “Failure to Thrive in the Lord’s Ordered World: Causes for Poverty in the Book of Proverbs”, shows that Proverbs acknowledges that the causes of poverty can include, slothfulness, evil actions by others, and acts of God. Estes also correctly noted that Proverbs esteems character and wisdom (i.e. godly wisdom) above financial wealth, underscoring that righteousness is better than riches. In the end, Estes concludes that Christians must have a balanced view of poverty, one that does not emphasize one cause over the other as occurs in political debates over social welfare policies. Estes is certainly correct. However, Estes missed two key issues. First, Estes did not discuss how the bible views government’s role in social welfare. I would suggest that scripture recognizes a limited view of government, one that focuses on jurisprudence and not social welfare programs. Second, Estes should have considered the role of the family (nuclear and extended) as the initial barrier against abject poverty. By ignoring the family’s role, he fell into the trap that the discussion only centers on individual behavior and government action or inaction.

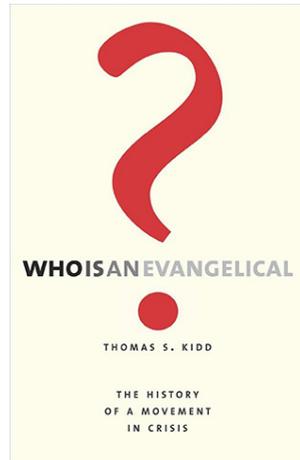
Does Paul understand poverty to be the result of injustice? Is Paul concerned with economic inequality? John W. Taylor in the article, “Paul, Poverty, and Economic Justice”, answers those questions, and others, by analyzing how poverty was understood in Greco-Roman and Jewish literature, followed by an investigation of key accounts of Paul’s teaching and activity. Taylor concludes that Paul does not believe that poverty is automatically the result of injustice. Rather the poor, just exist. Paul teaches that Christians should give to the poor and to do so voluntarily. In addition, the poor should learn to be content and to work so as to be self-sufficient so that they would be able to help others. In short, Paul was not a social justice warrior.

Article-based books are always difficult to evaluate because the diversity of writers and topics resists sweeping comments. This text is no exception to that general rule. Certainly, the book jump starts thought on the topic of human flourishing from an Evangelical/biblical framework. At best the book is suggestive and encouraging of further development and thought. No one reading this text will come away with a framework, let alone a foundation for the area, so in that sense the book was disappointing. Several articles, however, a few which I have highlighted, justify purchasing the book on their own.

Seminary faculty looking for a supplemental text to extend the conversation on human flourishing should consider this book. There is certainly enough here to give students ideas for research papers and class discussion.

Thomas Kidd.
*Who is an Evangelical?:
The History of a
Movement in Crisis*
Yale University Press, 2020. Hb,
Pp, 200,
\$26.00. ISBN 978-0-3002-4141-9.

Reviewed by, Geoffrey Butler. Wycliffe
College, University of Toronto



Labelling it “arguably America’s most controversial religious movement” (p. 1), Kidd engages a tradition inextricably linked to right-wing politics for many. He writes as one “committed as ever to historic evangelical practices and beliefs” such as the centrality of Christ and the authority of Scripture, despite the movement’s “crisis”

over self-identity.

Kidd's 1st chapter traces evangelicalism's origins. The movement owes much to figures like John Wesley and George Whitefield, whose 18th century ministries focused intently on the new birth. In their view, living under Christendom did not equate to being a true follower of Jesus. Chapter 2, along similar lines, discusses 18th century Americans who dissented from established denominations, with Baptists especially opposing religious taxes and the concept of a state church. "The First Amendment was a great victory for evangelicals," Kidd claims, despite the ensuing "struggle to define disestablishment" (p. 33). A Southern Baptist, he expresses the hesitancy to link state and religion characteristic of some Baptist forerunners, claiming "Whether (America) was a Christian nation in substance is doubtful, given the harsh realities of slavery, Native American removal from the Southeast, and other glaring moral problems" (p. 38).

Chapter 3 explores early 20th century fundamentalism. Kidd argues efforts to "ban Sunday mail delivery, the sale of alcohol, and the teaching of evolution" were "misguided" (p. 53), setting a precedent for the unhealthy politicization of evangelicalism. This era also witnessed the emergence of major African American denominations, Asian evangelical congregations on the Pacific coast, and an explosion of evangelicalism globally, as "Missionary advocacy helped to sustain long-standing connections among American, Canadian, and British evangelicals" (p. 61). Chapter 4 documents the rise of neo-evangelicals like Billy Graham. "Some observers today," he explains, "use fundamentalist and evangelical as synonymous terms," but this is inaccurate (p. 75). Evangelicals like Graham exhibited an ecumenical approach, envisioning "an intellectually robust, culturally engaged form of conservative Protestantism" (p. 75). For them, "cultural influence always centered around evangelism" (p. 88), a truly commendable distinctive.

In chapter 5, Kidd highlights American evangelicalism's burgeoning alliance with the Republican Party. "It was Ronald Reagan," he notes, "who

truly began to charm rank-and-file white evangelical voters for the GOP” (p. 117), a demographic still crucial to its base. Kidd also observes, “During the twentieth century, the center of world Christianity shifted to the Global South”, and many immigrants to North America from the region are firmly evangelical (p. 108). “Demographically,” he asserts, “they represent the evangelical future” (p. 110). Kidd’s 6th chapter, “Evangelicals from Reagan to Obama”, claims the former’s presidency “unified white neoevangelicals and fundamentalists in a way they had not been since the Scopes Trial in 1925” (p. 121). This unity was encouraged in part by renewed adherence to conservative doctrine within much of evangelicalism, eventually giving rise to organizations like The Gospel Coalition and Desiring God. This era also saw rapid growth within denominations like the Assemblies of God, “in which nonwhites make up more than half of the members” as of the 2010s (p. 128). Yet, “Many polls about evangelicals allow a category only for whites,” Kidd observes. Thus, although non-white Protestants may hold evangelical beliefs, they are often not categorized as such by pollsters. The term, therefore, is often detached from its theological meaning, failing to give an accurate picture of the movement’s nature

Kidd finishes by addressing, “Donald Trump and the Crisis of Evangelicalism”. In 2016, Black Protestants overwhelmingly supported his opponent, some of whom held evangelical convictions. Kidd points out one of Clinton’s last campaign stops was an African American Pentecostal church; thus, it is noteworthy that 81% of their white counterparts voted for the president. Some leaders in the former community expressed opposition to Clinton on LGBT issues and abortion, while some in the latter were aghast at Trump’s behaviour, including his rhetoric regarding immigrants and women – including the “infamous Access Hollywood video” (p. 145). Their objectionable options notwithstanding, however, the outcome indicated substantial disagreement among those with common theological convictions. Kidd contends that although many voted “against Hillary Clinton more than for Donald Trump”, hoping the latter would appoint pro-life Supreme Court justices, “The damage caused

by evangelical white voters' support for Trump was substantial, leading many women and people of color to question the fundamental integrity of the movement" (p. 149). To support his claim, Kidd points to instances of minorities dropping the evangelical label or finding new churches after the heated election.

Political conservatives, at this point, might suspect Kidd of Democratic sympathies. However, he usually voted Republican prior to 2016, supporting neither Trump nor Clinton that year, though during the GOP primary he served on Marco Rubio's religious liberty advisory board. Thus, his differences with evangelicals who voted for Trump cannot be attributed to affinity for Clinton. Nor does Kidd suggest evangelicals withdraw from the public square. He lauds their charitable work, noting "Two of the three biggest disaster-relief agencies in America are also evangelical: the Salvation Army and the Southern Baptist Convention" (p. 153), representing evangelicalism at its best. What Kidd rejects, rather, is a partisanship which has made it "uncertain whether the term evangelical can be rescued from its political and racial connotations" (p. 154). I resonate with his concern, having attended an American evangelical college during the 2016 campaign. Though strengthened by the vibrant spiritual life on campus, I was deeply concerned with the combative posture taken by some during the election and its aftermath, sensing too many folks viewed "evangelical" as a more political than theological expression.

That said, Kidd might have helped his case by more explicitly detailing why many white evangelicals voted as they did in 2016. His historical work on the religious right is impeccable, yet non-evangelical readers in particular may struggle with how many supported an individual of Trump's character. While he acknowledges the role abortion played, (p. 147), religious liberty is not addressed at length, although as part of Rubio's advisory board Kidd would be well equipped to articulate an evangelical perspective. Personally, I concur that it makes little sense to "see Donald Trump as a key player in the reassertion of America's godly

values” although he “manifestly contradicts those values in his own life and rhetoric” (p. 154). Kidd’s concerns about character and public witness are evident throughout the book; he rejects the position that policy alone is crucial to political engagement. Indeed, fully addressing this tension would require an entire book in itself. Nevertheless, evangelicals who consider issues like religious liberty and abortion determinative might appreciate an explanation of their perspective here.

While Kidd’s work is centred on evangelicalism’s history rather than political associations *per se*, the movement’s complicated past with civic engagement should give pause to those who might link the gospel too closely with any political party or figure. As he correctly asserts, “partisan commitments have come and gone....but conversion, devotion to an infallible Bible, and God’s discernable presence are what make an evangelical an evangelical” (p. 156). This may well serve as a timely reminder to the church in a highly polarized era. In short, students, pastors, and those interested in the history of the movement would be well served by Kidd’s thorough, user-friendly introduction exploring “the religion of the born again” (p. 4).

Richard Bauckham.

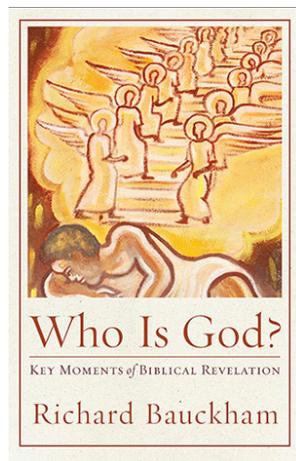
Who Is God?

Key Moments of Biblical Revelation

Grand Rapids, MI: Baker
Publishing, 2020.

Reviewed by, Cathryn Carmichael,
M.Div., Oral Roberts University
Licensed minister/Teaching Assistant
at ORU

Richard Bauckham is a theologian, Bible scholar, and award-winning author.



He holds several academic positions, including senior scholar at Ridley Hall, Cambridge University, visiting professor at St. Mellitus College, and New Testament professor emeritus at the University of St. Andrews. The author has an extensive academic history in New Testament literature studies, including teaching, reading, and lecturing on various New Testament topics. His current book, *Who Is God? Key Moments of Biblical Revelation* is comprised of the material from his 2015 Frumentius Lectures at the Ethiopian Graduate School of Theology and the 2018 Haywood Lectures at Acadia Divinity College in Nova Scotia except for Chapter One, which is new to the book (vii).

The book is a short, easy read with illuminating biblical truths that answer his thesis: Who is the God of the Christian Bible, and what does his self-revelation say to humanity? Bauckham has succinctly undertaken the exposition of God's self-revelatory identity in four profound chapters. Each chapter includes compelling elements that further his thesis and allows the reader to glean the material's expanse: footnotes with scriptural cross-referencing and explanatory notes (vii); well-placed images granting the reader a visual perspective; and a short bibliography. The moderate use of ancient biblical languages, Hebrew and Greek, for keywords and ideas expounds the author's theological evidence that 'God is with us.'

Bauckham illuminates "key moments of divine disclosure" (2) by exegeting individual Bible stories. He begins his discourse in Chapter One by discussing "The Revelation of the Divine Presence" (pgs. 5-34). The author offers the story of Jacob's dream (Gen. 28:10:22) as a pivotal starting point for revealing the nuances of God's omnipresence in individuals' lives and upon the earth (e.g., Temple). He exquisitely covers these nuances through "sub-sections," which succinctly discusses the different motifs that coalesce his mega-theme of "God is with us." Bauckham writes, "Many of the varied forms of God's presence that we find in the Old Testament continue or have equivalents in the New Testament, but many

of them also find their culmination in a new form of divine presence that surpasses them: incarnation, God's presence as the human Jesus Christ" (13). Chapter One is enlightening and thought-provoking, bringing together the Old and New Testaments, revealing the myriad of ways that God is with us.

Bauckham begins Chapter Two, "The Revelation of the Divine Name" (pgs. 35-60), with a short explanation of God's name in Hebrew and Greek. The author's brief overview of God's name in the ancient biblical languages shows his thoughtfulness for readers who may not have Biblical language experience. Following, he turns the reader's attention to Moses and the Burning Bush in Exodus 3, revealing God's self-introduction. Bauckham takes meticulous care to demonstrate how the Divine Name reveals His character: holy, committed, "self-subsistent and self-determining" (42). Chapter Two shows the Divine Name's historical, cultural, and theological importance, demonstrating a loving, committed God.

Chapter Three, "The Revelation of the Divine Character" (pgs. 61-87), is closely related to the previous chapter, illuminating who God is through his name. At the same time, Chapter Three carries the discovery further in answering 'What is God like?' 'What sort of God is he?' (62). The parallel themes of God's self-revelatory name alongside the disclosure of His behavioral characteristics give the reader a comprehensive picture of the Who? How? and Why? of God's nature. Bauckham uses Moses at Mount Sinai in Exodus 34 to show God's qualifying behavioral characteristics such as mercy, grace, love, and faithfulness (68). The author expounds further on these qualities to reveal a relational and consistent God in dealing with humanity. Bauckham poignantly shares, "Only when we have focused as intently as the psalm does on the positive qualities of God's character and the universality of his desire for the good of all his creatures can we get into proper perspective the way God deals with evil" (79). Bauckham superbly deals with the ideology that the Old Testament's God is full of anger and wrath, while the God of the New Testament is merciful. Chapters Two and Three are deserving of special attention as they lead the

reader on a more profound journey of discovering the God of the Bible.

The final chapter deals with “The Revelation of the Trinity” (89-113). The author contends with “three key moments of revelation in the Gospel of Mark”: Jesus’s baptism (1:9-11), the transfiguration (9:2-8), and “tearing of the veil” and the centurion (15:37-39) (89). Bauckham theologically ties the three passages together, coalescing their similarities and pointing to the “spirit.” Yet, Bauckham could more aptly explain the Trinity’s mysteries by examining the personhood of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The book closes in the way it began: His divine presence “to us, with us, and in us in distinguishable ways” (110).

Who Is God? Key Moments of Biblical Revelation is an excellent book that is theologically and scripturally sound, thereby allowing for applicability in many ways. The book is an excellent resource for seasoned theologians and scholars as well as the everyday reader who seeks to understand the nuances of God’s complex identity. Academically the book is well-suited for undergraduate level theology courses or higher. One unexpected approach to Bauckham’s book is its usefulness for Bible studies and home groups. The author’s inclusion of cross-scripture references and short chapter sections favor group discussions. The book has two significant problems: First, there are moments in the author’s writing that his thesis can be hard to follow. Second, Chapter Four does not catch the theological essence of the Trinity. Despite these issues, the book warrants a spot on the bookshelf of all knowledge seekers. Bauckham answered his thesis succinctly but thoroughly.

James B. Jordan.
Christendom and the Nations
Theopolis Books, Athanasius
Press,
West Monroe: LA, 2019. ISBN-13 :
978-0986292491

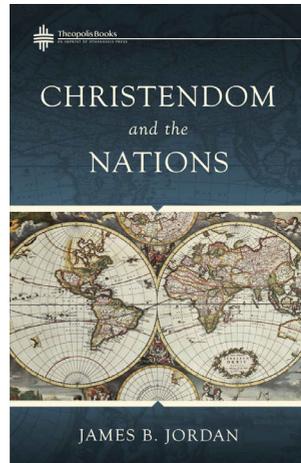
Reviewed by, Jonathan Ashbach.
Lecturer in Politics, Baylor University.

What guidance might scripture contain for foreign policy? It is an interesting question. Very little of the literature on Christianity and Politics addresses

this issue systematically, but James B. Jordan's *Christendom and the Nations*¹ (hereafter CATN) seeks to defend a body of specifically Christian principles for international relations. While one can be grateful for Jordan's initiative in seeking to draw greater attention to this part of the discipline, however, the work's flaws also leave one hoping that this will not be the last word on the subject by scholars of the Christian tradition.

Chapter 1 defines some central terms and themes. A nation is described as "a body of people, usually living in the same place, sharing a common faith and culture, and desiring a common and separate government" (7). States—which Jordan believes should ideally map to nations—are areas governed by force. The ideal for international relations is spiritual unity within a variety of Christian nations, Jordan argues.

The next five chapters elaborate on this theme of unity and diversity. Chapter 2 argues that biblical government must be local, with larger governmental units depending upon alliances of smaller ones. Chapters 3



1 James B. Jordan, *Christendom and the Nations* (West Monroe, LA: Theopolis Books, 2019).

and 4 argue that God desires nations to be united in the word and worship of the Church and through free trade, but that he will thwart “pagan” international unity based on force and convenience. Chapter 5 defends plurality within that unity, holding that national borders and their defense are legitimate and that each nation should “mind its own business” (61). It also articulates a series of principles for warfare: War must be defensive, it should target enemy leadership, the enemy must be offered a negotiated peace, civilians are not legitimate targets, and armies should consist of local militia. Chapter 6 argues that alliances with “pagan” nations are forbidden unless they settle border disputes or are alliances of mutual defense initiated by the non-Christian nation.

The second half of the book mixes theoretical argument with commentary on contemporary foreign policy issues. Chapter 7 criticizes past US imperialism and contemporary foreign aid both as failures to “mind our own business” (96). Chapter 8 argues that church relations and spies are more central to international communication than are ambassadors. Chapter 9 denounces the UN as inherently anti-Christian. “The United Nations was founded as an international secular church with salvation as its explicit goal,” Jordan claims, a thesis justified by reference to the UN charter’s aspiration to “save” future generations from war (123). Jordan psychologizes UN advocates with the claim that “people committed to playing God...are the only kind of people attracted to the U.N.” (126). The next two chapters (9 and 10) focus on the concept of sanctuary. CATN praises the medieval version of this idea for recognizing separate spheres of authority within a nation—thus instigating further divisions of governmental power. It then argues that Israel was, and the United States should be, a sanctuary for the nations, accepting all those fleeing oppression who are willing to convert to Christianity. It is not entirely clear what is to become of these immigrants. Jordan suggest that they should be made citizens once they have acculturated but then suggests

segregating them into “certain areas...ghettoes in the older sense of the term – in which refugees might live and continue their own customs” (145). The final chapter reiterates the ideal of free trade and church unity.

One should be grateful for Jordan’s desire to provoke thought about the implications of Christianity for foreign policy. As a serious attempt to grapple with this area of study, however, CATN suffers from a number of major flaws. The least serious involve factual assertions that are false or problematic. For example, the book repeats the myth that the Civil War was fought over tariffs rather than slavery—“the Southern States seceded from the Union because of Lincoln’s tariffs” (52).² It claims that localities rather than states are the traditional “basic unit” of American government (21).³ And it rather blithely labels opposing viewpoints with undefined pejorative constructs like “secular humanism” and “paganism” (17-18).

More serious are the book’s methodological problems. In defining the biblical “nation” (Greek: *ἔθνος*), for example, CATN inexplicably turns to dictionaries of the English language (3-4). The book also heavily employs the fallacy of over-extension of an analogy, apparently assuming that because humans bear the image of God, anything that can be said about God finds a parallel in humanity—to the point of claiming a precedent for national boundaries in the integrity of the persons of the godhead (57, cf. 17, 71). Most troubling, methodologically, the book apparently adheres to a naïve presumption that anything done by biblical Israel is normative for all time. Thus, Gideon’s identification with his tribe and household in Judges 6 and Jethro’s advice to Moses in Exodus 18 are held forth as transcendent normative statements of “the intensely local character of

2 See, by contrast, the South Carolina Declaration of Secession in, e.g., Brooks D. Simpson, Stephen W. Sears, and Aaron Sheehan-Dean, eds., *The Civil War: The First Year Told By Those Who Lived It* (New York: Library of America, 2011), 149-55.

3 See, by contrast, e.g., Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist: The Gideon Edition*, ed. George W. Carey, and James McClellan (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001), 42:219-20, summarizing positions at the time of the Founding.

biblical government” (19). Similarly, a spattering of historical examples transform assassination and reliance upon militia from tactical tools appropriate in particular circumstances into moral principles of warfare.

This last critique bears on CATN’s deepest flaw. Like theonomy before it,⁴ the book fails to grasp the single most important truth about politics—the need for prudential flexibility. Thus, we are told that “the Christian faith” is “committed to localism” and stands firmly against centralization, in principle (24). Entirely absent is any consideration that forms of political organization might be instrumental structures appropriately adapted to changing technological⁵ and economic realities.⁶ Once CATN has declared that “[m]assive centralized government makes God angry” in principle, such prudential questions apparently seem unnecessary (75). Similarly, the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) is dismissed as un-Christian on the ground that “[c]ivilians are not to be attacked” with no apparent reflection on the possibility that MAD may have been the best way to prevent such an attack. And once the “principle” that “trade [should] be free of civil laws that restrict voluntary trade, except in wartime” has been anointed with sacred significance, the door has been closed to questions whether some trade restrictions might reasonably, e.g., safeguard essential industries, or alleviate the distress of displaced domestic workers (49).

These criticisms highlight the caution with which a foreign policy must proceed in claiming the title “Christian” for set and unvarying “principles.” But CATN does provide an ever-timely reminder: Christianity offers guidance for all of life, including a nation’s relationship to its neighbors. Unfortunately, the book provides little insight into the details of that guidance.

4 See Greg L. Bahnsen, “The Theonomic Position,” in Gary Scott Smith, ed., *God and Politics: Four Views on the Reformation of Civil Government* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1989).

5 Cf. *Helvering v. Davis*, 301 U.S. 619 (1937).

6 Cf. *US v. Lopez*, 514 U.S. 549 (1995).

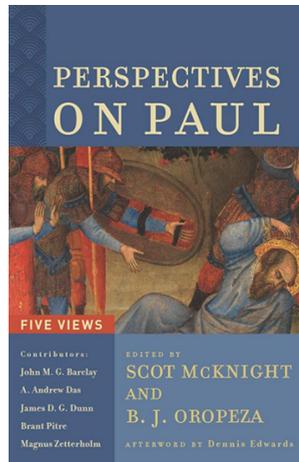
Scot McKnight and B. J. Oropeza,
(editors).

*Perspectives on Paul:
Five Views.*

Contributors: John M. G. Barclay,
A. Andrew Das,
James D. G. Dunn,
Brant Pitre,
and Magnus Zetterholm.

Grand Rapids, MI:
Baker Publishing, 2020.

Pp. xvi, 285. Pb \$29.99. ISBN 978-
1-5409-6075-7.



Reviewed by, Cathryn Grace Carmichael. Licensed Minister,
M.Div., Teaching Assistant, Oral Roberts University.

In their new book, *Perspectives on Paul: Five views*, Scot McKnight and B. J. Oropeza bring their scholarly expertise to the Pauline discussion in an essay/response format through five theological experts' contributions. Scot McKnight currently holds the Julius R. Mantey Chair of New Testament at Northern Seminary. He is a well-established authority on the New Testament, the historicity of Jesus, and early Christianity. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Nottingham. B. J. Oropeza is currently a professor of Biblical Studies at Azusa Pacific University. He is an internationally published author, including contributions in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation* and *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Bible and Theology*. Oropeza received his Ph.D. from Durham University.

The book begins with a summarization of E. P. Sanders's *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Fortress Press, June 1977) and *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Fortress Press, June 1983), featuring his six central "tenets" crucial to maintaining "New

Testament scholarship” (3-6). Followed by James D. G. Dunn and N. T. Wright’s perspectives noted in their respective publications regarding NPP (New Perspective on Paul) (6-11). The chapter closes with a brief discourse covering “[r]esponses to the New Perspective” and a few “Post-New Perspectives” revealing a continual academic interest in Pauline scholarship (12-22).

McKnight and Oropeza have included a well-laid out abbreviations list (xi), separate indexes for author (267), scripture (273), and subject (279) referencing, as well as extensive footnotes. The short preface (ix) gives the reader insight into the author’s Pauline background and the “decisive impetus” for the subsequent perspectives included in each of the following chapters (ix).¹ The authors state, “The book sought to demolish the typical stereotype of Judaism at work in much scholarship, but at the same time, and only in tentative ways, it opened the door to fresh analysis of Paul in light of Sanders’s reconstruction of Judaism” (ix). Hence, the authors seek to bring to the reader’s remembrance the theological and historical importance of Paul’s epistles (x).

Each of the ensuing five chapters begins with a compelling essay from one of the contributors in their expert perspective, followed by responses from the remaining four contributors. Brant Pitre’s expertise is the Roman Catholic perspective in Chapter One (25). A. Andrew Das follows with the traditional Protestant view on Paul in Chapter Two (83). James D. G. Dunn begins Chapter Three with the New Perspective (133). In Chapter Four, Magnus Zetterholm shares his perspective of Judaism and Paul (171). The final chapter (five), written by John M. Barclay, discusses, “[t]he gift perspective” (219). Although each chapter engages in its trajectory that is befitting for that writer’s perspective, the main issues can be cautiously summarized as justification, salvation, and grace. The chapter closes with a final reply from the original presenter.

Brant Pitre has the distinction of being the first to offer his perspective

1 McKnight and Oropeza “decisive impetus” stems from E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977).

on Paul and justification through the lens of Catholicism. Pitre states that his essay will “show that Sanders’s interpretation of Paul is in fact very close to Catholic soteriology on several key points” (26). He admits his essay is not exhaustive due to space. Yet, he attempts to shed light on Catholic soteriology with three objectives: (1) focusing on scriptures that are crucial for “Catholic exegesis” (26); (2) synopsis of how those scriptures would have been “interpreted in the Catholic tradition” (26); (3) how Paul and E. P. Sanders complement one another (27). Pitre covers a lot of doctrinal and historical ground in his short essay, which is an excellent springboard for the rest of the book.

The remainder of the book covers traditional (Protestant) perspectives; therefore, having been armed with Catholic soteriology from the outset, the reader will glean more effectively through the inherent side-by-side comparison. For example, the reader can summarize that the Catholic perspective stresses justification through “the remission of sins and a real participation” in Christ’s work (27), but the traditional Protestant would state that “righteousness is apart from human activity or efforts” (106). Comparatively, the New Perspective shows the reader that justification is a mix of faith and the Holy Spirit’s gift (144). The book does not offer a definitive soteriological answer or new advancement in the discussion of Pauline theology. Instead, the book presents a mixture of theological opinions and responses based on a forty-year-old publication by E. P. Sanders.

Barclay’s essay, “The Gift Perspective on Paul,” takes the reader on an exegetical journey “tracing the ways in which Paul’s language of gift and the incongruity of the Christ-gift shape Paul’s soteriology, his scriptural hermeneutics, his ecclesiology, his ethics, and much else besides” (219). His insight into the apostle Paul’s gift of grace theology and the various “vocabularies” that constitute the work of Christ help to delineate ambiguities in Christian terminology (220). Barclay traces the meanings, usages, and historical importance of grace as a “multifaceted concept, capable of perfection in a variety of ways” in the crux of how Paul and the

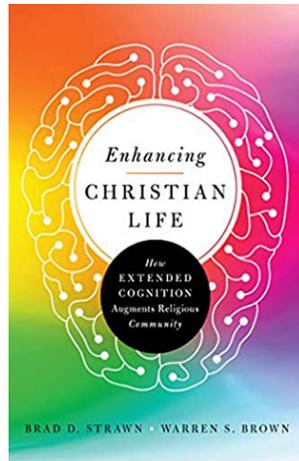
Jews understood grace (225). Barclay effectively shows the importance of studying Christian soteriological grammar in a way that leaves the reader with essential study themes to further glean from Paul's theology of grace.

Dennis Edwards writes an exceptional "Afterword" (259-266). He points to the fact that he will not speak into the aforementioned essays; rather, he aims to "urge pastors, teachers, and all thoughtful Christians—and especially leaders—to continue exploring academic discussions concerning the apostle Paul's theology" (259). Edward continues his discourse by showing that "Pauline theology" is more than a few simple issues and rightfully suggests an excellent benefit for pastors and church leaders in further excogitating the apostle Paul's writing (259). Edwards includes a section, "Doing Our Best with Paul," discussing the biblical principle of "doing our best" to understand and practice the "ideas" found in Paul's writings (262-264). His insight is a beautiful reminder of the importance of studying God's word.

Academically the book is pertinent to theology students, especially those specializing in New Testament studies or Pauline literature. The title can be moderately misleading as a potential reader may presuppose that the book will offer new insight into the apostle Paul. Yet, the book is a response to E. P. Sanders, which McKnight and Oropeza state in the text. Some readers may find it advantageous to read Sanders's publications, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion and Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People*, prior to delving into this book. The excessive amount of footnotes may be daunting, but the reader can glean from the text without investigating each footnote. *Perspectives on Paul: Five Views* is worth the read, especially for the life-long student of Pauline literature.

Brad D. Strawn
and Warren S. Brown.
*Enhancing Christian Life:
How Extended Cognition
Augments Religious Community*
Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity
Press, 2020
Softcover, pp. 166, \$31. ISBN: 978-
0-8308-5281-9.

Reviewed by, Viktor J. Tóth, PhD
candidate, Fuller Theological
Seminary



In his, now classic book, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, George M. Marsden uses the history of Fuller Theological Seminary to give a narrative about how American Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism was being shaped in the second half of the last century.¹ Faculty members of Fuller were in the vanguard of the so called “Battle for the Bible,” which was the hallmark of the movement’s struggle to find its new identity. In our own century a new battle, the “battle for the soul” seems to unfold, and prominent members of Fuller’s faculty are, again, in the forefront. Nancey Murphy’s *nonreductive physicalism*,² or Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen’s *multidimensional monism* are two prominent examples.³ Brad D. Strawn and Warren S. Brown, the authors of *Enhancing Christian Life*, are both members of Fuller’s faculty, and very much in line with their evangelical colleagues

- 1 George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1987).
- 2 See e.g., Nancey Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).
- 3 See e.g., Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Creation and Humanity*, vol. 3 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for the Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015).

“reforming” American protestant theological anthropology.

In this book, Strawn and Brown, expand on their previous work, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church*.⁴ They urge the reader to rethink how Christian faith and life might be enhanced by realizing that spirituality is not simply a private affair focused on the condition of the individual’s soul, but primary exists within a network of relationships. The book is divided into three sections. Section one and two outlines the authors’ theological anthropology (the radical embodiedness of human nature) and introduces various concepts and implications of extended cognition (closely invoking the work of Andy Clark). In section three they provide particular implications for Christian life building on their anthropological notions.

One of the aims of the authors to “clean up” theological language about spirituality and, as a result, to avoid historically problematic dualities. Thus, they prefer the phrase “Christian life” rather than “spirituality” and argue that “inner” should be only used as a metaphor which in no way connote spatial conceptions. In the same line of thought they strongly oppose “privateness” claiming that spiritual practices are always “forms of virtual soft coupling with the body of Christ (i.e., the church)” (120), and thus inevitably collective. There are three serious implications of this line of thought: (1) a renewed interest on the body; (2) a turn from individualistic approach and the centrality of personal feelings toward the “reign of God as central”; (3) and a necessary emphasis on Christian formation. Thus, the conclusion of “Section One” is that “Christian spirituality... is about bodies socially embedded in particular times and places” (34).

In their effort to renew language about spirituality the authors also attempt to provide a new understanding of “mind.”⁵ They claim that

4 Warren S. Brown, Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, and the Church* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012).

5 In Anglo-American philosophy and theology “mind” and “soul” connotes the same meaning.

although human “mind” is physical it cannot be limited to the neural activity of body and brain. In their view a human being is a hypercomplex physical system that “has aspects of the whole person (like thinking, deciding, and feeling) that are emergent from the ongoing interplay of the parts (cells, neurons, neural systems, the brain, etc.) but cannot be said to be properties of the parts themselves” (43–44). “Mind” (or “minding” as they prefer to say) is constituted by the constant and complex action loops between the brain and body, between the body and its environment (i.e., in a specific, embedded life situation), and between brains and bodies (i.e., our historic, socio-cultural situatedness). The redefinition of “self” (or “I”) naturally follows. The “self” or “I” is “this body that has this particular history of being an active agent in these contexts and with this particular imagination for the possibilities for my future action” (54). The “self” is the experiencing, thinking, learning, creating, and imagining body that always “embedded in relational networks” (115–16).

Another linguistic innovation is coining the phrase “mental wiki.” This expression is used as a metaphor. It is “the accumulated and assembled contributions of a lot of other persons over a period of time ... [and] contains knowledge that is readily available when needed to enhance our knowledge and thinking” (128–29). Cultures (including religious traditions) are the accumulations of “mental wikis” (129). Thus, the authors claim that “Christian faith is belief in wikis we have received” (134), including rites, rituals, and narratives. Christian individuals exist within niches of these wikis and into them they can extend. This concept leads to another important anthropological notion. Humans are not special because they have a unique soul, but because the “human system” has a special kind of wide plasticity and openness to assemble into bigger systems, using language as a special tool. Instead of focusing an individualistic image of a “soul,” this openness must be the key for Christian spirituality. Thus, Christian life and spirituality “is inherently and inescapably extended into people and processes that are outside of ourselves” (150). Such extension “supersizes” human life and “enhance the

possibility for formation, leading to more robust, embodied, and holistic form of Christian life” (87). Thus, church life must focus on creating a space for members to “regularly soft coupled to one another in reciprocal extensions . . . resulting in reciprocal cognitive and spiritual enhancements that makes Christian life richer, both individually and collectively” (94—emphasis omitted). The authors provide practical insights about prayer, reading of scripture, singing, hearing the spoken word, and being sent in this context (97–106).

Although I have great respect toward both authors and agree with most of their claims (especially when it is built on scientific research), I believe that part of their argument is based on a misrepresentation of piety and classical dualism. In my estimate, modern Western individualism (which I agree is a problem the American church needs to overcome) is much more a materialistic secular movement of the modern industrial society than an outcome of deceptive pietistic practices. A quote from Desmond Tutu⁶ might be in order here: “People ask me about the source of my joy and I can honestly say it comes from my spiritual life—and especially these times of stillness. They are an indispensable part of my day, whatever else I might face. I also take quiet days when I do not talk, at least until supper. Once a month I take a room at a local convent and spend a day sleeping, eating, praying and reading, and at least once a year I go on a retreat of at least three or more days.”⁷ The life of this world renowned cleric and theologian is an apt example of how “individualistic piety” can empower somebody for the kind of deep engagement with others within and outside the church.

Another critique comes more from a theological perspective. By redefining certain key aspects of human nature (e.g., soul, mind, self), and pushing back against individualism, the authors create an eschatological

6 Although I am aware of the controversial theological stances about the South African theologian, I see in him an excellent example of somebody who attributes his ability of constant connectedness and thriving social engagement as something deeply rooted in the kind of “individual, internal, and private ‘spirituality’” (4) that Strawn and Brown consider individualistic and counterproductive.

7 Desmond Tutu, *God has a Dream* (New York: Image Books, 2005), 102.

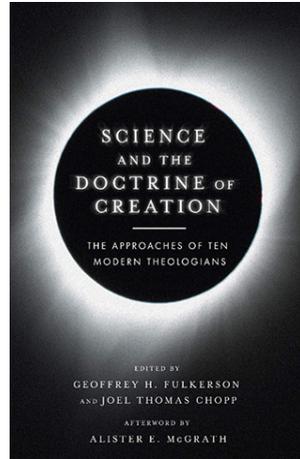
ambiguity. Namely, how personal resurrection is secured? In other words, if in “some sense, then ‘self’ is not soothing that we *have* or we *are* but is something that is *evoked* via our memories of what we did, or tend to do, in the context of the situations of our lives” (56—emphasis original), how this “self” has identity with the resurrected person? This “hard problem of personal identity”⁸ is something that physicalists still yet to overcome. Furthermore, by putting the main emphasis on the “immanent work of God” the book somewhat neglects the transcendent actuality of God in the world. The authors are also aware of this and offer an explanation at the end of the book (145–46).

Nevertheless, as a pastor who tries to achieve some of the goals outlined in this book, I think that it could be an asset in the library of any minister or lay leader. The book reconceptualizes church governance in a way that helps not only to cope with recent sociopolitical changes in North America, but also gives recommendations about active social engagement, and guidance of how to become a thriving cooperative community. The authors provide drafts for a church that fosters extension and has genuine plug points for interactive soft coupling into the life of the local and wider church, and even beyond, into the neighboring society. Additionally, the authors provide resources for enhancing the liturgical practices already present in the church.

8 I play on words here referring to the famous “hard problem of consciousness” of course.

Geoffrey H. Fulkerson & Joel
Thomas Chopp (Editors).
*Science and the Doctrine of
Creation:
The Approaches of Ten Modern
Theologians*
IVP Academic, Downers Grove,
IL. March 2021.
pp. 264, £15.99. ISBN: 978-0-
8308-5280-2

Reviewed by Matthew Wong, King's
Evangelical Divinity School



The text comprises well-researched essays on how ten influential modern Protestant theologians discuss the doctrine of creation in light of key developments within the natural sciences of their day. The editors instructed the writers to largely avoid discussion on origins to place greater emphasis on other, often neglected, aspects of creation¹ and to produce some much-needed research on how theologians have engaged with “particular theories or developments in the natural sciences” (p.1) without reducing the discussion to an antagonistic science versus religion debate.

Each chapter features helpful introductory, contextual and biographical information on each theologian. These are, in chronological order: William Burt Pope [Fred Sanders]: *distinction between primary and secondary creation*; Abraham Kuyper [Craig Bartholomew]: advanced worldview analysis; B.B. Warfield [Bradley J. Gundlach]: “*theologically*

1. Fulkerson and Chopp are interested in expounding a “distributed doctrine” of creation – one that “appears throughout the dogmatic corpus, from theology proper to anthropology and eschatology” (p. 3).

appropriate form of evolution” (p. 5); Rudolph Bultmann [Joshua J. Wipp]: *distinguishing myth from science, the latter “[speaking] of the world rationally and from a distance*” (p. 6); Karl Barth [Katherine Sonderegger]: avoidance of *“conversation or quarrel with the sciences”* (p. 6); T.F. Torrance [Kevin J. Vanhoozer]: *“kataphysical” theology* (p. 7); Jürgen Moltmann [Stephen N. Williams]: *the inextricable links between theology and science and the eschewal of [encumbering] scientific minutiae* (p. 7); Wolfhart Pannenberg [Christoph Schwöbel]: *theology of nature that shuns both mechanistic naturalism and theological scientific disengagement* (p. 8); Robert Jenson [Stephen John Wright]: *science and theology serve each other symbiotically* (p. 8); and Colin Gunton [Murray A. Rae]: *“science as a human cultural enterprise,” “the nature of knowledge,” and creation ex nihilo amongst other foci* (p. 9).

Overall, the book presents several helpful insights, such as Kuyper’s worldview analysis that couches the natural sciences within a paradigm that involves faith (pp. 42, 55), Pope’s distinction between primary and secondary creation, and the complementarian approaches of Moltmann and Pannenberg. It is apparent, however, that the selected theologians come from particular confessional backgrounds, mainly Lutheran and Reformed, which comprise nine out of the ten featured theologians. Whilst this is perhaps unsurprising, given the volume’s focus on exploring the theological nexus between faith and science (not constructing a dogmatic “normative” theology of Christian engagement with the natural sciences [p. 1]), it would nonetheless have been helpful to broaden the book’s theological appeal by also featuring the insights of evangelicals and biblicists. It could be that the editors sought to avoid the ‘risk’ of turning the book into one that *primarily* grapples with the conflict between Darwinian evolutionary theory and the biblical account of creation.

No featured theologian rejects Darwinian evolutionary theory *outright*, rather the book presents subtle gradations of acceptance, or at the very least

ambivalence, ranging from tacit non-disavowal and ‘theoretical’ agreement to fully fledged theistic evolution. Along the way, irresolvable tensions exist as to how a form of evolution can be embraced yet simultaneously denied its full expression, and how such belief squares with the biblical account of creation. Pope, for example, though critical of “the materialist philosophy of evolution” (p. 24) nonetheless “accepts the idea of development broadly” (p. 28). This obvious tension is seen in the writings of Kuyper, Warfield, and Gunton who all affirm a belief that evolutionary theory, at least in its abstract/theoretical form, is permissible and congruent with orthodox Christian faith, yet oppose strains of dogmatic or “thoroughgoing” (p. 67) evolution.² The unexplained reasoning behind such opposition to “thoroughgoing” evolution, which appears to be the logical outworking of theoretical adherence to evolutionary theory, is not robustly addressed by the respective authors. Greater interrogation is required to distinguish between strains of *unacceptable* Evolution (“a grand theory...that explains everything”) (p. 50) and those deemed “*permissible*”.

To offset the range of attitudes towards the doctrine of creation, there is a need to include the theological writings of leading theologians with a demonstrable scientific background. Though Kuyper, Moltmann and Pannenberg are rightly recognised for their complementarian approach to theological engagement with the natural sciences, there is a need to hear the voices of those able to grapple with both the theology *and* science

2. For example, Kuyper embraced theistic evolution (p. 50) but according to Bartholomew maintained that “Evolution as a metanarrative ultimately leads to nihilism” (p. 52). Warfield espoused ‘theistic evolution’ as acceptable to orthodox Christians (p. 65) though contradictorily warned against “a thoroughgoing evolutionism” (p. 67). According to Gundlach, “Warfield never repudiated the doctrine of evolution. He never endorsed it outright, either. He *allowed* it, and in my opinion expected the transmutation of species to be proven eventually...” (p. 76). In a similar vein, Rae recorded that “Gunton has no objection to Darwinism as a theory about adaptation and evolution of species, but he objects strongly to Darwinism being turned into an all-encompassing dogma about the origin and essential nature of all life” (p. 219).

of the doctrine of creation. It is necessary to show the reader that serious theologians have and continue to present valuable insights concerning the doctrine of creation that reject Darwinian evolutionary theory on both theological and scientific grounds, a perspective this book lacks. The call for a multi-disciplinary approach, acknowledged by McGrath (p. 241), is apt as none of the featured theologians are scientifically trained and therefore lack a credible voice outside their respective areas of expertise. If, as McGrath asserts, bridges are to be built between theology and the natural sciences (p. 242), a wider selection of theologians, including those scientifically trained, is required.

By focusing on how Protestant theologians have explored the doctrine of creation in an age of increased scientism, the book makes a welcome and refreshing contribution to the existing body of literature that is replete with critical Christian appraisals of evolutionary theory. However, the conscious decision to analyse theological attitudes to creation in isolation from human and cosmological origins is puzzling. It is questionable whether the doctrine of creation – in its full sense – can be studied, in any meaningful way, without concomitantly exploring Christian engagement with the scientific claims of origins. This is because evolutionary mechanisms directly impinge upon the formulation of the doctrine of creation. McGrath, for example, notes: “There is much more that needs to be said about the relation of the natural sciences and the Christian faith than the doctrine of creation...” (p. 248). Though he acknowledges this doctrine as a “wonderful” starting point (p. 248), he asserts that the concept of the image of God “...is an aspect of the doctrine of creation that is ripe for further exploration” (p. 245). This indeed would be a fruitful facet to explore as any discussion of *Imago Dei* would likely address the question of origins.

It must be noted that the doctrine of creation is bigger than origins and encompasses such subjects as: the nature and image of God, mankind’s

ontological standing in the created world, attitudes towards the natural environment including resource use and preservation, animal rights and population growth to name but a few. These issues have their roots in the doctrine of creation because living beings' responsibilities are shaped by their ontological status as God's handiwork alongside their hierarchy in the created order. Such topical subjects as these are ripe for discussion, yet no chapter specifically addresses them in any detail. Pope, for example, shows how the wisdom or "ordered, sequential dynamics" of 'secondary creation' manifests God's love (p. 20). He notes that the invisible attributes of God are clearly seen in creation (Rom. 1:20) (p. 21, 32) and argues that created beings have divine worth precisely because they are works of God. He therefore lays the groundwork for a Christian environmental ethic that would indeed have much to say on the aforementioned issues. Unfortunately, the implications of his distinction between primary and secondary creation are undeveloped and would remain so until the birth of the modern Christian environmental movement in the 1960s.

Readers should understand the text's focus on epistemology, ontology and philosophy of science make it best suited for seminarians pursuing theological degrees. Moreover, the featured theologians are not scientifically trained and therefore do not make pronouncements on scientific issues. The text's uniqueness lies in the authors' purely theological (as opposed to biblical or scientific) engagement with the doctrine of creation that largely avoids origins. Though this approach makes for a stimulating read, overall, it fails to equip readers to confront the most challenging questions faced today in an increasingly secular world that is hostile towards the biblical account of creation – namely how to counter the claims of Darwinian evolution whilst holding fast to the creation narrative *in both a biblical and scientifically credible manner*. There is scope for the editors to include a more diverse range of theological positions to include both Creationist and Intelligent Design standpoints, and to more critically address the

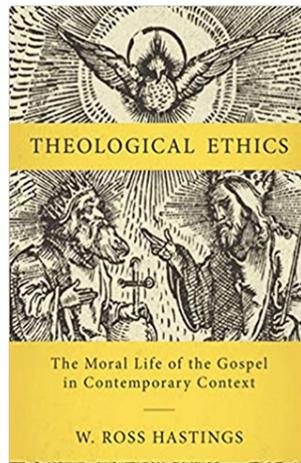
ambiguities and inconsistencies evident in some apparent, though non-stated, quests to formulate theologically ‘acceptable’ strains of evolution.

Though the implications of ancillary aspects of the doctrine of creation, such as mankind’s ontological status (and attendant responsibilities) in the created order could have been explored in more detail, what has been identified as a weakness of this text, namely an overtly theological and non-constructive approach, is also an indisputable strength: the invitation for readers to draw their own conclusions and to wrestle with the “assumptions, claims, and methods of the natural sciences” (p. 1) as they pertain to this important doctrine.

W. Ross Hastings.
*Theological Ethics:
The Moral Life of the Gospel in
Contemporary Context*
Grand Rapids: Zondervan
Academic, 2021
(xii + 244 pages) \$29.99 hardcover.

Reviewed by Forrest H. Buckner,
Whitworth University

W. Ross Hastings, the Sangwoo Youtong Chee Professor of Theology at Regent College, develops a theological framework for ethical reflection and action that is centered in the triune God and God’s engagement with the world in Jesus Christ. Hastings works analogously from God’s triune being (understood as persons-in-relation) and God’s acts to build a framework for Christian ethics and action in the world. I will give a brief overview of the book before providing a few reflections.



Hastings begins the book with three chapters laying the foundation of theological ethics. He first asserts that ethical reflection, contrary to appeals to reason or natural law, must begin by looking to God and thus be *theological*. Hastings says, “Only as we know who God is and what he has done can we know *how* we ought to be and do” (8).

In Chapter 2, Hastings defines what he means by “Trinitarian” theology, a method of theological reflection influenced by Karl Barth, T.F. and Alan Torrance, Robert Jenson, Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, Colin Gunton, Athanasius, and others that centers on God’s triune being and acts. In the process, Hastings makes a case for ethics as an expression of personal and corporate union with the incarnate Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Chapter 3, Hastings asserts the Bible as the church’s authoritative source for theology and ethics. Addressing the entire sweep of Scripture, he describes how to interpret the Bible rightly in regards to ethics, particularly highlighting the ways that God’s grace precedes and undergirds the commands of the Bible.

In Chapter 4, Hastings explicates a holistic doctrine of creation and its impact on ethical reflection, contending for image-bearing as primarily understood in light of the God who is being-in-relation. That relational center drives the functional (ruling and vocation) and structural (capacity) aspects of image-bearing. This relationality has ethical implications in that humans are made for relationships with God, others, self, and creation.

In Chapter 5, Hastings continues to follow the biblical narrative through the fall, reconciliation, and consummation. Because of the fall and the subsequent shattering of relationships, ethics now must take into account the inclination of humans toward personal and communal sin. In the work of reconciliation and redemption, God in Christ by the Spirit frees the saints to pursue the ethical life, but still, as sinners, “within a life of confession and repentance” (117). The *telos* of the moral vision is a restoration of all four relationships (God, others, creation, self) and freedom to obey God in perfect justice and love as God redeems the whole of creation.

In Chapter 6, Hastings argues that ethics must be *Evangelical* in the sense that they are driven by the grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Calling upon Calvin's double grace of justification and sanctification, Hastings outlines a gospel-centered ethical approach that is initiated and empowered by unconditional grace but is not unconditioned in the fact that it contains the expectation of a "life of faith leading to obedience" (120).

In Chapter 7, Hastings asserts that the resurrection is key to ethical reflection because it affirms God's faithfulness to his commitment to redeem and restore creation according to his original intent. However, because of the fall, people cannot perceive ethics rightly apart from God's Word and works, even though they retain a moral order in their fallen nature.

In the only chapter dedicated to a particular ethical question, Hastings then reflects upon sexual ethics as they relate to his Trinitarian anthropology articulated throughout the book. Hastings rebuts a number of contemporary cultural narratives regarding sex and "sexedness" (i.e. gender) by examining sexuality through the divine-human analogy of humanity as image bearers of the triune God. He argues that "the church is an icon of the Trinity, and marriage is, in turn, an icon or image of the church" (169). Being made in the image of the Trinity implies that humans belong to one another as interdependent yet differentiated (including sexedness). Therefore, our sexual nature, whether we are engaging in sexual activity or not, moves us "out of ourselves toward the human other in fulfilling relationship, and toward God in contemplative worship—where ultimate satisfaction is found" (175). Following this methodology, Hastings draws a number of conclusions, including asserting the goodness of sex, sexedness as part of our human identity, sex drive as a desire that points to a longing for intimacy with God, and sex as an other-centered, self-giving act. He also concludes that, because of the distinctiveness of the persons in relationship within God's being (and in alignment with Scripture's "clear" teaching), human gender boundaries and the

commitment to marriage as defined by the union of a man and a woman are to be maintained in Christian ethical frameworks (189). This leads to a “welcoming but non-affirming” position in the public square (192).

Hastings then makes a case for why and how the church should engage publicly in regards to ethics. The missional God invites the people of God to “bring to completion the mission of the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.” He argues thus that the church is called to humble and loving public engagement through the Great Commission, Great Commandment, and cultural mandate as the chief, visible, communal manifestation of the kingdom of God.

Hastings’ concludes with a concise summary of the ethical framework constructed throughout the book. In short, “Housed within the gospel, flowing from its life in the triune God, the church as the icon of the Trinity made up of persons-in-relation, is the primary locus of ethics... [The only sphere] in which moral transformation, discernment in ethical inquiry, and courage and power for ethical action can happen [is] the sphere of participation in the triune God...his love, his life, his justice, his righteousness, his holiness” (225).

I would like to provide three reflections on the book that may help an interested reader know what to expect. First, Hastings’ book is self-consciously not a book on applied ethics but instead the development of and apology for a particular approach to Christian ethics that can be applied to various ethical dilemmas in a variety of contexts. Besides the chapter on sexual ethics, Hastings typically comments on particular ethical questions only tangentially or simply identifies categories of ethics that might relate to the topic at hand. For example, in his chapter on the eschatological ethics of God’s creative purposes for humanity, Hastings identifies the trinitarian shape of the Father’s creation of people to be human image-bearers as culture makers, Christ’s call to conversion and Christlikeness, and the Spirit’s gifting and sending into particular vocations. He sees these three levels of human flourishing as coinhering and thus freeing the church from dualisms that separate evangelism and

justice or Sunday worship and the Monday-Friday work world. These type of applications occur, but Hastings' central goal is developing the theological framework for ethical reflection.

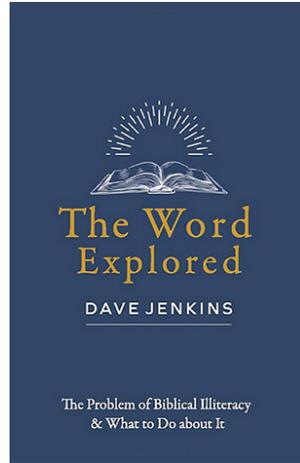
Second, the book self-consciously adopts a "Trinitarian" methodology of theological reflection that is not universally accepted. Hastings demonstrates awareness of some of the criticisms of his Trinitarian approach, like repeatedly asserting that arguments regarding anthropology based on the divine being must be analogous not univocal. Similarly, he acknowledges the debates around the historicity of the narrative of distinct Eastern and Western emphases in the doctrine of the Trinity. However, he does not choose to address extensively or directly the arguments against methodologies that draw conclusions from supposed knowledge of God's inner life, a methodology that is not universally accepted in Christian theological study.

Third, the book covers an immense amount of ground. The breadth of Hastings' knowledge is impressive as he engages with topics ranging from the *analogia entis* debates to virtue ethics, from Calvin's double grace to gender, from Old Testament theological hermeneutics to models of public engagement. Hastings also often surveys a variety of authors' perspectives on a particular topic. In light of the sheer volume of information, summaries at the end of each chapter would have been useful. Hastings somewhat ameliorates this weakness with his excellent concluding chapter.

In sum, this book provides a thorough, insightful, and pastoral approach to ethics that is self-consciously centered in the nature and being of the triune God of grace revealed in Jesus Christ that many readers, particularly those with an appreciation for the methodology of theologians like Robert Jenson, Jürgen Moltmann, Miroslav Volf, and Colin Gunton, will find compelling and useful.

David Jenkins.
*The Word Explored:
The Problem of Biblical Illiteracy &
What to Do about It*
Ontario: House to House Press,
2021.
pb. pp.100, \$16.99. ISBN 978-1-
989174-86-9.

Reviewed by, Charles Schmitz. Liberty
University, Lynchburg, Virginia



Jenkin's concern centers on resolving the problem of biblical illiteracy and lack of biblical authority in the church. With over 60% of Christians unable to name five of the Ten Commandments, the problem of biblical illiteracy is indeed grave. Jenkins begins with a story of William Tyndale and how he gave his life so that people could have access to God's Word to remind readers of how others sacrificed to give us access to God's Word. Jenkins shares how the Holy Spirit's ministry works to stifle biblical illiteracy. Jenkins argues that the first step in resolving biblical illiteracy is to recognize there is a problem.

In the first chapter, Jenkins explores the importance of hearing the Word of God. Hearing and reading God's Word continually adds to discernment of His Word and what He expects of Christians. Delight in the duty of personal Bible study is the way God's Word is understood and acted upon. The second chapter emphasizes how good Bible doctrine leads to Christ-like living that can be read and emulated from the Bible. The lack of good Bible doctrine, can cause Christians to miss Christ's example even if they are reading the Bible. Therefore, reading the Bible alone doesn't assure that the reader will

capture Christ's example within. Jenkins includes this comprehension facet, by using examples of the supposed biblically learned Pharisees that ignored the myriad of signs for Christ's Incarnation in the Old Testament, as evidence of the same aforementioned illiteracy that is happening today in the Church. The third chapter emphasizes the importance of memorizing and meditating on Scripture. Indicative of Christ's Own exhortation and application is the action of applying Scripture to memory that leads to meditation of Scripture, then ultimately quoting Scripture at the appropriate time to give God glory. The fourth chapter expresses or explains how to be a doer of the Word by daily using the Bible in the Christian walk. Practically using the principles of the Bible, helps readers appreciate it and crave it more. Jenkins is careful to emphasize that changes to our hearts and behavior, not just gaining intellectual information, is the goal. Jenkins kindly lists various behaviors that are readily practiced by those living the Word, as It flows out of their hearts into daily life.

Chapter five transitions from individual use of scripture to corporate use. Scripture is a treasure that must be unearthed by a community of believers in Christ. Christ followers should also frequently share in love, personal findings from the Bible. Chapter six focuses on the proper preaching of God's Word, starting with Jesus, who used Scripture in His teaching. Expository preaching is promoted as the best preaching style, because God's Word is the foundation. Jenkins states, good preaching from the Word, stimulates a congregation to learn more, from the Word. The seventh chapter delves into the advantages of a distinctive small group in the local church to trounce biblical illiteracy. Growth, accountability, prayer, fellowship, and insight come from gathering with believers regularly to study the Bible, by putting context to what was preached in the pastor's sermon. The last chapter looks at Jesus' directives from the Great Commission in Matthew 28. What Jesus said is analyzed from previous chapters and next steps are given. Inferred is the true mission of a believing Body, to go into the

world ministering or discipling with Jesus presence and guidance, bringing glory to Him, for His name's sake.

Jenkins' writing benefits from the fact that few scholars have discussed the problem of biblical illiteracy amongst Christians. The material on biblical illiteracy is scarce, as there were only a handful books or articles available for emphasis or support when researching this topic. Readers will appreciate Jenkins' succinctness, and dedication not to stray from the subject of the problem of biblical illiteracy and its solutions. Jenkins uses appropriate rhetorical tools to grab the readers' attention even those not familiar with the problem of biblical illiteracy, by using known stories of the historic church fathers and Bible characters whose ministry was devoted to overcoming biblical illiteracy. The proposed process to solving biblical illiteracy may deduce that Jenkins should take to penning organized Bible reading plans to make time in God's Word efficient or looking at various ways to help the reader engage and be more excited about the Scriptures read, but Jenkins does neither to make his case. Jenkins' thesis is argued unpretentiously by simply advising to read God's Word and hear it, with no specially designed or specific way, except to be in God's Word continually and looking for Jesus Christ throughout. Jenkins additionally shows how the Holy Spirit will exponentially open the Word to our hearts when it is heard or read.

Memorization and meditation of the Bible, are not common practices in the contemporary American church. Jenkins goes against this modern thought, by promoting the initiation of biblical literacy, through memorization and meditation on single Scripture verses or passages. A person can delight in God's Word and also begin to be biblically literate, even if a single passage is memorized and thought upon. Literacy of the Word, starts with a single verse and builds to more reading, memorization, meditation, and thus eventual knowledge, becoming truly literate of the Word, as a life lived studying it progresses. Jenkins then takes the logical next step of promoting application of what has been memorized and meditated. Being a doer of the Word is

what Jenkins states is what creates true biblical literacy in the Christian. Jenkins' main point is that God the Father, gave Jesus to instill Salvation and to reveal His Word to the believer, then through the indwelling and power of the Holy Spirit, a Christian armed with the revealed Word can live it out daily, thus glorifying Jesus, according to the will of God the Father (John 14:26).

Having addressed the role of scripture with the individual, Jenkins' transitions to the corporate reading of the Bible for congregational unity, along with the necessity of biblical preaching, to encourage going deeper into God's Word. Jenkins' then moves to the benefits of a weekly small group Bible study, to study Scripture contextually for accenting personal study. Jenkins takes traditional view of what a local body looks like in his chapters on congregational reading and biblical preaching. Liturgical practices such as responsive reading or reading aloud the Bible, though reasonable in my opinion, overlooks that there are other styles of worship in multitudes of churches. Jenkins' prefers his traditional Protestant-like view that he describes in the book over other views. Jenkins does not take into account various church cultures or members that grow non-traditionally and maybe even turned away from his emphasized formation of church services. Jenkins also does stress that Christ's community using what God's Word says about loving each other and working together as a community, can fulfill what many people crave from the church. The definition of biblical preaching also could be expanded upon versus Jenkins narrowly recommending the single or few verse expository preaching, as there are several styles of biblical preaching that do cover chapter context or topics from various Scriptures.

Jenkins' weight on small groups properly acknowledged, how a community of Christ followers interacts with one another, using the Bible. He could have emphasized more the individual growth aspect in the Lord, from Scriptural interaction with others though. Lastly, Jenkins focuses on the Great Commission and its various misunderstood

aspects that distract from Christ's original vision. His points on the Great Commission are valid, but can be precocious, as the point of the thesis implies to subside biblical illiteracy first. Hence, if the chapters, are ordered sequentially, then the final chapter is well-placed. If the chapters are ala carte, then I would rather not have someone biblically illiterate, attempting to fulfill the Great Commission before they knew its purpose.

Jenkins' book is recommended since works on biblical literacy are rare, additionally Jenkins, as an author, handles the processes and material in his book well. Save for remarks on the concluding chapters, Jenkins' work is a great addition for a personal library or to reference recent studies and solutions to guide Christians to be biblically literate. The book is strongest at its start when it shares what to do personally in God's Word, such as how to manage our attitudes and passion. The latter chapters, though helpful for the thesis overall, tend not take into account the various types of local church cultures potentially in the scope of its thesis perspective. This author would recommend that a follow up volume be written that would focus on the subjects of local church, biblical preaching, and the Great Commission, that Jenkins' didn't handle adequately.

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