CONTENTS

ARTICLES

Introduction: Literature and the Bible 1
Adrianne Miles and Matthew Mullins

Interview with David Alan Black 5

Picturing the Son: The Cognitive and Affective Dimensions of Biblical Imagery 17
Michael Travers & Matthew Mullins

Narrative Criticism in the Gospels and Acts 35
Osvaldo Padilla

Postsecular Scriptures: The Bible on Film in the 21st Century 57
Caleb Spence & Jack O'Briant

The Importance of Being Earnest: Evangelicalism's Aesthetics of Sincerity 85
Karen Swallow Prior

Book Reviews 99

BOOK REVIEWS

Benjamin D. Suchard. *The Development of the Biblical Hebrew Vowels, Including a Concise Historical Morphology* 99
H. H. Hardy II

William J. Webb and Gordon K. Oeste. *Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric? Wrestling with Troubling War Texts* 101
Robb Coleman

Matthew Barrett. *Canon, Covenant and Christology: Rethinking Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel* 103
Levi Baker

John Kampen. *Matthew within Sectarian Judaism* 106
Charles L. Quarles

Francis J. Moloney. *The Apocalypse of John: A Commentary* 107
Dalton Bowser

Denny Burk, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Brian Vickers, eds., *God's Glory Revealed in Christ: Essays on Biblical Theology in Honor of Thomas R. Schreiner* 109
Brandon Freeman

Steven J. Duby. *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology* 110
David Mark Rathel

Gavin Ortlund. *Retrieving Augustine's Doctrine of Creation: Ancient Wisdom for Current Controversy* 112
Chet Harvey

Oliver D. Crisp. *God, Creation, and Salvation: Studies in Reformed Theology* 114
Francis Jr. S. Samdao

Michael S. Heiser. *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness* 116
Nicholas A. Dawson

Gilbert Meilaender. *Thy Will Be Done: The Ten Commandments and the Christian Life* 118
Michael J. DeBoer

Michael Pasquarello III. *The Beauty of Preaching: God's Glory in Christian Proclamation* 120
Kevin D. Koslowsky

Paul Gould. *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* 122
Stephen D. Mizell

S. Joshua Swamidass. *The Genealogical Adam and Eve: The Surprising Science of Universal Ancestry* 124
Stephen D. Mizell

John C. Lennox. *2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity* 127
Ken Keathley

STR 12.2 (Fall 2021): 1–3

Introduction: Literature and the Bible

Adrianne Miles & Matthew Mullins
Guest Editors

In recent decades, numerous scholars have argued that the literary character of the Scriptures is integral to their meaning. Robert Alter, Adele Berlin, David Lyle Jeffrey, James Kugel, Tremper Longman, Leland Ryken, Meir Sternberg, and many others have produced compelling scholarship demonstrating that when we fail to take literary artistry into account, we risk misreading the Bible. And yet, prevailing approaches to Bible interpretation often minimize or overlook just how fundamentally its meaning is entangled with its artistry. Why must scholars make a perennial case for the literary value of the Scriptures? What is it about taking a literary approach to the Bible that makes it seem risky or unnecessary? Why do so many readers, teachers, preachers, and even scholars emphasize the instructional dimensions of Scripture to the near exclusion of its literary dimensions? And, perhaps most importantly, what are the costs of failing to account for this literariness? We might begin to answer such questions by pointing out that there is an implicit connection between the artistry of the Bible and the question of its authorship. The more we focus on literary qualities, the more we tend to emphasize the situated perspective of its human authors. The more we overlook literariness in favor of instructional content, the more we tend to emphasize the transcendent perspective of its Divine Author. This special issue of STR is devoted to these questions and to the relationship between the Bible's artistry and authority. In short, how should we understand the dynamic between artistry and authority, and how does this dynamic inform our interpretation of the Scriptures? Though there is no singular argument we could deduce from the essays collected here, we contend that one collective implication of the analyses that follow is that an appreciation for the literary qualities of the Scriptures is integral to good interpretation.

And yet, we do not want to dismiss the tension between the artistry and authority of the Bible offhand. In her examination of the development of the literary study of the Bible as an academic discipline, Tomoko Matsuzawa points out that in the last half century or so, "the study of the Bible for the purpose of literary and aesthetic edification rather than for

its liturgical, doctrinal, or salvific efficacy" has become commonplace.[1] And so, it would seem there is good reason to pause anytime the Bible is being treated primarily as an object of literary study and ask what effects such study has on its authority. However, we see no path to good interpretation that fails to consider the literary character of the texts collected in the Bible because it is in literary interpretation that we best account for the form of the Scriptures. Form, as we will see throughout the essays gathered here, is not decorative, let alone ancillary to meaning. Form is inseparable from what we often call "content" and thus is as much the *meaning* of the text at hand as whatever paraphrasable idea we might distill from it. When the writers of Exodus tell us that God commanded that his people have no other gods before him, it is significant that the charge was given in prescriptive, imperative language, rather than in figurative, poetic language. Poetic language leaves room for ambiguity and meditation; it resists closure. The commandments are not presented as poetry. The decree is clear. Conversely, the psalmist sings that the Lord is his shepherd, that the Lord is a lamp and a light, that the Lord is a rock. In each case, the use of poetic language leads us away from the literal and toward the figurative, making use of concrete examples to render this abstract God more real and knowable. For scholars with a high view of Scripture, form must be considered as equally important as content or, perhaps more precisely, inseparable from content. Understanding the content of a passage hinges on understanding its form, and this is where literary approaches are illuminating.

The articles collected in this special edition begin by specifically discussing some of the tension between artistry and authority (Black) and move on to present helpful applications (Travers & Mullins, Padilla) that guide readers of the Bible to consider both the form and content of passages to deepen their understanding of God's word. The collection concludes with a look at how biblical content is treated in film (Spencer & O'Briant) and some socio-historical literary implications for how we read the Bible today (Prior).

We begin with an interview that invites biblical scholars, preachers, teachers, and readers to consider the implications of form and artistry in Bible translation work. David Alan Black demonstrates the inextricable link between *what* is said and *how* it is said in his discussion of the denotative and connotative levels of language. He explains that 2 Timothy 3:16 compels him to believe that "everything written down in the [Bible] is inspired by God," including the form of the literature. Michael Travers and Matt Mullins unpack the connotative effects of six poetic images of the Son of God in the Bible. By recognizing and understanding such poetic images, the reader is compelled to reflect on multiple theological truths at once. Poetic images create a reading experience whereby we can "taste and see" who Jesus is, informing and forming our faith more deeply, perhaps more fully, than mere explanation, command, or description. Osvaldo Padilla uses narrative criticism as a helpful tool in clarifying "the theological categories of the text" in his Narrative-Critical analysis of Luke 7:36–50. This analysis reveals common themes with the previous episodes in Luke, themes of love, faith, prophecy, and sinner/sins. Padilla concludes by suggesting that Narrative Critical analyses of Scripture demand a unique response from readers.

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[1] Tomoko Mazusawa, "The Bible as Literature?—Note on a Litigious Ferment of the Concept," *Comparative Literature* 65.3 (Summer 2013): 306.

The literary artistry of the Bible is significant not only hermeneutically but also culturally. There is perhaps no more influential work of literature than the Bible. From images such as the tree of life to parables like the prodigal son, the influence of the Bible can be discerned in literary traditions across history, geography, and language. In our own day, its stories have been adapted in mediums ranging from poetry to novels to television series and films. Caleb Spencer and Jack O'Briant analyze three filmic adaptations of biblical narratives as mirrors reflecting the spiritual image of their age. Building on the work of philosopher Charles Taylor and literary critics such as John McClure, Spencer and O'Briant demonstrate how these adaptations can help us understand the relationship between faith and doubt in a world where secularism has run out of steam and, in the process, provide new ways of theorizing about what many scholars have called *postsecularism*. Karen Swallow Prior closes out the issue with an essay on the cultural history of evangelical humor. Tracing the dynamic between irony and sincerity through literature and culture across multiple centuries, Prior shows how a distinctively evangelical sense of earnestness structures our view of the world and informs how we read everything from Jane Austen to the Gospel of John.

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Michael Travers, who labored tirelessly in the world of Christian higher education for many decades to help students and scholars alike appreciate the literary artistry of the Bible. His high view of Scripture and commitment to Christian education continues to encourage countless readers to study the Bible as an irreducibly intellectual and spiritual practice. In the spirit of his life and work, it is our prayer that the essays gathered here will demonstrate how the artistry of the biblical texts facilitates our understanding of their theological meaning while inviting us to know God more fully, even as we are fully known.

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Interview with David Alan Black

David Alan Black is Retired Senior Professor New of Testament and Greek and Dr. M. O. Owens, Jr. Chair of New Testament Studies (Former) at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina. He received his Doctor of Theology degree at the University of Basel in 1983. His publications include Learn to Read New Testament Greek, Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications*, and* It's Still Greek to Me: An Easy-to-Understand Guide to Intermediate Greek. *He has also edited or co-edited numerous books, including* Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis, Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues, *and* Linguistics and New Testament Greek: Key Issues in the Current Debate.

In literary studies, scholars tend to view some texts as more "literary" than others. As Terry Eagleton explains, "The most common mistake students of literature make is to go straight for what the poem or novel says, setting aside the way it says it. To read like this is to set aside the 'literariness' of the work—the fact that it is a poem or play or novel, rather than an account of the incidence of soil erosion in Nebraska. … Part of what we mean by a 'literary' work is one in which what is said is to be taken in terms of how it is said. It is the kind of writing in which the content is inseparable from the language in which it is presented."[1] As a biblical scholar, do you find this distinction useful in understanding the Scriptures? Do you see a range of more- and less-literary texts in the Bible?

Yes, I do indeed see a range of literary texts in the New Testament. Here I am speaking, of course, only of the New Testament since that is my field of study. I once recalled Marshall McLuhan famously saying, "The medium is the message." I do not agree with that statement completely, but I do believe it is partly true. I do not think the medium *is* the message, but I do think the medium is a big part *of* the message. In other words, when we study the New Testament writings, and here I am referring to the original Greek, we must understand that not only *what* is said is important but also *how* it is said is also vitally important. My conviction is based upon 2 Tim 3:16, the famous passage that asserts the inspiration of the Bible. In other words, *pasa graphē theopneustos* means more than just that the words were inspired by God. It means that everything *written down* in the text is inspired by God. Does this include the words? Of course it does. I believe in verbal plenary inspiration: every word everywhere is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. But I would take it a step further. Not only are the words inspired but also the tense, the voice, the mood, the person, the gender, the number, the case, the source, the word order, the phrase order, the clause order, the discourse structure, the alliteration, the assonance, the paronomasia, the chiastic structure—all of these are inspired, I am convinced, by God the Holy Spirit, as are the words themselves. Hence, I would agree completely that *what* is said is to be taken into consideration as well as *how* it is said. And so we have a balance between, if you will, the *denotative* level of language and the *connotative* level of language.

What are the costs and/or benefits in thinking of the Bible as a work of literature?

One example that immediately comes to mind is the poetry we find in the New Testament. I had the privilege of being the base translator for the International Standard Version (ISV) New Testament, and one of the things we did was to try and bring across into English not only, again, the denotative level of language but the connotative level of language as well—the literary devices an author uses in order to create impact and appeal or the "hitting" and "drawing" of his or her audience. I became interested in this subject when I was reading a biography of Karl Barth in German (*Karl Barth's Lebenslauf*). One of the interesting things about that book is that when Karl Barth was growing up in Basel, he was often bored in school and so would resort to writing poetry. In the book we have an example of that poetry, and I will give it here in the German:

> Ihr liebe Lüte, hört mich an
> Ich bruche jetzt nit zur Schuele z'gahn
> Sintemal sie mich wand zum Papste han…[2]

Since I had not seen the English translation of this biography, I was wondering whether the translator would attempt to bring across the German poetry into English poetry. And sure enough, the author did exactly that. Notice the end rhymes in the English translation:

> My dearest people, here's my rule
> I will no longer go to school

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[1] Terry Eagleton, *How to Read Literature* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 2.

[2] Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth's Lebenslauf: nach seinen Briefen und autobiographischen Texten* (München: Kaiser, 1976), 23.

Since now as pope I have my stool…[3]

This fascinated me. Why would a translator seek to render German poetry by English poetry and not simply by prose? Thus, when I began to translate the International Standard Version—all twenty-seven books—into English, I knew I would have to struggle with the question of whether I should translate Greek poetry into English poetry.

How difficult was it for you to translate Greek poetry of the New Testament into English poetry?

Well, it was not easy, and I am not sure we succeeded. But I do know that a great concern of the process of Bible translation is what I would call the loss of connotative impact, especially in highly literary texts, even though the essential denotative content can be communicated. In rendering poetic language, the task of Bible translators is a particularly difficult one. They recognize the need to convey the essential denotative content of the text, but they are also concerned with the inevitable loss of connotative impact. They know that rhetorical features are just as important as lexical or syntactical features in contributing to meaningfulness, but they also desire not to sacrifice content to style. In translating the ISV, we encountered head on questions of translation equivalence (how accurate is the translation?) and translation acceptability (how much variation will be tolerated?). One also encounters the stubborn fact that the meaning of any utterance is not a single phenomenon but a synthesis of various elements—phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, lexical, and semantic—the importance of each element varying from one situation or language user to another.

As is well known, one of the qualities that chiefly distinguishes great literature from nonliterary writing is the close relationship—indeed the actual fusion—of form and idea. We may sometimes pretend to detach the meaning from the form of a word, but we soon realize that this extracted "meaning" is far less than the total meaning. To be sure, nonliterary writing has significant form, for its diction is part of the meaning. But in poetry the union of form and content is so intimate that it is almost impossible to extract meaning without paying considerable attention to form. The text is not only trying to get information across; it is also making an appeal to its readers. As Eugene Nida notes, "Emotive meanings are not related primarily to language structure but rather to the manner which this structure manifests itself, especially in the actual discourse."[4]

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[3] Eberhard Busch, *Karl Barth: His Life from Letters and Autobiographical Texts*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 11.

[4] Eugene Nida, *Exploring Semantic Structures* (Munich: Fink, 1975), 18.

In other words, translation involves not only analyzing what a person says but also how that person says it. Nida says, "Truly poetic passages should be translated as poetry and if so the format should reflect the way in which poetry in the receptive language is normally printed."[5]

Can you give us some specific examples of poetry in the ISV?

Here are three examples:

1 Timothy 3:16

In flesh was he revealed to sight,
Kept righteous by the Spirit's might,
Adored by angels singing.
To nations was he manifest,
Believing souls found peace and rest,
Our Lord in heaven reigning!

Titus 1:12

Liars ever,
men of Crete,
Savage brutes
that live to eat.

1 Corinthians 13:4–7

Love is very patient,
Love is very kind,
Love is never envious
Or vaunted up with pride.

Nor is she conceited,
And never is she rude,
Never does she think of self,
Or ever get annoyed.

She never is resentful,
Is never glad with sin,
But always glad to side with truth,
When 'er the truth should win.

She bears up under everything,
Believes the best in all,
There is no limit to her hope,
And never will she fall.

In Dr. Miles's British Literature course at Southeastern, students read Mary Sidney's

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[5] Eugene Nida, "Poetry and the Bible Translator," *BT* 33 (1982): 332.

"Psalm 52," an English versification of Psalm 52. The students often struggle with the poem because it's not a "word-for-word" translation of the Bible. However, Douglas J. Moo argues, "To suggest in our discussion of translations among a general audience that 'word-for-word' is a virtue is to mislead people about the nature of language and translation."[6] What presuppositions, whether helpful or detrimental, are embedded in the concept of a "word-for-word" translation?

To answer the question, I would start by saying that the denotative level of language is undoubtedly the most important level of language for receptors. That said, there is no need for us to insist on a "word-for-word" translation as being necessarily more accurate than a "thought-for-thought" translation. Probably the ideal would be to combine as much of a literal approach as possible with an approach that does not sacrifice English readability. That, in fact, was the goal of the ISV.

The translation theory behind the ISV was different from theories employed in previous Bible translations. Traditionally, two basic methods of Bible translation have been used. The older method (and for many centuries practically the only method used) has been labeled "literal" or "formal equivalent." This type of translation allows the readers to identify as fully as possible with the source languages of Scripture and to understand as much as they can of the Bible's customs, manners of thought, and means of expression.

The other method is termed "idiomatic" or "functional equivalent." The goal of an idiomatic translation is to achieve the closest natural equivalence in modern language to match the ideas of the original text. Idiomatic translations have little or no concern for maintaining the grammatical forms, sentence structure, and consistency of word usage of the source languages.

All major translations of the Bible fall somewhere on a scale between complete formal equivalence and complete functional equivalence.

Competent Bible translators have always recognized that a strictly literal translation of the words of Scripture can be misleading. For example, "the wicked will not stand in the judgment" might be interpreted as proving that evil people actually would not be judged. Hence literalness is not always equivalent to accuracy.

On the other hand, the limitations of idiomatic translations are also obvious. Such translations frequently tend to cast the words of Scripture into new molds that convey the ideas in a significantly different spirit or emphasis. An example is the NIV's rendering of the Greek *paidia* in John 21:5 as "friends" instead of "children." Idiomatic translations have, in a sense, a commentary built into them; they represent a choice made by the translators as to what the *translators* think a passage means. For that reason, an idiomatic translation is easier to read but less reliable for careful study.

I believe a good translation will steer a careful course between word-for-word translation and interpretation under the guise of translating. In other words, a good translation will be both *reliable* and *readable*. The best translation, then, is one that is both accurate and idiomatic at the same time. It will make every effort to reproduce the culture and exact meaning of the text without sacrificing readability. In the ISV, we called this type of translation "literal-idiomatic."

In the sixteenth century, when the Reformation was well underway, there was a flurry of English Psalm versifications like Mary Sidney's that scholars like Kathleen Swaim have argued "performed the cultural work and public service of making the Psalms accessible to readers of vernacular languages in simple memorable forms."[7] What, if any, are the benefits to readers of such versified translations in the twenty-first century?

Three observations are in order here. First, a small difference in sound quality may be very important. Second, I reiterate that one's perception of the emotional qualities of sounds is conditioned by the meanings of the words that carry the sounds. Finally, the most important point is this: the analysis of poetic form is not an end in itself. There is little value in determining that a stanza has a pair rhythmic clausulae or that a passage has used alliteration of certain sounds or that it has employed this or that figure of speech if one does not go on to collect these separate observations into some kind of comprehensive account of the text's meaning. To do that, one must be sensitive to certain aspects of the *context* of poetry.

This brings us to the important point that the literal meaning a poem may convey and the poem itself are separate things operating at different levels of meaning. One may say, "I am falling asleep" and expect to be understood. But in Tennyson's line, "To sleep I give my powers away;/my will is bondsman to the dark," the fact of sleep is not as important as the feelings associated with it. Tennyson treats the subject not as information but as felt experience—the feeling of helplessness and subjection to something beyond one's control. Stated in prose, the main idea of Tennyson's line is simple. The poem, however, says much more than this, for Tennyson skillfully opens up an area of unstated possibilities by quietly attaching feelings to the inevitability of sleep by means of such figures of speech as personification and metaphor.

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[6] Douglas J. Moo, *We Still Don't Get It: Evangelicals and Bible Translation Fifty Years After James Barr* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 10.

[7] Kathleen M. Swaim, "Contextualizing Mary Sidney's Psalms," *Christianity and Literature* 48.3 (Spring 1999): 254.

Because poetry is marked by many of these characteristics, it can go a long way toward exchanging functions with prose without ever losing its identity as poetry. Hence, poetry may be factual and still be poetry. The Latin poet Horace once said that poetry has the function of teaching as well as delighting—it is both sweet and useful (*dulce et utile*). Indeed, once one turns to the poetry of the New Testament, one is likely to find that most of it has a moral quality. It seeks not merely to express a view of something but to suggest the kind of behavior appropriate to that view. The *Carmen Christi* (Song of Christ) of Phil 2:6–11 is one of the best-known illustrations of such poetry. The poem reminds us that everyday activities are to be controlled by the mind of Christ and not by personal ambition, thus illustrating Paul's ethical injunctions in 2:1–4:

In God's own form existed he,
  And shared with God equality,
    Deemed nothing needed grasping.
Instead, poured out in emptiness,
  A servant's form did he possess,
    A mortal man becoming.
In human form he chose to be,
  And lived in all humility,
    Death on a cross obeying
Now lifted up by God to heaven,
  A name above all others given,
    This matchless name possessing.
And so, when Jesus's name is called,
  The knees of everyone will fall,
    Where'er they are residing.
Then every tongue with one accord,
  Will say that Jesus Christ is Lord,
    While God the Father praising.

In your own work on New Testament translation, you have rendered Greek verse into conventional English forms (e.g., using iambic pentameter). What was your rationale for this approach, and how did it affect the translation process?

I would say that poetry communicates *in many ways at once.* The various levels of meaning interact with each other and may reinforce or counteract each other to produce a net effect that is greater than the impact that the several components have when taken separately. In short, a work of art must be taken as a whole; it is an inseparable fusion—a complete flowing together—of idea and form. In a broad sense, then, New Testament poetry is both productive and theoretical, irrational and rational. This contrast, in Aristotelian terms, constitutes the difference between "making" and "doing," for poetry is essentially a creative art, the end of which is not simply practical action but also beauty itself. I felt that if we could carry over this creative reality from Greek into English, using whatever literary devices were available to us in the receptor language, then our project would be a success.

What unique challenges, if any, does the translator of Scripture face when translating poetry?

Poetry—to be poetry—must have appeal to the reader's imagination and powers of observation. Herein lies a defense of the so-called reader-response critic, whose work is not primarily an analysis but a description of experiences of certain highly developed sensibilities in contact with the work of literature. The chief value of literary criticism is, after all, not in supplying final verdicts but in affording certain aesthetic sensibilities that will equip one with a suppleness of mind for an effective individual analysis. This principle applies even in the field of traditional grammatical historical exegesis, where critics are exceedingly careful (as they should be) to pay due attention to matters historical and theological. Of course, the study of form and style as factors in biblical exegesis has little more than begun and is beset by peculiar difficulties. But when the facts are known, biblical scholars will find still another field for the application of principles of biblical interpretation.

How would you summarize your own philosophy of translation?

Imagination, like all human faculties, may be either active or passive. Effective poetic analysis goes beyond mere passive observation and allows itself to be led eagerly along by the imagination in perceiving meanings and relationships that lie beneath the surface. An activated imagination was what once caused my five-year-old son, as we were waiting for a traffic light to turn green, to speak of God's controlling the traffic signals by means of buttons and wires connecting heaven to earth. The deduction was incorrect, of course, but the story works by illustrating the power of true imaginative vision, in which the result is flashed upon the inward eye, not arrived at by logic or ingenuity. It is precisely this tendency to approach the poetic text as if it were prose—and thus overlook its essential nature—that worries the literary critic of the Bible. It is probable that all the New Testament writings contain at least traces of poetry, and the more such poetry is recognized as being present, the more difficult the problem becomes. In order to isolate poetry in the context of a biblical text, we need a sensitivity that will enable us to recognize different aspects of poetic language. To employ a well-known analogy, magicians do not expect their audiences to actually see ladies sawed in half. The feature that makes the magician's performance more than simple detection is the audience's knowledge that it is a trick.

Likewise, what makes poetry so intriguing is knowing that it is poetry, though of course one's satisfaction depends not merely on one's ability to perceive the presence of poetry but also on one's ability to perceive how the "trick is done." Translators who can do both participate in the text to the fullest extent possible, giving full rein to both their imagination and their analytical intelligence. To them, poetry reveals an amazing amount of information since behind each poem is an author who put everything into the poem he or she sees and put it there for a reason.

Given your years of expert work in the classroom, what formulations and explanations of these subjects (translation, genre, literariness, etc.) have you found consistently resonate with students?

My approach to exegesis may be characterized as analytical, in the modern tradition of a "close reading" or *explication de texte*. But the chronic problem facing all theories of reader's response criticism is that they rarely explain *why* poetry is there. In my classes, I attempt to focus on the question *To what end does one study poetry?* My answer has been to suggest that New Testament poetry is not just an objective form of language *per se* but a special use of language and that by its very nature New Testament poetry demands the attention of the translator. It seems to me, then, that the real test of poetry is the test of translation. To "carry over" (trans-late) from one language to another—as impossible as that may seem—is therefore a worthy and noble task for any translator.

It follows, therefore, that another basic truth must be admitted: not only is poetry an art of language, but also the words the poet uses are characteristically enriched by human associations, affecting words through their involvement with the mundane affairs of humane experience. This process of enrichment explains why poets rarely create new words but are quite content to draw their vocabulary from the same sources used by everyone else. "Poetry is not a special kind of language," notes Charles Wheeler.[8] "It is, rather, a special way in which language is used." In order to see what qualities poetry possesses, it is thus necessary to see how poetry (and prose) is related to language as a whole.

Poetry is but the artful use of language, though no radical separation between prose and poetry is possible. In the translation of prose, what is more important than verbatim rendering, and what is frequently more possible to attain, is an accurate reproduction of the author's thoughts.

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[8] Charles Wheeler, *The Design of Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1966), 6.

Poetry, however, is like a spoiled child that constantly asserts itself, incessantly shouting, "Look at me! Here I am!" Prose may be stated (and translated) in many different ways; poetry is not an alternative way of saying something but the only way. In other words, the systems by which messages are encoded and conveyed also influence what can be conveyed in them—not as much as Marshall McLuhan claimed, perhaps, but nevertheless in real and important ways. Poetic texts are therefore produced and interpreted through the mediation of poetic devices as well as through language itself.

Let me try to be more precise, now, in situating poetic interpretation among the other approaches to biblical exegesis. As I alluded to above, today there are advocates of both author-oriented and reader-oriented criticism. E. D. Hirsch, the principal advocate of author-oriented criticism, has argued—in my view persuasively—that one cannot speak of a determinate interpretation unless postulating an authorial intention that governs that interpretation.[9] Hirsch's approach assumes—again, in my view correctly—that the author of a literary text is by definition superior to the reader and that the burden of the reader is to recover the author's intention. This approach has many obvious strengths. But it is clear that the weaknesses in this approach—and this is where the reader-oriented criticism are most vocal—lie in the fact that students are not necessarily adequate readers. Sadly, author-oriented criticism often leads to a rigid sort of authoritarianism that stifles the student's creative impulses and makes reading (and interpretation) a chore. Yet surely in the science of biblical interpretation there must be some middle ground between the anarchy of interpretive variation inherent within reader-response criticism and the law-and-order authoritarianism that characterizes author-oriented criticism. To be sure, biblical texts must be understood as the product of a person (or persons), at a given point in human history, in a given form of discourse. The analyst is thus entitled to speculate about this or that grammatical possibility or about this or that historical setting. However, it seems to me that it is relevant for biblical interpretation to emphasize the text *as a text*, within the legitimate limits imposed by historical-grammatical exegesis. Poetic texts work differently than prose, as the reader-oriented critics have demonstrated very well, but like prose are dominated by language codes and conventions (as the author-oriented critics are quick to point out).

In my classes, I have my students read through my book *Using New Testament Greek in Ministry* to get an overview of the ten steps of exegesis. My approach essentially follows the traditional historical-grammatical method. Students engage in several types of analysis—textual, lexical, syntactical, structural, theological, homiletical, etc. But one of my ten steps is literary analysis—a field that is often overlooked in New Testament exegesis classes. This is a grave mistake in my view. The rhetorical level of language is a very significant level of language for readers. To ignore it is to risk overlooking an important dimension of meaning in the text.

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[9] E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

Conclusion

This interview began with certain fundamental questions about the nature of New Testament poetry, to which I have tried to supply answers of a purely introductory fashion. I noted that poetry is a special way of using language, within the context of other uses of language. I also noted the qualities of language that poetry brings into being. The result is an admittedly overly condensed discussion that minimizes the pragmatic dimensions of New Testament poetry and concentrates instead on the task of developing insight into it. We are thus, by this inevitably roundabout way, back to the question with which this interview began.

Because poetry and prose employ language so differently, it is no wonder that poetry and prose tend to repel each other. If what I have argued is correct, however, then one may no longer be content to focus on the extrinsic character of prose to the neglect of the intrinsic character of poetry. One must now think of language in poetry as having something to say *beyond* the denotative meaning of words, however difficult this connotative meaning may be to discern—and translate. But then, with full attention to the texture as well as the import of what one reads, one comes to share in the achievement of the poet, discovering that even texts supposedly familiar appear fresh and new. In the collaborative act between writer and reader, the nuances that were otherwise only potential come into full being, and the mere physical form of the Word awakens into the reality of a poem.

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Picturing the Son: The Cognitive and Affective Dimensions of Biblical Imagery

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Editors' Note: *Michael Travers*[1] *was, above all else, a humble and committed Christian. He labored for decades in the world of Christian higher education with zeal and faithfulness as a teacher, scholar, and administrator. He devoted much of his scholarship to understanding how the literary artistry of the Bible contributes to its truthfulness and beauty. Most notably, he published a book entitled* Encountering God in the Psalms *in which he helps readers see how the literary qualities of the Psalms enhance their devotional power. Soon after Michael's death in 2017, his colleague and friend Andrew Spencer came across a paper Michael had delivered at the 2016 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Providence, Rhode Island, under the title "'A Lamb Standing as Though It Had Been Slain': Poetic Images of God the Son in the Bible." As Spencer told me in a recent email exchange,*

> *I found the previously unpublished essay while sorting through Michael's personal papers as I prepared a biographical chapter for his Gedenkschrift,* The Christian Mind of C. S. Lewis: Essays in Honor of Michael Travers *(Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019). This paper reflected Michael's longtime interest in studying both theology and the Bible as literature. It reflected his commitment to the truthfulness of Scripture and the spiritual benefit of the beauty of Scripture. Like his book* Encountering God in the Psalms*, this essay was a study in how to grow in Christ by loving the Bible as a work of literature.*

When he found out that Adrianne Miles and I planned to assemble a special issue of Southeastern Theological Review *on the topic of Literature and the Bible, Spencer reached out and asked if we would be interested in including the conference paper in the issue. As a former student, colleague, and friend of Michael's, I jumped at the chance. In consultation with STR's senior editor, Ben Merkle, and with the blessing of Michael's widow, Barbara Travers, Adrianne and I decided the paper would be a perfect fit for the issue. However, because it was written for an oral presentation, the paper was not heavily researched or structured as a journal article. To get it in shape would require significant revision. Once again with Barbara's blessing, I set out to situate Michael's central argument and exegeses in a broader scholarly conversation. The result is the essay you will find below: "Picturing the Son: The Cognitive and Affective Dimensions of Biblical Imagery." The key terms "cognitive" and "affective" come from Michael's original conclusion. The organization of the essay into two major subsections was Michael's plan as well, with the first part focused on images that picture the role of Jesus and the second on images that picture the relation of Jesus to his people. Thus, the spirit of the argument and the substance of the readings remain Michael's. The framing of that argument in the introduction and conclusion and the secondary research that now informs it throughout come from my efforts to situate Michael's paper at the intersection of two conversations, one on New Testament uses of the Old Testament and the other on the hermeneutical significance of poetic language in the Bible. Though I couldn't give an exact breakdown of how many words are his and how many are mine, for anyone who knew Michael or has read his work, there are moments when his voice is nearly audible. Though this was among the most challenging projects on which I have ever worked, I was blessed to learn from Michael yet again. I pray you will be as well.* (Matthew Mullins, Fall 2021)

Abstract: *Scholars have devoted significant attention to how New Testament writers utilize the Hebrew Bible and, specifically, to how they reuse poetic language to make historical and theological cases for the deity of Jesus Christ and his status as the promised Messiah of the Old Testament. Scholars have also made extensive and compelling arguments for the distinctiveness of poetic language in forming and conveying meaning. This essay asks how the distinctively poetic nature of images drawn from the Old Testament and employed in the New Testament contributes to the historical and theological claims surrounding the representation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God and promised Messiah. We argue that imagery expands the cognitive claims of theology and history through its appeals to the affections, calling readers both to acknowledge and to know Christ.*

Key Words: *imagery, meaning, Messiah, New Testament, poetic language, Son of God*

In the New Testament, Jesus's name and various titles point to his divine role as the one sent to bring salvation. Christopher Wright notes that the name "Jehoshua (Joshua, Jeshua—or in its Greek form, Jesus)" literally means "*Jahweh is salvation*."[2] The monikers "the Christ" and "Messiah" designate an anointed or sent one. Beyond names and titles, the writers of Scripture also use a range of images to create a picture of God the Son as an anointed one sent to live, die, and conquer death on behalf of humankind. How can the most common images used to represent Jesus help readers develop a more robust understanding of the second person of the Trinity? Poetic imagery is essential to helping readers imagine and relate to the triune God because rather than simply telling us about God as Father, Son, and Spirit, these images provide us with pictures that appeal to the imagination. There are thus both cognitive and affective dimensions to the imagery of the Son of God in Scripture. The cognitive dimensions develop literary and historical connections between Jesus and the promised Messiah spoken of in the Hebrew Bible, while the affective dimensions cultivate readers' affections for Jesus as the Messiah so that we might call on him for salvation. The literary nature of these images facilitates an understanding of who Christ is and what he has done, even as it seeks to move readers to faith as a result.

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[1] See https://betweenthetimes.sebts.edu/?s=travers.

[2] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God: Celebrating the Bible's Central Story* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2007), 50.

This dual nature of imagery—what we might call its informational and formational nature—is at the heart of our argument. The Scriptures are intended not only to tell us information about God but also to form our love of God, and a literary approach is especially well suited to grasping both dimensions. A literary approach to the Scriptures is, in the most basic sense, one that sees form as integral to content. As Adele Berlin says of parallelism, so we would say of literary style more broadly and of imagery in particular: imagery "itself does not have meaning; but it structures the meaning of the signs of which it is composed."[3] Attending to literary style is thus integral to understanding the meaning of a given text. Such an approach assumes that if a poetic image is used to communicate something about the Son of God, for instance, then there must be something important about that particular image and not only whatever abstract proposition it may communicate *about* the Son of God. While some with a high view of Scripture may object that a literary approach threatens to draw readers away from the historicity and facticity of the Bible and to flatten differences between the Bible and any other work of literature, David Beldman maintains that "one of the marvels of our God is that we hear his voice as it is mediated through human writers, using the conventions of literary composition at their disposal. Thus, as we read the Bible *as any other book* we will recognize it as *unlike any other book*."[4] To attend to the figurative nature of some of the language found in Scripture is thus not to emphasize the role of human authorship to the exclusion of divine authorship but to grapple with the significance of what Kenton Sparks calls "God's word in human words."[5]

Our primary contribution concerns the images from the Hebrew Bible used to characterize the Son of God in the New Testament. In his *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, G. K. Beale offers twelve main purposes for which the New Testament writers make use of the Old Testament:

1. To indicate direct fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy
2. To indicate indirect fulfillment of Old Testament typological prophecy
3. To indicate affirmation that a not-yet-fulfilled Old Testament prophecy will assuredly be fulfilled in the future
4. To indicate an analogical or illustrative use of the Old Testament
5. To indicate the symbolic use of the Old Testament
6. To indicate an abiding authority carried over from the Old Testament
7. To indicate a proverbial use of the Old Testament
8. To indicate a rhetorical use of the Old Testament
9. To indicate the use of an Old Testament segment as a blueprint or prototype for a New Testament segment
10. To indicate an alternate textual use of the Old Testament
11. To indicate an assimilated use of the Old Testament
12. To indicate an ironic or inverted use of the Old Testament[6]

By examining the literary function of poetic images drawn from the Old Testament and employed in the New Testament, we hope to add to this list an additional use: to help readers come "to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and the participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:10–11).[7] That is, we hope to emphasize the affective and formational power of these literary devices. New Testament writers utilized a range of Old Testament images to describe the incarnated and ascended Son of God both to establish a clear connection between the long-awaited Messiah and Jesus of Nazareth and to characterize him as a source of reassurance, comfort, boldness, authority, love, and—ultimately—salvation.

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[3] Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 138.

[4] David J. H. Beldman, "Literary Approaches and Old Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 71 (emphasis original).

[5] Kenton Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008).

[6] G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 55–93.

[7] All biblical citations come from the *New International Version*.

In the analyses that follow, we explore six images used to characterize the Son of God in the New Testament. The first four—bread of life, shepherd, lamb, temple—focus on the role of the Son, who he is in history and in the divine order of things. The last two images—vine and bridegroom—emphasize the relation of the Son to the people of God. In each case, we briefly examine connections between the Old Testament and New Testament uses of the image in question in some of the traditional ways cataloged by Beale before offering an interpretation of the image as a literary appeal to the imagination and an affective invitation to know Christ.

"Who do you say I am?":
Images That Picture the Role of Jesus

Bread of Life

When Jesus asks his disciples the pointed question "who do you say I am?" in Matt 16:13–20, Peter famously answers, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). Peter's answer was direct, making use of the formal name for the promised savior. But Christ often spoke of himself using figurative language during his earthly ministry. Some of the images that come immediately to mind are the famous "I am" statements that Jesus may well have offered in answer to his own question—important because they declare him to be Yahweh, or God incarnate, the covenant-keeping One. Christ's New Testament "I am" statements are typically followed by predicate nominatives: for instance, "I am the living water," "I am the good shepherd," "I am the bread of life." This last proclamation, made in John 6:35, is a declaration of deity, an identification with Yahweh in the Old Testament, and a foreshadowing of the coming substitutionary sacrifice of his body on behalf of sinners. He makes this claim about himself following the feeding of the five thousand and, in his conversation with the people, alludes to himself as the Old Testament manna on which the Hebrews subsisted in the wilderness: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (John 6:51). Here, in the image of the bread, Jesus announces himself as the ultimate fulfillment of Yahweh's provision for his people in the Old Testament.

The image of the bread of life represents a historical and theological claim, especially in John's Gospel. Jesus overtly declares that he is the very "bread that came down from heaven" (6:41) and that he is superior to the Old Testament manna: "Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die" (6:49–50). Bolstering the arguments of scholars who read John 6:51c–58 christologically, Meredith Warren situates the images in this passage in the historical and literary context of the Greco-Roman age: "Other heroes in the classical world become associated with gods and goddesses through ritual sacrifice."[8] And so, when Jesus claims, shockingly, that he is the bread of life and that those who wish to live must eat his flesh, Warren argues that the passage is using "the sacrificial language of consuming flesh and drinking blood in order to make claims about Jesus' divine identity."[9] Jesus is God, John's Gospel insists.

But the image of the bread is also an invitation to know Christ intimately. Just as the Hebrews relied on the manna for daily sustenance, Jesus's use of the bread of life imagery suggests that those who would follow him must partake of his very essence. At their final meal together in Luke's account, Jesus holds up literal bread as a figurative representation of himself: "And he took the bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me'" (Luke 22:19). As the manna once sustained the Hebrews, so the body of Christ would be given for the world. The bread in the hands of Jesus is at once both literal and figurative, a thing and an image. By enjoining the disciples to partake of the bread "in remembrance" of himself, Jesus makes the meal into a memorial that can be rehearsed again and again in other times and at other places. The bread—which is consumed so that our bodies may be nourished and so that we may live—invites readers of the Gospel and those gathered around tables anywhere to imagine Christ's sacrifice whenever we eat. Theological truth is thus brought to life as it must have been for those around that table whenever they broke bread after that night. To hold the bread thereafter must have invoked mixed feelings of sorrow and gratitude. Modern readers, through prayer and reading, may come to know Christ so intimately that we too might experience such mixed emotions whenever we gather at the table.

Shepherd

Where Christ's representation of himself as the bread of life recalls the historical manna from heaven in Exodus, the New Testament images of Jesus as good shepherd place him squarely in line with imagery used to picture Yahweh in the Old Testament. Kenneth Bailey has pointed out that any study of the good shepherd image "invites its readers on a thousand-year journey" and can be traced from Psalm 23 to 1 Peter 5.[10] In each case, the figure of the shepherd is used to help the audience understand and relate to God as protector, leader, host, and redeemer, reminding us that such complexity makes poetic language rich. This complexity is especially important in understanding the image of the shepherd, as Timothy Laniak observes, because "shepherding has a figurative meaning in certain contemporary religious settings where it has been 'applied' in reductionist ways. … Such associations have their relative merits, but they are not anchored in or controlled by the cultural realities and texts of the biblical world."[11] We examine two New Testament uses of the shepherd imagery, one from John's Gospel and one from Peter's first epistle, in a way that honors the inextricability of those "cultural realities" and the literary artistry of the biblical texts.

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[8] Meredith J. C. Warren, *My Flesh Is Meat Indeed: A Nonsacramental Reading of John 6:51–58* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 20.

[9] Warren, *My Flesh Is Meat Indeed*, 22.

The good shepherd imagery in the Gospel of John can be read as an allusion both to well-known literary tropes like that found in Psalm 23 as well as to the temple sacrifices used to expiate sin since the figure of the shepherd also recalls that of the lamb. The shepherd imagery in 1 Peter 5:4 represents Christ as "Chief Shepherd" of the church and looks forward to his eschatological return. Jesus is thus both the once and future shepherd in the New Testament. The image of the shepherd, then, not only compresses multiple important theological ideas into one figure but also provides comfort for believers that he will take care of his own and one day return to gather them all together under his final protection.

In John's account, Jesus offers an extended metaphor representing himself as the shepherd. In the opening verses, the shepherd is contrasted with the thief: "anyone who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep" (John 10:1b–2). The shepherd is also contrasted with the "stranger": "When [the shepherd] has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice. But they will never follow a stranger; in fact, they will run away from him because they do not recognize a stranger's voice" (10:4–5). Bailey distinguishes between the thief and the stranger: "the 'stranger' is not a 'thief.' The thief gives the sheep no choice. He steals the sheep by force. The 'stranger' represent [sic] voices that call out every morning offering other options to the sheep."[12] Jesus represents himself as the shepherd who protects his flock from both thieves and strangers, that is, from those who would steal them away as well as those who would lure them away. The primary means by which he does this is his voice, which the sheep know anywhere. Twice more in this passage he goes on to claim that "I am the good shepherd" (10:11, 14), and four times he insists that he lays down his life for the sheep (10:15, 17, 18 [2x]). Jesus is at once the shepherd and the sacrifice. The image would have been ubiquitous to Jesus's audience and to the Gospel's original audience as well. Jesus is protector and leader to those who know him. And so, when Peter exhorts the elders among the church to "Be shepherds of God's flock" (1 Pet 5:2a), he is encouraging them both to protect and lead their people and to imitate Jesus. This connection is clear in Peter's reference to Jesus as the Chief Shepherd: "when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away" (5:4). Jesus is the shepherd the psalmist once wrote about and the one who is returning at the coming of the kingdom.

When Jesus uses the shepherd as a "figure of speech" in John 10, we are told that "the Pharisees did not understand what he was telling them" (10:6). This detail suggests that the Pharisees are sheep who do not recognize the voice of the shepherd; they are not among the flock that daily goes in and out the gate at the call of the shepherd's voice. In poetic fashion, the image of the shepherd also has aural implications. It calls to mind both the sights and sounds of shepherds leading their flocks through the gates. To know the voice of the shepherd requires the daily habituation of hearing that voice until it becomes distinct from all others at the slightest call. As in Psalm 23, though the terrain and time may vary widely, the sheep know the shepherd's voice because they follow it daily. In this way, John 10 and 1 Peter 5 employ the image of the shepherd as both a theological claim to know who Jesus is and a spiritual invitation to know him as the sheep know their shepherd. Like all poetic figures of speech, this image employs a familiar figure to make an abstract and unfamiliar figure visible, legible, knowable. We can relate to and know Jesus as we relate to and know other shepherd-like figures in our lives. The difference is that Jesus is the once and future Good Shepherd.

Lamb

Of all the images for Jesus, the lamb is perhaps most clearly a picture of salvation drawn from the Hebrew Bible. The lamb is the primary sacrifice from Exodus on, and the book of Isaiah famously speaks of the suffering servant "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (53:7). In this passage, the prophet writes of the promised one who will lay down his life as the unblemished sacrifice for God's people: "as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth" (53:7).[13] John the Baptist uses the same image when Christ comes walking toward him after overcoming the wilderness temptations: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29 and again in 1:36). When Philip encounters the Ethiopian official by the side of the road from Jerusalem to Gaza, this is the passage the man is reading, and Philip uses it to tell "him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:35). Both New Testament accounts present Christ as the Son of God and savior by identifying him with the Old Testament sacrificial lamb. The New Testament writers use this Old Testament image to indicate Jesus as the Son of God.

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[10] Kenneth E. Bailey, *The Good Shepherd: A Thousand-Year Journey from Psalm 23 to the New Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 22.

[11] Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, NSBT 20 (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 21.

[12] Bailey, *The Good Shepherd*, 219.

The fact that the New Testament writers make these well-known symbols from the Hebrew Bible (lamb, shepherd, bread, etc.) into images in their own writing about Jesus is possible because images allow for multiple levels of meaning; they are irreducible. Literary critics after John Keats refer to the multiplicity of meanings in aesthetic forms as "negative capability": a capability of "being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason."[14] As both a property of works of art and as a capacity of viewers, negative capability refers to the irreducible complexity of art. The New Testament writers rely on this irreducibility to repurpose Old Testament images with existing historical significance toward new ends in the person of Jesus Christ. In her study of paschal lamb imagery in the Gospel of John, Dorothy Lee synthesizes a range of scholarship on biblical imagery and hermeneutics by claiming that "symbolism is not easily located in singular meaning but opens itself, by definition, to a 'surplus of meaning' that exceeds intentionality or design."[15] This "opening up" does not mean that interpretation is impossible or that meaning is relativistic in a facile sense. "On the contrary," Lee continues, "core symbols possess cognitive content, and have a religious rationale that can in one sense be translated, albeit inadequately."[16] Thus, New Testament writers can reuse images from the Hebrew Bible, drawing on their traditional meaning and extending that meaning to account for the coming of the Messiah. In the image of the lamb, the need for sacrifice is maintained from Old to New Testament, but the figurative language resists singular meaning and creates space for the image to be reused and reimagined across space and time for a broad range of audiences.

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[13] We should note that not all scholars agree that the lamb imagery in Isaiah alludes to that found in the Pentateuch. The arguments for and against this connection are summarized in Jeremy Schipper, "Interpreting the Lamb Imagery in Isaiah 53," *JBL* 132.2 (2013): 315–17.

[14] John Keats, "A Letter to George and Thomas Keats," in *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 320.

[15] Dorothy Lee, "Paschal Imagery in the Gospel of John: A Narrative and Symbolic Reading," *Pacifica* 24 (February 2011): 14.

[16] Lee, "Paschal Imagery in the Gospel of John," 14.

Imagery is thus integral not only to recognizing Jesus as the Son of God and savior of the world but also to calling on him and communing with him. "In a religious context," Lee argues, "it brings meaning into being, becoming the bridge between divine and human."[17] Just as the paschal lamb is both literal and symbolic, so too does Jesus's death function both literally and symbolically. And it is the irreducibility of the image of the lamb that the New Testament writers use to make this connection. Images—regardless of whether they function symbolically in a given instance—are not mere decoration for ideas. Historical, political, literary, cultural, and religious significance is wrapped up in the image of the lamb that cannot be disentangled from that image and that cannot quite be articulated so concisely and precisely in explanatory writing. Jesus is not merely the new sacrifice; he is not simply the object of cultural memory; he *is* the lamb. He takes on himself the weight of the community, the sins that separate us from God. What separates Jesus-as-lamb from the sacrificial lambs of the Hebrew Bible is that, as Schipper observes in his interpretation of Isaiah 53, "the servant is 'acquainted with' sickness (v. 3), he 'bears' the sickness of others (v. 4), and is 'crushed with' sickness (v. 10)."[18] In Schipper's argument, this language is important because it suggests that the image of the lamb in Isaiah is distinct from that found in the Pentateuch. Only spotless lambs could be used as sacrifices, but the lamb in Isaiah is not spotless. The implication is not that Jesus was imperfect but that he was "acquainted" with the pain and suffering that attends human imperfection. Simultaneously, this observation affirms the irreducibility of poetic imagery *and* reveals how Jesus-as-lamb is renewing the very reality of sacrifice. Jesus can relate to us because he not only "bears" our sickness but also is "acquainted with" it himself. He is not merely the promised one, the Son of God, the Savior; we can cast our cares on him because he knows what it means to care for us.

Temple

In the Old Testament economy, the temple is the place where God meets with his people, where he demonstrates his presence among them. In the New Testament, when Christ cleansed the Jerusalem temple of the money changers, he was asked for a sign to demonstrate his authority. He replied, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). The temple, in Christ's usage, is at once a literal and historical entity and an image of his body and coming sacrifice. John's Gospel goes on to say that after Christ was raised from the dead on the third day, his disciples remembered and believed. Jesus's representation of himself as the temple is thus an image of salvation. Wright cites Peter's sermon in the temple in Acts 4 to bolster his claim that "in Acts, in the courts of the temple itself, Peter declared that salvation is now to be found exclusively in Jesus. Jesus has become the new temple—the locus of all salvation."[19] Or, as Peter explains with another image, Jesus is "the stone that was rejected … which has become the cornerstone" (Acts 4:11). In his life and resurrection, Christ is associated with the temple, even superseding the temple by embodying salvation in himself. The image of the temple, then, is an instance in which, as Tremper Longman contends, "images … serve to bring our attention to old truths in new ways."[20] The old truth of the temple as the meeting place between God and God's people is reimagined in the person of the Son of God.

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[17] Lee, "Paschal Imagery in the Gospel of John," 14.

[18] Schipper, "Interpreting the Lamb Imagery in Isaiah 53," 323.

The image of the temple employed in John's Gospel and in Acts accomplishes a number of the uses of the Old Testament as outlined by Beale in its clear references to the earthly temples envisioned, planned, and built/rebuilt in the Hebrew Bible. But Joseph Greene argues that the "Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the temple by closely associating Jesus with the *heavenly* temple more than the earthly temple. Jesus embodies the heavenly (proto?) antitype to which all previous Jewish worship centers pointed."[21] As a picture of the earthly or heavenly temple, temple imagery represents Jesus as the embodiment of the meeting place between God and God's people. "By presenting Jesus as embodying the heavenly temple," Greene suggests, "the Fourth Evangelist offers his readers more than simply a replacement to the earthly temple. Through the *glorified* Jesus, believers continue to have access to the true, heavenly temple and the eschatological blessings that flow from it."[22] The significance of the temple as an image of the Son of God is thus irreducible to a specific site when seen through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, and this new understanding enlivens the "old truth" of God's presence with his people.

The temple in the time of Jesus was not only a place of worship; it was also an enduring sign of the return from exile and the hope of the people. It was a temple rebuilt against great odds: "The Books of Ezra-Nehemiah

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[19] Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God*, 179.

[20] Tremper Longman, *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 132.

[21] Joseph R. Greene, "Jesus as the Heavenly Temple in the Fourth Gospel," *BBR* 28.3 (2018): 426.

[22] Greene, "Jesus as the Heavenly Temple in the Fourth Gospel," 446.

reveal that the community that attempted to rebuild the temple experienced numerous difficulties and frustrations."[23] The emotions expressed at the laying of the foundation are complex:

> And all the people gave a great shout of praise to the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid. But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid, while many others shouted for joy. No one could distinguish the sound of the shouts of joy from the sound of weeping, because the people made so much noise. And the sound was heard far away. (Ezra 3:11b–13)

It was this temple that stood at the center of the Jewish community which found itself under the thumb of yet another empire. Jesus's suggestion that he could rebuild the temple in three days, let alone that it could be destroyed, is an inflammatory claim to say the least. For him to paint a picture of himself *as* the temple is for him not only to relocate the site of meeting with God to himself but also to identify himself as the hope of the people. The affective dimension of this image becomes clear when considered in these terms. All that the Jewish community would have felt for the temple as a sign of who they were and of any hope they may have had for the future is now to be placed in Jesus. When the temple was destroyed by the Romans, perhaps those who remembered what he had said about the temple not only believed but retained their hope. As we reflect on this image today, Jesus-as-temple is an invitation to place our hope and our very identity in the Son of God.

"I am the vine; you are the branches": Images That Picture the Relation of Jesus to the People of God

Vine

The organic relation in the image of the vine and the branches in John's Gospel immediately suggests Jesus as a source and sustainer of life: "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). This image pictures the relation between Jesus and the people of God. In representing himself as the "true vine" (15:1), Jesus recalls and modifies the image of the vine found in Jeremiah, which represents the people of Israel as a vine planted by the Lord:

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[23] Jeffrey L. Rubenstein, *A History of Sukkot in the Second Temple and Rabbinic Periods* (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2020), 33.

I had planted you like a choice vine
  of sound and reliable stock.
How then did you turn against me
  into a corrupt, wild vine? (Jer 2:21)

The Lord God remains the divine gardener in the Johannine Gospel account, but Jesus has replaced the people of Israel as the vine. If they become the "corrupt, wild" vine, then Jesus is the "true vine" and the people are now "branches." Jesus is the one who will not turn away, who will not be corrupted, and so he becomes the sole source of hope for the life and salvation of the people: "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4). The modification of the vine image is powerful: the Lord faithfully planted Israel as a pure vine, but Israel proved faithless again and again, as noted throughout the Hebrew Bible. The image of the vine in John's Gospel brings this whole history into focus.

When Jesus alludes to and alters the image of the vine, he associates himself in the most intimate terms with his people, representing himself (and not the people of Israel) as the vine tended by the Lord. By incorporating the people into himself, Jesus reconciles them salvifically to the Lord, as the uncorrupted vine planted in Jeremiah 2, and saves them much like the Lord had done in the exodus as imagined in Ps 80:8–11:

You transplanted a vine from Egypt;
  You drove out the nations and planted it.
You cleared the ground for it,
  And it took root and filled the land.
The mountains were covered with its shade,
  The mighty cedars with its branches.
Its branches reached as far as the Sea,
  Its shoots as far as the River.

God has saved his people before, and, in the person of Jesus, he has done it again. The image of the vine is also be adopted by Paul to demonstrate that salvation in Jesus is reserved not only for Israel but also for all people. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul refers to the Gentiles as "a wild shoot" that has "been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root" (Rom 11:17). In calling himself the "true vine" in John 15, Jesus declares himself the source of salvation for all who will be grafted.

Apart from knowing Jesus Christ, the image insists, there is no other relationship that can save, not even belonging to God's chosen people. The image of the "true vine" takes the claim about Jesus in John's Gospel well beyond the scope of history or even theology. As William Barclay

notes,

> It is as if Jesus said: "You think that because you belong to the nation of Israel you are a branch of the true vine of God. But the nation it is, a degenerate vine, as all your prophets saw. It is I who am the true vine. The fact that you are a Jew will not save you. The only thing that can save you is to have an intimate living fellowship with me, for I am the vine of God and you must be branches joined to me."[24]

As with so many of the Old Testament images utilized in the New Testament, there is a boldness inherent in the "true vine" image, a quality that must have seemed exceedingly presumptuous to the contemporaneous audience. But it is this very sense of shock that makes the figurative language and its entanglements so compelling. "Smashing into the psyche like a blunt instrument," Rita Felski exclaims, shock "can wreak havoc on our usual ways of ordering and understanding the world."[25] While many Bible scholars and lay readers today will be familiar with the exclusivity of Jesus's claims, the image of the vine offers a textual moment of shock that might be as effective for modern readers as it would have been for Jesus's audience and the first readers of John's Gospel. When Jesus represents himself as the "true vine," John's Gospel is certainly making historical and theological claims, but the image also shocks us; it jolts us with the truth that we will die apart from Christ. The work of the image is not merely to convey a truth about the nature of our relation to Jesus Christ but also to shock us, to stun us with the life-or-death implications of being cut off from the vine and thrown in the fire.

Bridegroom

The image of God's people as bride and God as bridegroom recurs throughout the Bible. Where the organic relation between vine and branch represents Jesus as the very source of life for the people, the social relation between bride and groom represents Jesus's love for his church in the New Testament as sacrificial in what Ephesians 5 calls "a profound mystery" (Eph 5:32). In this letter, Paul uses Christ's sacrifice for the church as an image (specifically a simile) to picture a husband's love for his wife: "Husbands, love your wives, just *as* Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless" (5:25–27, emphasis added). Husbands are exhorted to sacrifice themselves for their wives; Christ actually *did* sacrifice himself for the church. Citing Gen 2:24, Paul goes on to describe the marriage union as the bride and groom's becoming one flesh in v. 31. To account for the bewildering nature of this metaphor, he comes straight out and says, "This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church" (Eph 5:32). Almost as an afterthought, then, he wraps up the discussion: "However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband" (Eph 5:33). In the image of the bridegroom, then Jesus's sacrifice is a self-sacrifice to be emulated.

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[24] William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 173.

[25] Rita Felski, *Uses of Literature* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 113.

Prior to Christ's incarnation, God is sometimes represented as the husband of his people, as in Isa 54:1–17, where he redeems Zion from shame. In vv. 4–5, the author recounts the litany of Zion's shame which is wiped out by her union with the Lord Almighty:

> Do not be afraid; you will not be put to shame.
>   Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated.
> You will forget the shame of your youth
>   And remember no more the reproach of your widowhood.
> For your Maker is your husband—
>   The Lord Almighty is his name—
> The Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer;
>   He is called the God of all the earth.

The people of Israel are represented here and throughout the passage with what Katie Heffelfinger describes as "a veritable tour-de-force of biblical images for female humiliation."[26] But in verse 5, "the poetic pattern of this line draws attention to this figure who causes Zion to forget her shame. The woman's husband is now explicitly named: 'Yhwh of the armies is his name.' … She has been deserted, but will be deserted no more. Now she is to become 'husbanded' as the poem goes on to detail."[27] The people are redeemed by the Lord Almighty as a shamed woman is redeemed by a husband.

When Jesus assumes the role of bridegroom, he redeems the people by sacrificing himself for them, as Paul says a husband should sacrifice himself for his bride. Similar to the adaptation of the image of the lamb from the Pentateuch through Isaiah to the New Testament, Jesus does not redeem from a distance; he is acquainted with our grief just as marriage renders the concerns of each spouse into concerns for both. He does not rescue from on high; he is mysteriously joined with his bride (the church) like a groom and bride are made one flesh. He is the cosmic kinsman redeemer, yes; he is God-the-husband, yes; he is the faithful groom to a faithless bride, yes. But he also knows us intimately. He is the love that knows fully in 1 Corinthians 13. He is the ascended bridegroom whose return we eagerly await, and this picture is an invitation to know him as intimately as a wife knows her husband. As Paul declares to the Philippians, "I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining resurrection from the dead" (Phil 3:10–11). The relation of Christ to his church is of such an intimate nature that to know him is as if we had died with him. Mystery is key here once again as Paul qualifies this likeness to Christ with the word "somehow." It is through our relation to and knowledge of Christ, like a bride's union with her groom, that we know the suffering of death to sin but, somehow, attain the same resurrection from the dead that Jesus attained.

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[26] Katie M. Heffelfinger, *I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes: Lyric Cohesion and Conflict in Second Isaiah* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 260.

[27] Heffelfinger, *I Am Large, I Contain Multitudes*, 263.

Conclusion: The Theological and Devotional Significance of Images of the Son of God

Some of the images used to describe Jesus as the incarnate Son of God are also used to describe him after his ascension and in the future as the returning King. In the book of Revelation, after the letters to the seven churches are read, John is taken in a vision to heaven where he beholds marvelous things. Early in this vision, he sees God the Father on the throne of heaven and, alongside him as the second person in the Trinity, the "Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing at the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders" (5:6a). The image of the slain Lamb points to Christ's worthiness to rule; his sacrifice on behalf of the people has seated him beside God the Father, and he has the authority to open the scrolls. The Lamb who was slain, then, is also the Lamb who reigns, the one before whom every knee will bow (Phil 2:10). Once again, Wright focuses this image soteriologically:

> Salvation also belongs not only to the Lamb who was slain, but equally to the Lamb on the throne, because he ever reigns with the Father. The sovereignty of the Lord of the universe is shared with Christ. This is visualized in the rather remarkable way John's vision of the throne of God not only sees it occupied by the Lord God, the creator (Rev. 4:11), but also by the Lamb who is "standing in

> the center of the throne" (Rev. 5:6). The government that is exercised from the throne is simultaneously God's and Christ's.[28]

This government is universal and encompasses all the people of God. Whereas Satan is the notorious divider and separator, Christ unites us with God as the shepherd tends his flock, as the lamb reconciles the people to God, as the temple houses the people with God, as the vine is united to the branch, and as the groom is united to the bride.

The truths of these images are not merely theological, however. They are also deeply devotional. Or, better yet, rather than distinguishing between the theological and the devotional, the imagery of the Son of God insists on the inextricable relationship between theology and devotion when both are practiced and lived out properly. The formal work of systematizing theological material is vital to the work of knowing Jesus Christ. Jesus comes as Son of God and savior at a particular time, in a particular place, and to a particular people. As regards modern readers of the Bible, there is also the history of how this savior and those integral contexts have been understood by others over the last few millennia. Such vast expanses of knowledge require taxonomies and systems if we are to know the history of the faith to which modern believers lay claim. The use of images embraces this kind of theological work as it represents a literary and rhetorical choice on the part of writers attempting to help themselves and their audiences understand and retain complex experiences and ideas wrapped in long histories and practices. But the use of images also aids in our attempts to know the Son of God as one knows a friend or family member, a kind of knowing that cannot be taxonomized.

While scholars can make new discoveries and illuminate dimensions of historical significance, language, and archaeology that fit images more and more neatly into their textual contexts, they cannot arrive at a point of interpretation or understanding that will necessarily result in the kind of knowing that a sheep has of the shepherd. Poetic images, like songs or expert performances by actors or canvases laced with colors, are attempts to express the inexpressible elements of human experience. This poetic quality does not mean that images, or figurative language in general, is somehow beyond interpretation or without a limited range of meaning. "Poetry is constrained but unfixed," argues Patrick Miller, "terse but open."[29] The image of the shepherd, then, cannot simply be interpreted any old way. But it is also resistant to simplistic or singular interpretations. Just as the threats of the wolf, the thief, or the stranger may require different responses from the shepherd, so too is the shepherd himself irreducible to a singular kind of actor. What is important here is that, though the particulars may vary, the shepherd is always, already, and forever a protector. And though that image may evoke as many different pictures, memories, and experiences as there will ever be readers of Psalm 23 or John 10, it nonetheless (perhaps even miraculously) communicates protection. There are thus both cognitive and affective dimensions to the figures of speech about the Son of God in Scripture: we understand who he is and what he has done, and when the images are effective, we are moved to faith as a result—to know Christ in a way that defies easy explanation like a good meal elicits only a satisfied sigh. Perhaps this is why the psalmist calls us to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps 34:8).

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[28] Wright, *Salvation Belongs to Our God*, 189–90.

[29] Patrick Miller, *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2000), 245.

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Narrative Criticism in the Gospels and Acts

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Abstract: *The essay at hand constitutes a review of the use of the discipline of literary criticism on the narrative sections of Scripture, particularly the New Testament. The essay explains how the phrase "narrative criticism" can refer both to a literary method that relies heavily on American formalism to exegete the narrative portions of the Bible as well as to a theological discipline that views narrative as a master genre that can yield fundamental insight into the works and character of God. The concentration of this essay is on the former category. A concrete example is given in a brief exegesis of Luke 7:36–50. We suggest that narrative criticism of the Gospels can be fruitful when it is practiced in connection with the socio-historical background of the Gospels as well as with an eye toward theology.*

Key Words: *Acts, Gospels, Hans Frei, higher-criticism, narrative criticism, narrative theology, reader-response*

When the phrase "narrative criticism" is employed in the field of professional theological and biblical studies, one of two meanings is usually being conveyed. First, there is the use of the phrase that primarily has to do with *method*. In this first case, scholars can simply employ the rules generated by literary critics, rules that were not initially formulated for use in biblical studies but for the investigation of the novel (see "Origins and Goals of Narrative Criticism" below for further development of this). Techniques were finetuned in the process of reading in order to maximize the depth of experience when reading narrative. Although narrative criticism of this type does work with a philosophical base, its primary aim is to *read*.[1] To be sure, there is a deep philosophical foundation for the concepts of meaning and hermeneutics that this type of narrative criticism can point to, if asked. Nevertheless, the mood no longer being controlled by modernity, this first type of narrative criticism operates within a much more Wittgensteinian ethos, where what ultimately matters is the actual performance of the activity in a communal context.

Thus, one approach to narrative criticism is a purely *descriptive* one. The practitioners simply apply to the text the methods that help in the understanding of categories such as setting, characters, plot, and so on. As such, this form of narrative criticism is essentially *practical*. Furthermore, it can in principle be used with any type of narrative—sacred or secular.

I now make one of the main observations in this essay: the type of narrative criticism that is used in the biblical guild, particularly in (but not limited to) evangelical circles, is just this type. It is mostly philosophically and theologically innocent at the foundational level; it is mostly concerned with the aid that the method provides in the exegesis of the narrative texts in the Bible.

The second type of narrative criticism that we can speak about is one which is essentially theological/philosophical in nature. The interest is not primarily with tools that, when used competently, may yield illumination of the text by observing how it has been constructed. The primary interest is rather with narrativity and its power in rendering that which is real. That is to say, the theologian is interested in narrativity because he or she believes that this is a more fitting way of describing God's interaction with humanity. In contrast to modernity, where theological communication was viewed as more amenable to the rational proposition,[2] narrative theologians believe that the story is just (if not more!) as universal as the proposition. Furthermore, it is argued that the biblical canon tells a *story*—with a past, present, and future—to communicate God's redemptive acts and thereby his identity. Narrative, therefore, is not just a genre within the Bible but a *master* genre, capable of bringing to light all aspects of theology. Consider the following statement about narrative in the influential work of Stanley Hauerwas and Gregory Jones: "[Narrative] is a crucial conceptual category for such matters as understanding issues of epistemology and methods of argument, depicting personal identity, and displaying the content of Christian convictions."[3]

An important example of the narrative approach described above is found in the work of the late Hans Frei, who taught for a number of years at Yale Divinity School and is known as one of the fathers of so-called postliberal theology.[4] Frei's theological instincts concerning the concept of revelation were essentially Barthian. As such, he viewed the central locus of revelation as taking place in the economic existence of Jesus Christ. For Barth, this was the essential place of revelation, for the life and work of Christ are a true unveiling of the eternal God: "What God is as God, the divine individuality and characteristics, the *essentia* or 'essence' of God, is something which we shall encounter either at the place where God deals with us as Lord and Saviour, or not at all."[5] Following Barth, Frei reasoned that if revelation is at its core Christology, and if Christology is primarily found in the Gospels, then theology is a matter of the narrativized life of Jesus in the Gospels. The identity of Jesus Christ is not some abstract metaphysical essence but his *acts*. The identity of Jesus Christ—and therefore of God—is depicted in the actions of Jesus as found in the Gospels (Frei favored the Gospel of Luke). And so Frei wrote one of his two major books on this, with the title *The Identity of Jesus Christ*.[6]

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[1] Note how Wolfgang Iser, one of the fathers of this type of reading technique, speaks of his goal in *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), xi–xii. His emphasis is on the necessity of *reading* the texts in the process of formulating a theory. His later books deal more directly with theory.

[2] Or more precisely, the goal was ultimately to put into propositions the canonical witness so as to make logical connections between thoughts. It is not the case that narrative did not matter but that it was viewed as more "scientific" (*wissenschaftlich*) to put the Bible into dense, abstract concepts, in accordance with universal reason. My statement here primarily refers to the eighteenth to nineteenth centuries.

[3] Stanley Hauerwas and Gregory Jones, "Introduction," in *Why Narrative: Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Hauerwas and Jones (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 5.

For our present purposes, one of the fascinating aspects of Frei's book is just how little use there is of narrative critical tools in his exegesis. One would think that as a narrative theologian writing a book on the identity of Jesus in the Gospels, Frei would put to use the vast armamentarium available from narrative criticism. Yet, although some basic concepts of narrative are present, the exegesis mainly consists of observations and comments that could be made of any genre of Scripture. One rarely hears of plot, setting, implicit or explicit commentary, point of view, or other terminology that is constitutive of the practice of narrative criticism. What matters most is the "interaction of character and happening."[7] Or as Frei put it in another place: "Jesus was what he did and underwent, and not simply his understanding or self-understanding."[8] And these actions can be best depicted in direct fashion by the medium of narrative.

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[4] On postliberal theology and its reading of New Testament narrative (especially the book of Acts), see Osvaldo Padilla, *The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History and Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 199–223.

[5] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2, part 1 (Doctrine of God), trans. T. H. L. Parker et al. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 261.

[6] Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975). His other major book is *The Eclipse of Bible Narrative* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).

[7] Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), 62.

[8] Hans Frei, *Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays*, ed. George Hunsinger and William Placher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 184.

To conclude this introduction, we can say that our attempt has been to tighten up our understanding of terminology. I have argued that when the phrase narrative criticism, or simply, narrative, is encountered in the literature, the reference can be to a more pragmatic, utilitarian use of a number of unique reading techniques that aid in the following two goals: understanding *how* a narrative has been constructed and understanding *what* the message(s) is that is being conveyed. One is likely to find this outworking of narrative criticism in biblical studies. A second meaning of the phrase narrative criticism is more theological. In Christian theology, many scholars understand the Bible as one long plot, a storied way of God's revelation of himself. A narrative approach is thus not so much a kit out of which tools are brought to open the how and the what of biblical texts; narrative is more a way of grasping doctrine in dramatic fashion. This manner of doing theology is viewed as more fitting for the disclosure of personal identity: "A … great advantage of narrative is that it is well suited for articulating a person's identity. Human or divine, a person's identity comes into focus more sharply not by listing various attributes or character traits but rather by recounting typical things that the person has done."[9]

In the sections that follow, my concentration will be on the *first* of the two approaches mentioned above, which I will continue to call narrative criticism. Yet, in the conclusion, I will return to speak about how both understandings of narrative criticism are ultimately ways of preserving academic study of Scripture after the fall of higher-critical method's tyranny over the study of the Bible and theology.

Origins and Goals of Narrative Criticism

We mentioned briefly above that narrative criticism was not a discipline formulated in biblical studies but in the study of literature. It will now be helpful to go a little deeper in this respect if we are to gain a better grasp of the method.[10]

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[9] Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*: *A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 93–94.

[10] The following are good starting places for the study of narrative criticism: Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989); Mark A. Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990); Daniel Marguerat and Yvan Bourquin, *Pour lire les récits bibliques: Initiation à l'analyse narrative* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 2004). This last work has been translated into English as *How to Read Bible Stories*. Whenever it is quoted in this essay, it is from the French and the translations are my own.

Narrative criticism is the incarnation in biblical studies of New Criticism and reader-response theory. The former is a view of art that arose after World War I. Some of the names linked to this theory, specifically in the domain of literature, are Cleanth Brooks, Robert Penn Warren, and W. K. Wimsatt. In large part, New Criticism was an attempt to move beyond the "intentional fallacy" that was bequeathed to art theory by romanticism. This "fallacy" refers to the view that judges the quality of a piece of art on the basis of the relationship between the piece and the creator of the piece. To be more specific, the intentional fallacy speaks of a successful work only if it matches the intention which the author had when planning or producing the work. This view was questioned by the New Critics, with one essay in particular making a lasting impact.[11]

The New Critics argued that the success and/or meaning of a poem (shorthand for any literary work) should be determined by *the work itself*, not the intention of the author, which may never be recoverable. This does not mean that authors should not be asked about their works, especially when they are still living; but the best way to engage a literary work, argued the New Critics, is by concentrating on what the authors actually wrote, on the artefact that they have left in the possession of the public. For the question: how am I to know what the author was attempting to accomplish? The New Critical answer is the following: "The poem itself shows what he was trying to do."[12] The value of concentrating on the final form becomes clearer when dealing with ancient writings, where the author(s) is no longer present as a living human being. What we ultimately have access to is the *persona* of the author as projected through the work: "We ought to impute the thoughts and attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic *speaker* …."[13] This "dramatic speaker" will later come to be called the *implied author* (on which see below), and the implied author can only be encountered in the work itself. This is in broad contrast to a romanticist approach to art. Beardsley and Wimsatt ask us to remember the three art-critical questions of Goethe: "What did the author set out to do? Was his plan reasonable and sensible, and how far did he succeed in carrying it out?"[14] By contrast, what matters to the New Critic is entirely present in the work of art. Daniel Marguerat's words are helpful in explaining the New Critical view and how it relates to biblical studies: "The text is not read as a document that sends us back to a historical world outside itself; it is not received as a document but as a *monument* that has value in itself…."[15]

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[11] The essay was written by Monroe Beardsley and W. K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy," in Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1954), 3–20.

[12] Beardsley and Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy," 4.

[13] Beardsley and Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy," 5.

[14] Beardsley and Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy," 11.

The second literary theory that goes into the narrative criticism of biblical studies is reader-response criticism. This theory could be viewed as a variation of narrative criticism or as a separate discipline. If the New Critics concentrated on the text itself as the locus of meaning, reader-response approaches tend to move in the direction of the reader as the locus of meaning. In part moved by the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricœur, where meaning is something that occurs in the intersection between the effects of the work and the reader, reader-response criticism concentrates on the person's experience of reading.[16] Robert Fowler, who has done a lot of groundwork in biblical studies from the reader-response perspective, puts it in the following way: "The world I explore in this book is the world that lies in front of the biblical texts—the world I live in and the world in which readers have always lived, the world of the reception of the Gospels—rather than the world of their production."[17]

There is actually a spectrum in reader-response criticism. For some theorists, the meaning of a text is purely the domain of the audience: it is the contemporary reading community that provides justification for the proposed meaning of a literary work. Interpretative justification is more a matter of group consciousness than retrieval of the author's meaning. For other theorists, while the reception of the work in the present may be helpful (even crucial) in understanding the work, there is more caution in the treatment of the author. For example, we could say that the present experience of a reading community being exiled from its land may *nuance* and *deepen* comprehension of some Old Testament writings where exile is a major topic (e.g., the book of Ruth or Esther). It may be, to cite just one example, that Cuban-Americans exiled by the Castro regime may help us better grasp those Psalms where the author at times deeply laments his situation as a foreigner in a land far from Jerusalem. On the other hand, a reader-response approach that employs the contemporary category of exile (or gender or social status, etc.) to judge the value or truthfulness of the Bible can be problematic—both from the perspective of the ethics of authorship and for those who hold Scripture as divine revelation. In the latter scenario, the Bible is being approached, not to learn something of our traditional faith, but to sit in judgment over its values by virtue of the readers' present experience or situation. Christian tradition, by contrast, has viewed the reading and study of Scripture as an act where, by his grace, the living God meets us and thereby gives us life. In the reading of the Bible, an entity outside ourselves meets us in a dialogical manner, hence the tradition in many churches after a biblical passage is read: "This is the word of the Lord." We answer, "thanks be to God!" because we believe that we are hearing from God. The danger in some extreme forms of reader-response criticism is that we read the Bible only to hear echoes of ourselves. Instead of a dialogue between author and reader, what takes place is more of a monologue in disguise.[18]

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[15] Marguerat, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 14 (emphasis added).

[16] See Joel Weinsheimer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991).

[17] Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 2.

To sum-up the origins of narrative criticism, we may say that if one were to search outside biblical studies for a discipline called "narrative criticism," one would find nothing, for a method with that exact name does not exist in literary theory. Nevertheless, from theories that *do* exist in the literary guild, biblical scholars have borrowed certain important principles and have applied them to the study of the Bible, particularly the narrative portions of the Bible. This is what is often meant by the phrase "reading the Bible as literature." I have highlighted one *aspect* (the centrality of the final form) from the New Critical movement; I have also concentrated on a *theory*, namely, reader-response criticism, where what is privileged is the effect of the work on the contemporary audience. Some in this latter camp simply want to use their situation in life (e.g., ethnicity and gender) to help better understand the biblical text and, in the process, themselves and their faith. Others use the biblical text as an entry for self-clarification, while still others read against the grain of the biblical text in order to "expose" its purported hidden ideology.

Whatever the ultimate goals for employing narrative criticism today, it is clear that those who originally borrowed from literary theory to use it in the exegesis of the Bible were doing so in order to provide a more concrete reading experience. In contrast to the putative sources and redactors generated by higher-criticism, and which often detracted from an aesthetically pleasing reading of biblical stories, narrative criticism could

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[18] I find myself sympathizing with Jörg Frey's conclusion, although a bit overstated, on the countless reader-response perspectives filling the pages of the AAR/SBL annual meeting program. For Frey, "the proponents are concerned primarily with *self-clarification* before the text (and often also *against* the texts); the scholarly value for the understanding of the texts (both historically and in terms of substance) is, however, often small" (*The Glory of the Crucified One: Christology and Theology in the Gospel of John*, trans. Wayne Coppins and Christoph Heilig [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press/Mohr Siebeck, 2018], 4 n. 6. [emphasis added]).

concentrate on the concrete text as it stood. Just as important, it was becoming clearer that theological education based on the tenets of higher-criticism was producing clergy that did not know how to handle Scripture, thereby impoverishing the spiritual lives of their parishioners.[19]

The pioneers of Old Testament narrative criticism were Robert Alter and Meir Sternberg.[20] Alter begins by engaging the story of Tamar and Judah (Genesis 38), a story that is notoriously difficult to fit in the Joseph cycle of Genesis 37–50. As a result, scholars who approach Genesis from a higher-critical perspective have judged that Genesis 38 is an interpolation. Alter proceeds to demonstrate that if the story of Tamar and Judah is read with the patience and attention to patterns that is common in the interpretation of "secular" narrative, then a powerful message emerges that can be summarized as follows: "Judah with Tamar after Judah with his brothers is an exemplary narrative instance of the deceiver deceived."[21] In Alter's opinion, the finely wrought narratives of the Hebrew Bible, which attempt to portray life's irreducible complexity, may better yield their genuine meaning when they are approached with the principles of literary analysis instead of the assumptions of higher-criticism.

Sternberg is less indebted to New Criticism than Alter. Indeed, apart from the salutary warnings expressed against the "intentional fallacy," Sternberg rejects many of the theoretical foundations of New Criticism. In particular, Sternberg questions the a-historical bias of New Criticism, which, as a matter of principle, refuses to ask questions about the relationship between the text and the community it may be addressing. For Sternberg, the genre of biblical narrative (call it theological history) forces its readers to grapple with questions of history and historicity.[22] Sternberg also rejects the tenet of some camps in reader-response, namely, that meaning has nothing or little to do with the original author but is a matter purely of reception: "Even worse is the equation of author's and audience's meaning. What text the author made and what sense a reader and public made of it are always distinct in principle."[23]

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[19] From a theological perspective, Karl Barth's *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Brian Cozens and John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1959), remains a most illuminating account. In German, an important account has been provided by Ulrich Wilckens, *Theologie des Neuen Testaments, band III, Historische Kritik der historisch-kritischen Exegese: Von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017).

[20] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985).

[21] Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 10.

[22] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 1–57.

With respect to New Testament literary criticism, it was the work of David Rhoads and Donald Michie who introduced into the New Testament guild the potential interpretative gains from reading the Gospel of Mark through the lens of literary criticism.[24] Rhoads, a New Testament scholar somewhat frustrated with higher-criticism (as expressed in source, form, and redaction criticism in biblical studies), asked his colleague from the English department, Donald Michie, to give his class on Mark a reading that freely employed the values and methods found in the interpretation of the short story. Rhoads found the lecture so illuminating that it led to the collaborative effort that is *Mark as Story*.[25] Methodologically speaking, the type of literary techniques employed in the book stem primarily from New Criticism. Perhaps the most important act in this respect was the willingness to move forward in reading Mark as a *narrative whole*. Rather than trying to guess what parts of the Gospel were the original strata and what parts were redactional additions by the evangelist (a very difficult endeavor, especially when applied to the Gospel of Mark), Rhoads and Michie simply explored the text at hand, making no assumptions about possible sources. In addition, their ultimate goal was not to discover the historical genesis of Mark; it was instead to observe *how* Mark constructed his Gospel and the effect it could have on the implied readers (on this category, see below).

The Tools of Narrative Criticism

In what follows, I mention and explain some of the most important factors in the communication model proposed by narrative criticism.[26] It will be helpful to think of three categories: the author, the reader, and the narrative.

The Author

The real author: This refers to the actual flesh-and-blood person who composed the work: Margaret Atwood as author of *The Handmaid's Tale*, for example. We must recall that from the heritage of New Criticism, narrative criticism is not tied to the real author as a source of meaning. That is to say, the reader does not need to know what was happening in the life of the author to understand the meaning of the work (was she sick when she wrote? Was she in a happy epoch of her life? Did she have children? etc.). The meaning, most narrative critics insist, is in the work itself.

The implied author: This refers to the author as we come to know him or her through the story. This is the *persona* of the author in the narrative, who is a reconstruction of the real author for the purpose of telling the story. The implied author may be presented as identical to the real author; at times, however, the implied author may be radically different from the real author. For example, although the real author may be a man in his forties, he may take on the *persona* of a teenage girl in narrating the story. The possibilities are numerous in the gap that can be created between the real author and the implied author, especially in the modern novel.

Do the real authors of biblical narrative make changes to their narrativized *personae*? The answer, to the extent that we can give an answer, would depend on the genre. In the Gospels, which I consider to be ancient biographies,[27] it is crucial that the real author be a direct or indirect witness of the Jesus-event. Therefore, I doubt that the evangelists wanted to create a gap between themselves and the implied author. Because the incarnation is the entrance of the Son of God into the immanent world in order to save humanity through his obedient life, crucifixion, and resurrection, *narration* of this entrance must accord with the action itself. And the accuracy of this narration in historical genres (such as ancient biographies) depends on the classical Greek concept of *autopsia*, where the author had to be himself an eyewitness of the events he narrates or have interviewed those who were eyewitnesses.[28] This is why the author of Luke-Acts opens his first volume, the Gospel of Luke, with the language of *autopsia* in 1:1–4. The picture of himself that he presents as implied author is of one who met the requirements of *autopsia*.

From what has been said above, the reader will realize that the relationship between real author and implied author may not only move in one direction, namely, from the real to the implied. It can be the case in historical works (and many times it is) that the implied author nudges the audience into the belief that the real author is one thing when he or she really is not. In other words, historians have been known to lie! The obvious question in the case of the Gospels and Acts, then, is the following: Are the implied authors identical with the real authors, namely, witnesses of the life and passion of Jesus? Or is the *persona* of the implied author in the Gospels, who generates trust in the audience by narrating as an eyewitness or simply telling the audience directly that he *was* an eyewitness (John 21:24), fundamentally different from the real author? And how would we know?

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[23] Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 10.

[24] David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982). The book is now on its third edition.

[25] Rhoads and Michie, *Marks as Story*, xv.

[26] See also Marguerat, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 18–108.

[27] See most recently Craig Keener, *Christobiography: Memory, History, and the Reliability of the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).

[28] See John Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 67–127. On this importance of *autopsia* in the Acts of the Apostles, see Padilla, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 77–121.

The early church understood this potential problem and addressed it. Irenaeus, in particular, by a combination of received tradition and exegesis, argued that the authors of the four Gospels and Acts were either apostles or companions of the apostles.[29] Thus, the early church (Irenaeus being one example) believed that the Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, all direct or indirect witnesses of the Christ-event. This ensured the Gospels as products of eyewitness testimony. To be sure, although our modern Bibles include the name of the evangelist at the heading of each Gospel, these Gospels are formally anonymous in that the evangelists' names are not part of the work itself. That is, in comparison to, say, Paul, who included his name in the actual body of his letters, the four evangelists did not include their names, although it is likely that the first copies of the Gospels circulated with flyleaves with the evangelists' names on them.[30]

It is precisely here that narrative criticism has proved helpful to many. Narrative critics may say the following: you do not need to know who really wrote Ruth or 1–2 Samuel or (as in our case) the Gospels and Acts in order to study them. You have the texts and the implied author who leads you in how to read those texts: read and learn! The point, then, is that we can engage the claims, constructions, and effects of the text in the present even if we lack information about the origins of the text. And in any case, the argument goes—in good New Critical spirit—we do not depend on the identity or situation of the author to interpret, for that would be to fall into the intentional fallacy.

On the one hand, then, the concept of the implied author is very helpful when dealing with narratives, especially anonymous ones. The author is "intrinsically present" in his work by means of the implied author.[31] The key is the following: with the implied author, one does not need to know the real author to make sense of the text. This may be the best gift that narratology has bestowed on contemporary biblical studies. On the other hand, I would argue that there is pressure placed on the readers of the Gospels and Acts, placed there by the authors themselves, to go backwards, as it were, and think of the real author as not in essence different

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[29] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.1.

[30] See Martin Hengel, *The Four Gospels and the One Gospel of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Collection and Origin of the Canonical Gospels*, trans. J. Bowden (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International Press, 2000).

[31] Marguerat, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 19.

from the implied author. That is to say, the kerygmatic nature of the Gospels and Acts is such that the readers are not encouraged to search for the gap between real author and implied author. The implied author is an *extension* of the real author, who himself is an eyewitness of the events of reconciliation described in the narrative. In this sense, it is often the case that the *nature* of the biblical narratives tacitly prohibits an endless game between the real and implied author.

The Narrator: Marguerat has helpfully explained that if the implied author is the "subject of the narrative strategy," then the narrator "is the *voice* that guides the reader in the narrative."[32] The difference between these two entities of narrative criticism may be grasped with the more concrete example of the Gospel of Matthew. Again, Marguerat explains, "If one is interested in the author of the first Gospel, one speaks of the narrator Matthew to describe the narrative production that he puts in place. One speaks of Matthew the implied author to make an image of the author in synthetizing the competences ... that he invests in his text."[33] With this example, it becomes clear that in biblical narrative the narrator does not occupy the important place that one finds in the modern novel. As such, the narrator is functionally equivalent to the implied author. In our demonstration of narrative criticism under "A Narrative-Critical Analysis of the Sinful Woman Episode: Luke 7:36–50" below, we will often use the name "Luke" to refer to the implied author and narrator.

The Reader

The category of reader works symmetrically with the category of author.

The real reader: This refers to the known flesh-and-blood individuals who will receive the work (e.g., a particular book club in a city in the United States).

The implied reader: This entity stands in symmetry to the implied author. As such, the implied reader is the reader as imagined by the implied author. The implied author, now in the *persona* chosen to narrate the story, is addressing a group that should possess the competence to understand the story as shaped by the implied author. The goal is that this imagined and shaped reader would understand the story. Fowler is helpful here: "The implied reader is the reader we must be willing to become, at least temporarily, in order to experience the narrative in the fullest measure."[34]

The Narratee: This entity stands in symmetry to the narrator. Just as we noted that the narrator is not as such an accentuated entity in biblical narrative, so it is with the narratee.

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[32] Marguerat, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 20 (emphasis original).

[33] Marguerat, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 20–21.

[34] Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand*, 33.

The Narrative

What is a narrative? Following the work of J. M. Adam, Marguerat states that in order to speak of a narrative, the following must be present: (1) temporal succession of events; (2) the presence of an agent/hero that moves the story towards an end; (3) a plot that links together the actions into a unity; and (4) a chain of cause and effect.[35]

Concretely speaking, one way to examine the story from the narrative criticism perspective is to break down each episode into three parts: setting, characters, and plot.[36] In what follows, our illustrations of these parts will stem from the Gospels and Acts.

First, then, there is the setting, which can be of three types: spatial, temporal, or social.[37] The biblical tradition is as a whole more economic in its description of setting than modern narrative literature. This economy, however, should not be confused with lack of importance. In the Gospels and Acts, the setting of the action can be very telling in the message being communicated, with some settings at times acquiring symbolic significance. For example, in all the Gospels but perhaps mostly in Matthew, *mountains* often have revelatory significance. This is established from the early parts of the Gospel of Matthew, where Jesus's primary revelatory sermon will be the Sermon on the Mount of chapters 5–7. Matthew makes the mountain motif clear by introducing the speech with "he went up to the mountain" in 5:1.[38] The transfiguration, another crucial revelatory event, also happens on a "high mountain" (17:1). It is likely that Matthew picks up the theme of mountains as places of revelation from the Old Testament Sinai tradition, where Yahweh reveals himself to Moses on the mountain.

It should be noted that before the advent of narrative criticism, biblical scholars already observed the importance of setting for communicating theological ideas. For example, redaction criticism, which operates from the presuppositions of higher-criticism, noted the symbolic meaning of

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[35] Marguerat, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 24.

[36] I have used this format previously on the Acts of the Apostles. See Osvaldo Padilla, *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts: Poetics, Theology and Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[37] For further examination of setting, see Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?*, 70.

[38] Translations from the Greek text are my own. Note that the NIV translates v. 1 with "he went up on a *mountainside*." This is a curious translation, probably an apologetic attempt to harmonize with Luke 6:17.

mountains in the Bible. Narrative criticism differs in at least two ways. First, less importance is attached to figuring out the specific locale on a map of the setting mentioned in the text. Second, the question of the biblical author's geographic *accuracy* is not often raised—not because it is unimportant but because the concentration is more on the contribution of the setting to the narrative as such.

The second part that should be studied is the characters. One way to explore the importance of characterization in narrative criticism is by comparing it to characterization in higher-criticism. It would be fair to say that the primary difference is just the amount of attention that is given to characters as such in narrative criticism. In higher-criticism, characters were not ignored; but to the extent that narrative criticism builds on modern conceptions of narrativity—where there is great density of character interpretation—so it is to be expected that the category of characters receives more attention in narrative criticism than it did in higher-criticism.

Theories of characterization in narrative move fast, and so it is difficult to give a definitive *status quaestiones* on the subject. However, we can say that, in comparison to the initial attempts, contemporary theories of narrativity have grown in complexity in this matter. We find Christopher Skinner's analysis helpful in its application to the Gospels.[39] Instead of the somewhat simple concepts of "round" and "flat" characters, Skinner suggests a continuum, with characters straddling at least three categories. First, we can think of characters as *agents*, where their primary function is just to move the plot forward. Second, we can think of characters as *types*, whose development usually includes one main static trait. Third, Skinner speaks of "full-blown characters," who receive direct and indirect characterization.[40] With these observations, we can thus say that the difference in characterization between narrative and higher-criticism is not just quantity but also the quality of depth.

Lastly, we come to the third area, namely, the plot. Simply put, the plot is what takes place in the narrative. Although this definition of plot is simple, approaches to discover how it is constructed and what message is being communicated by it are, by contrast, complex. Of the many possible ways of exploring plot, we suggest the quinary model, which is a nuancing of Aristotle by P. Larivaille.[41] Marguerat has helpfully applied this model to biblical narrative.[42] As its name indicates, this plot has five parts: (1) the Initial Situation, which provides the readers with the information needed to make sense of the narrative; (2) the *Nouement*, where we find the beginning of dramatic tension; (3) the Transformative Action as the "pivot point" of an episode, as such determining the destiny of the narrative; (4) the *Dénouement*, which stands in symmetry to the *Nouement*: it represents the resolution of the initial cause of tension; (5) the Final Situation, which is in symmetry to the Initial Situation. By the time we reach the Final Situation, the tension is clearly at an end. After this, a new episode may begin at either the micro- or macro-level. In the case of the latter, this may constitute the end of the work.

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[39] Christopher Skinner, "Introduction: Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John: Reflections on the *Status Quaestionis*," in *Characters and Characterization in the Gospel of John*, ed. Christopher Skinner, LNTS 461 (London: T&T Clark, 2013), xvii–xxxii.

[40] Skinner, "Introduction," xxv.

[41] P. Larivaille, "L'Analyse (morpho) logique du récit," *Poétique* 19 (1974): 368–88. See Aristotle, *Poetics* 1455b, 24–29.

Below, we provide an example from the Gospel of Luke that employs the tools of narrative criticism.

A Narrative-Critical Analysis of the Sinful Woman Episode: Luke 7:36–50

Context

We have noted the importance that narrative criticism puts on reading both long and short episodes as linked units. Unless there are strong reasons to the contrary, readers should pay close attention to narrative connections between one episode and the other, for often a theme or set of themes is announced in this fashion.

In the interpretation of the sinful woman of Luke 7, we can see at work the differences between a narrative approach and a higher-critical one when it comes to the importance of theme by means of linked units. Taking the monumental commentary of Joseph Fitzmyer as an example of the higher-critical approach, we note the following.[43] First, Fitzmyer sees no significant thematic connection between the current and previous episodes that are part of the larger unit (4:14–9:51, according to Fitzmyer). He states, "In itself, [this episode] is unrelated to the three preceding passages, and it is not easy to discern the reason why it has been added at just this point."[44] We find this to be a remarkable statement in light of the many connections that will be pointed out below![45] Second, Fitzmyer is keen in discovering Luke's sources for the episode. He ultimately views the story as being derived from the discreet Lukan source called L. Furthermore, the story is "almost certainly" conflated because there are very similar stories in Matthew, Mark, and John. Third, this leads to the conclusion that an early story of a woman anointing Jesus floated around during the oral period of the gospel tradition. Each evangelist then took this basic story, and each expanded it for his own purposes.

One would think that this view of the material would potentially lead to a certain skepticism of the Lukan "additions." And yet, Fitzmyer does not make any judgments of historicity concerning even the details of the narrative. He continues to speak of Jesus doing, Jesus teaching, and so on. So one wonders, what was the purpose of the detailed historical investigation?

The late evangelical scholar I. Howard Marshall also devotes several pages to the tradition-history of the story.[46] For him, it is probable that verses 48–50 were a Lucan addition to an original core. Like Fitzmyer, however, Marshal does not note any interpretational significance. One wonders, again, how these observations of sources help with the meaning of the text.

The narrative-critical approach to this story, by contrast, does not speculate on sources. This does not mean that the complete text fell from heaven as one unit! In my view, it is likely that there *is* a complex tradition behind the final form of the story; furthermore, there may be occasions to investigate those. However, we cannot be certain about the specifics and how they help better to understand the text in question.

Reading the text as a unit with the previous episodes yields the following observations. First, a number of identical terms and concepts appear from 7:1 forward: love (7:5, 42, 47), faith (7:9, 50), prophet (7:16, 26, 39), and sinner/sins (7:34, 37, 39, 47, 48). Second, the concept of *humility* is present both in the story of the centurion's servant and the story of the sinful woman. The centurion, despite his social status, recognizes that he is "not worthy" (7:6) of receiving Jesus under his roof. Interestingly, those who come to deliver the message state the very opposite: "He is worthy," they say, to receive the healing of his servant, because the centurion "loves our people and himself built the synagogue for us" (7:4–5). The sinful woman is just like the gentile centurion in her humility. This humility is shown by her washing Jesus's feet with her tears and perfume and by drying them with her hair. We therefore have an example of *synkrisis* or comparison/contrast. To be noted is that both gentiles and women tended to be marginalized even in the early church. Yet, these are precisely the two characters Luke employs to exemplify humility and faith.[47] Third, we should note that the first time Pharisees are mentioned in chapter 7 is in a critical fashion (7:30). This prepares the way for the Pharisee's attitude in 7:36–50. Lastly, we note that the phrase "friend of tax collectors and sinners" is predicated of Jesus immediately before the story of the sinful woman (7:34), thereby preparing the way for the meaning of the narrative that follows.

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[42] Marguerat, *Pour lire les récits bibliques*, 56–64.

[43] Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I–IX)*, AB 28A (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970).

[44] Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 684.

[45] On the other hand, Michael Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, HNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 290–91, notes many stimulating thematic connections between the passages. Note that Wolter operates from a combination of historical and narrative interests.

[46] I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 304–7.

Observing these connections, which are often absent from higher-critical studies of the passage because of its skepticism towards a unified text, already point us in the direction of the main themes of 7:36–50.

Setting

Luke is not interested in telling us the specific city or village where the event took place. The emphasis is rather on the fact that it happens in the home of a *Pharisee* (mentioned four times!). Given the clashes between Jesus and the Pharisees precisely over the status of sinners (see especially 15:1–32), the setting raises the expectation of *tension*.

Another spatial/social setting, which is easy to miss, is the *dining* scene. Luke tells us in verse 36 that Jesus "reclined." This is probably a reference to the *triclinium*, the dining room of the house, where the host and guests would eat, drink, and have discussions. Luke is likely evoking the long tradition of the *symposium*, where philosophical discussions took place. The symposium actually became a literary type, especially with Plato, and dialogues on topics such as ideal love, among others, where common themes (see *OCD*^{3}). That Luke is evoking the symposium type may be shown by the mention of reclining and by the dialogical nature of the exchange between Jesus and Simon the Pharisee: "Simon, I have something to say to you" (v. 40); "Yes, teacher," Simon responds. Then, "Simon responded: 'I suppose [ὑπολαμβάνω] ...'" (v. 43). Lastly, "And he said, 'You have judged correctly'" (v. 43). Luke is thus portraying Jesus as the wise teacher and Simon as the pupil. However, because the narrator has an omniscient vantage point, he informs the readers that Simon actually does not hold Jesus in very high regard. In verse 39 Simon grumbles in his heart: "If this one were a prophet he would know who and what type of woman is this who is touching him, that she is a sinner." The setting, then, helps in characterization, to which we now turn.

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[47] While possible, John Nolland's judgment that the controlling theme of 7:1–50 is the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus overlooks the symmetry between 7:1–10 and 7:36–50. See John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, WBC 35A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 351.

Characters

There are three characters on which Luke focalizes in this narrative: Jesus, Simon, and the sinful woman. Luke portrays Jesus as (1) a wisdom teacher in the symposium tradition; (2) one who welcomes sinners, even scandalous ones; (3) one who knows what is in the hearts of others; and (4) one who forgives sins. The last three traits, when viewed in the light of the Old Testament, indicate that the knowledge and actions of Jesus are those of the God of Israel. Did the original readers of the Gospel of Luke, then, view Jesus as God in the flesh? This is a question that dominates higher-critical methodologies. But we do not have access to the original readers in order to answer this question. We do, however, have the text, where it is clear that Jesus takes upon himself the prerogatives of God. Therefore, as implied readers, it is for us to wrestle with this central theological question.

Simon's character is portrayed negatively from the very beginning—the fact that he is a Pharisee is already a problem in light of 7:30. There, Luke tells us that "the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the will of God." Will Simon be one of these kinds of Pharisees? Or will he be the exception? Sadly, as the narrative continues, Simon's portrait looks very similar to that of the other Pharisees. In particular, we hear of his erroneous assessment of Jesus: Simon does not believe that Jesus is even a prophet! The readers, who have read of Jesus's healing from a distance (7:1–10) and his raising of the widow's son from the dead (7:11–17), have been given privy information about Jesus that shows how far from the truth Simon really is. Next, Luke continues Simon's negative portrayal by showing that he is not aligned with the values of Jesus, particularly with the latter's welcome of sinners. Lastly, in light of Jesus's statements of contrast in verses 44–46, the narrator is making it clear that the real host of that evening was not Simon but the sinful woman! Thus, even Simon's initial apparent virtue of hospitality is revised in light of his lack of actions—lack of love—towards Jesus. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of hospitality in the ancient Mediterranean world. To lack that virtue is equivalent to being evil.[48] Simon's character therefore receives a double indictment: he is a poor host in general and a poor host of none other than Jesus the Son of God.

The third character is the sinful woman. Scholars have debated her potential status as a prostitute. Even though Luke does not use this term for her, I suggest that her actions at the symposium ironically represent her as a *former* prostitute. How so?

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[48] The classic *topos* of an evil being, demonstrated by his lack of hospitality, is Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*. In the OT, Abraham's hospitality towards the angels demonstrates in future rabbinic Judaism that he is the virtuous man *par excellence*.

The setting is the key. The setting is the key, for it is well known that symposia, in addition to being a *topos* for philosophical learning, often developed into places of eroticism.[49] Prostitutes would often enter the *triclinium* to play music, dance, and eventually engage in sexual acts with the men, who were likely drunk by that time. Thus, while in one sense it was scandalous for the sinful woman to sneak into a setting that was male dominated, in another sense, if she was known as a prostitute, then the *triclinium* may be exactly where she should be! But there is a catch, which deepens the irony. While the woman's being at the symposium and some of her actions (e.g., loosening her hair and kissing Jesus's feet)[50] may indicate that she is not a foreigner to the actions of a prostitute, Jesus's statements beginning in verse 44 reveal that her actions should not be construed as those of a prostitute but of a contrite, repentant, and grateful woman who is demonstrating, in over-the-top hosting, her love for the Jesus who has forgiven her.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that Simon the Pharisee's home was known as a place where symposia turned into sexual debacles! My point is simply that given the reputation of symposia in the Mediterranean world and the actions of the sinful woman, her character may be construed as that of a (former) prostitute. There are sufficient covert signs in the narrative for the implied readers potentially to reach this conclusion.

Plot

The *Nouement*, or beginning of tension in the narrative, starts immediately, as we noted above, with the fact that the host is a Pharisee. However, the tension begins to dominate the narrative with Luke's insertion of "behold" in verse 37. There follows a detailed description of the woman's identity and actions: she is a sinner, she knows that Jesus would be visiting the home of the Pharisee, she bought an alabaster jar of ointment, she entered the house, she stood crying at Jesus's feet, she dried his feet with her hair, she kissed his feet and anointed them with the perfume. The last three actions are presented by the use of the imperfect tense in Greek, thereby nudging the reader to view these actions from the inside, as it were.

Were the people in the symposium mumbling or shouting at this "indiscretion" of a sinful woman? By totally focusing on the actions of the woman, Luke has imposed a silence which raises the tension to its breaking point. At last in verse 39, we hear of Simon's thoughts, which lead to the Transformative Action of the plot: what will Jesus the "prophet" do

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[49] For helpful examples and explanation, see s.v. "symposium," in *OCD*^{3}.

[50] See Wolter, *Das Lukasevangelium*, 293, for primary sources.

with this woman? As is often the case in Luke-Acts, the Transformative Action is a matter of *speech*, or we might say *speech-act*: something is said by one of the characters that moves the direction of the story with finality towards one horizon or another.[51] In this episode, Jesus, who has been presented as the philosophical teacher and leader, will (as a good teacher!) introduce a parable that constitutes in large part the Transformative Action. The simple parable of two debtors, one who owes little and the other much, is put to Simon: who will love more, the one forgiven little or the one forgiven much? Intellectually, Simon knows the answer; but because he is far from the values of Jesus (and the Old Testament!), he does not know how, or simply refuses, to apply the parable to the situation at hand. Jesus explains that the scandalous (yet hospitable!) actions of the strange woman stem from the fact that she loves much because she has been forgiven much. Simon, on the other hand, because he is a self-righteous Pharisee (cf. 15:1–2), does not realize that his little love for Jesus comes from the self-deception that he does not need much forgiveness.

There is a sense in which this narrative never reaches a *Dénouement* or the Final Situation. The internal question of the guests reinvigorates the tension all over again: "Who is this man who even forgives sins?" (7:49). The pronouncement of Jesus is the punchline of the story, thereby showing that this narrative is ultimately about the theological category of Christology: "And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace!'" (v. 50). The narrative is also about the categories of anthropology and soteriology. Anthropologically, those humans are received by Jesus who recognize, like the centurion of a previous episode, "I am unworthy." This unworthiness is simultaneously an act(s) of contrition and repentance, shown by the woman's audacious deeds. Soteriologically, the key words are faith and love. But note that Luke, in contrast to many of us, is not interested in showing *how* the woman came to believe in Jesus: did she hear him preaching? Did others tell her about him? Did the previous preaching of John the Baptist lead to her repentance and forgiveness?[52] These are important questions, to be sure. But Luke's *compression* of the material shows us that, for this narrative at least, what matters is a contrite faith that is demonstrated by extravagant love. Luke often employs compression or telescoping (e.g., Luke 24:1–53; Acts 2:1–36). This form of narrative ellipsis pushes the reader to concentrate on that which is actually said in the text, not to speculate or attempt to reconstruct.[53] At the end, then, this text is about how Jesus's love, demonstrated in forgiveness, is received by faith. This should lead the forgiven to genuine hospitality in the name of Jesus

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[51] See Padilla, *The Speeches of Outsiders*, for speech as the Transformative Action in Acts.

[52] This is Nolland's speculation, which at the end blunts the Christology of the text (*Luke 1–9:20*, 351, 353).

[53] On compression and ellipsis in Acts, see Padilla, *Acts of the Apostles*, 88–106.

Conclusion

Much more could be said about this beautiful episode. But I hope enough has been done to show the wealth of insight that narrative criticism can provide. I also hope that the reader notices that narrative criticism should be combined with knowledge of the socio-historical context of the text (e.g., the importance of the symposium tradition to understand this narrative). Lastly, I encourage a narrative criticism that can clarify the theological categories of the text—and these demand a response from us in a way that is perhaps more direct than classical higher-criticism.

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Postsecular Scriptures: The Bible on Film in the 21st Century

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Abstract: *"Postsecular Scriptures" attempts to show what postsecular biblical film adaptation looks like by suggesting that three films* (Last Days in the Desert, Tree of Life, *and* Calvary) *that have been recognized as of religious interest are also postsecular adaptations of the Bible. Looking briefly at what we mean (and don't mean) by "postsecular" and "adaptation" will help us to see how these are adaptations in a postsecular guise. More specifically we will argue that these films in their postsecular guise produce exemplary representations of doubt and near exhaustion of faith (*pistis*—trust) only to conclude with a recuperation of trust/faith that is shown in the films' concluding trajectories. As such these are not just postsecular adaptations, but at their root, they are, we will argue, best understood as postsecular* kerygma*; they are postsecular proclamations of the kenotic logic of the gospel proclamation of Jesus the Crucified coupled with an insistence upon the hope of the resurrection. Each film also suggests that the way of grace, which we increasingly see is the way of trust, creates conditions in which no matter what the end (even in suffering, crucifixion, and death), the person comes to a good end. If these films are not just biblical adaptations but postsecular ones, then we will suggest we may need to refine and revise our conception of the postsecular.*

Key Words: Calvary*, film adaptation, John Michael McDonagh*, Last Days in the Desert*, postsecular, religion and film, Rodrigo Garcia*, *Terrence Malick,* Tree of Life

Introduction: The Bible and Literature

A film opens with a black screen; next, a slide reminiscent of a silent film with the text of Job 38:4, 7 in white, simple letters, and quickly there follows a flickering flame. The flame lingers then slowly disappears. This opening sequence alerts the viewer, from the epigraph on, that the film *Tree of Life* is intertextually linked to the Bible. Indeed, from the text of

Job to the appearance of the flame to the film's conclusion with the same flame—an image of heat and light, presence, culture, and care—*Tree of Life* is drenched in biblical images, themes, discussions, and challenges. But while it begins with the Bible, should we think of such a film as an adaptation? If so, what kind of adaptation?

In this special issue of *STR* we are looking at questions surrounding the Bible and literature. Biblical characters, stories, and themes have been important in movies since the early passion plays shown as lantern stills in the late nineteenth century.[1] Just as in other visual arts, music, literature, and the stage, representations of Jesus have been central to the cinema.[2] But what does it mean to consider a film representation a "biblical adaptation"? Should we understand such films as adaptations if the Bible is a source of narrative, or a source of theology, or perhaps a source of social practices? Further complicating matters is how questions of historical moment and context affect our conception of adaptation. So how is the Bible being refigured in the current conversations about a postsecular age? If we are now indeed in such a postsecular age, with a commitment to a rejection of both dogmatic secularism and dogmatic religiosity of the earlier ages, then what happens when that age begins to adapt Scripture?

To answer these questions we will take as our inquiry launch point twenty-first-century film understood as a literary form and its engagement with the biblical text in the example of three different films. We will suggest that each adapts the biblical Passion story as a source for their narratives and philosophical intents but do so in ways that make the nature of their adaptation less than obvious. Against those who read these and other postsecular works as simply partial or weak assertions of faith, we will argue that these postsecular biblical adaptations present the gospel story of doubt and mistrust leading to confidence, conversion, and trust through the mechanism of suffering, which in turn produces hope and action, even as, critically, these films all also leave open the very real possibility that this hope may be misplaced.

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[1] There is nothing new about filmmaker's adapting texts for the purposes of films. Indeed, even in this increasingly visual age, a huge percentage of films are based upon existing texts, whether as adaptations of novels or as reproductions of existing screenplays. The religiosity of the filmmaker is not really the issue either: to adapt the Bible's material as a source of literary interest, either for its narratives, its characters, or its ideas, is not to endorse them; nor is it to presume orthodoxy. Their significance to culture and their power as mythos alone make them valuable for engagement, critical or otherwise. Jesus, in particular, garners interest as a historical figure in part because of his unique personae and in part because of the innumerable extrabiblical representations of him.

[2] See for example Steven Vredenburgh, "Bible and Cinema: An Introduction," *Journal of Religion and Film* 18.2 (2014): https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol18/iss2/11.

We will begin with Rodrigo Garcia's *Last Days in the Desert*, which is a loose retelling of the Matthew narrative of Jesus's wandering and temptation in the desert. This film is on its surface the most literal adaptation we will engage because it has such a clear relationship to the form and content of the biblical original. *Last Days in the Desert* is also not only an adaptation of key events in the Gospels, but its interpolated addendums are important and seem designed to tease out the relationship between a father and a son and, by extension, between the Father and the Son of the gospel. We argue that though the film's presentation of the Passion is short, its representation of the Resurrection and its discussion of the Christocentric logic of suffering and resignation makes it a demonstrable adaptation of the *kerygma* of Christ in a postsecular guise. And, while we will see that *Last Days* relates most clearly on an indexical level (a term we will define in our discussion of adaptation) to its biblical source material, it seems to also be the most ambiguous and tentative in its theological and doctrinal conclusions.

In the case of Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life*, at least a superficial connection to a biblical textual foundation is obvious, since the first image of the film is an important quotation from the book of Job. This essay, however, will suggest that this Job reference is the foil for the gospel story that will be the central adaptive interest of the film—the story of nature and grace in the film's own terms. Unlike *Last Days*, Malick's film, although more amorphous in its relationship to its biblical sources, seems more resolute in its theological/doctrinal implications while still leaving enough openness and uncertainty to be considered postsecular in the terms presented in this essay.

Finally, we will take up John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary*, showing that though the film does not set out to be a direct adaptation of any of the Gospel or New Testament books, Father James's story is clearly a kind of doubter's *kerygma*, a proclamation in the most postsecularist of terms: revealing a Christ-following fool and then begging the audience to decide, like the New Testament writers, "What kind of man was this?" Through these readings, this essay suggests a certain kind of postsecular cinematic adaptation of the Christ story in which the degree of indexicality of the adaptation to the biblical text's narrative, setting, form, and style is independent of the degree to which each film might be considered an adaptation of the core theological contents of the Passion. Before turning to our analysis of the films, we should look briefly at how we are using "postsecular" and how we are conceiving "adaptation" such that we can call these films postsecular adaptations since the former is a newer critical

term and the latter a vexed category in the discourse.

Postsecularism and Film

In twenty-first-century film studies, postsecularism has increasingly come to be of interest as a critical framework, first in books like *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema: The Postsecular Constellation*, edited by Costica Bradatan and Camil Ungureanu, and also in *Immanent Frames: Postsecular Cinema between Malick and von Trier*, edited by John Caruana and Mark Cauchi.[3] Caruana and Cauchi suggest in their introduction that 2011 is a significant year in the history of postsecular cinema, with *Tree of Life* and Lars von Trier's *Melancholia* both released that year and at two ends of what they see as a spectrum for contemporary religious cinema. They write, "*Tree of Life* and *Melancholia* are nevertheless united in the way they challenge the Enlightenment narrative that has dominated Western thought for the last four centuries. In particular, they powerfully exemplify what in recent philosophy and critical theory has come to be called the 'postsecular condition.'"[4] They go on to describe this "condition" as the "loss of confidence in the supposed certainty of reason and the neutrality of secularism," which is shown in the "thoughtful meditation on faith in 'Tree of Life'" but is also demonstrated in the "non-triumphal atheism of 'Melancholia.'" Taken together such cinema "dissolves the strict boundaries … between belief and unbelief" and lives in tension with many of the "dominant strands of film theory today" which divide the representational possibilities too neatly into "secular and religious," the very categories these films seek to interrogate according to Caruana and Cauchi.[5]

This discussion of dissolving boundaries between religious and secular began even earlier in literary studies, where recent debates have emerged centering around the religious status of postmodern works of art such as the fiction of Thomas Pynchon, Don DeLillo, Toni Morrison, and Cormac McCarthy. Thus, John A. McClure, Amy Hungerford, and many others have separately argued against seeing these and other authors' works as secular fictions, this conversation of scholars suggesting instead that these and other works and authors are representative of a "postsecular" flourishing in late-modern culture.[6] For McClure, in his book *Partial Faiths*, the "postsecular" is defined as a "mode of being and seeing that is at once critical of secular constructions of reality and of dogmatic religiosity."[7] In other words, McClure argues these works represent a kind of third way between religious dogmatism on the one hand and a Comteian, materialist secularism on the other.[8] As one critic explains, "McClure's work identifies a strand of contemporary fiction that attempts to portray a transcendent worldview without adhering to any specific sensibility." In other words, these are "forms of faith" that are "dramatically partial and open-ended."[9] McClure describes this new ideological frame as alternately a "partial" or a "weak faith." The postsecular marks a kind of believing that emerges from a confrontation with the possibility of nonbelief. McClure's formulations are helpfully elucidated by Charles Taylor in his account of the secular in his magisterial *A Secular Age*.[10] There Taylor shows that the secular is a state of believing that is cognizant of nonbelief both outside and within it. This is not a condition of being from belief to unbelief but a form of believing from within the knowledge and awareness of other beliefs and even unbelief.

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[3] Costica Bradatan and Camil Ungureanu, *Religion in Contemporary European Cinema: The Postsecular Constellation* (New York: Routledge, 2014); John Caruana and Mark Cauchi, eds., *Immanent Frames: Postsecular Cinema between Malick and Von Trier*, SUNY Series, Horizons of Cinema (Albany: State University of New York, 2019).

[4] Caruana and Cauchi, "What Is Postsecular Cinema? An Introduction," 1.

[5] Caruana and Cauchi, "What Is Postsecular Cinema? An Introduction," 1–2.

This essay's deployment of the term "postsecular," like McClure's, proceeds from the conditions of optionality of belief (or unbelief) that Taylor suggests are characteristic of contemporary Western society. Unlike McClure's work, however, the films discussed in this essay, which vary widely in terms of their makers' religious commitments and, we can assume, artistic intentions, do not necessarily conclude that a weakened or "partial" faith is the only kind that can exist under these conditions but instead present the possibility of robust faith adapted into the vocabulary—and tempered by the ever-present skepticism—of a secular age.

Adaptation Problems

At the same time that postsecular is a polysemic term, "adaptation" is a rather vexed category in film and literature studies, regardless of the source material. Adaptation often refers to a relationship of indebtedness and origin: one cultural object emerging from the influence of another. Because cultures are the products of multiple and multiplying intersections and effects, it is often challenging to discern primary influence on a work, and as Foucault came to realize, it is easier to discern genealogies of knowledge than archaeologies. This difficulty of determining genealogies is especially true with the adaptation of scriptural myths, stories, and theologies: it is easier to see influence than to discern origins in many films. While the films discussed in this essay vary in the degrees to which they draw explicitly upon the biblical text as their source material, this essay argues that each film may be considered a biblical adaptation and, in particular, an adaptation of Christ's passion. We argue that each film digests the biblical source's core content independent of the film's degree of indexicality to its source material on a formal, stylistic, or even narrative level.

Different understandings of biblical adaptation will lead to very different productions: in the most vernacular sense of the term, a biblical adaptation would be a film that retells a biblical story while retaining most of the story's thematic and/or doctrinal contents. Such biblical adaptations, especially when explicit in their doctrinal intent, rarely breach the divide between religious subcultures and the secular mainstream, although rare exceptions have succeeded in this regard—prominent examples might include Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) or, perhaps to a lesser extent, Darren Aronofsky's *Noah* (2014). These films present themselves plainly as adaptations in that they seek to transmit a story from one medium to another while keeping intact narrative content, character details, and the main aesthetic force of the original, with varying degrees of success. In his chapter, "Adaptation, or the Cinema as Digest," Andre Bazin contends with "the aesthetic justification for the adaptation of novels to the screen."[11] Bazin implies that critiques of adaptation are often misguidedly rooted in the sort of formal determinism associated with the New Critical modernism—the notion that "a novel is a unique synthesis whose molecular equilibrium is automatically affected with you tamper with its form."[12] Form here refers to the medium of the content, in this case the novel versus the film. In contradistinction to the formal determinists with their fears of paraphrase and hence adaptation generally, Bazin suggests that form can be altered while preserving the style of the source material. He writes, "'Form' is at most a sign, a visible manifestation, of style, which is absolutely inseparable from the narrative content, of which it is, in a manner of speaking and according to Sartre's use of the word, the metaphysics. Under these circumstances, faithfulness to a form, literary or otherwise, is illusory: what matters is the *equivalence in meaning of the forms*."[13] That phrase "equivalence in meaning of the forms" suggests that Bazin's position is that different styles can convey the *same* meaning through different forms. As such, to use the language of structuralist linguistics, the signifiers may change, but the signified will remain the same. Bazin's point then is "that it is perhaps not metaphysically impossible to make a cinematic work inspired by a literary one, with sufficient faithfulness to the spirit of the original and with an aesthetic intelligence that permits us to consider the film the equal of the book." But he goes further, insisting that "adaptation is aesthetically justified, independent of its pedagogical and social value, because the adapted work to a certain extent exists apart from what is wrongly called its 'style,' in a confusion of this term with the word form."[14]

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[6] Of course, not everyone is thrilled about the turn to the postsecular. Tracy Fessenden, for one, has concerns about the leveling effect that such religious investigation can have when done by undertrained film and literature critics who simply find undifferentiated experiences of the holy or numinous wherever they look. For further explanation, see Tracy Fessenden, "The Problem with the Postsecular," *American Literary History* 26.1 (Spring 2014): 154–67.

[7] John A. McClure, *Partial Faiths: Postsecular Fiction in the Age of Pynchon and Morrison* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2007), ix.

[8] McClure in coining the term "partial faith" is adopting Gianni Vattimo's similar phrase "weak religion," which is in contrast to "strong religion." The straw man here is a psychological one: weak versus strong theology is not ultimately about the reasons for belief, nor the arguments, but about the psychological confidence with which one asserts and holds one's beliefs. Gianni Vattinmo, John D. Caputo, and Richard Rorty each variously discuss each variously discuss the postmodern theology that is believed, but only "partially" in McClure's terms. They see this as a form of "weak" faith. Of course, it remains to be seen whether in fact this is not a prismatic view of faith that presupposes the certainty of the Enlightenment, which would have been unthinkable not only to a figure like Augustine but equally to a figure like Pascal or Kierkegaard. For all three of these, faith was not strong because it was complete but because it was trusted and acted upon. Each of these thinkers points to the possibility of maintaining a psychology of doubt and partialness as long as faith is defined by a set of actions rather than a psychological phenomenon (see, e.g., Augustine's commendation in *City of God* to live like a Christian and see if you would become one, Pascal's wager, and Kierkegaard's obvious obsession with *pistis* as action). One can act and still doubt, and as such one can believe and doubt at the same time.

[9] McClure, *Partial Faiths*, ix.

[10] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

In short, for Bazin, the style of a work is not its essence (or Form) and so a translation of sorts is possible so that one work's meaning can be conveyed in another style. Bazin concludes his defense of the digest, arguing, following Sartre, "[b]ut one could also understand" the digest or

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[11] Andre Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema of Digest," *Film Adaptation*, ed. James Naremore (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 58.

[12] Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema of Digest," 58. In literary studies, this is a rejection of Cleanth Brooks's most famous chapter in *Well Wrought Urn*, "The Heresy of Paraphrase." In contrast to Brooks, Bazin establishes the possibility of the digest as formal equivalent and rejects formal determinism and non-translation of the type that Brooks' New Critical modernism praises.

[13] Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema of Digest," 58–59.

[14] Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema of Digest," 62.

adaptation as having "been made more accessible through cinematic adaptation, not so much because of the oversimplification that such adaptation entails … but rather because of the mode of expression itself, as if the aesthetic fat, differently emulsified, were better tolerated by the consumer's mind."[15] Bazin makes an argument for the aesthetic and artistic superiority of the digest, understood as both digested and condensed as well as transformed in style and form as the French terms *digere* and *resumer* each separately suggest. Of course, this does not guarantee that any adaptation will be superior to its original, but it does theorize a space in which the condensed cinematic form might convey an "equivalence in meaning" through a different style. For Bazin, neither form nor style constitute what he refers to as the "artistic soul," and he insists "[t]he style is in the service of the narrative: it is a reflection of it, so to speak, the body but not the soul. And it is not impossible for the artistic soul to manifest itself through another incarnation."[16]

In this vein, this essay argues that biblical adaptations discussed below, which we have termed postsecular scriptures, vary greatly in the degree to which they relate indexically[17] to the biblical Passion narrative. Nevertheless, each can be conceived as faithful adaptations that may be uniquely suited to a postsecular resistance to religious dogmatism that may be perceived in biblical adaptations that are more scrupulous in their indexicality to their scriptural sources. Of the films discussed, the first, Rodrigo Garcia's *Last Days in the Desert*, has the most indexical relationship to the biblical Christ, yet it takes perhaps the most liberties in terms of its theological and thematic explorations. In contrast, Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life* is more oblique in its references to the Passion while still explicit in its biblical inspiration and perhaps strongest in its presentation of gospel themes. Lastly, John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary* relates the least indexically to any particular scriptural source text and, as a result, demonstrates how an adaptation can, in Bazin's words, serve as a digest of the biblical narrative with little indexical relation to that source.

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[15] Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema of Digest," 62.

[16] Bazin, "Adaptation, or the Cinema of Digest," 58.

[17] Bazin's conception of the relationship between a cinematic adaptation and its source material seems linked to his ideas in another essay, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image," trans. Hugh Gray, *Film Quarterly* 13.4 (1960): 4–9, on the artistic relationship between painting and photography. As much as Bazin has argued for the possibility of the aesthetic superiority of the adaptation to its source material, in this essay he argues for the possibility of equal or greater aesthetic value in photography as has traditionally been credited to painting. He suggests that the relationship toward realism in painting, which rose to prominence in the Renaissance, creates a problem even for painters not pursuing an expressly realist project: "painting was torn between two ambitions: one, primarily aesthetic, namely the expression of spiritual reality wherein the symbol transcended its model; the other, purely psychological, namely to duplicate the world outside" (p. 6). Photography, Bazin suggests, has an ontologically indexical relationship to its subject based on the objectivity of image-capturing process: "The photograph as such and the object in itself share a common being, after the fashion of a fingerprint" (p. 8). Therefore, it begins with the object as a given from which the artist is free to pursue the expression of the spiritual reality, unencumbered by the "obsession with realism" Bazin identifies in the artistic tradition of painting from the fifteenth century onward (p. 9). The point this essay wants to draw out

Last Days in the Desert:

The Postsecular Scripture, Literally

Rodrigo Garcia's *Last Days in the Desert* begins with a tempest over the desert rather than a temptation in a desert. But from that beginning we move to a clear equivalence in the narrative from Matthew 4 that is the source text for the heart of the story.[18] The storm over the desert is a metonym for the storm within the main character's soul. From the film's opening images, it is easy to see *Last Days* as an attempt to adapt the Bible as the film indexically refashions the visual landscape of the ancient Near East, even as it was shot in the deserts of far east San Diego County, California. But it's not just that the *mise en scene* is biblical—the narrative, too, is a representation of a key story from Matthew's Gospel. *Last Days* depicts a loose retelling of Jesus's wandering in the desert from Matthew 4 complete with its own devil and temptations as well as interpolated dialogue and narrative.

The biblical passage describing Jesus's testing in the wilderness is short and well known: in Matthew's account Jesus is fasting in the desert, led there by the Spirit, with the purpose of being "tempted by the devil," who

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in making this connection is that the acknowledgement of an indexical relationship between the photograph and its subject does not imply that the photograph exists solely to provide an index to that subject any more than an adaptation's indexical relationship to its source material (on the levels of form, style, or even narrative structure/contents) implies the degree to which that adaptation expresses the "spiritual reality" or "artistic soul" of the work itself.

[18] This is a commonly adapted story to the big screen as is shown in David B. Howell, "Screening the Temptation: Interpretation and Indeterminacy in Cinematic Transformations of a Gospel Story," *Journal of Religion and Film* 11.2 (2016): https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol11/iss2/3.

is later referred to as "Satan" in the passage.[19] In Garcia's imagining, Ewan McGregor is cast as Jesus (called Yeshua in the story), the "holy man," while McGregor also plays the role of Satan in various scenes,[20] tempting Jesus to not trust (*pistis*) his Father, albeit through temptations that differ from the originals in Matthew's account. Garcia's Satan does not offer bread, but he does tempt Yeshua to question his Father's care for him. He never asks him to throw himself down from any height, but he repeatedly suggests that Yeshua's Father is indifferent not only to Yeshua's plight but also to the plight of all humans. Garcia's Satan in various ways suggests that humans are merely God's puppets, set about their lives for his entertainment.

Critical responses to the film were varied, and it is perhaps still too soon after the film's release to formulate a critical consensus. Nick Pinkerton, writing for *Film Comment*, disliked the film, quipping, "replacing the kitschy pieties of *Son of God* with art-house arthritis and a fretful stringy section doesn't go far toward revivifying the Greatest Story Ever Retold."[21] This comment contrasts the film's aesthetic sensibilities against the 2014 film *Son of God*, which sought to rather straightforwardly adapt the biblical Christ story into a blockbuster epic—the film was largely maligned by mainstream critics and only mildly praised by a few religious publications—with Pinkerton's suggestion being that Garcia's film is equally lacking in depth, only with a superficial guise of artistry. William Blizek, on the other hand, defends *Last Days* in the *Journal of Religion and Film* while aligning with others who see the film as using a mythic and religious story to engage with universal human themes.[22]

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[19] There is a longstanding Christian tradition that reads this New Testament account as drawing upon or referencing the narrative of Job in the Hebrew Bible, a comparison made perhaps most notably by Milton's *Paradise Regained*. See Victoria Kahn, "Job's Complaint in *Paradise Regained*," *ELH* 76.3 (2009): 625–60. "Just as Job begins with a prologue in which God permits the trials of Job, moves to a central dialogue between Job and his comforters, and concludes with an epilogue in which everything is restored to Job, so *Paradise Regained* begins with a discussion between God and the angel Gabriel in which God permits Satan's temptations of Jesus, moves to a central dialogue between Jesus and Satan, and concludes with the angels singing and Jesus returning home from the wilderness" (p. 625). As we will see, Malick's *Tree of Life* also evokes the book of Job in its more oblique rendering of the Christ story, which also wrestles with the apparent silence of God in the face of suffering.

[20] Emmanuel "Chivo" Lubezki's cinematography renders the sparse badlands of the Anza-Barrego as a fitting site for the holy man's struggle with a demon (most often played by McGregor himself). Though it is a story of suffering, the film's photography is beautiful: stunningly so. And, of course, we have come to expect no less from Chivo. The film's visual lyricism does a great deal of work establishing the mood and mode of Garcia's narrative, contrasting the storm over the desert, an image of rain, with the arid landscape below the billowing clouds. This visual dualism will continue and be reproduced in key images of McGregor contra McGregor where the actor will be facing off against his own tempter as Yeshua and The Demon.

[21] Nick Pinkerton, "Short Takes: Last Days in the Desert," *Film Comment* 52.3 (May/June 2016): 72–73. The actual quote reads, "… Greatest Story Every [sic] Retold."

Taking a similar approach in his review of the film for the *LA Times*, David Ansen suggests that we see the film in part as Freudian Father/Son narrative based on Garcia's relationship with his recently deceased and famous father Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Thus, Ansen agrees with Blizek's emphasis on the father/son relationship in the film but suggests that the film's concern may be more with the immanent than the transcendent dimensions of this theme. Ansen interviews Garcia, whose comments offer some affirmation of this reading of the film. Garcia explains, "Both Yeshua and the boy are trying to find their destiny from under a powerful father," adding that he is "not so blind I don't see that" as central to his own story of finding his destiny with a powerful father. *Last Days*, as Ansen and Garcia make clear, is a story of a son trying to understand his father's wishes, but it is also a story about a son trying to understand his father's love. In this sense, then, Garcia's own biographical reflections add another source to the adaptation equation, in turn diminishing the indexicality of the film's relationship to its biblical predecessor. As we consider the narrative elements that Garcia's screenplay introduces that are not present in the biblical source, we are confronted with the possibility that these additions are based on Garcia's own biographical materials rather than extrapolations of the theological and narrative contents of the original. [23]

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[22] William L. Blizek, "Last Days in the Desert," *Journal of Religion and Film* 19.1 (2015): https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol19/iss1/20. Blizek writes, "By making this story about the most famous son, he elevates the conflict between fathers and sons to an existential level—beyond the level of popular psychology. The conflict is not a problem to be solved, but a fundamental part of our being and this requires that we rethink fathers, faith, and destiny. By putting the conflict between father and son in the context of Jesus and his Father—the creator of the universe—Garcia has changed the game."

[23] Of course, adding interpolated details to the life of Jesus is by no means noteworthy in fiction or film. There has been a cottage industry of extrabiblical literary texts depicting imagined scenes from Jesus's life that have hardly slowed or abated in the season of our supposed secularization. Indeed, some of the most famous Jesus films have been loose or even heretical with details from the Gospels—one thinks of the likes of *The Last Temptation of Christ* or *The Life of Brian*. So what then makes *Last Days* noteworthy? We would suggest that what is fascinating about Garcia's presentation of the temptation and crucifixion of Yeshua is its momentary (and possibly illusory) commitment to breaking the immanent frame eighty minutes into the film when Yeshua hovers miraculously above the rocks of the badlands at Fonts Point.

Other critics see the film as less universal and mythic in orientation and instead as more clearly religious and Christian in import while reckoning with Garcia's own comments seemingly to the contrary. For example, Czarina Ong pointedly titles her review of the film "*Last Days in the Desert* Director Rodrigo Garcia can't get Jesus out of his head, even if he's not religious," explaining that "Garcia is admittedly not a religious man, and that is the reason why he never dreamt he would ever direct a film based on the life and trials of Jesus Christ."[24] Ong's title is based on Garcia's own words. Garcia claims to have asked himself "what he was doing? A movie about Jesus?" but persisted in making the film "because" he "couldn't get it out of" his "head." In Ong's view, Garcia, unlike Gibson and many other Jesus-filmmakers, didn't set out to tell a Jesus story but ended up having his story of a father and son turn into THE story of the Father and the Son—even if the version he tells is quite a departure from the biblical telling. In Ong's account, the mythic father/son story then becomes a story about religious significance, a reversal of Ansen's assertion that the biblical father/son story ultimately serves to illuminate human relationships. For Ong, this film's adaptation of Matthew 4 serves to explain Father/Son relationships of trust more fully in order to then explain more fully, by faithful analogy, the relationship of trust between the Son and his Father in Christianity.

Regardless of the emphasis one chooses, it is clear that while *Last Days* is a movie about Jesus, it is also a movie about relationships between fathers and sons. Indeed, some of the most fascinating moments in the story are when Yeshua speaks privately to the boy (played brilliantly by Tye Sheridan) or to the father (equally well cast as Cirian Hinds). These triangulated relationships reveal the unspoken plot and a tacit but critical theological theme, as Yeshua wrestles with the silence of his own Father—the film's first line is "Father, where are you?" as Yeshua sits in the desert listening. The next words are "Father, speak to me," and both cries are met with the noise of the desert, the winds, and sands and dust-blown dry landscape. Is this an answer, or is this silence? Does his Father speak? Does he hear? Viewed from this perspective, it is not the time in the desert or the interpolation of extrabiblical material in the form of the family drama that make this a noteworthy example of postsecular biblical adaptation. Instead, it is the plausibility even for Yeshua, the son of God, to have misgivings and doubts about his Father. In Garcia's imagination, even Jesus is not immune to doubt and displays a faith in God that is "dramatically partial," as McClure describes it, in that he questions his Father's presence and care. Thus, the story as Garcia tells it is a story about doubt and faith, where the latter is understood in more than psychological terms as a question of action: the film asks if Yeshua will obey in action what he believes his Father is asking him to do (leading to the Passion), even if he has doubts—doubts which include not hearing from his Father or understanding his command. Indeed, the theological implications here resonate far more deeply with the Passion narrative—the "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" of Matthew 27—rather than the resolute resistance to temptation displayed in Matthew 4, the putative source text for this adaptation.

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[24] Czarina Ong, "'Last Days in the Desert' Director Rodrigo Garcia Can't Get Jesus Out of His head, Even If He's Not Religious," *Christian Today*, May 12, 2016, https://www.christiantoday.com/article/last-days-in-the-desert-director-rodrigo-garcia-cant-get-jesus-out-of-his-head-even-if-hes-not-religious/85863.htm.

The film plays out the theological question of a seemingly silent God through Yeshua's interactions with the father and son he encounters in the desert. In one scene, while speaking to the boy as they walk to the river to collect water, Yeshua comes to realize that the boy thinks his father doesn't know him or his desires. In their conversation, he discovers the boy's plans for his life, his hopes to see Jerusalem and the ocean. In part due to the father's stoic and unaffectionate demeanor, it is easy to sympathize with the son's perspective at this stage, just as Yeshua seems to do. Later, however, when Yeshua speaks alone with the father, he sees the Father's love and provision for the son, even as he sees more clearly from his previous conversation with the boy the father's communicative infelicity. The Father tells Yeshua he doesn't know how to speak to the boy and asks for his help. We see in this relationship an image of Yeshua and his Father: a son who doesn't sense his Father's love and doesn't know if he is being heard, and the revelation of a Father who loves and is trying to communicate to his son in a way the son can hear. This provides a moment of insight for the holy man as he (and we) sees the implication that he, too, might have a caring father who is communicating in a way that he (and we) cannot hear. Garcia places Jesus in the context of a *secular* father and son relationship in order to help him understand the *sacred* relationship of trust required of him in the Passion.

While we have already seen prior critics' disagreements over whether to give primacy to the film's exploration of secular father/son relationships or the theological relationship between Christ and the Heavenly Father in the Matthew 4 temptation narrative, this essay argues that both the materials adapted from the temptation account and the dynamics derived from Garcia's own father/son relationship ultimately contribute to the film's function as, more fundamentally, an adaptation of the biblical Passion narrative. While the request "Father speak to me" has been answered in the relationship of the father and son, this "answer" is hardly as demonstrative and clear as the challenges of the Demon. We see and hear him. We don't hear the Father, and we don't hear Yeshua hear him. Thus, the story becomes something of the "partial faith" or "weak faith" that we saw in McClure's rendering of the postsecular. And yet, Yeshua leaves the desert and decides to act upon what he has come to believe about his Father, against the temptations of the Demon, and it is from this point forward that the film most clearly connects the desert temptations to the theological questions central to the Passion. Before Yeshua leaves the desert, he is depicted walking with the Demon following. They face each other, and the Demon tells him that he will "come to" him "in the end" and that Yeshua can be rescued by the Demon if he wants at that moment. For those who know the story, we know that the tempter is offering the opportunity to relinquish the suffering of the cross.

The events of the Passion are no doubt foreshadowed in Matthew's temptation account, particularly in the second temptation (4:5–7) in which the temper brings Christ to Jerusalem and impels him to throw himself down from the temple, suggesting that surely God will send his angels to save him. This foreshadows the scoffers at the crucifixion in Matthew 27 who suggest that if Jesus is truly the Son of God, then God should rescue him from his suffering and death on the cross (27:43). But in the final minutes of the movie Garcia explicitly depicts the central events of the Passion—the crucifixion, Yeshua's body dead on a slab, a tomb with a rock covered door. While he hangs on the cross, a hummingbird comes before Yeshua mirroring the earlier images of Yeshua and the Demon face to face. This symbolic hummingbird in the face of the holy man Christ on the cross seems to be the Demon coming to him,[25] offering relief and a way off the cross, but he remains and dies. After we leave the body entombed in the dark, we are returned to a cliff edge where we had, just ten minutes prior, seen Yeshua.

This is the key moment for the film's theological work. In the earlier scene Yeshua is floating in the air in broad daylight, his body is suspended above the cliff, and then he awakes from sleep in the predawn light. The image is striking. It is the only moment in the film that breaks with the visual realism: even the Demon seems to follow the logic of mechanics and physics. While there are many possible ways to read the image of the floating body, which is notably ignored in much of the extant literature about the film, it is difficult to avoid the suggestion of this moment offering a prefiguration of the resurrection. As such, this moment becomes a central, if admittedly, subtle key to the postsecularity of the film. Yeshua wakes alone in the early predawn on the hillside by the father and son's tent after we see the image of his body's floating in daylight reminiscent of the Dali "Crucifixion (*Corpus Hypercubicus*)." It is only as the film ends and we see contemporary hikers step out onto the cliff edge in the Borrego Badlands in Southern California that we realize the connection between this scene and the Crucifixion: it is a taste of the resurrection, but a resurrection only hinted at in a dream and hardly demonstrated in empirical form: a "partial" resurrection, not a dogmatic one.

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[25] According to Mesoamerican scholars, in Latin American iconography the hummingbird is a representation of the devil.

But what do we make of the ordering of the scenes? Is Garcia's levitating Jesus a temptation for Yeshua, a prefiguration of the resurrected Christ for him and for us, a hope from the dreams of a haunted holy man seeking resolution in the desert? The film does not tell us. There is no dogmatic clarity, no assertion of the Resurrection: it is suggested, hinted, and left. We don't see Yeshua again after he is placed in the tomb. Instead, Garcia's Yeshua is like W. H. Auden's "Friday's Child," which ends with a kind of postsecular faith, exclaiming, "Now, did He [Jesus] really break the seal / And rise again? We dare not say."[26] Garcia leaves his viewer, like Auden leaves his reader, with the question that the Gospels proclaim and then answer: Did he break the seal and rise again? It seems reasonable to say Garcia does not give a final and definite answer, but the image of the levitating Christ suggests the dream, the hope, that he might have. The answer is partial: it is not exclaimed or declaimed; it is not asserted. It is hinted at, dared to be believed, and then taken away.

The film concludes with a storm over the desert reminiscent of the storm in the opening scene. Between these two storms we have seen the holy man cry out to his father, be tempted to despair by his own image, watch a father and a son wrestle over the direction of the son's life and vocation, and seek to aid a suffering mother. The resonances of the interpolated family plot with the biblical Passion narrative are also apparent, as they represent the holy man's own struggle with his father in the coming scene in the garden of Gethsemane and his attempt, like the boy he meets in the desert, to come to terms with his father's will for his life. As the movie ends there is still the storm. We might conclude that the doubt

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[26] W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 509–10.

the film opens with—"Father where are you?"—remains present and is being asked again. This time it is the film and its audience that ask, and one wonders if the image of the hikers on the cliff, like the image of the Christ levitating, is not the dream from which we viewers will wake as we leave the dark of the theater. Like Yeshua, we will have to turn our faces toward our Jerusalem, Garcia seems to imply, and await the Father's instruction as we walk in the direction of the next step of the journey.

Tree of Life: Suffering, Silence, and Grace

As with *Last Days in the Desert*, Terrence Malick's *Tree of Life* deals extensively with themes of suffering and death and the relationships between fathers and sons. Also like *Last Days*, Malick's film makes no secret about its ties to biblical source material. At first glance one might be tempted to think of *Tree of Life* as an adaptation of the book of Job. The opening frame of the film is a quotation from Job 38:4, 7. It reads, "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the Earth ... When the morning stars sang together?"—suggesting that Job plays a significant part in the conceptual schema of the film. Further, like Job, the story of the film deals with the loss of children and with the place of God in human suffering. The repeated question of the film—"Where were you?"—is a restatement and transformation of God's question to Job in the well-known discussion between God and Job in chapter 38. In *Tree of Life*, Malick resignifies that question: rather than God's asking it of the human character, the people in the film repeatedly ask it of God. This is not an insignificant change; it redirects the story toward a trial of God rather than a trial of the man as in the book of Job. *Tree of Life*, like Job, deals with a blessed family that loses a child and the consequences of that loss on the belief, trust, and practice of the family's members in light of the loss.

And yet, as Alan Jacobs notes in his recent review of Malick's newest film *A Hidden Life*, from "from the *Tree of Life* on, his films have been concerned with overtly religious, indeed specifically Christian, themes."[27] So even though *Tree of Life* begins with a quotation from Job—there is also a pivotal scene at church where a minister gives an extended reflection on the book—it does not remain in the Hebrew Bible but moves from *Job's* questions to Christianity's answer. That is, like the Gospel writers, Malick works in the film to show the family members' making sense of the loss in light of the hope that somehow God is both sovereign and present despite the reality of pain and loss. But should we see this film as a biblical adaptation? And what about calling it a "postsecular adaptation," with the implication that term has a kind of recuperation of belief, on the one hand, and a kind of weak faith or agnosticism, on the other? The film asks where God is and if his grace is real even when he seems silent. It answers with stunning, almost supernatural depictions of natural phenomena—images that gesture, even hope, that even when it doesn't seem like it, the way of suffering may indeed be the way of grace. *Tree of Life* is postsecular in its dogmatic assertion that the ways of God may at times be unclear, but it is emphatic that following and trust (*pistis*) in the "way of grace" will lead to a good end.

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[27] Alan Jacobs, "Patience: Terrence Malick's *A Hidden Life*," *The Point*, March 5, 2020, https://thepointmag.com/criticism/patience-a-hidden-life/.

Given Rodrigo Garcia's open agnosticism, the suggestion that his work is postsecular is hardly controversial. But considering Malick's explicit affirmation of Christian faith and openness about the theological intents of the film, the question of whether *Tree of Life* should be considered postsecular may present greater complications. Jacobs is hardly the first critic to note Malick's religious orientation. Rather, many viewers and critics have read this film as deeply religious, which seems to suggest the opposite of the kind of "weak" religion presented by McClure and others as postsecular. For these viewers, Malick's work is seen as anything but fuzzy about the doctrinal and religious answers to its profound philosophical questions. Jacobs's view has represented the general consensus, but that does not mean it is without detractors.

Notable exceptions include Roger Ebert, whose review of the film expresses suspicion concerning the film's putative religiosity. Instead, he insists that

> Terrence Malick's new film is a form of prayer. It created within me a spiritual awareness, and made me more alert to the awe of existence. I believe it stands free from conventional theologies, although at its end it has images that will evoke them for some people. It functions to pull us back from the distractions of the moment, and focus us on mystery and gratitude.[28]

Key to seeing Malick as a species of a postsecular filmmaker is Ebert's phrase "stands free from conventional theologies." Ebert wants to make *Tree of Life* open to "spirituality"—which he implies is itself open—without closing that off to a specific doctrinal or dogmatic tradition. According to Ebert, Malick is committed to representing "a dramatically partial and open-ended" faith in the stream of McClure. And Ebert is not alone in thinking that the film might be read without reference to doctrine, theological claims, or religion. Along similar interpretative lines, Shawn

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[28] Roger Ebert, "The Blink of a Life, Enclosed by Time and Space: *Tree of Life* Movie Review," June 1, 2011, http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/the-tree-of-life-2011.

Loht's 2014 article suggests that we ought to understand the film in philosophical terms indebted to Heidegger, arguing for a reading that shows "that *Tree of Life* presents a bona fide philosophical argument regarding the conditions of human flourishing." Loht argues against those who exclusively read "the film from a largely theological and Christian standpoint," suggesting a complementary reading that focuses on Malick's interest in a Heideggerian mode of authenticity.[29]

In the critical conversation, these articles that argue for readings of *Tree of Life* that downplay the religious dimension of the film each seem the exception that prove the rule, since nearly every review—and the sheer volume of articles in places like the *Journal of Religion and Film*—suggests that, far from being "free" from "conventional theologies," the film is founded on them: the film, as one scholar suggests, *demands* a theological reading.[30] For example, in his "Spirit(uality) in the Films of Terrence Malick," Christopher Barnett insists that while Malick "has manifested a noticeable interest in religious ideas and themes" throughout his career, "it is *Tree of Life* that most clearly exhibits a desire to engage theological issues, particularly from within the traditions of Judaism and Christianity."[31] This analysis contrasts any vague and undefined spirituality, as Ebert has it, or simply nonreligious philosophy, as Loht suggests. Barnett argues that, to the contrary, "if one were to set about [reading] Malick's films dogmatically … as illustrations of religious teachings on creation, fall, love and so forth …, such an approach might yield some noteworthy points of connection."[32]

In addition to emphasizing the film's theological themes, critics have also suggested that its form might also be considered religious. For example, M. Gail Hamner explains that she is "interested in how the film's restless camera—moving almost unceasingly, and cutting non-linearly—itself suggests a divine force that stitches together the humans' disjointed and mournful restlessness, without unifying or homogenizing it."[33] And Pat Brereton and Robert Furze argue in "Transcendence and The Tree of Life" that *Tree of Life* "promotes a transcendent experience, even an experience of the sublime or Holy, that exceeds aesthetic or intellectual analysis."[34] For Barnett, Hamner, Brereton, and Furze, both the form and content of *Tree of Life* suggest something profoundly theological. The questions that remain are how that theology should be characterized and how it relates to the adaptation of the Bible.

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[29] Shawn Loht, "Film as Ethical Philosophy, and the Question of Philosophical Arguments in Film—A Reading of The Tr*ee of Life*," *Film and Philosophy* 18 (2014): 164–83.

[30] Peter Leithart, *Shining Glory: Theological Reflections on Terrence Malick's Tree of Life* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), vii. See also Christopher B. Barnett and Clark J. Elliston, eds., *Theology and the Films of Terrence Malick* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[31] Christopher B. Barnett, "Spirit(uality) in the Films of Terrence Malick," *Journal of Religion and Film* 17.1 (2013): https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol17/iss1/33.

[32] Barnett, "Spirit(uality) in the Films of Terrence Malick," 2.

We can begin to see this relationship if we look at some of the more conventional theological themes that have been evoked by the oft-discussed opening scene of the film. Here we can also begin to see how the film might be understood as not only a theologically rich narrative in its own rite but also an adaptation of the biblical Passion narrative, just as this essay has argued regarding *Last Days in the Desert*. Due to *Tree of Life*'s visual lyricism, it would be very challenging to write a synopsis of the film as a whole. It is formally composed of two main narrative threads, a cosmic depiction of creation *ex nihilo* from darkness to the evolution of humanity and a narrative of the O'Brien family (Mrs. O'Brien played by Jessica Chastain and Mr. O'Brien played by Brad Pitt). The O'Brien family story involves the loss of life in the death of RL (the middle brother) and the story of a fall from innocence, loss of faith, and return to faith of the eldest brother, Jack. The story—to the extent that there is one—centers on the history of this family even as that history begins with the loss of one of its members. The story is simultaneously a memory and a kind of theodicy, as we see from this opening scene.

The film's opening presents images of what we come to recognize as Mrs. O'Brien, the mother figure, as a young girl. A voiceover is heard saying,

> The nuns taught us there were two ways through life—the way of nature and the way of grace. You have to choose which one you'll follow. Nature only wants to please itself. Get others to please it too. Likes to lord it over them. To have its own way. It finds reasons to be unhappy when all the world is shining around it. And love is smiling through all things. Grace doesn't try to please itself. Accepts being slighted, forgotten, disliked. Accepts insults and injuries. The nuns taught us that no one who loves the way of grace ever comes to a bad end. I will be true to you. Whatever comes.

What "comes" next here in the sequence of the film is a telegram explaining the death of RL, the most grace-loving of the children of Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien. In the scene, it is the young RL whom we see backing away from the camera as Mrs. O'Brien proclaims that "no one who loves the way of grace ever comes to a bad end." This proclamation is problematized when we come to find out that RL, while away studying music, took his own life, just as Malick's own musically gifted brother had done at nineteen years of age. The rest of the film develops what it might mean to think that, despite this child's death by suicide, he has not come to a "bad end." The film comes to suggest that it is better to follow the way of grace and die by suicide than follow the way of nature and lead a long and prosperous life as Jack, RL's older brother, does.

The way in which the film proceeds to make this case has as much to do with its aesthetic vision as with its narrative content. In her article "Filming Reconciliation," Hamner writes about the cinematic technique of the film and the experience thereby produced when watching *Tree of Life*, suggesting the explicit theological goals of Malick in this form. She explains,

> The cinematography … repeats the opposition between the way of nature and the way of grace, but also reconciles it in the eternal life of God. Put differently, the film's formal, cinematographic restlessness reframes and reconciles the diegetic restlessness of its human characters. In arranging the film form in this way, I contend that Malick presents less a story about Christian faith than an affective presentation of Christian reconciliation.[35]

Hamner's point seems to be that the disorienting force of the cinematic technique of the film serves a theological purpose, one she suggests here, and goes on to argue in the rest of the piece, is best understood as the generation of a "feeling" or "affective presentation."[36] This feeling in turn is best understood as a "presentation of Christian reconciliation," which is another way of saying theology becomes experience. Thus, for Hamner, it seems Malick is following contemporary postsecular literature and film in its concern with a theology of experience.[37] In some ways, Malick's cinematography may be the culmination of this view, since his work makes experience not only theological but also, if Hamner is right, doctrinal. Of course, there is nothing that surprising about this when we consider that Malick is a Protestant of the Liberal Protestant variety through his Episcopalian membership.

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[33] M. Gail Hamner, "Filming Reconciliation: Affect and Nostalgia in The Tree of Life," *Journal of Religion and Film* 18.1 (2014): https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol18/iss1/43.

[34] Pat Brereton and Robert Furze, "Transcendence and The Tree of Life: Beyond the Face of the Screen with Terrence Malick, Emmanuel Levinas, and Roland Barthes," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 8.3 (October 2014): 329–51.

[35] Hamner, "Filming Reconciliation," 2.

[36] Hamner, "Filming Reconciliation," 2.

[37] Even Ebert, after suggesting that the film might be enjoyed and understood

But if Hamner is right that Malick's "cinematography … repeats the opposition between the way of nature and the way of grace" but also reconciles it in the eternal life of God above nature, then what does that cinematic form mean as not just a doctrine but also an adaptation of the Bible? In brief, the opening scene—the biblical quotation, the image of a flame, the voiceover discussing nature versus grace—seems to make clear that Malick does wish to engage theological concepts with a level of doctrinal specificity. These theological topoi will be present throughout the conclusion of the film, in which the lost son will reappear to be reunited with his family in some sort of spatial and temporal zone beyond our present one (possibly Malick's vision of heaven) and Mrs. O'Brien will relinquish ownership of her son, claiming repeatedly, "I give you my son." This image of a mother releasing her son into divine hands may conjure the image of Mary, the mother of Jesus, present at his crucifixion (John 19:25), but, even more overtly, it seems to echo Christian messianism's conception of the divine Father giving his Son. This connection between Mrs. O'Brien and God the Father is again supported by the film's opening scene, in which Mrs. O'Brien's voice initiates the film's narrative action, a voiceover sequence which precedes and leads directly into the extended cinematic interlude depicting the origins of the universe. Surely this evokes the particular biblical vision of a God who spoke all things into creation—the Word in the beginning. But even if it evokes the biblical story as we are suggesting and could thereby be a digest in the sense that Bazin uses the term, it is less clear how it might be indexical in Bazin's (or any other) sense.

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without reference to its supernatural concerns, insists that the film was in some way religious. Ebert explains, "Many films diminish us. They cheapen us, masturbate our senses, hammer us with shabby thrills, diminish the value of life. Some few films evoke the wonderment of life's experience, and those I consider a form of prayer. Not prayer 'to' anyone or anything, but prayer 'about' everyone and everything. I believe prayer that makes requests is pointless. What will be, will be. But I value the kind of prayer when you stand at the edge of the sea, or beneath a tree, or smell a flower, or love someone, or do a good thing. Those prayers validate existence and snatch it away from meaningless routine" (Ebert, "The Blink of a Life, Enclosed by Time and Space: *Tree of Life* Movie Review"). Thus Ebert insists that *Tree of Life's* value inheres in it revelatory power, its natural supernaturalism.

And yet, while we will agree that this film is much more clearly conventional in its theology than other postsecular films of the same period, we think that Ebert is probably right and, despite its clearer doctrine, *Tree of Life* is more like the "postsecular" than anything approximating dogmatic and didactic art. In other words, like *Last Days in the Desert*, Malick's film remains "dramatically partial and open-ended."[38] It begins with a flame and it ends with a bridge, but it is not didactic about whether that light will lead the pilgrim to cross. *Tree of Life* shows the transformation of a father by the death of his son in profound scenes of repentance, but it doesn't show us if the brother who stays at home crosses over the bridge that RL's death and grace make available as the film ends.

So the similarity between *Last Days in the Desert* and *Tree of Life* only begs the question of whether or not we ought to think of the latter film as both postsecular and an adaptation of the Bible. Malick's story is not only the story of RL and grace and his father's move from nature to grace but also a retelling of the Christian pilgrimage story in Jack. And as such we would argue that it is clearly the story of a renewed faith and trust (*pistis*) born from the sacrifice of a (good) son. While the film lyrically affirms the choice of grace over nature and calls Jack and its audience to embrace that "good end," it remains undogmatic and winsome, wooing rather than preaching. So while it is a proclamation of the *kerygma*, it is also a postsecular proclamation, a call not to certainty or out of the secular life but to trust and the goodness of the embodied, beautiful creation. Malick's answer in the end to the question "Where were you?" is shown in the stunning camera work that Calvin would well have recognized when he described God's presence as everywhere reflected in nature as in a mirror in Book 5 of his *Institutes*. Beauty as a sign and sacrament that screams "all around you if you have the eyes to see" seems to be Malick's filmic answer to the question "Where were you?" As such, *Tree of Life* is a recreation—a faithful digest, or "equivalence of meaning"—of the gospel story. It is a postsecular adaptation, even if it is much less indexical in its form than *Last Days in the Desert*. In it the way of grace is available, just below the surface of the vision, for those with the eyes to see.

***Calvary:* The Death of a Good Priest**

John Michael McDonagh, like Garcia and Malick, produced the film *Calvary*, which centered on the relationship between a type of father and a kind of son in order to show the way of nature and the way grace, or at least posit its possibility. *Calvary* is the story of a "good priest" (a father and Father), who is murdered by a man (the son), who was abused by a bad priest. It is a priestly sexual abuse narrative from the opening scene, in which a man comes to confession and says that he "first tasted semen at seven years of age." The man goes on to tell the priest that he is going to kill him because he is a good priest, and no one cares if you kill a bad priest. This startling beginning, evoking the familiar narratives of priestly abuse from the last two decades, may lead us to certain presumptions about where the story is going, but McDonagh has other plans. But how can the story of a son killing a father be an adaptation of the *urtext* of a son giving his life willingly to his father, the story of Jesus on the cross of Calvary? It is a testimony to McDonagh's skill that he accomplishes no less of an alchemic reversal such that the seemingly least indexical film of the three we are considering here might just be the most complete digest of the biblical *kerygma*.

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[38] McClure, *Partial Faiths*, ix.

We know that the vengeance killing is going to happen from the opening of the film. The good priest is thus a substitute for the fault of another man. As such, it is an analog to the story of Jesus, understood as the perfect sacrificial lamb or atoning sacrifice for the sins of another. To be sure, *Calvary* is a film that is not a clear adaptation of any specific passage of the Bible, nor is it an obvious retelling of a biblical story. Instead, it is a creative retelling of the basic story of the priestly sacrificial logic of Jesus where the priest and the lamb for sacrifice are the same character: Father James, the good priest and good father. In this sense, out of the films discussed in this essay, *Calvary* relates least indexically to any biblical source material but is perhaps the most directly analogical to the central theological concern of the biblical Passion under the framework of penal substitutionary atonement theory. And yet, the degree to which the film is comfortable with this logic is another question, again lending to its categorization as a postsecular adaptation.

As his brother Martin McDonagh had sine in *In Bruges* (and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*), John Michael McDonagh addresses vengeance in *Calvary*. But whereas the retributive logic *In Bruges* fails—a guilty molesting priest is killed and with him a young boy is shot, followed by additional, snowballing killing—the logic of vengeance in *Calvary* does not. At its conclusion, *Calvary*, like *In Bruges*, has a young boy watch but this time the altar boy observes as an innocent man willingly gives his life as a substitute for a guilty man—and with him the violence ends. As such, *Calvary*, like the Gospels, tells a story of retribution, but also the end of retribution. The altar boy of *Calvary* becomes like something of a Gospel writer, as is shown in his mimetic work painting the beach scene. This altar boy is an observer seeing the grace on display, whereas the praying boy of *In Bruges* witnesses vengeance paid out upon a guilty man and suffers death alongside that guilty man. Martin McDonagh in *In Bruges* and

John Michael McDonagh in *Calvary* both address a father-and-son relationship, both address a priestly abuse situation, and both deal with vengeance and its effects. And yet, that is where the similarity stops. J. M. McDonagh goes on to retell a story of a "good end" like Garcia and Malick, even if that "end" is an untimely, in some sense an avoidable, and sacrificial death. This end is then the postsecular adaptation, and even proclamation, of the *kyrgyma*, a digest of equivalence in meaning that forgoes much in the way of the indexical.

The critical conversation about *Calvary* has recognized the ways that the story engages with the substitutionary logic of Christian Scripture. Thus, Catherine Wheatley explains in her "There's No Point in Killing a Bad Priest," that the film "displays a serious thematic concern with notions of goodness, innocence, struggle and sacrifice inherited from the Judeo-Christian tradition."[39] These notions include the substitutionary atonement of Judaism and then Christianity. But Wheatley also goes on to argue in her essay that the film addresses "a dialectic between faith and uncertainty, religion and institutions" in a way that she thinks, "treats its religious themes with a certain worldliness" which she contrasts to the postsecular mode of Malick that she calls a "more cosmological approach" with a "mythical" and "amorphous religiosity."[40] So *Calvary* engages in a specific place (Ireland) with a group of very specific and specified characters in order to develop a logic that is as universal as anything in Christendom: the logic of the good man dying as the atoning substitute for the bad man.[41]

Of course, not everyone agrees about the centrality of penal substitutionary atonement logic to the film, and some see it instead as a kind of smoke-screened *apologia*. In his review of the film, Mark Lawson explains something quite dissimilar when he insists that in discussing the priestly scandals of the first decade of the twenty-first century, "*Calvary* gets to the heart of the matter by bypassing it—cleverly and thoughtfully addressing the worst men in the Church by showing one of the best."[42] For Lawson the film is a kind of cultural dodge and only seems to be about abuse when it is actually an indirect plea for the dignity of the priesthood by contrasting the good, voluntary, if reluctant, scapegoat, Father James, with the bad priests who abuse their role. In this way, we are presented with a similar critical question as was discussed regarding *Last Days in the Desert*: Are the film's transcendent concerns a vehicle for its more immanent social/cultural commentary, or is the film's primary project a theological one? This problem seems endemic to works that take the more open posture toward religious matters characterized here as a postsecular approach.

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[39] Catherine Wheatley, "'There's No Point in Killing a Bad Priest': John Michael McDonagh's *Calvary* and the Broken Middle," in Caruana and Cauchi, *Immanent Frames*, 171.

[40] Wheatley, "There's No Point in Killing a Bad Priest," 172.

[41] Substitutionary atonement is not a universal Christian belief. It is indeed an interesting choice for a film centered on Catholic Christians to foreground this logic. Luther was the Augustinian monk who helped bring about the Protestant Reformation through his emphasis on this logic within the Catholic church, and the Counter Reformation and contemporary Catholic church have oscillated between emphasis upon satisfaction, ransom, *Christus victor*, and penal substitutionary atonement theories as is outlined in numerous works on soteriology.

As an adaptation of Scripture, *Calvary* is the hardest to recognize. In terms of indexicality, at most the film is the smoke to some other texts' fire: *Calvary* is not set in a biblical time, it doesn't retell a biblical story, and it makes no claim to be a recreation of anything within the Bible. And yet, while it does not imitate characters or stories from the Bible, I would argue that it nevertheless does retell in a kind of parabolic form central components of the gospel narrative. Father James's story can be quite easily seen as an imperfect analogue of Jesus's. He is a middle-aged man who serves his undeserving and ungrateful flock despite their bad treatment of him. He doubts his calling and even starts to run away from his cross before turning his face (back) toward his Jerusalem and marching toward his Golgotha. He is betrayed and ultimately killed by one of his own flock, a man whom he both loves and cares for. And finally, his life and death are presented as examples of a kind of trust in what is to come, a trust that none of the other characters in the film seems to possess. Father James's life, though it ends in a violent death, seems a far superior life than the living deaths of the flock he tends. Thus, John Michael McDonagh's work is not unlike the writers of the Gospel, especially John, who set out to show a somewhat skeptical audience that the man who seems to have lost in the story is actually the winner, whom we would do well to emulate. McDonagh's adaptation, indeed his coda image, might be Matt 10:39: "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (ESV). And thus while Calvary is indexical and evocative in its title, it is a digest of the heart of the gospel message.

Conclusion

If these biblical adaptations do espouse the sort of partial or "weak" religion with which John McClure associates the postsecular in *Partial Faiths*, either in their sometimes-tenuous connections to their biblical

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[42] Mark Lawson, Critic At Large, *New Statesman*, March, 28, 2014, p. 53.

sources or in their resistance to dogmatic explications of their theological conclusions, then they certainly cannot be accused of doing so in order to broaden their appeal to a secular mainstream box office. Indeed, all three films were distributed via limited theatrical release after their festival debuts, and of the three, *Tree of Life* was by far the highest grossing at $61.7 million—compare this to Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*'s $611 million, Aronofsky's *Noah*'s $359.2 million, or even Ridley Scott's critically panned *Exodus: Gods and Kings*'s $282.2 million. It could be argued that by eschewing clear marketing categories such as the blockbuster epic, the hyper socially conscious "Oscar bait" stereotype, or even the smaller but often still lucrative market share of the faith-based film industry, these films run the risk of alienating both religious and secular audiences. But it is these films' deliberate acceptance of this risk that makes them compelling examples of the theological and artistic potential of postsecular cinema. Therefore, against those who read these postsecular works as partial or weak assertions of faith (*pistis*), we have argued here that these postsecular biblical adaptations present the gospel story of doubt and mistrust leading to confidence, conversion, and trust through the mechanism of suffering. This suffering in turn produces hope and action, even as, critically, these films all also leave open the very real possibility that this hope may be misplaced. It is this last element that so closely aligns these works with the postsecular conception of "weak faith" even as it also aligns with the tradition Christian conception of faith, at least before the Enlightenment transformed belief into a category that was opposed to knowledge and value as a category in opposition to fact. Furthermore, we have argued against assertions that postsecular works depict faith and religion merely in a way that is uncertain, shrouded in doubt, and at times mystical, and in doing so, avoids engagement with the substantive stream of influence from sacred texts or engagement with traditional theological discourses. Instead, we submit that, while there may be ambivalence (as McClure suggests) on the part of postsecularists to affirming dogmas and practices of orthodox faiths, there is no squeamishness about adopting, adapting, and playing with the sacred texts that inform such faiths.[43]

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[43] Of course the scope of this present essay has been limited to the Hebrew Bible and the New and Old Testaments and the ways that filmmakers have engaged the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, adapting them to enable a deep interpretation of the Bible as seen and shown through the literary forms of cinema. Still what we are suggesting McClure gets absolutely right about the "partial" quality of the faiths on display in the films I am here analyzing in this essay is the way that they each deal with the significant angst, dread, and suffering caused by

Doubt is not the antithesis of belief, but there is a peculiarity to the doubt represented in these films. *The Last Days in the Desert* begins with the question "Father, where are you?"; *Tree of Life* begins with the echo of "Where were you?" from a critical passage in Job; and *Calvary*, while it does not begin with a question about God's absence or presence, does begin with a confession of sexual abuse acidic enough to cause any believer doubt about God's care for his church, if not the entire Christian faith. Each film has central characters who wonder about their obedience and even in some cases wander from obedience to their religion because of their doubt.

And even though each story ends with characters who are in states of fidelity, all three still show that fidelity as conditioned and informed by their doubt and ambivalence. So if they have faith, that faith is certainly "partial," if partial means not absolute or without doubt but conditioned by the possibility of being rejected. But so what? Is this a unique form of trust and faith? I would suggest that postsecular faith, belief that is practiced in the presence of doubts and unknowns, is the only kind we ever get as humans, at least if we are defining it in terms that are psychological (belief as psychological certainty). Postsecular faiths, like postsecular adaptations, are the only kinds of faiths we humans get to have after the Enlightenment.[44]

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doubt. The faiths that are on display in all three films are faiths of practice, affect, and conviction that are uneasy, lacking complete conviction, questioning, and in some respects contested.

[44] It might be reasonably asked, "So then why call these postsecular adaptations at all?" and I'd answer that I want to mark the ways that what has changed is the assumption of religious homogeneity and belief. In short, as James K. A. Smith shows in his excellent analysis of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* in Smith's *How (Not) to Be Secular*, the condition in which religion is engaged is what Taylor means by "Secular" (Smith calls this concept "secular$_3$" to differentiate it from other types of "secular" which he calls "secular$_1$" and "secular$_2$"). Secular$_3$ is the condition described by Taylor as a condition of optionality, where it is assumed not that secularization of religious decline is true, but that "religious belief, or belief in God, is understood to be one option amongst many" and is "thus contestable" (James K. A. Smith, *How [Not] to Be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014], 21). Taylor describes this as the movement from "a society where belief in God is unchallenged, and indeed unproblematic," (what Smith calls "secular$_1$") into a society "in which it [religious adherence and belief in God] is understood to be one option among others" (Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3). The "secular" then that I am claiming we are "post" is secular$_2$, the assumptions

As such, the conditions of these films are rather like the conditions of the Gospels and Epistles: they are made for people who probably don't believe, or at least believe without any doubt, with the assumption that it is possible that they might believe more than they do. These films then are produced as the New Testament was, within a plausibility construct where believing was one option among others. The alternative to this is Christendom, where the conditions of belief are such that to believe is to just be encultured. Taylor and Smith show that it's not just the nonbeliever who has a different experience of religious adherence in the secular, but the believer too. In a secular age, believers believe, but they do so aware that they don't have to, that others don't, and that it is optional not to.

This essay has also argued that these films are not only postsecular explorations of faith and doubt but also distinctly postsecular adaptations, in one way or another, of the biblical Passion narrative and its central theological contents. It can be concluded, then, that these films view this tension between doubt and faith, unbelief and belief, as a central theological component of Christ's life and death. Under the conditions described by Taylor as secular, in which unbelief is not only an option but more often the default option, or immanent frame for contemporary culture, it is not surprising that the apparent silence and inaction of God the Father in the face of his suffering Son, as well as the possibility of faith in spite of this uncertainty, might be the "artistic soul," to return to Bazin's terminology, that these postsecular biblical adaptations seek to "manifest … through another incarnation."

Through biblical adaptation of stories of what Bazin calls "equivalence in meaning," these three films show what it is like to live in age of belief conditioned by doubt and doubt conditioned by belief. As we have suggested, with the notable exception of the dark night of the Enlightenment, trusting and acting in spite of doubt and uncertainty has been what it means to believe in every age, and so these postsecular adaptations have brought us back to the biblical story as it was always meant to be told: "but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31 ESV).

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of the secularization hypothesis and what Taylor calls the "subtraction" narratives of the Enlightenment. Instead of highlighting the erasure of religious practice and belief in contemporary times, these are postsecular biblical adaptations in this sense: they are films that adapt the Bible for a context that see beliefs in the Bible's truth as one option amongst many.

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The Importance of Being Earnest: Evangelicalism's Aesthetics of Sincerity

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Abstract: *A recent debate between theologians James Eglinton and Michael Bird illuminates questions about the aesthetics of evangelicalism, in particular the place and limits of its characteristic earnestness. Historically and theologically, this earnestness arose against a backdrop of the earlier eighteenth century marked by sharp religious and political divisions which served as a breeding ground for satire—a mode or aesthetic that is in many ways the opposite of earnestness. Yet, even in as emblematic a satirical work as Jonathan Swift's* A Tale of a Tub*, earnest, even fervent, religious commitments prevail, albeit through indirection. The spirit of seriousness that undergirded the evangelical movement and, later, the ethos of the Victorian era hinders a dialogism more prone to cultivating a genuine and authentic faith, particularly within the context of the later modern age depicted by the philosopher Charles Taylor. Inasmuch as style is substance, the circumspect posture of humor is its own kind of earnestness.*

Key Words: *Charles Taylor, earnestness, evangelicalism, humor, Jonathan Swift, satire, Systemic Theology*

All human language—even the language of the Bible—is varied in its richness, layerings, and depths. Literary language—especially the language of the Bible—is even more so. To read the Bible literally requires reading it literarily, with an eye for all the ways in which words communicate—directly and indirectly, straightforwardly and sideways, seriously and humorously, earnestly and ironically. This is the essence of hermeneutics: reading a text in such a way so as to understand not merely the words themselves but their meaning.

Earnestness and Edmund Gosse

The devastating results of a hermeneutic derived from a flat understanding of language, a hermeneutic that fails to consider the literariness of the Bible's language, including its use of narrative, poetry, symbol, and other figures of speech, is shown dramatically, tragically, in the life and works of English poet, critic, and biographer Edmund Gosse. Gosse, whose life spanned from 1849 to 1928, lived in the wake of evangelicalism's peak influence in England's Victorian era, an age known—like the evangelicals themselves—for its earnestness.[1]

The only child of his evangelical parents, Gosse was raised in his father's belief that his child was among the elect and in his mother's hope that "I should be the Charles Wesley of my age, 'or perhaps,' she had the candour to admit, 'merely the George Whitefield.'"[2] While his father's severity certainly played a great part in his turn away from the faith, as a young man with early propensities toward literature and imagination (passions his parents sought to repress), ultimately, it was Gosse's parents' approach to Scripture that seems to have had a more profound impression on the young man. In his 1907 memoir, *Father and Son*, Gosse describes the flatness with which his parents read Scripture:

> In order to realize [my mother's] condition of mind, it is necessary, I think, to accept the view that she had formed a definite conception of the absolute, unmodified and historical veracity, in its direct and obvious sense, of every statement contained within the covers of the Bible. For her, and for my Father, nothing was symbolic, nothing allegorical or allusive in any part of Scripture, except what was, in so many words, proffered as a parable or a picture. … Hence, although their faith was so strenuous that many persons might have called it fanatical, there was no mysticism about them. They went rather to the opposite extreme, to the cultivation of a rigid and iconoclastic literalness.[3]

As Gosse goes on to explain, this extreme literalness led to misreading the highly symbolic book of Revelation:

> When they read of seals broken and of vials poured forth, of the star which was called Wormwood that fell from Heaven, and of men whose hair was as the hair of women and their teeth as the teeth of lions, they did not admit for a moment that these vivid mental pictures were of a poetic character, but they regarded them as positive statements, in guarded language, describing events which were to happen, and could be recognized when they did happen.[4]

Gosse's mother, having long repressed her own inclinations toward imaginative literature, forbade her son to read novels. But this suppression, not surprisingly, had a reverse effect—not only on novel-reading but ultimately on Gosse's rejection of the truth of the Bible, from which his parents had stripped all wonder, wit, and imagination:

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[1] Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 1976), 9–14.

[2] Edmund Gosse, *Father and Son* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 19.

[3] Gosse, *Father and Son*, 41.

[4] Gosse, *Father and Son*, 42.

> The longing to invent stories grew with violence; everything I heard or read became food for my distemper. The simplicity of truth was not sufficient for me; I must needs embroider imagination upon it, and the folly, vanity and wickedness which disgraced my heart are more than I am able to express.[5]

In looking back on his upbringing, Gosse understands his parents' views to be, not singular, but reflective of their evangelical culture: "To extremely devout persons, there is something objectionable in most of the great writers of antiquity. Horace, Lucretius, Terence, Catullus, Juvenal,—in each there is one quality or another definitely repulsive to a reader who is determined to know nothing but Christ and him crucified."[6]

Gosse closes his memoir with the scene in which he finally rejects his father's demands regarding the reading of Scripture. Amid this ongoing battle, Gosse's "distaste for Holy Scriptures" grew. Even so, he says, "My desire was to continue to delight in those sacred pages, for which I still had an instinctive veneration." Despite this yearning, he "could not but observe the difference between the zeal" with which he read literary works compared to the daily Bible readings his father pushed him to read with all solemnity.[7] Then (referring to himself in the third person) Gosse describes his final rejection of the authority of both his earthly father and his heavenly one:

> No compromise, it is seen, was offered; no proposal of a truce would have been acceptable. It was a case of "Everything or Nothing"; and thus desperately challenged, the young man's conscience threw off once for all the yoke of his "dedication," and, as respectfully as he could, without parade or remonstrance, he took a human being's privilege to fashion his inner life for himself.[8]

If, as his parents insisted, the Bible can be read only in a flat, straightforward fashion, with no room for tension or play, Gosse would not read it at all. As though adding insult to injury, *Father and Son* is written with rapier wit and subtle irony, a devastating counterstrike against the aesthetics

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[5] Gosse, *Father and Son*, 16.

[6] Gosse, *Father and Son*, 96.

[7] Gosse, *Father and Son*, 177.

[8] Gosse, *Father and Son*, 186.

of his parents' earnestness.[9]

Gosse's story demonstrates that, in matters of faith, style and substance are inextricably connected. From Carl F. H. Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* to D. W. Bebbington's quadrilateral to Mark Noll's *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* to Thomas Kidd's *Who Is an Evangelical?*, the substance of modern evangelical belief has continued to be a subject of discussion and debate.[10] Relatively less attention has been given, however, to the style of evangelicalism. Yet, in many ways, in evangelicalism (as in all things), style is substance. Indeed, what Edmund Gosse rejected, his memoir shows, is not the substance of his parents' belief but its style. Gosse explains,

> Whether the facts and doctrines contained in the Bible were true or false was not the question that appealed to me; it was rather that they had been presented to me so often and had sunken into me so far that, as someone has said, they "lay bedridden in the dormitory of the soul," and made no impression of any kind upon me.[11]

Gosse's use of "impression" in this reflection is key, for this word refers more to an aesthetic felt response than an intellectual one, again, to style more than substance. It is instructive, then, to attend to the recurring questions regarding the evangelical mode, its style of worship, culture, art, and its very mood and posture—in other words, the aesthetics of evangelicalism. Of course, given that there is little agreement over the definition or the ingredients of evangelical belief, it is likewise difficult to define a characteristic aesthetic, particularly across its history, which is nearly three hundred years long. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that one defining and enduring quality of the style of evangelicalism is earnestness of the sort that produced the literalism of Gosse's parents and the apostasy of Gosse himself.

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[9] For more on Gosse's rejection of evangelical belief, see David Hempton, *Evangelical Disenchantment: Nine Portraits of Faith and Doubt* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 139–62.

[10] Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947); D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from 1730 to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989); Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995); Thomas S. Kidd, *Who Is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).

[11] Gosse, *Father and Son*, 177.

Earnestness in Modern Dialogue

A recent discussion between two theologians whose work bears significant weight today within evangelical communities offers a helpful glimpse into the continued role of earnestness within evangelicalism, along with skepticism toward its opposing impulses (including humor, jesting, and playfulness), particularly within the spaces evangelicals are likely to take most seriously—the theological ones.

In a review of Michael Bird's *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*,[12] Reformed theologian James Eglinton questions Bird's use of humor, in particular the sidebars that appear throughout the 969-page book titled "Comic Belief," which offer jokes, puns, and other humorous bits. Eglinton questions whether Bird's use of humor in a systematic theology "indulges in the trivialisation of the ultimately important" and expresses concern, following John Webster, that "our theology be properly theological." Eglinton's brief history of humor from pre-modernity through modernity to our current day culture of the therapeutic leads to his charge that "one of our culture's key therapies" is "fun: a recently invented, self-administered soft drug that enables us to laugh at paradox and in so doing, to trivialise its claims upon our lives and make us momentarily forget [Charles] Taylor's problem of haunting immanence." To joke, not only about theology but about God himself, as Bird does in his book, is essentially to suggest, Eglinton believes, "that God puts us in need of therapy, whilst turning to trivialisation, rather than the transcendence of faith, in search of healing." Eglinton's concern—valid in and of itself as well as instructive for numerous other applications—is whether or not such an aesthetic mimics "the norms of secular therapy in its response to the paradox of God." If fun has become a secularized therapy, then a fun systematic theology is, in Eglinton's view, by definition a secularized theology. Citing Wittgenstein, Eglinton concludes that humor is not merely a mode or mood but a worldview.[13]

In other words, style is substance.

Of course, whether or not a humorous style is inherently trivializing depends upon what humor is—a crucial point that will be picked up later in this essay.

In response to the review, Bird rejects Eglinton's account of humor as part of a secular culture of the therapeutic. Rather, Bird argues that humor is simply part of what it means to be human. It also plays a role in both

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[12] Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013).

[13] James Eglinton, "On Fun and Systematic Theology: No Laughing Matter?" *ExpTim* 127.3 (2015): 124–28.

God's story and the human story, for "theology is a drama, and in any drama, even in tragedy, there is a deliberate engineering of comic moments," including in Scripture itself. Theology is not only something we observe but something we live. Bird agrees that "theology should not be trivialized" but cautions that "theology can be trivialized without humour (by suppressing its importance) and humour does not necessarily trivialize its subject (in instances where it genuinely engages, excites, and enlightens an audience)." Thus, Bird argues, a humorous style embodies "delight in the exorable majesty of the God of the gospel," a posture particularly important for theologians and ministers to take. The teaching of theology, Bird concludes, has "one purpose: to lead students to smile and delight in the exorable majesty of the God of the gospel."[14]

Once again, style is substance.

What then is the substance of humor, given that it is not merely a mode or style? And does humor inherently oppose earnestness? Or can the two serve to correct one another and combine into one coherent understanding? These are questions deserving of the many treatments already written on these topics and deserving of many more than what will be suggested briefly in this essay. This treatment will consist of a cursory look at the religious and cultural factors (particularly literary ones) that preceded and gave rise to evangelical earnestness, consider exemplary illustrations of the earnest style in early evangelicalism, and offer some observations about the necessity of the double vision humor offers, not only to a genuinely earnest and lasting faith but also to a basic understanding of reading and interpreting the Bible.

Earnestness in Pre-Evangelical Context

The sincerity that characterizes the evangelical mode did not emerge from within a vacuum. Following the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, which ended an eleven-year Puritan-led Commonwealth, a *via media* was wanted, not only as evidenced by the strengthening of the Established church as a stabilizing force but also as shown by the development of a middle way in the realm of aesthetics and taste. Stuart Tave explains,

> To good-natured Englishmen of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries the legacy of the Commonwealth and the Restoration was a double burden. As they saw it, first had come the Puritan, enthusiastic, morose, and austere, then the rake, cynical, gay, and debauched: two extremes in agreement on the natural de-

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[14] Michael F. Bird, "Rejoinder by a Smiling Theologian," *ExpTim* 127.3 (2015): 129–31.

> pravity of human nature, and either intensely holy or intensely profane.[15]

The Neoclassical Age in England that followed the period of the Restoration was a time of general stability and consensus, occurring after a long period of internal division and strife. It was thus an age ripe for comedy in general and satire in particular—the opposite of the earnestness that would develop later and triumph in the next century. Comedy depends on the agreed upon norms and standards required to provide the humor that arises from deviation from these. In art and literature, on stage and page, humor, jesting, coarseness, and bawdiness prevailed. Satire, a mode of verbal irony, reigned supreme as, arguably, the most accomplished art form of the age. In its most basic sense, going all the way back to the origins of the Greek word *eiroeia,* irony refers to "artful double meaning,"[16] an incongruity, in other words, between what is *said* and what is *meant.* Satire is based on the clearest of all double visions. Because it mocks vice or folly for the purpose of correction, it requires the ability to see vice or folly as such and to see the rule by which it ought to be corrected. The greatest satirists of the age were, not coincidentally, some of the most devoutly religious men of the day: John Dryden, poet laureate and dramatist; Jonathan Swift, the Dean of St. Patrick's in Dublin; Laurence Sterne, Anglican cleric and novelist; and Alexander Pope, Catholic poet and translator of the classics.

No better demonstration that style is substance even as it pertains to doctrine and church practices is found than in a vivid picture painted by Swift in his 1704 satirical work, *A Tale of a Tub.* Half of this digressive, genre-busting work of genius centers on an allegorical tale of three quarrelling brothers—Martin, Jack, and Peter (who represent the three branches of the church, Anglican, Puritan, and Catholic, respectively). The brothers disagree over how to implement the instructions left to them by their late father's will (which serves in the allegory as a symbol of the Scriptures). Jack and Peter (unlike the more faithful Martin) take an approach to their father's will (Scripture) that is the polar opposite of the flat reading of Gosse's parents, stretching the meaning of the text far beyond any reasonable sense in order to read into it whatever passing fashions meet wordly approval. "Fashion" is rendered by Swift quite literally in the form of a coat to which the brothers seek to attach whatever accoutrements come into style. Ironically, by the end of the tale, the embattled Jack and Peter have become so polarized in their opposing beliefs and practices that they end up being almost exactly alike, even to the point of being easily mistaken for each other. Jack (symbolizing within the allegory the Puritan severity of John Calvin) so rends his coat that viewed from a distance, its tatters resemble the frills and finery with which Peter (who symbolizes the Catholic tradition) has adorned his own coat.

A Tale of a Tub, like nearly all of Swift's considerable corpus of works, is satirical. Yet, Swift uses the humor of satire to promote his own earnest adherence to the Church of England—in his view, the *via media.* In writing some of the greatest satires in the English language, Swift—beloved Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, ardent churchman, and defender of both human and religious liberty—also provides some of the most profound and insightful (and brilliantly humorous) theological works of the age, although his theology was by no means "systematic."[17] Swift was, of course, no evangelical (or rather, less anachronistically speaking, he rejected the Puritan strain of the church from which evangelicalism emerged toward the end of his life). His sardonic, Juvenalian brand of satire would soon fall out of favor even among those appreciative of humor. Yet, his earnest doctrinal convictions were derived from, based on, and deepened by the accommodation of different perspectives within his understanding. The sincerity of Swift's doctrinal belief was, paradoxically, distilled from the impure waters of paradox, wit, humor, and satire.[18]

The ideas about humor developing around the early eighteenth century took a very different turn from the satirical mood of Swift and his fellow Augustans. The new ideal "exerted a twofold influence on the comic," Tave explains. This aesthetic "corrected the Puritan by liberating and encouraging the milder forms of comic expression, the smile, or sympathetic laughter, and innocent mirth; and it corrected the rake by controlling and discouraging the more vigorous forms, punitive laughter, ridicule, satiric wit."[19] The cheerful smile offered a *via media* between moroseness and ribaldry. Eventually, Lord Chesterfield would advise his son in a letter in 1748, "I could heartily wish, that you may often be seen to smile, but never heard to laugh."[20] Thus, the wit and satire embraced by the neoclassicists of the early eighteenth century was gradually replaced, first, by a standard of gentler humor or cheerfulness—a "middle way of the joyful Christian"—then, in one short skip, from cheerfulness

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[15] Stuart M. Tave, *The Amiable Humorist: A Study in the Comic Theory and Criticism of the 18th and Early 19th Centuries* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 3.

[16] Claire Colebrook, *Irony* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2.

[17] Indeed, "systems"—the product of those Swift referred to derisively as "Moderns"—were a primary object of Swift's satire.

[18] The word "sincere" derives etymologically from root words meaning "whole," "sound," "genuine," and "pure."

[19] Tave, *The Amiable Humorist*, 3.

[20] *Lord Chesterfield's Letters*, ed. David Roberts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 72.

to earnestness.[21]

Earnestness in Evangelicalism

The earnestness embraced by the earliest evangelicals was a counterstrike against both the spirit of personal licentiousness, on the one hand, and that of religious complacency, on the other, that characterized the dominant culture of the Restoration and the Neoclassical periods. (Religious minorities, including Catholics, Puritans, and other Dissenters, as well as those of other religions existed throughout on the margins.) Earnestness flows throughout the movement, forming it in both word and deed, in its sermons, music, literature, and, later, film, as well as in the portrayals of evangelicals by outsiders (especially critics) within the broader culture. Indeed, this earnestness is not only a defining mood but also, as Eglinton would have it, a worldview.

Earnestness became a chief characteristic, not only of evangelicalism but also of the culture of the Victorian era in which evangelicalism gained its peak cultural influence.[22] Seriousness—nearly synonymous in sense and usage with earnestness—in belief, practice, and demeanor has been the hallmark of evangelical Christians since its embryonic stage in the Wesleys' Holy Club at Oxford, through the evangelically influenced Victorian age,[23] to the omnipresent altar calls of present-day churches. As Richard D. Altick explains in his examination of the evangelical influence on the Victorian age, "To be serious was to cherish Evangelical religious views." A "serious person," he continues, "was puritanically opposed to the vanities and frivolities of life, devoid of humor, and intolerant of others' frivolity and indulgences." Earnestness, "while not excluding humor and innocent pleasure, alluded to the same zealousness and above all sincerity in the pursuit of presumably worthwhile personal and social goals."[24]

Altick's descriptive language closely echoes the prescriptive language in John Angell James's popular and highly influential work, *An Earnest Ministry: The Need of the Times* (1847). The reach of James, a well-known Nonconformist English preacher and abolitionist, was extended even by Charles Spurgeon, who cited him in his handbook for preachers.[25] In *An Earnest Ministry*, James defines and expands on earnestness for the minister as a unified pursuit, desire, devotion, and aim.[26] Likewise, in *Lectures to My Students*, Spurgeon writes,

> If I were asked—What in a Christian minister is the most essential quality for securing success in winning souls for Christ? I should reply, "earnestness": and if I were asked a second or a third time, I should not vary the answer, for personal observation drives me to the conclusion that, as a rule, real success is proportionate to the preacher's earnestness.[27]

In an 1862 sermon titled "Life in Earnest," Spurgeon describes earnestness as whole-heartedness. Earnestness is not only an approach to life, vocation, and ministry; it also works upon the body itself, Spurgeon observes, for "it enters into every part of the spiritual man: earnestness quickens his pulse, increases the circulation of his blood, it makes the man in all respects in an healthy state; these holy stimulants make the soul stronger than the giant when he is refreshed with new wine."[28] In their own opposing ways, then, both Spurgeon and Gosse appeal to the bodily impression of or response to earnestness; it is, in other words, an aesthetic experience (or in the case of Gosse, the lack of one).

Outside the fold of evangelicalism, critics in its peak years of influence in the nineteenth century range from the high Anglican Jane Austen—whose satirical style was the opposite of earnestness and who declared, "I do not like the evangelicals"[29]—to nominal Anglican (eventual Catholic) Oscar Wilde, whose most-loved play, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, satirized this evangelical-cum-Victorian seriousness.[30] The most well-known example of Austen's satirical wit is the famously ironic opening line of

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[21] Tave, *The Amiable Humorist*, 4.

[22] Many Victorian novelists, the novel being the foremost literary genre of the age, are characterized by critics today for their "moral earnestness" and "theological pontification," in the words of Chad P. Stutz, "Across the (Many) Dividing Lines: Evangelicalism and the Spirit of Interdenominational Cooperation," *Victorian Review* 46.2 (Fall 2020): 172–76.

[23] See, e.g., Herbert Schlossberg, *The Silent Revolution and the Making of Victorian England* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2000); Ian Bradley, *The Call to Seriousness: The Evangelical Impact on the Victorians* (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

[24] Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 175.

[25] C. H. Spurgeon, *Feathers for Arrows, Or Illustrations for Preachers and Teachers, from My Notebook* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1870), 31–32.

[26] John Angell James, *An Earnest Ministry: The Need of the Times* (Edinburgh: William Oliphant and Sons, 1848), 12.

[27] C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1877), 145.

[28] C. H. Spurgeon, "Life in Earnest: Sermon on 2 Chronicles 31:21" (February 2, 1862), in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 8, https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/life-in-earnest/#flipbook/.

[29] Jane Austen, "Tuesday [January 24, 1809]," in *Jane Austen: Her Life and Letters: A Family Record*, by William Austen-Leigh and Richard Austen-Leigh (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1913), 228.

[30] *The Importance of Being Earnest* was first performed in London in 1895.

Pride and Prejudice, whose meaning (not the words) expresses not a universal truth but rather the particular wish of parents of daughters like the Bennet sisters whose futures depend on prudent marital matches: "It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife."[31] Here Austen uses humor to prompt readers to consider the important distinction between unquestioned assumptions or desires (ones she is, in fact, sympathetic to) and truth. At the latter end of the same century in which Austen wrote (the most marked evangelical cultural influence occurring in between), Wilde mocked earnestness itself, pointing out that even earnestness can be trafficked for personal gain and those too sincere to see that will prove only gullible. When the character Algernon discovers that his friend who has been going by the name of Ernest is really named Jack, Algernon protests unbelievingly:

> You have always told me it was Ernest. I have introduced you to every one as Ernest. You answer to the name of Ernest. You look as if your name was Ernest. You are the most earnest-looking person I ever saw in my life. It is perfectly absurd your saying that your name isn't Ernest. It's on your cards. Here is one of them. [Taking it from case.] 'Mr. Ernest Worthing, B. 4, The Albany.' I'll keep this as a proof that your name is Ernest if ever you attempt to deny it to me, or to Gwendolen, or to any one else. [Puts the card in his pocket.]

Jack, who has been living a double life in pretending to be Ernest (and earnest) replies, "Well, my name is Ernest in town and Jack in the country."[32]

The trajectory illustrated by these two satirists alone—a movement from a virtue ethicist in Austen, whose aim is to conserve traditional values and beliefs, to a subversive in Wilde, whose wit was employed to counter the same—does support the claim, one echoed by Eglinton, that following the eighteenth century, humor has become a force for increasing secularization.[33] While Austen uses irony to stabilize truth, Wilde uses irony to expose what he sees as the unstable foundations of his society's understanding of truth. "Ernest" is but a name that one might slip in and out of at will.

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[31] Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: Penguin, 2002), 5.

[32] Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Ernest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* (2021), First Act, https://www.gutenberg.org/files/844/844-h/844-h.htm.

[33] Russell Heddendorf, *From Faith to Fun: The Secularization of Humor* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), xiv–xv.

Earnestness and Humor

As all these examples show, humor can be used for good or evil, to show truth or overturn it. In other words, earnestness is not unquestionably good nor humor necessarily evil. The real questions facing Christians, before attempting to understand what humor *can* do, are what humor *is* and how it functions.

The word "humor" as we use it today is derived from the same word that originally referred to the four bodily fluids thought to flow throughout the human body. It was believed that these humors needed to be in proper balance for health. The current phrases "to be out of humor" or "to humor" someone reflect the origins of this idea. From this usage, it is a short jump to see humor as understood today as something that brings a certain balance or proportion to a situation or understanding. In this way, humor inherently depends upon the notion of two (or more) qualities or perspectives in tension with one another.

A simple example of this from the Bible is seen in 1 Kgs 18:27, where Elijah taunts the priests of Baal by suggesting that their god is not answering their prayers because he is thinking, going to the bathroom, or asleep. Such mockery is not humorous to the priests of Baal, of course, but from the perspective of those who follow the God of the Israelites, the incongruity is humorous and satisfying. Other instances of the way in which a double perspective is needed for right reading can be found throughout the Bible. The many symbols in Revelation, which confounded Gosse's parents, represent another set of good examples. The seemingly contradictory views expressed in Ecclesiastes are reconciled by understanding each as a partial view within an all-encompassing eternal perspective. The satire of the Old Testament prophets, the paradoxes and irony of the wisdom literature, and the sharp rebukes of the religious leaders by Jesus are all examples of how language must be engaged and understood beyond a surface level through layers of understanding and perspective that often defy an earnest reading of the text.

While earnestness and sincerity imply a seriousness and unity of vision, humor, in all its forms, depends upon a kind of double vision, an incongruity, a recognition of the difference between what is and what should be. As mentioned above, humor emerges from the deviation from an implied or expected standard or norm. This double vision inherent in humorous forms is, by its very nature, dialogical, requiring a simultaneous recognition of what is and what should be, or at the very least, that something is not as it should be. Earnestness, or seriousness (its closest synonym), is by nature unified and monological, less admitting (if admitting at all) of alternative outcomes, conditions, or views. The problem with earnestness, then, is not its seriousness or sincerity but its tendency toward monologism rather than dialogism—in other words, its totalizing nature. Once a structure of thought becomes totalizing, it no longer leaves room for faith, or even the book of Job.

The greater possibilities for authenticity—including authenticity in one's faith—cultivated by dialogism are outlined by Charles Taylor in *The Ethics of Authenticity*, his treatment of the construction of the self in the modern age, the very context in which Eglinton, Heddendorf, and others assert that humor has become an agent of our therapeutic culture. Taylor explains, "We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression." By "language" he means "not only the words we speak but also other modes of expression whereby we define ourselves, including the 'languages' of art, of gesture, of love, and the like." (Humor, I would add, is also such a language.) These languages, the very materials of self-identity, are acquired in dialogue with others, Taylor says.[34] If nothing is more central to self-identity than religious belief (which defines one's view of all other aspects of one's being), then Taylor's emphasis on the dialogical nature of the language of religious expression is a caution against too tight a grasp on earnestness.

Conclusion

None of this is merely academic or theoretical. In a different context, I have elucidated, anecdotally, the way in which the failure of evangelical culture to not only entertain but to welcome a dialogical approach to faith can lead to doubt, deconstruction, and deconversion,[35] as the life of Edmund Gosse shows—along with many others of his generation and ours. The ability to hold to one belief while recognizing the existence and even the validity of differing views doesn't trivialize faith—it elevates and strengthens it. Particularly now, in this "secular age" in which Christian belief presents itself as just one choice among many others, a style (and substance) that not only can, but does, admit other and competing views (and does so even enthusiastically) is the wiser, more loving course. A double vision that accounts for perspectives other than truth pays homage to the power of truth. It's tempting to imagine how the witty, bright, and

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[34] Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 33.

[35] See my chapter, "Anti-Intellectualism: We Must Ask Hard Questions," in *Before You Lose Your Faith: Deconstructing Doubt in the Church*, ed. Ivan Mesa (Austin, TX: The Gospel Coalition, 2021), 93–100. See also my article, "How to Love Your Ideological Enemy," *Christianity Today*, May 18, 2017.

searching Edmund Gosse might have turned out if his father had approached teaching his son the tenets of the Christian faith as Bird does in the opening of his book's first chapter, "What is Theology?"—with a multiple-choice quiz:

> What exactly is theology? If the question is posed in a multiple-choice format, we could choose from the following options.
>
> A. The name of the eighth full-length album by Sinead O'Connor, released in 2007.
> B. What my father tells me to stop doing and get a real job.
> C. The study of God.
> D. All of the above.
>
> The answer is option (d), "All of the above." However, option (c), "The study of God," is technically the more correct answer, and we can unpack that a bit more.[36]

Such "comic belief" echoes the overarching narrative of the Bible, which is, after all, a comedy in the classical sense: a story that begins with a disruption of order and ends with its restoration.

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[36] Michael Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 3.

STR 12.2 (Fall 2021): 99–129

Book Reviews

Benjamin D. Suchard. *The Development of the Biblical Hebrew Vowels, Including a Concise Historical Morphology*. Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics 99. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2019. xii + 304 pp. Hardback. ISBN: 978-9004390256. $113.00.

The past few decades have witnessed what may be characterized as a "linguistic turn" in biblical studies.[1] The most prolific research involves the application of pragmatics, text-linguistics, and discourse analysis. In many ways, this recent move is not altogether novel. Linguistic inquiry was birthed in the context of nineteenth-century (and earlier) comparative philology. In contrast with the turn to the synchronic analysis of pragmatics and meta-discourse, the earliest linguistic investigations were historically oriented and focused on phonology and morphology. Its theoretical origin may be traced to the so-called *Junggrammatiker* ("Neogrammarians"), who proposed that diachronic sound change was without exception regular. A great number of successes—including the oft-cited confirmation of Saussure's proposed Proto-Indo-European laryngeal theory—paved the way for landmark achievements in grammar and lexicography.[2] Similar advancements were achieved in Semitic and Hebrew philology. The longevity of the work of Theodor Nöldeke, Carl Brockelmann, Wilhelm Gesenius, and others exemplifies the value of comparative methodologies and further authenticates the insights of what became known as historical linguistics.

Even though some biblical scholars have questioned the principle of regular sound change (notably Joshua Blau), in this 2019 work, Benjamin Suchard seeks to account for the origin and development of the Tiberian vocalic system using the Neogrammarian paradigm (pp. 1–2). To accomplish this goal, he addresses a number of problematic phonological developments in Hebrew vowels. The study is anchored by analyses of the Canaanite Shift (Chapter 3), stress and lengthening (Chapter 4), diphthongs and triphthongs (Chapter 5), Philippi's Law (Chapter 6), the law of attenuation (Chapter 7), and word-final vowels (Chapter 8). Each chapter provides a review of previous scholarship, an evaluation of the outstanding issues, an identification of the most problematic exemplars, and an attempt at reconstructing regular sound change rules. The conclusion includes a rule-ordered relative chronology of the development of Hebrew phonology and a selected list of examples. An appendix summarizes biblical Hebrew morphology of "pronouns, nouns and adjectives, numerals, and verbs" from a historical linguistic perspective (p. 231).

On the whole, Suchard provides strong evidence that the traditional formulations of historical phonology should not be abandoned when dealing with biblical Hebrew. Yet, specialists will find many quibbles with the niceties of the proposed developments (e.g., the reconstruction of an analogically developed syllable closing -*h* [i.e., **ʔantah* et passim] to solve the anceps problem, pp. 203–6).[3]

Suchard is to be congratulated on his yeoman's service to the field of biblical Hebrew phonology and his aim to realign future queries to conventional historical linguistic research. This work provides excellent examples of the prodigious gains and the promise of continued research in the area of Hebrew phonology. One would hope that biblical scholars would engage with historical linguistics and the resources it provides to better understand the languages of the Bible. Suchard's discussions are most helpful not as a replacement of more comprehensive treatments, such as Bauer and Leander, *Historische Grammatik der Hebräischen Sprache des Alten Testamentes* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1962 [1922]), but as a starting point for scholars and students interested in phonology from a Neogrammarian perspective.

The project, however, suffers from several underspecified assumptions and omissions. First, dialectal variety and diversity is eschewed for a monolithic language presentation at the earliest and latest stages of Hebrew development. Second, a robust description of Tiberian phonology is altogether missing. The endpoint of the developmental pathways is not the phonetic realization of Tiberian Hebrew,[4] but the final stage appears to be a pre-Tiberian phonemic reconstruction. Third, the phonological development of proper names is not considered. While these nouns have particular difficulties because of their tendency to resist systemic sound change, they also exhibit innovations which need to be included in a full-scale historical accounting. Fourth, the dueling solutions of genetic transmission and areal diffusion appear to be enacted in an ad hoc fashion. A more robust engagement with dialect geography and contact linguistics would improve the analysis. Fifth, focusing on Tiberian Hebrew restricts the scope of the historic associations and verification. Incorporating additional transcription evidence (Hexapla, Jerome) and other medieval phonologies (Babylonian, Palestinian) could have provided a closer temporal approximation of the phonological changes in Hebrew.

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[1] This term is apt but should not be confused with the description of analytic philosophy by Richard Rorty (*The Linguistic Turn, Essays in Philosophical Method* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967]), even though the theoretical origin of both, at least in part, can be connected with the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure.

[2] Jerzy Kuryłowicz, "ə indoeuropéen et *ḫ* hittite," in *Symbolae grammaticae in honorem Joannis Rozwadowski*, vol. 1 (Cracow: Uniwersytet Jagielloński, 1927), 95–104.

[3] Following Ahmad Al-Jallad, "Final Short Vowels in Gəʿəz, Hebrew ʾ*attā*, and the Anceps Paradox," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 59 (2014): 315–27.

[4] Geoffrey Khan, *The Tiberian Pronunciation Tradition of Biblical Hebrew*, vol. 1, Cambridge Semitic Languages and Cultures 1 (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2020).

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William J. Webb and Gordon K. Oeste. *Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric? Wrestling with Troubling War Texts*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019. 397 pp. Paperback. ISBN: 978-0830852499. $40.50.

Bloody, Brutal, and Barbaric? (*BBB*) attempts to solve the problems raised by genocide and war rape texts in the Bible. In this reviewer's estimation, William Webb and Gordon Oeste accomplish a Herculean feat by elucidating the complex issues within these texts and by providing innovative and orthodox answers to difficult questions. In this review, I devote significant space to a survey of the volume's contents followed by an assessment.

BBB is neatly divided into three sections. In the first two sections, the authors introduce the basic claims of the book, survey genocide and war rape texts in the Bible (e.g., Num 31:1–54; Deut 21:10–14; Josh 8–12), and outline traditional and non-traditional solutions to the presence of genocide and war rape in the Bible. *BBB* makes six basic claims: Christians apply the wrong answers to the right questions, the Bible's total-kill rhetoric is hyperbolic, the genocide and war rape texts reflect divine accommodation, the Bible portrays a redemptive-movement ethic, the portraits of YHWH and Jesus cohere, and the Bible presents an unfinished justice story (pp. 13–19).

Webb and Oeste consider the following "traditional answers" to genocide and war rape texts: God is the source of holy war commands, holy war has good purposes, the extreme sinfulness of the Canaanites merited extreme divine punishment, and divine warfare against the Canaanites anticipates eschatological judgment (pp. 35–50). Webb and Oeste contend that these answers do not solve the modern ethical problems raised by the genocide and war rape texts. However, they argue that these answers solve the ethical problems of the ancient audience (i.e., the creation of sacred space resulting in the expulsion of Canaanite idolaters from YHWH's sacred land).

Webb and Oeste deem their approach "non-traditional" and capable of solving the modern ethical problems raised by the genocide and war rape texts. The foundation of their "non-traditional" approach is a redemptive-movement hermeneutic (Chapter 4). Webb and Oeste admit that there are legitimate problems in the biblical text due to divine accommodation (e.g., genocide and war rape). They believe that these texts depict an early stage in God's redemptive story. Moreover, they note that despite real ethical problems in the biblical story, Israel's ethics supersede the ethics of their ancient Near Eastern neighbors. Chapter 5 outlines the (truly) ugly side of war rape in Deut 21:10–14 (i.e., women as sexual property who were given one month to grieve their past before being coerced to marry an Israelite). Chapter 6, however, shows that Israel's custom was morally superior to their ANE neighbors. Unlike their neighbors, the Israelites were not permitted to commit battlefield rape or rape temple slaves. Moreover, compared to Israel's ANE neighbors, Deut 21:10–14 shows some concern for the foreign woman.

Chapter 7 functions as a transitional chapter arguing that both issues of genocide and war rape require an incremental ethic approach. Chapters 8–16 consist of Webb and Oeste's resolution to the problem of genocide in the Bible. In Chapters 8–11, the authors contend that total-kill language in texts like Num 31:1–54 and Joshua 8–12 is hyperbolic. They argue that ANE scribes regularly used hyperbole to describe warfare and that ancient Israelite scribes followed suit. In Chapter 8, they discuss examples of hyperbole in ANE literature. They list numerical hyperbole (i.e., number of troops in battle), speed hyperbole (i.e., length of time taken to defeat an enemy), severity hyperbole (i.e., heightening the extent of human lives lost in battle), extent hyperbole (i.e., geographical domain defeated), and attribution hyperbole (i.e., king-rather-than-army as victor in battle) as representative examples. They then show how Joshua and Judges are laced with these forms of hyperbole in Chapter 9. In Chapters 10–11, they quell arguments against the hyperbole thesis.

They support their argument for hyperbole by showing that expulsion was an equally acceptable form of removing the Canaanites from YHWH's sacred space and, therefore, it is unlikely that "total-kill" meant total-kill in those texts (Chapter 12). In Chapter 13, they demonstrate that the Hebrew Bible forbade the ancient Israelites from committing the war atrocities committed by Israel's ANE neighbors. They survey texts in the

Old Testament that reveal YHWH's hatred of war and deem him an uneasy war God in Chapter 14. Then, in Chapter 15, they show how the cross, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus transfer literal warfare against God's enemies to the domain of spiritual warfare against God's enemies. They also show that the Christ-event moves history towards the goal of ultimate justice. Finally, in Chapter 16, they argue that the warfare in Revelation is not literal, but spiritual and that Jesus defeats his enemies on the last day with a word not a sword.

In my estimation, Webb and Oeste's non-traditional approach to the concerns with war rape and genocide in the Bible paves the right path forward. Their approach is both accurate and comprehensive. By situating war rape and genocide in the Bible within in its larger ANE literary context, they correctly demonstrate that Deut 21:10–14 ethically surpasses ANE war rape practices (although it is not without its own problems!) and that texts like Num 31:1–54 and Joshua 8–12 employ significant hyperbole in their description of warfare (but with their own problems too!). In sum, Webb and Oeste support their thesis with a thorough argument. They leave no stone unturned and, thereby, overcome dissenting opinions. Their work is sure to help believers and skeptics navigate the Bible's darkest corners for years to come.

My primary criticisms of the book concern the interpretation of individual passages. For example, I dispute their interpretation of YHWH's rejection of the institution of the monarchy in 1 Samuel 8 and their interpretation of YHWH's character as weighted towards love and forgiveness based on Exod 34:6–7 (pp. 306–11). However, the overarching redemptive-movement thesis of *BBB* is both valid and sound.

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Matthew Barrett. *Canon, Covenant and Christology: Rethinking Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel.* New Studies in Biblical Theology 51. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020. xiii + 359 pp. Paperback. ISBN: 978-0830829293. $30.60.

In this important study, Matthew Barrett, Associate Professor of Christian Theology at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, offers a biblical-theological defense of a robust, evangelical doctrine of Scripture. Adopting an edifying rather than polemical approach, Barrett aims to "fortify evangelicals and remind them that their doctrine of Scripture depends not on a few proof texts but is far more organic, grounded as it is in the character of God, his covenantal speech, and Christological fulfilment" (p. xiii).

Barrett's work is motivated by a dilemma facing evangelicals. Scripture is God's unified, covenantal, and redemptive revelation (pp. 2–4). However, some scholars have concluded that Paul's "explicit" testimony regarding the Old Testament and the apparent lack of comparable statements from Jesus and the Gospel writers suggest a divide between Jesus and Paul, with the doctrine of inspiration constituting a non-Jewish development within Christianity (p. 5). If accepted, devastating effects follow for inspiration, canonical unity, and redemptive history. Unfortunately, some evangelicals are tempted to affirm this divide or merely to "pay lip service to inspiration" (p. 5). Barrett counters this "hermeneutical darkness" by showing that Jesus and the Evangelists have "just as convictional a doctrine of Scripture" as Paul, if one reads Jesus and the Gospels "within the Old Testament's promise-fulfillment pattern and typological tapestry" (p. 6).

In Chapter 1 Barrett discusses some foundational issues for his argument, particularly its cornerstone: "divine authorial intent" (p. 24). Its diminished appreciation in post-Enlightenment scholarship produced a loss of biblical authority (pp. 9–17). Divine authorial intent is foundational for Scripture's unity, which is canonical, substantial, expressed through typology and *sensus plenior*, and fundamentally Christological.

In Chapter 2, Barrett explains the presuppositions of Jesus and first-century Jews concerning Scripture to prepare readers to understand how Jesus read the OT. He highlights the covenantal, progressive, and divinely-interpreted nature of God's revelation (pp. 41–47). Offering a mini whole-Bible biblical theology, he demonstrates the OT's nature as an "inscripturated" covenantal text, the prophets' awareness of their own inspiration, and the unity of God's revelation. Furthermore, often by means of prophecy and typology, the prophets "narrowed" their focus upon the one through whom God's redemption would be fulfilled, the promised prophet, priest, and king (p. 88).

Chapters 3 and 4 offer two "case studies" from the Gospels of Matthew and John, demonstrating how the Evangelists and Jesus read Scripture as a conceptual unity, finding its fulfillment in Jesus. Underlying this assumption is the conviction of all Scripture's inspiration and divine authorship (p. 98). Importantly, Barrett unpacks how in Matt 5:17–19 (on fulfilling the Law) Jesus affirms Scripture's Christological telos as well as its verbal, plenary inspiration; its "reliability and authority;" and its "perpetual efficacy" (p. 119). Likewise, Jesus knew his actions fulfilled Scripture as he took them (p. 136). These chapters' closing implication is that the OT Scriptures "give birth to Jesus himself and are the genesis of the church" (p. 197).

In Chapter 5 Barrett investigates the Synoptic Gospels, explaining how Jesus's redemptive mission is successful because he as the "obedient Adamic son" offers covenant obedience to the Scriptures (p. 204). This obedience accomplishes redemption and affirms Scripture's authority and inspiration (p. 204).

In Chapter 6 Barrett connects "the reliability of Jesus' position on Scriptures" (p. 249) to his Trinitarian identity as the Incarnate Word. He details evidence from all four Gospels that prove Jesus's divine identity and authority and explains how the whole Trinity is involved in the process of revelation. As God, Jesus confirms and fulfills God's word in the OT and has the authority to speak a new, inspired word (p. 295). Barrett closes by proposing how this argument can inform systematic theology and conversations about inerrancy. His main emphases are that the "ultimate dogmatic location" of divine inspiration is the doctrine of God (p. 302) and that the doctrine of Scripture he articulates is more Christological than the Barthian separation. For, "to drive a wedge between Christ as the Word and the inscripturated text is to miss the unified trinitarian delivery of revelation" (p. 309).

On the whole, Barrett's argument is compelling, and he demonstrates the high stakes of an impoverished doctrine of Scripture. The work's interdisciplinary focus, drawing from the fields of biblical theology, hermeneutics, historical theology, and systematic theology, is one of its chief strengths. He successfully integrates important research from the field of biblical studies to demonstrate how the biblical authors presupposed a divine authorial intent lay behind Scripture's unity. Despite this, he is more conversant with recent biblical scholarship when discussing NT texts than OT texts since he is overly reliant upon Meredith Kline. That does not negate his overall argument though. In fact, as a biblical scholar, I found this study not only convincing, but also *convicting*!

Barrett's book should be required reading for every seminary student as a timely prophylactic and balm against the deleterious effects of an over-focus on the human authorial intention at the expense of the divine. Yet it also offers a model for aspiring theologians and biblical scholars. Hopefully evangelicals will take his assessment and proposed solution seriously.

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John Kampen. *Matthew within Sectarian Judaism*. Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019. xvii + 320 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0300171563. $65.00.

John Kampen is Distinguished Research Professor at Methodist Theological School in Ohio and a recognized authority on the Dead Sea Scrolls. In this new book, he seeks to draw on his expertise in the sect that produced and preserved the scrolls to understand the social setting of Matthew's Gospel.

Kampen's thesis is that "the gospel of Matthew is distinguished among the writings of the New Testament by notable similarities to other sectarian literature composed by Jews of the Second Temple era" (p. 203). Focusing on that era, scholars who apply the social sciences to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls have argued convincingly that the Qumran community was a sectarian group. Kampen contends that the sectarian traits manifested in the Qumran documents are also found in the Gospel of Matthew. For example, he sees the content of the Sermon on the Mount as closely paralleling the paraenetic material in the Rules text of the Qumran corpus. He regards the diatribe of Matthew 23 as part of an intramural debate that juxtaposes the sectarian followers of Jesus with the rest of the Jewish community. He also suggests that Matt 28:16–20 is a statement on the role of this sect in Jewish history. Consequently, Kampen infers from this and other evidence that the genre of the Gospel of Matthew is "sectarian narrative" (p. 209).

Kampen's insights challenge several popular views of the character of Matthew's Gospel. He argues that material in Matthew that treats the Mosaic law is not "anti-Pauline" as some scholars have claimed. Instead, this material addresses differences of opinion about the law that distinguished Jewish sects of this era. He argues that material that some scholars have seen as anti-Semitic is really neither pro-Roman nor pro-Gentile, but purely sectarian. The author of Matthew's Gospel wants his readers to understand that Jews who oppose the Christian sect are responsible for Jesus's death. However, he does not intend to indict the entire nation of Israel for Jesus's execution. Kampen thus asserts that instead of seeing the community addressed by the Gospel as one that has separated *from* Judaism, it should be viewed as a sect *within* Judaism.

Unfortunately, Kampen exaggerates the parallels between the Qumran sect and Matthew's community at times. He also hesitates to affirm some of the implications of his own thesis. Moreover, Kampen argues for a later date of composition for the Gospel than most scholars affirm, placing it at the end of the first century. However, the parallels between Matthew and the Dead Sea Scrolls are well suited to a date of composition several decades earlier since the sectarian documents of the Dead Sea Scrolls were written prior to AD 70. Despite these caveats though, the book is a valuable contribution to scholarship that will interest those who seek to understand the relationship of the Matthean Christian community in Galilee to other Jews in the region.

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Francis J. Moloney. *The Apocalypse of John: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. xxiv + 404 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1540961778. $54.99.

Francis J. Moloney, Senior Professorial Fellow at Catholic Theological College, University of Divinity in Melbourne, Australia, makes a unique contribution to the interpretation of the book of Revelation in his new commentary, *The Apocalypse of John*. Moloney rejects the traditional eschatological and millenarian interpretation of the book, but rather asserts that the book should be read Christologically and ecclesiologically "as a steady statement and restatement of the saving effects of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which act from before all time" (p. 27). Moreover, "The book is a celebration of the perennial significance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the mystery of God perennially present across the whole of sacred history, from the beginning of creation down to the time of the Christian church" (p. 27). This work offers a creative interpretation of Revelation, but ultimately, when compared closely with the text of Scripture, is not compelling. Nevertheless, anyone looking for a unique and fresh reading of Revelation will benefit by reading this book.

Much of Moloney's commentary captures not his own ideas but represent his "rethinking and rewriting of the interpretation of Eugenio Corsini," an Italian scholar who has not had wide reception in the English-speaking world (p. xvi). Corsini insisted that Revelation is not a prophecy about the end of the world but "is the story of a past event that embraces the whole of the history of salvation, beginning with the creation of the world and culminating in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ" (Corsini in foreword, p. xi). Moloney embraces this view which guides the rest of the interpretation of the book.

He makes several important interpretive decisions. First, he believes that Revelation is "bent" apocalyptic in that it is missing "God's final saving intervention [that] will mark the end of all time, the eschaton" (p. 8). Instead, Revelation presents the victorious Lamb as slain before the foundation of the world: "The victory has already been won" (p. 8). Second,

Moloney rejects the common view that Revelation was written to persecuted Christians. John is not writing to a struggling community and urging them to persevere in light of God's coming judgment, but rather Revelation is "directed to Christians facing a situation of great ambiguity, caught between belief in the saving effects of Jesus' death and resurrection and a lifestyle that that belief requires, on the one hand, and the allure of the glittering Greco-Roman world within which they lived, on the other" (p. 33). Finally, Moloney sees the series of sevens as determining "the heart of the document" (p. 32). Beginning with the seven churches, the series of sevens rehearses the history of humanity and the saving work of Jesus Christ among them. For example, although the letters to the seven churches are an exhortation to the churches in Asia, they also "represent Israel's sacred story, foreshadowing, preparing, and instructing the church" (p. 67). The letter to Ephesus takes believers back to the garden reminding them of the fall from the original love, Smyrna recalls the affliction and plagues in Egypt, and so on, until Laodicea, which relates Israel's rejection of the Messiah and the coming of the Son of Man.

At times, Moloney's Christological reading of Revelation is very moving and enriching. The history of Israel and Christ's death and resurrection do play central parts in the book. However, this approach goes too far by insisting that Revelation is not eschatological but merely rehearses the present benefits of Christ's work. First, if Revelation is not eschatological, why was it written in the inherently eschatological apocalyptic genre? Second, verse 1 of the book notes that Jesus is making known to his servants "the things that must soon take place." If the book was a mere rehearsing of the history of Israel and work of the Messiah, it would not allude to future events in the first verse. Furthermore, the book ends with a final judgment and a vision of the new heavens and the new earth. All these images reflect an eschatological judgment and final vindication and reward for the people of God.

The greatest weakness of Moloney's commentary is its failure to employ an already/not-yet eschatology. We can affirm that there are present blessings and effects of Christ's saving work to the church. However, we do not have to deny that a future eschatological confirmation and vindication are still to come. The fact that Jesus has died and been raised secures that future victory. In the present, however, we live in the tension of the already/not yet. *The Apocalypse of John* will help readers see how the history of Israel and work of the Messiah permeate Revelation; however, its denial of the book's eschatology weakens it at many important interpretive junctures.

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Denny Burk, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Brian Vickers, eds. *God's Glory Revealed in Christ: Essays on Biblical Theology in Honor of Thomas R. Schreiner*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2019. Hardback. ISBN: 978-1462795581. $38.47.

For more than a quarter of a century, Thomas R. Schreiner has enriched evangelicalism as an esteemed biblical scholar. His writing ministry reveals a remarkable breadth of expertise: several commentaries on the Pauline and General epistles, a biblical theology, a New Testament theology, and a Pauline theology, in addition to essays and edited volumes. Within the Southern Baptist Convention, Schreiner has been at the forefront of New Testament scholarship while his works span the disciplines of biblical theology and systematic theology. A cherished faculty member of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary since 1997, he has carried forward the legacy of A. T. Robertson. Schreiner is a worthy recipient of *God's Glory Revealed in Christ*, written in his honor.

In sum, this festschrift is a collection of chapters dedicated to biblical theology. It includes sections on whole Bible approaches to biblical theology (Chapters 1–5), major themes and issues in biblical theology (Chapters 6–11), background issues and biblical theology (Chapters 12–14), and applications (Chapters 15–19).

In the section on whole Bible approaches to biblical theology, the various "schools" of biblical theology reflect on how their biblical-theological framework contributes to hermeneutics, redemptive history, and understanding the Bible as a whole. Each approach to biblical theology is undergirded by core observations. For instance, building on classic dispensational theology, progressive dispensationalism argues that God's promises to Israel under the old covenant relate to national Israel and will be fulfilled with national Israel, contra progressive covenantalism, which views the church as the true Israel. Then, new covenant theology, while insisting that the new covenant fulfills the old covenant, rejects a single covenant of redemption as held in classic Reformed theology. Overall, each of the approaches to biblical theology affirms salvation history as integral to biblical theology, even while nuances such as the ordering of the Old Testament books—argued by Jim Hamilton—are suggested for best understanding salvation history in its fullness.

The second section of *God's Glory Revealed in Christ* covers chapters on major themes and issues in biblical theology. One such theme is the newness of Paul's gospel and the reality that Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism expressed in terms of continuity and discontinuity. In addition, John Piper highlights Schreiner's emphasis that God's purpose in all things is his glory through Christ, as affirmed through Paul's view of sanctification. Reflective of Schreiner's own interests and writings, other chapters are written on the ministry of Paul to the Corinthians, the Trinity in Hebrews, typology, and soul care in the pastoral office.

The role of backgrounds in biblical theology and other theological disciplines is continuously debated. In this regard, Clinton Arnold likely writes the most controversial chapter in the book, on the need to reconstruct the background of Colossians to understand the letter. Although the historical-cultural background of New Testament texts is illuminating and at points even necessary to understand the full thrust of a passage, the importance of backgrounds should not be overstated. Arnold contends that we cannot understand certain passages without historical study, but appropriately concludes that we can understand the theology of Colossians even if we do not know the precise nature of the false teaching the epistle addresses. Also on backgrounds, Jarvis Williams sheds light on the use of extrabiblical material, namely Second Temple Jewish literature, toward the study of the New Testament.

Since practical theology flows out of biblical theology (as well as the other theological disciplines), the final section of the book includes chapters on applications of biblical theology. Denny Burk's chapter on transgenderism helpfully demonstrates how biblical theology teaches the complementary differences between male and female. Moreover, biblical theology impels the church toward missions, as Brian Vickers observes.

This collection of essays makes its contribution in its broad engagement of important topics within the discipline of biblical theology. *God's Glory Revealed in Christ* demonstrates awareness of remaining challenges in biblical theology such as how to integrate the theological disciplines, navigate the unity-diversity question, and utilize historical background study in exegesis. Alongside the benefit of an engaging book on biblical theology, readers will find themselves edified by Tom Schreiner himself, as a Christian, pastor, theologian, and scholar.

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Steven J. Duby. *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019. xvi + 295 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0830848843. $40.00.

Steven Duby, a theologian noted for his work on the doctrine of divine simplicity, provides a substantial contribution to InterVarsity Press's new series on Christian doctrine and Scripture with *God in Himself*. Duby attends to *theologia* in the strict sense of the word, that is, "consideration of

God in himself without primary reference to the [divine] economy" (p. 6). He offers "a sketch of the rationale and practice of Christian reflection on God himself in his transcendence of the economy" (p. 6). This meditation on God *in se* allows Duby to interact with some of contemporary theology's most influential voices—Karl Barth and Robert Jenson in particular—and sees him contend for a reframing of "the roles of natural theology, metaphysics, and the incarnation in the doctrine of God" (p. 6).

Modern theology that follows the trajectory set by Barth prioritizes God's knowability through Christ. Barth famously rejected natural theology; eschewed metaphysics by arguing that such work begins with a generic, human conception of God; and condemned talk of an analogy of being between God and humanity (*analogia entis*) as anti-Christ. He did so out of his conviction that we must consider God primarily through Christ's presence and actions in the divine economy. Referring to the divine essence, Barth wrote that we encounter God "either at the place where God deals with us as Lord and Saviour, or not at all" (Barth, *CD* II/1, 261). Robert Jenson and Bruce McCormack are but some of the many theologians who have embraced Barth's program and developed it further.

Duby offers a respectful but penetrating critique of the Barthian project. He acknowledges Barth's warnings about arrogant human speculation into divine things, but he pulls his readers more into the direction set by Thomas Aquinas and many Protestant scholastic theologians. Rejecting Barth's singular focus on the divine economy, Duby contends that "God intends to grant us knowledge of himself in his completeness and transcendence of the economy" (p. 16). This revelation of God in himself, revelation that we possess in an admittedly ectypal manner, can then serve as an organizing principle for theological inquiry. In making this claim, Duby stands in good company. Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Amandus Polanus all framed theology primarily as consideration of God himself and then, by derivation, all things in relation to God.

From this position, Duby provides an account of Christian thought that attends to natural theology, the incarnation, and metaphysics. Natural theology reveals certain divine attributes and discloses humanity's need for God, a point that Duby makes through a sophisticated—and charitable—reading of Aquinas. The incarnation is not the external cognitive principle of theology proper, but it does represent the culminating moment of supernatural revelation. Metaphysical concepts borrowed from the Aristotelian tradition help offer an account of God *in se,* provided that such concepts operate in a ministerial role. The doctrine of analogy, particularly the analogy of attribution, can play a constructive role in the theological enterprise by locating the triune God as the source of creaturely natures and perfections.

Each of these moves breaks with Barth. Duby supports them with a deep reading of the biblical text and a thorough engagement with the Christian tradition. Indeed, in his reading of the tradition, he often interacts in depth with Barth, seeking to demonstrate how he either misunderstood or failed to deal charitably with claims made by Aquinas and others.

God in Himself is ultimately a recovery project, an attempt to take the trajectories set by Aquinas and numerous Protestant scholastic theologians and resource them for our post-Barthian context. Duby corrects the errors he sees in Barth's thought while attempting to heed Barth's cautions and warnings. He offers a substantial contribution to contemporary theological discussions, and his work coheres well with recent projects undertaken by Katherine Sonderegger and the late John Webster. Future writers could build on Duby's work by further extrapolating the practical and pedagogical implications that emerge from this renewed interest in God *in se.*

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Gavin Ortlund. *Retrieving Augustine's Doctrine of Creation: Ancient Wisdom for Current Controversy*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020. xii + 249 pgs. Paperback. ISBN 978-0830853243. $30.00.

Gavin Ortlund's *Retrieving Augustine's Doctrine of Creation* is part of a larger trend of theological retrieval in evangelical theology. As one of the stalwarts of theological retrieval a generation ago, John Webster wrote that it exists in part "to rehabilitate classical sources of Christian teaching and draw attention to their potential in furthering the theological task" ("Theologies of Retrieval," *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, 596). Ortlund uses Augustine for the latter of these two purposes in this book by demonstrating how he can be used in furthering the theological task in the doctrine of creation. Across the six chapters of his work, Ortlund applies his retrieval of Augustine specifically to current creation debates in the evangelical world.

The author spends the first three chapters detailing Augustine's perspective on creation and Genesis 1–3, his broader ontological understanding of God and creation, and his epistemic humility, in order to show ways in which Augustine can influence these current creation debates. In the introductory chapter, Ortlund explains his approach to each area of debate by picturing Augustine sitting at a table with representatives from Answers in Genesis (young-earth model of creation), Reasons to Believe (old-earth model of creation), and BioLogos (evolutionary model of creation), and adding his perspective to the discussions that they would have in areas of mutual interest. These three organizations are Ortlund's major conversation partners throughout the rest of the book.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for Augustine's specific teachings on the doctrine of creation by laying out the implications of his doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. For Augustine, *ex nihilo* creation demonstrates God's ontological priority over creation, his transcendence from and immanence within creation, and creaturely contingence upon God. Ortlund even places Augustine's thoughts on human happiness in the context of this larger framework of creaturely contingency in order to demonstrate humanity's ultimate need for God on the basis of our status as creatures. Chapter 2 then details Augustine's biblical and theological approach to the doctrine of creation, and specifically his humility in dialogue with various viewpoints on creation. This humility is unfortunately often lacking in creation debates today, and so Augustine's voice is as helpful here as it is in any specific debate. This chapter lays out specific features of Augustine's open-mindedness that guide the ideas in the rest of the book.

Chapters 3–5 are devoted to gleaning insights from Augustine's writings that are fruitful for specific areas of debate within evangelical doctrines of creation, including the age of the earth, animal death, and the historicity of Adam and Eve. Ortlund separates each of these issues out, but there is obvious overlap between them that makes the chapters in part dependent upon each other. Ortlund doesn't offer a full-scale defense of Augustine in these areas or a deconstruction of Augustine's understanding of creation similar to James K. A. Smith in *The Fall of Interpretation*, but rather uses Augustine to show there are different possibilities for understanding the text. In each of these chapters, Ortlund notes the difficulty of bringing Augustine into dialogue with areas of debate that would have been of no concern to him at the time of writing. So, for example, on the issue of the age of the earth, the question for Ortlund isn't whether Augustine saw himself as young earth or old earth, but whether his scriptural and theological interpretation allowed for the possibility of an old earth. The answer for Ortlund is a resounding yes. Part of the way that Ortlund arrives at this answer is to understand how Augustine approached the text of Genesis 1–2. In his interpretation of Genesis 1, Ortlund notes that Augustine conceived of each day of creation as different from ordinary days (p. 123). Further, he emphasizes that Augustine's understanding of the ordering of Genesis 1 isn't based on temporal sequence, but angelic knowledge (p. 125). Finally, as Ortlund points out, Augustine believed that creation was instantaneous and thus there was a literary quality to Genesis 1.

In Chapter 4, he demonstrates that Augustine's position on death (i.e., Adam and Eve contracted rather than originated death in Genesis 3) opens up the possibility of prelapsarian animal death. In Chapter 5, he demonstrates how Augustine's view of creation could align with *certain* forms of evolutionary creation. This thought has been drawn out by other writers such as Alister McGrath. However, unlike McGrath (and others), Ortlund does not proffer Augustine's *rationes seminales* as a case of predicting modern scientific discovery. Rather, he calls it an underdetermined part of Augustine's understanding of creation. Ortlund then uses Augustine's views of the historicity and nature of Adam and Eve as an entry way for opening dialogue into the possibility of evolutionary creation. Ortlund does not try to defend evolutionary creation here, but rather aims only at showing its limited possibility.

This book will be an immense help for anyone desiring to understand the doctrine of creation from the viewpoint of evangelicalism. Ortlund doesn't attempt to convince the reader of any particular view between young-earth, old-earth, and evolutionary creation. Instead, he shows how Augustine makes the latter two legitimate possibilities (with theological caveats that he continually brings into the conversation), and thus brings Christian sisters and brothers of various views together to the table with each other, and with Augustine.

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Oliver D. Crisp. *God, Creation, and Salvation: Studies in Reformed Theology*. London: T&T Clark, 2020. xv + 204 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0567689535. $36.95.

The complex task of theology produces voluminous works of literature simply because the Christian faith is encapsulated as *fides quarens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding). This is emphasized by Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), although rooted in Augustine of Hippo (354–430). In his recently published book, Oliver Crisp attempts to scrutinize essential doctrines of the Christian faith in the spirit of Anselm with two purposes, theological construction and retrieval of the Christian tradition. Crisp earned his PhD at the University of London, served as a professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, and now holds the Chair of Analytic Theology at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland. As a Reformed and analytic thinker, he is qualified to engage the different issues that relate to Reformed theology.

The title of the book presents its structure in three parts, ordered thematically. The first delves into the task of theology, the second focuses on God and creation, and the last discusses Christ and salvation. Crisp begins by scrutinizing significant issues entrenched in systematic theology and then discusses central structures in the theology of John Calvin (1509–1564) vital to the evolution of Reformed theology. After that, the author brings the readers in Chapter 3 to Jonathan Edwards's understanding of divine conceptualism, to Augustinian thoughts on Edwards, and to the latter's perspective concerning abstract objects as divine ideas. Edwards believes that creation is immaterial at first, then God communicated it to exist. Creation, however, is not eternal since its existence is ephemeral.

Crisp puts John L. Girardeau and Edwards as interlocutors on the issue of free will in Chapter 4. Girardeau believes that prior to the fall, humans could choose against moral orientation, but after the fall, they are bound to their sinful inclination. The freedom to choose still exists (chastened libertarianism) but outside the parameter of soteriology. Chapter 5 elucidates Huldrych Zwingli's theology of original sin, that fallen humans do not possess original guilt from Adam's sin but are only blameworthy for the sins they have committed. For Zwingli, original sin is a disease that makes humans inclined to sin, but it is not sin per se.

Chapter 6 deals with the objection of James T. Turner Jr., who argues it is impossible for the Word to be "hypostatically united to any human nature" (p. 112). Crisp disagrees and continues the conversation in Chapter 7 with Thomas F. Torrance as an interlocutor. Torrance contends that Christ has a fallen but not sinful nature. The author elaborates this position as "the vicarious humanity" wherein the fallen state has been cleansed to become sinless during the "act of assumption making it a fit vessel for the Word" (p. 125). Crisp ends with Edwards's virtue ethic. For Edwards, the main *telos* of a regenerated life is to participate in the existence of the triune God.

There are many things to appreciate in this volume. First, it is a well-written academic work. Second, Crisp elucidates the depth and breadth of Reformed thinking. Third, he provides primary sources in footnotes when dealing with theologians of the past (Calvin, Zwingli, Edwards, and others). Fourth, the trajectory of his thought is mapped out in the preface, which serves as a foretaste of what he has baked in his theological oven. He also clarifies that some chapters were presented in different settings. That does not make the various topics disconnected though since Crisp weaves them together in a traditional dogmatics structure.

With the rise of the new Calvinism, this work is timely because the author elucidates the differences within the Reformed tradition, which implies that Reformed theology is far more than monolithic "TULIP" soteriology. As such, this volume contributes to the scholarship of the Reformed tradition. It would certainly be a helpful companion to a Systematic Theology course in a seminary.

There are some drawbacks though. First, Crisp avers that this book is written from an *Anselmian* perspective, but there seems to be a lacuna between Anselm and the topics covered. Anselm's works are not adequately discussed except for brief explanations in Chapters 3 and 8. Second, this volume is suitable for seminary students and professors but would be heavy reading for laypeople in the church. Without a background in historical theology, or a knowledge of various positions of Reformed thinkers and the task of systematic theology, one might get lost in the conversation.

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Michael S. Heiser. *Demons: What the Bible Really Says about the Powers of Darkness*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. ix + 321 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1683592891. $16.45.

Angels, demons, and the supernatural realm collide in Michael Heiser's new work, *Demons*. Tracking the development of darkness from Old Testament foundations, Second Temple Judaic Literature (STJL), and New Testament authorship and contextualization, the author exposits semantics, interpretations, and contemporary issues with the intent of building a better, more faithful hermeneutic of primary sources (p. xvi). *Demons* also clarifies obscure traditions and myths that plague mainstream thought on Satan and his legion of darkness.

Satan, who is not specifically named in the OT, is of minor concern in the Hebrew literature (p. 83). The term "the satan" is better suited for courtroom language or an adversarial figure scattered throughout the OT (p. 78). However, Heiser builds his discussion around three divine rebellions. The first, found in Genesis 3, is not associated with fallen angels. Moreover, according to the author, fallen angels are not the "sons of God." Instead, the "sons of God" scattered throughout the OT and STJL are divine image-bearers that share responsibility in the heavenly or unseen realm. In contrast, the significant terms "Nephilim" and "Rephaim" are closely associated with the second and third divine rebellions and are the starting point for the forces of darkness and demonic beings (pp. 92–93). Genesis 6:1–4 and Genesis 11 provide the foundation for Heiser's conclusions here, but he draws more deeply from Mesopotamian literature alongside STJL.

Significantly, STJL directs most of his understanding of these obscure passages (pp. 97–101). However, should STJL have more weight than biblical literature? Building a better hermeneutic allows STJL to influence contextualization, but Heiser's claims accord more authority to STJL and traditions not prominently expanded in other biblical passages. Contemporary interpreters typically understand the "sons of God" in Gen 6:1–4 to be human, in contrast to the minority position of fallen beings rebelling against God by intermingling divine and human figures. This interaction produces the "Rephaim" leading to the "Nephilim;" but where is the biblical evidence that these "mighty men" are demons (p. 126)? Heiser's claims suggest extrabiblical sources are necessary, if not equivalent to primary texts. At the same time, his conclusions help the reader see the importance of understanding the ancient Near East landscape, even if his position lacks full acceptance.

The third divine rebellion surrounds the Tower of Babel and its ramifications, which lead to Israel's election as God's chosen people. Because God has chosen Israel to be his light to the nations, Heiser argues that he abandons other nations in favor of his salvific plan (pp. 150–51). Babel's judgment certainly alters humanity's relationship with God, but is Israel a bridge back to God—or a means to divorce other nations from grace (p. 186)? However, Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 82 provide some support for the author's claims, allowing for a divine council that turns away from God and enables the third rebellion to draw the nations away from worshipping the Lord (p. 161).

In the NT, Heiser paints a different picture of familiar passages pertaining to Satan: Christ in the wilderness, his temptation of authority over rebellious nations, Satan's fall like lightning, and the conversation with "Legion." Christ's interactions reveal the undoing of the powers of darkness and the ushering in of God's Kingdom (pp. 182–86). The temptation of Christ to submit to Satan is significant because the first-century audience would typically link abandoned nations, watched by the "sons of God" (cf. Deuteronomy 32), to Satan's authority over the nations. Christ's inauguration of the Kingdom conveys Satan's fall though since the true Son of God undoes the rebellions by the "sons of God" (p. 206). Matthew's revelation that Christ has all authority in heaven and earth signals Christ's true position of power (pp. 233–35). In fact, as the NT writers show, Christ's power over spiritual forces returns godly power over the nations, through his life, death, and resurrection.

While many will debate OT passages relating to the divine council/sons of God, the three rebellions, or even goat demons by the name of Azazel, all should find comfort that Christ's incarnation in the world of old proclaims his power and glory over the forces of darkness. Whether one believes in Satan, numerous satans, or demons and devils, the Kingdom of Satan dwindles away as the true Son of God appears, reversing

the effects of rebellion (p. 206).

Demons sheds light on the background of the ancient world, STJL, and poor church traditions, graciously and eagerly urging biblical investigation to spur faithful conversations about God's revelation. Heiser equips both laymen and scholars but hews toward the latter since his references and conclusions rely heavily on Second Temple literature. Even if one does not agree with him on all points, *Demons* is well worth the read as one untangles the web of tradition, folktale, and myth and replaces it with humble biblical and historical interpretation.

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Gilbert Meilaender. *Thy Will Be Done: The Ten Commandments and the Christian Life*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020. 144 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1540961969. $21.99.

In *Thy Will Be Done*, Gilbert Meilaender, Senior Research Professor of Theology at Valparaiso University, explores the shape the Ten Commandments give to the Christian life. He agrees with Karl Barth that ethics should offer an account of human action that corresponds to God's action in creation, reconciliation, and redemption and thus locates human action in the biblical story. Situating human action in the biblical story provides three angles of vision that, Meilaender believes, should inform Christian reflection on the moral instruction in the Decalogue. He uses these angles of vision to organize his thoughts about the commandments and to highlight how God and man encounter each other in five different bonds that unite human beings in community. These are marriage, family, life, possessions, and speech. His book thus offers Christians a view of the bonds in the light of creation, the need for healing, and the redemptive work of God, and helps them understand God's will as commanded and as ultimately fulfilled in the new creation.

This book is a work of moral theology that provides an examination of revealed truth regarding the moral life. Various doctrines—creation and sin, justification and sanctification, the persons of the Trinity and the Incarnation, the Church and "last things"—are consulted to gain insight into the moral life. Although it is not a work of biblical, historical, philosophical, or applied ethics, it treats biblical texts and draws upon the moral teachings of prominent Christian thinkers, including Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, C. S. Lewis, and John Paul II. Furthermore, it employs natural law reasoning and applies the Decalogue's moral teachings to an array of practical issues, such as abortion and assisted reproduction, divorce and homosexuality, suicide and burial, avarice and lying, civil government and war.

Meilaender is a prominent contemporary voice in theological ethics who reveals his Lutheran convictions in Chapter 1 ("The Law of Christ"). In discussing faith and law, he emphasizes that believers are not to rely on works of the law to be made right with God. But, the peace that Christians have with God through faith in Christ does not eliminate the distinction between behavior that conforms to God's will and behavior that does not. Accordingly, Christian moral reflection on the law of God (all of which has its goal in Christ) should differentiate between those aspects that do and do not continue to direct the Christian life. By recognizing the continuing value of the moral law in teaching Christians what pleases God (i.e., the third use), Meilaender answers the charge of antinomianism that has been directed against Lutherans. Additionally, pointing to Luther's use of the Decalogue in his Small and Large Catechisms, he highlights its great value for catechetical instruction in the law of Christ.

In Chapter 2 ("The Marriage Bond"), Meilaender reflects on the prohibition against adultery. This prohibition leads him to consider the body, the created nature of male and female, the love-giving and life-giving purposes of marriage, the training in love marital faithfulness provides, and singleness. Chapter 3 ("The Family Bond") addresses the command to honor parents, which includes reverence, obedience, and gratitude. Meilaender contends that the family is a school of virtue that develops the capacity to love those in close relationships, those more distant, and ultimately the Heavenly Father. In addition, parents bear witness to the reality that they stand under the authority of God, who alone can secure their lives.

Chapter 4 ("The Life Bond") treats the prohibition against unjustified killing, which is predicated upon humankind's creation in God's image and the common bond of humanity. This commandment points to the special relationship between God and humankind, which culminated in God in Christ taking human life into his divine life. In Chapter 5 ("The Possessions Bond"), Meilaender discusses the prohibitions against stealing and coveting the neighbor's house, wife, servants, and possessions as well as the commandment to sanctify the holy day. The Christian life, he contends, involves a constant movement between enjoyment of the good things of creation and renunciation of those things because they "are not Goodness itself" (p. 81). He also explains that the negative commands include positive duties to help neighbors and be grateful for God's gifts and that these commandments teach Christians to trust God to care for them.

Chapter 6 ("The Speech Bond") considers the commandments against false testimony and taking God's name in vain. Meilaender understands

the goal of human speech to be the praise of God. He urges that truthful speech, which is ultimately grounded in truthful speech about God, binds lives together in trust and thus involves more than speaking words that mirror thoughts. These commandments, he believes, instruct Christians to use speech to bind human lives together by ensuring that outer words are harmonized with inner desires for the good of neighbors. In Chapter 7 ("The Great and First Commandment"), Meilaender observes that the first commandment makes clear that the bonds of life cannot hold first place, for Christians are to love God with all their being. Consequently, a persistent tension between the first commandment and the other commandments will remain until the commandments are fulfilled in the new creation when God's people will do his will perfectly.

In this book, Meilaender succeeds in examining the shape of the Christian life in terms of the Ten Commandments, and readers will benefit richly from his insightful exploration of God's will as expressed in the Decalogue. Readers will also come to a greater trust in God who, in the commands, promised to make Christians into "people who truly delight in and love his commands" (p. 12).

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Michael Pasquarello III. *The Beauty of Preaching: God's Glory in Christian Proclamation*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. xxxiii + 254 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0802824745. $26.99.

God's intrinsic beauty captures the heart of the preacher and listener. This is the core theme of *The Beauty of Preaching*, in which Michael Pasquarello offers an extended meditation on Augustine's "restless desire for eternal truth, goodness, and beauty" (p. 85). Preaching's beauty resides not in its style nor its pragmatism. Instead "the beauty of preaching is found in its blessed uselessness. … with no purpose other than delighting in the truth of God" (p. xx). Delight in the astonishing love of God thus prompts the preaching of the gospel. Pasquarello rejects "contemporary strategies of topical teaching, motivational speaking, and social or political analysis" (p. 5). The preacher must aim at "wisdom, rightly ordered knowledge and affection for God" rather than simple pragmatic applications (p. 7).

Chapter 1 seeks to shape a doxological life. Pasquarello begins with Isaiah's message of the beautiful feet of the messenger and the doxological purpose of preaching. Chapter 2 highlights the generosity of the unnamed woman of Mark 14 who pours ointment upon Jesus. She has found a "compelling vision of a useless God" by which Pasquarello means a God who is so great that he is worthy of worship for who he is and not what we think we can get from him (p. 60). She serves as an example of the preacher's devotion. The substance of the book follows, built around Augustine, before Wesley and Luther are brought to the table.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on Augustine's warnings against disordered loves that turn affection from God. True preaching is "to know, love, and enjoy the triune God made known in Christ" (p. xxviii). Augustine's meditations of truth and beauty offer "not a theory of preaching but rather a way of loving God with his thoughts, affections, and words" (p. 105). Beautiful preaching is not filled with flowery language or poetic flow, but "is displayed by speaking the truth of God as aesthetically pleasing, accessible, and clear" (p. 112). Preaching should delight in the "self-giving love" of God displayed in Christ (p. 115).

John Wesley's contribution in Chapter 5 builds upon Augustine to find "both holiness and happiness in God" (p. 144). Martin Luther, in Chapter 6, exposes the "'strange beauty'... in the deformity of Christ, through whom God absorbs the ugliness of sin and shares his beauty with sinners" (p. 168). In contrast, the distorted heart seeks satisfaction in the self. True beauty and joy are found only when the heart is reoriented to God. Pasquarello concludes, "Preaching must be attractive and persuasive in order to disentangle our affections from attachment to false loves, desires, and delights. Sermons must be capable of delighting in the sweetness and joy of Christ" (p. 214).

The Beauty of Preaching offers a rich contemplation of Augustine's conception of true love. Each page is filled with extended quotes, from primary and secondary sources to the extent that Pasquarello's contribution is not so much in the novelty of his own words, but in the gathering of voices around the concept of beauty. The reader will need days to meditate upon each chapter as the book overflows with weighty quotations assembled from across the centuries. Regrettably though, Pasquarello highlights the practical nature of Jesus's preaching (p. 34), but remains almost exclusively in the abstract with his claims: "Giving glory to God is both the motivation and the goal of proclaiming the gospel of God's righteousness. ... God's glory is manifested in a life of mutual love and harmony" (p. 52). The text is beautiful and meditative but lacks concrete examples.

The preacher looking for a handbook of ideas to quickly implement will need to look elsewhere. Instead, Pasquarello invites the reader to pull up a chair and listen. His prose sometimes rings poetic, "doctrine, devotion, and discipline that dispose one's thoughts, words, and affections" (p. 146), but more frequently he foregoes his own words to share extracted quotes from theologically diverse thinkers, including Rowan Williams, former archbishop of Canterbury, and Pope Francis.

Pasquarello expects mainline preachers, including women, along with evangelicals to benefit from the book, but I fear his diverse audiences will read the book very differently. Evangelicals will connect the concepts of beauty back to the historical reality of the cross while mainline preachers may be content with vague applications of brotherly love. While pragmatic issues were not Pasquarello's concern, it is in the actual task of preaching that the gospel is made known. *The Beauty of Preaching* will warm the heart of the preacher in his personal meditation and preparation, with the reminder that God's glory is always needed, but the preacher will only grow in his display of God's glory if he is already rooted in the historical truth of the gospel.

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Paul Gould. *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. 240 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0310530497. $22.99.

The term "cultural apologetics" is not new, but one now regularly sees it together with the name Paul Gould. Readers of his latest book will see why. *Cultural Apologetics* brings together Gould's skills as an artful storyteller, a rigorous scholar comfortable in analytic philosophy, and a passionate evangelist as he takes up the challenge of explaining the essence and task of cultural apologetics. The result is nothing short of excellent.

Gould lays out his book's project in Chapter 1. The author's thesis is that the task of cultural apologetics is to establish the Christian voice, conscience, and imagination within a culture, that Christianity is seen as true and satisfying on both the global and local levels (pp. 21–25). Using Paul's speech at the Areopagus in Athens as his model, Gould claims this task is two-fold: *understanding* our culture, which for Westerners is disenchanted, sensate, and hedonistic; and *resurrecting* the *relevance* of Christianity by showing how it meets our universal human longings for beauty, truth, and goodness. Chapters 2–3 explain how our culture became disenchanted and recommends steps that need to be taken toward reenchanting it. Chapters 4–6 look "at" and "along" the three capacities of imagination, reason, and conscience that all human beings possess as guides to beauty, truth, and goodness. Chapter 7 addresses some of the barriers to Christianity's truth and desirability, both those arising within the church and those found in the culture at large. Finally, Chapter 8 explores our quest for home undergirding our pursuit of beauty, truth, and goodness.

That quest, Gould argues, finds fulfillment presently and in eternity in God. In an appendix, the author highlights how one might apply the Pauline model for cultural engagement to non-Western cultures.

Much should be said in praise of Gould's book, but I highlight two features that stand out and make *Cultural Apologetics* required reading for anyone interested in defending the faith today. First, while the book's endorsement describes it as a "fresh model for cultural engagement," the author really calls us to *return* to a more ancient model of engagement (cleverly implied in the ideas of returning to God and going back home). True, his model for apologetics offers a fresh take on assessing our modern Western culture (e.g., one can see the influence of Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* peeking through the book at times). However, those like Gould who have read classic works from theologians of the caliber of Augustine or Aquinas know that the church consistently spoke of God as the beautiful, the true, and the good. By highlighting our universal human longings for beauty, truth, and goodness, Gould's model connects deeply with the church's theological and philosophical tradition of understanding God as the telos for humanity and, thus, avoids being merely faddish. When the cultural artifacts he references are forgotten (a problem all books on cultural engagement face as they age) and the philosophical arguments with which he interacts evolve (which is why traditional apologetic books focusing exclusively on truth or goodness must constantly be updated), readers can still turn to Gould's model and find the essential task of cultural apologetics.

Second, throughout the book the author demonstrates the task of cultural apologetics he presents. He moves easily between cultural artifacts that significantly shaped Christianity and modern Western culture (such as Aristotle, Pascal, and Shelly's *Frankenstein*) and currently popular cultural artifacts (such as Endo's *Silence*, Martel's *Life of Pi*, and the movie *La Land*). Moreover, Gould is no dilletante when it comes to contemporary work in apologetics and philosophy of religion. He interacts effortlessly and precisely with live issues in the scholarship pertaining to, for example, the viability of naturalism, the argument from desire, and science's supposed ability to disprove the existence of God. Yet, he does all this in the language of everyman. In sum, the book argues for and illustrates the task of cultural apologetics.

Readers can discover additional gems to mine. For instance, Gould presents a strong case for reintroducing an appreciation for beauty into the church in Chapter 4 that deserves careful attention. Also, the section in Chapter 7 addressing internal barriers to Christianity—especially what he identifies as the unbaptized imagination—reminds us that the task of cultural apologetics incorporates the content and character of our lives. These stood out to me as significant.

My only complaint with the book concerns what the author says about the relationship between cultural apologetics and other approaches to apologetics (pp. 21–23). Gould claims a "new lane" for cultural apologetics. An accompanying diagram suggests he sees cultural apologetics as another apologetic approach alongside rational, imaginative, and moral approaches. But earlier he states that cultural apologetics integrates these other approaches into a "more realistic and compassionate approach to apologetics" (p. 22). This seems to suggest that cultural apologetics includes these other apologetic approaches. So, is cultural apologetics simply another way of doing apologetics alongside rational, imaginative, and moral approaches? Or is cultural apologetics envisioned as a more complete approach that includes these other approaches? Gould could be clearer on this. That, however, is a minor spot on an otherwise superb work.

A short review cannot adequately praise a book like *Cultural Apologetics*. Gould's writing is as delightful as it is educational, for layman and scholar alike. If you have not already, I highly recommend you read it now.

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S. Joshua Swamidass. *The Genealogical Adam and Eve: The Surprising Science of Universal Ancestry*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019. 264 pp. Hardcover. ISBN 978-0830852635. $27.00.

Since the publication of *On the Origin of Species*, most have come to believe that (1) the traditional account of Adam and Eve as real people created directly by God only thousands of years ago, who are the progenitors of every human being alive today and (2) Darwinian evolution coupled with the evidence of science, are incompatible. If (1) and (2) are incompatible, Christians face a difficult decision: reject science so they can hold to the traditional account or get creative (pun intended) at fitting the Adam and Eve story into whatever space science leaves unclaimed. But are (1) and (2) incompatible? Do evolution and science rule out the traditional account of Adam and Eve? S. Joshua Swamidass argues that they do not. Evolutionary science does not require one to reject Adam and Eve as real people created specially by God as recently as six thousand years ago, who are the progenitors of every human alive today (p. 7).

A scientist by training, Swamidass presents and tests what he calls the genealogical hypothesis. Initially presented in Chapter 1, it states that consistent with genetic (and archaeological) evidence, it is possible that Adam and Eve were specially created less than ten thousand years ago and that upon leaving the Garden their offspring blended with biologically identical neighbors so that eventually Adam and Eve become the genealogical ancestors of every human by AD 1 (pp. 10, 25–26). Swamidass then devotes Chapters 2–7 to developing various aspects of this hypothesis. Of particular importance is Chapter 3 where he distinguishes between genetics and genealogy, arguing that the traditional account of Adam and Eve concerns genealogy, not genetics—a distinction, he claims, most discussions have failed to discern. Chapters 8–11 turn to anthropology. There, he highlights the lack of consensus in both science and theology about what a human being is, which allows him to introduce a distinction between biological and textual humans. Consistent with evolution, biological humans could have existed outside the Garden prior to the creation of Adam and Eve. Thus, Adam and Eve and their lineage should be understood as textual humans that blend with biological humans and eventually become the ancestors of all humans by the time of Jesus. The author then proceeds with theological experimentation in Chapters 12–17, speculating about human origins in the light of his genealogical hypothesis. Chapter 18 concludes with reflections on what the genealogical hypothesis suggests for future conversations about human origins. In this regard, readers should know that in addition to the printed appendix at the end of the book, IVP has posted on its website five appendices from scholars who have dialogued with Swamidass.

Readers must remember that the author presents his genealogical hypothesis as a *thought experiment.* Thought experiments do not presume to report what is indeed the case (even if it turns out that what they present is factual). Thought experiments present what is possible. Philosophers have long understood the value of thought experiments in evaluating allegations of contradictory propositional claims, for if no contradiction exists, then should one claim turn out to be true, that claim does not *ipso facto* rule out the truth of the other claim. So, in evaluating the author's argument, one must not ask, "does it present the truth of the matter?" Instead, one must ask, "does Swamidass's thought experiment show that evolutionary science, if true, entails that the traditional account of Adam and Eve is false (or vice versa)?"

Unfortunately, I have doubts. Some of these emerge from Swamidass seemingly conflating science and evolution. Throughout the book, he uses the terms "science" and "evolutionary science" interchangeably. I assume that by "science" he means those results obtained utilizing empirical observation and experiment. If "evolutionary science" is synonymous with "science," then his thought experiment succeeds *ceteris paribus*. But, why add the adjective "evolutionary"? Adding this suggests some distinction. If there is one, then it is reasonable to assume that the distinction involves the addition of Darwinian evolution. But Darwinian evolution is not a synonym for science. Moreover, the theory of Darwinian evolution faces its own philosophical difficulties that (as others have noted) science cannot alleviate. So, by not clarifying his terms, Swamidass calls into question the "scientific" side of his thought experiment—despite his excellent presentation of the evidence from current genetic science.

More substantial doubts arise when readers consider the other side of the author's thought experiment that represent the traditional account of Adam and Eve. For some, his speculative narrative may involve such significant theological revision that it proves unacceptable in the broad Christian tradition. In that case, his thought experiment would fail because it loses sight of the theological community reading the traditional account of Adam and Eve. But more problematic would be incoherencies arising from the author's speculative narrative itself, for this would show that the thought experiment fails logically. Two possible incoherencies stood out to me: one related to his interpretative approach to Genesis, the other related to anthropology and ethics.

Part of his speculative narrative includes the assumption that the flood of Noah's day was a regional event that did not destroy all life on earth outside the ark. I do not dispute that this is possible. But does a *regional* interpretation of Genesis 6–8. fit with the traditional (all encompassing) account of Adam and Eve? I think not. The traditional account of Adam and Eve emerges from the impression people have when they read Genesis 1–2. Why should we think that Genesis 6–8. leaves any other impression on its readers than that the flood was global, destroying all life on earth except what was preserved in the ark? Though more descriptive, the biblical flood account does not seem to lend itself to a regional interpretation. Indeed, most readers understand the flood to refer to a global event. So, if we are to reject this reading, we need additional evidence. Unfortunately, Swamidass offers us none—not even a footnote (see pp. 169–70). Endorsing a traditional account of Adam and Eve but providing no evidence for why we should ditch a traditional account of the flood as global, suggests that the author's speculative narrative harbors hermeneutical inconsistencies. Such hermeneutical inconsistences might also entail theological inconsistencies and an overall incoherent theological outlook. What these inconsistencies might be, I cannot say. But until Swamidass can explain why his speculative narrative endorses one traditional account but not another, readers should have reservations about his thought experiment's success.

The other possible incoherency in his narrative concerns how he understands the Fall in relation to biological and textual humans. Swamidass defines textual humans as Adam, Eve, and their genealogical descendants and classifies as biological humans all organisms defined taxonomically as humans, including those people who existed outside the Garden (p. 134). Later, when presenting his speculative narrative, he claims that those biological humans outside the Garden have a moral sense and commit wrongdoing, but such wrongdoing does not result in a fall. However, when Adam and Eve commit wrongdoing, they fall and infect all their descendants, with the result that they are now morally corrupt and indebted. (Swamidass's description of the Fall includes other elements, pp. 175–91, but these are irrelevant to the point I am about to make.) Now if people outside the Garden commit wrongdoing and Adam and Eve commit wrongdoing, what is distinct about the wrongdoing that Adam and Eve commit that results in corruption and indebtedness? Swamidass alludes to Adam and Eve's wrongdoing being evil and not just mere wrongdoing, but this seems an ad hoc attempt to avoid either (at best) equivocation or (at worst) inconsistency. I suspect that the problem here stems from Swamidass dismissing anthropology too quickly in Chapter 9. Readers can decide if this suspicion is warranted.

The above reflects doubts I have about the author's argument, not my wholesale rejection. I believe these doubts stem from the novelty of his approach to the subject of origins. Sometimes our attempts to understand an important issue become gridlocked into inflexible camps until someone with enough imagination widens our horizons. Despite my concerns about the success of his thought experiment, I found myself thinking of new possibilities and new questions as I read this book. Swamidass reveals new avenues of exploration to those concerned with integrating theology and science. I especially find exciting the prospect of rediscovering old ways of thinking if, as he claims, science now must return illegitimately annexed territory to theology. Readers who engage with Swamidass may find ways to shore up his argument or avoid the potential criticisms I mentioned above. Perhaps we will look back and see *The Genealogy of Adam and Eve* as the first significant step toward showing that evolution, even if true, does not discredit the record of our common ancestry found in Genesis.

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John C. Lennox. *2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan Reflective, 2020. 229 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0310109563. $19.99

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Perhaps the two most influential dystopian novels of the twentieth century were George Orwell's *1984* and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World.* Both visualized a world in which the general population is controlled by a ruling entity, but the books presented very different scenarios as to how this control was exercised. Orwell envisioned an oppressive totalitarian political regime that subjugated its citizens by suffocating surveillance and total control of all media. The closest present-day fulfillments of *1984*'s nightmarish vision are countries such as North Korea and increasingly, China. The control predicted by *Brave New World* was more subtle and therefore much more insidious. Huxley predicted that people would be controlled, not by external coercion, but by giving them everything they wanted. Those in control would render the populace passively compliant by providing them with all their desires. Lennox uses these two novels to launch into an investigation of technological trends in the twenty-first century with the book's title, *2084*, as homage to Orwell's work.

In addition to those two classic twentieth-century novels, Lennox also interacts with more current works of fiction, such as Dan Brown's potboiler *Origin.* Lennox has good reasons for exploring the world of AI (Artificial Intelligence) through the lens of fiction. Thought influencers have used and continue to use fiction, more specifically science fiction, as a primary venue to address either their concerns or their hopes about the future.

Lennox distinguishes between broad and narrow (or weak and strong) versions of AI. Broad AI is already here, and it's all around us. Examples of broad AI are the programs embedded in social media software and search engines that use algorithms to determine the user's likes and preferences, programs that assist drivers on the road, and programs that can defeat humans at games like chess and Jeopardy. However, these programs are also called weak AI for a reason. They can do a singular task well, but they do not *think*—at least not in any normal sense of the word. They have no more cognitive ability than a pocket calculator. Cognitive ability is the goal of narrow AI: to produce software that can truly replicate the reasoning functions of the human brain. Lennox shows that such strong AI is still elusive and at this point remains in the domain of fiction. "The 'artificial' in artificial intelligence is real" (p. 26).

One area in which broad AI currently excels though, is in the collection, storage, and manipulation of large amounts of data. When the data collected is data about *you*, what then? Lennox describes the rise of surveillance capitalism, where the harvesting of information about individuals has become big business. The flip side to this is surveillance communism, in which the Chinese government keeps tabs on all its citizens by means of facial recognition and a myriad of other similar technologies. Thus armed, China is implementing "social credit" programs to reward compliance and punish what the government deems undesirable traits or behaviors.

Moving from broad AI to narrow AI, Lennox demonstrates that the motivations driving the quest for narrow AI are part of a much greater agenda—the desire to transcend humanity. Adherents ascribing to these ambitions self-identify as Transhumanists. Transhumanists envision a future in which humans fuse with technology in such a way that makes them, quite literally, immortal. Transhumanists such as Yuri Harari don't hesitate to refer to these future humans as *Homo Deus*. In many ways Transhumanism is an updated version of Gnosticism. It certainly displays the Gnostic disdain for the human body. The Transhumanist sees his physical body as a burden, a prison from which to escape. A person's real essence, his mind or consciousness, is a ghost in the machine, ready and willing to be uploaded into some future non-biological apparatus.

While Lennox devotes the first half of the book to describing AI and Transhumanism, in the second half he presents the claims of the gospel. He argues that what Transhumanists truly desire are Christ and the Kingdom of God, even if they won't acknowledge it. Jesus Christ is the true *Homo Deus*, the resurrection is the true transhumanist transformation, and the Second Coming is the true omega point of history.

2084 is brief, accessible, and engaging. Lennox has written this book with the busy pastor or interested layperson in mind, and he has a teacher's knack for making difficult ideas clear. He has produced several similar apologetic works, including *Seven Days that Divide the World*, *Gunning for God*, and *God's Undertaker?* When sharing my faith with someone who has a scientific interest, I may give him or her a copy of one of these books. *2084* joins them as another excellent resource.

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