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Introduction to the Volume

Benjamin L. Merkle
STR Editor

Introduction

As the new editor of the journal, it is privilege to introduce this volume of *Southeastern Theological Review* (*STR*). I am grateful to the leadership of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary for offering me this position which I accepted with both fear and trembling but also with joy and thanksgiving. I am grateful to Dr. Heath Thomas, who now serves as the dean of the Herschel H. Hobbs College of Theology and Ministry and associate vice president for church relations at Oklahoma Baptist University, for his outstanding leadership of the journal over the past four and a half years. Under Dr. Thomas's leadership the journal has continued to thrive and fulfill its mission "to equip the Church to serve the Lord Jesus Christ and fulfill the Great Commission." I also wish to express gratitude to Ant Greenham who will continue to serve as the book review editor and to the new editorial board that consists of Bruce Ashford, Chip Hardy, George Robinson, Benjamin Quinn, and Ray Van Neste.

The Present Volume

The focus of this volume is applied theology. Although *STR* is not technically a "themed" journal, we often receive essays that can be grouped together to produce an issue that has some coherence. Such is the case with this volume. In our first essay, Bruce Ashford, Provost of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and professor of Theology and Culture, offers a theological vision for higher education. He proposes that Scripture is the norm for all life, including the teaching and learning that takes place in higher education. After surveying several views concerning the Bible's relationship to life in general and to teaching in particular, he argues for a *grace renews nature* perspective. That is, although this world has been affected by the Fall, the creational realm has not been corrupted ontologically. One day God will restore and renew this world and therefore our educational philosophy should seek to reflect this reality.

The second essay is by David Jones, professor of Christians Ethics at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this essay, Jones discusses conflicting moral absolutes and then employs the story of Rahab in Josh 2:1–24 and her moral dilemma as a test case. After presenting the three main evangelical models for resolving conflicting moral absolutes (conflicting ab-

solutism, graded absolutism, and non-conflicting absolutism), Jones then explains how each of these positions handle the case of Rahab. In the end, Jones thinks that non-conflicting absolutism is the best view because it is the traditional Christian view, because it is most consistent with how the Bible portrays so-called ethical dilemmas, and because it bests reflects God's character.

Mark Liederbach, professor of Theology, Ethics, and Culture at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, addresses the question "What is sexy?" in the third essay. Although some believe that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, Liederbach convincingly argues that true beauty is found in our creational design. Specifically, he maintains that sexiness includes both spiritual *and* physical elements—but all of these are based on God's purpose in creation which includes celebrating the distinctions between male and female.

In the fourth essay, Steve Ladd, associate professor of Theology and Philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, suggests a way to help evangelicals in their evangelism efforts with Muslims: instead of focusing on Islamic terrorism and jihadism we should focus on the main distinction between Islam and Christianity, the doctrine of the Trinity.

Moving to history, Eric Smith, Senior Pastor of Sharon Baptist Church in Savannah, TN, discusses the evangelical catholicity of Oliver Hart (1723–95) and the Regular Baptists. During the time of the Great Awakening, some Baptists, as exemplified by Hart, were willing to associate and participate with other like-minded Christians from various denominations (including Presbyterians, Methodists, and Anglicans) while remaining passionate about biblical church order. Thus, it is wrong to view Regular Baptists as standing outside the revival tradition.

The final essay in this volume is an interview with Professor Grant Macaskill of Aberdeen University facilitated by Ray Van Neste of Union University. Macaskill recently filled the Kirby Laing Chair of New Testament Exegesis first held by I. Howard Marshall. Because many evangelicals have studied under (and greatly benefited from) professor Marshall, we thought it might be helpful to expose our readers to Dr. Macaskill and his vision for training and equipping pastors and scholars.

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What Hath Nature to Do with Grace? A Theological Vision for Higher Education

Bruce Riley Ashford
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

Introduction

This essay argues that Scripture is the norm for all of life, including the teaching and learning that take place in higher education. It begins by outlining five historical views of the way God's saving works and word relate to higher education, revealing that many Christians deny that God's special revelation should be a source or norm for non-theological or non-ministerial disciplines. It proceeds to argue in favor of the "grace renews nature" view, which posits that special revelation does in fact shed light on problems in every discipline of a university or seminary. Next, it summarizes the way in which the "grace renews nature" view goes against the plausibility structures established by modern scientism. Finally, it articulates some of the educational benefits of the "grace renews nature" view.

In an essay entitled, "The Intellectual Vocation," R. R. Reno suggests that the intellectual crisis in the West has less to do with relativism, per se, than with the fragmentation or diminishment of the truth. This crisis is crystallized in the modern university. No longer does the West believe that the disciplines of the modern university can come together to teach us about life. In this situation, reason has not been *denied* as much as it has been *demoralized*.[1]

Similarly, Gerald Graff, in his book *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind*, describes his experience as a college student in the mid-twentieth century. As he took courses in the various disciplines required as an undergraduate, he felt like he was being shuttled back and forth between incommensurate paradigms. He writes:

> What was striking about my experience . . . was how little cognitive dissonance there actually was. Since the perspectives of the literature and sociology courses never came together to be compared and contrasted, they remained in separate mental compartments. . . . Clearly, it is crucial to begin providing students with a more connected view of the academic intellectual universe, one that lets them recognize and

[1] R. R. Reno, *Fighting the Noonday Devil: And Other Essays Personal and Theological* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 94–98.

> enter the conversation that makes that universe cohere and relates it to the wider world.[2]

Indeed, modern higher education lacks a connected view of the academic intellectual universe.

It is presupposed in this essay that Christ himself is the unifying factor for higher education, existing as he does as the one who created all things and in whom all things consist (Col 1:15–18). If Christ is the "clue" to the universe, as Lesslie Newbigin once put it, why would he not be the clue to all teaching and learning? If he holds together the universe, how could it not be that he is the coherence of the academy and its curriculum?

The real trick, however, is demonstrating the way in which he is the clue to all teaching and learning, and for this reason the question we intend to answer concerns the relationship between God's written word and higher education. If, as we confess, Scripture is a divine word and if, as we confess, Christ is divine, then Scripture is his word. Christ—the pre-incarnate and incarnate Word—speaks and rules through the written word.

What, therefore, is the relationship between Scripture and our life in this world? Consider the words of the Psalmist, "Your word *is* a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Ps 119:105), or, similarly, "The entrance of Your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple (Ps 119:130).What does it mean that Scripture provides light for feet on a dimly lit or dark path? What does it mean that the Bible illumines one's mind and gives understanding? Is the Bible's helpfulness limited to private spirituality, church life, and certain ethical concerns? Or does it help us to see more clearly and know more truly in other areas of life, such as the ones investigated in the halls of a university or seminary?

This essay will argue that Scripture is the norm for all of life, including higher education and the teaching and learning that take place on campuses. The world we study in higher education is, as I will seek to demonstrate, created by God and it will be renewed and restored by him in the future. It is his world, and therefore the truth about his world is unified in him who is the Creator of it. The Creator's word sheds light on problems in every discipline of a university or seminary. Because truth is unified, the disciplines are united, forming a whole. Truth in one discipline sheds light on truth in another discipline.

Not only non-Christians, but also many conservative evangelical Christians deny that God's special revelation is a source for disciplines such as philosophy, literature, anthropology, natural science, or education. But, if special revelation is viewed as irrelevant to the various disciplines, God's people in the academy will have great difficulty working together to discover truth. H. Evan Runner writes:

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[2] Gerald Graff, *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 65, 77.

> If God's Word therefore has no *intrinsic* connection with the world of learning, we shall never have the exhilarating joy of working together as members of Christ's Body to bring to manifestation *in our studies* patterns of God's glorious Kingdom.[3]

I will begin by outlining several historical views concerning the Bible's relationship to life in general and to teaching and learning in particular. After doing so, I will argue for my view, summarize the way it goes against the plausibility structures established by modern scientism, and then finally articulate some of its benefits.

Nature and Grace: Competing Visions of the Relationship between the Bible and Learning

The question of how to relate nature (creation and culture, as it has been perverted by sin) and grace (God's saving work and word) is not a question about "teaching and learning in higher education," per se, but it is a deeper and more foundational question that must answered before one can arrive at a coherent conclusion about the relationship of the Bible to teaching and learning. This question concerning the relationship of nature and grace is one which can be answered only by looking at the overarching biblical narrative, discerning the *meaning* of creation, fall, and redemption, and the *relation* between those three plot moves. What one decides about the meaning and relation of creation, fall, and redemption will make all the difference in how one views the relationship of the Bible to life in general and to teaching and learning specifically. Bernard Zylstra writes:

> These differing visions [of nature and grace] have exerted a phenomenal impact on the way Christians live in the modern world. For these visions are the human responses to the meaning of the Gospel itself, and they thus shape one's life practice, spirituality, ethic, worldview, and interpretation of Scripture. In the realm of scholarship, these confessional visions shape one's philosophy, theology, and one's understanding of history and science.[4]

This essay enumerates five historical visions concerning the relationship of nature and grace. It should be noted that the healthiest proponents of visions A, B, C, and E tend to look more like each other than they do the unhealthy proponents of their own vision. The only exception is vision D, which is essentially atheistic. For this reason, proponents of the four Christian visions can treat each other as mutually beneficial conversation partners arguing together toward truth, rather than as mere opponents needing to be

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[3] H. Evan Runner, *The Relation of the Bible and Learning* (Jordan Station, Canada: Paideia, 1982), 42.

[4] Bernard Zylstra, "Preface to Runner," in Runner, *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*, 23.

dismissed or defeated. Let us examine four of these visions, therefore, before turning to a fifth vision, the one for which I argue in this essay.

A. Grace above Nature ("Bottom-Floor Education")

The first vision is one we call "grace above nature." This vision has many Roman Catholic proponents, but also finds adherents in certain Anglican and more broadly Protestant circles. In particular, this vision is represented by manualist Thomists. Proponents of this vision understand the world as being composed of two stories—nature and grace—which are hierarchically related. A Christian splits his time between the two stories. When he is at church, doing theology, or having personal devotions, he is in the upper story. When he is interacting with his family, working his job, talking politics, or going to college, he is in the lower story. Upper story activities are affected by the Fall and are in need of God's gracious revelation and redemption. Lower story activities are not affected by the Fall in any way that would necessitate reliance upon God's special revelation for those activities.

This vision has a distinctive view of the way Christians should live in this world. Proponents of this vision assign special revelation to the upper story of grace, and general revelation to the lower story of nature. When a Christian interacts in the lower story by, for example, building a business, debating politics, or going to work, he draws upon general revelation. Only when he goes upstairs to the second story, the story of grace—in order to go to church, do theology, or spend time in prayer—does he find special revelation waiting to be used.

This vision also has a distinctive view of the way Christians should do scholarship. Not surprisingly, the way Christians of this vision approach scholarship is similar to the way they live in the world. When a Christian professor or student is downstairs studying philosophy, biology, or literature, he should draw upon general revelation. If he wishes, he can draw upon special revelation as he does, say, philosophy. But special revelation is not intended for a task such as philosophy, and if one does bring special revelation into philosophical reasoning, one's task ceases to be philosophy and becomes a branch of theology, namely, philosophical theology. When a Christian professor or student is upstairs studying theology or ministry, however, he not only can but should draw upon special revelation.

Within the realm of scholarship, Christian professors who teach on the lower floor can easily accommodate the insights of non-Christian professors as long as their insights are drawn from general revelation rather than from religion or biased ideology. In other words, there are no specifically Christian principles or criteria by which one judges what suits the first-floor disciplines best. In this vision, there is no such thing, for example, as *Christian* philosophy. Philosophy can, of course, be done by Christians, but their philosophy is not informed by special revelation and, as such, is not Christian philosophy.

This view has certain strengths. Most significantly, it considers lower-realm activities significant and worthwhile. It values things like teaching and

learning, or politics, or the workplace. It rightly recognizes that sin cannot corrupt ontologically this lower story that God created good. Unfortunately, this view swings too far in the other direction, failing to recognize the misdirecting power of sin in the lower realm, the way that sin and idolatry warp and distort our teaching and learning, or political interactions, and our workplaces. Accordingly, this vision fails to see the necessity of bringing God's grace and his special revelation to bear in that realm in order to redirect it toward God. But we must bring grace and special revelation to bear. After all, if the roof is leaking, the whole house will have water damage, not just the upper story, and the subsequent repair job should affect the rest of the house, and not just the upper story. In short, this view does not recognize sufficiently the necessity of drawing upon special revelation when we find ourselves engaged in lower story activities.

B. Grace against Nature (A Plague on the Educational House)

The second vision is one we call "grace against nature." Historically, proponents of this vision include certain Anabaptists and monastics, as well as some Christians influenced by these streams of Christianity. In the twentieth century, many conservative evangelicals promoted this vision. Proponents of this vision view the natural realm as having been ontologically corrupted by the Fall. The Fall destroyed the goodness of God's creation, and therefore we now experience a barrier between us and God's original creation, to which we no longer have access. The Fall was so devastating to creation that the natural realm (the lower story of the previous view) cannot be saved. Redemption cannot be applied to the lower realm. Instead, redemption includes not only salvation from our sins, but deliverance altogether from the fallen natural realm.

This vision sets forth a distinctive view of the way a Christian should live in this world. Since the world is fallen, we should not view it as our home. After all, in the end, God will not redeem this world. When the Bible says that God will make *all things new*, proponents of this view interpret it as meaning that God will make *all new things*. Accordingly, just as God will build an entirely new world next to this one, we Christians should focus on building the church next to this world, instead of in the midst of it. The good Christian should separate himself as much as possible from the goings-on of the natural realm, as he waits for a salvation that will separate him from it once-and-for-all.

There are varying, and sometimes conflicting, ways this vision affects the way a Christian would go about doing scholarship. Some proponents of this view manifest an indifference toward scholarship and higher education, and a few even reject such things out of hand. Other proponents draw upon special revelation in order to analyze and criticize the myriad ways sin has corrupted this fallen world, to proclaim the dissimilarity between this created-but-fallen world and the entirely new world which God will create one day.

This vision has one especially great strength: its proponents have a keen eye to discern the evil operative in society and culture today. Because they tend to draw upon special revelation regardless of whether they are dealing with matters of grace or matters of nature, and because they are attuned to the warping and distorting power of sin, they are able to wield incisive and prophetic critiques of current social, cultural, and political realities.

However, we reject this vision for several reasons. First, and unlike "grace above nature," this vision gives sin too much credit. While we agree that the natural realm has been corrupted, we do not agree that it has been made ontologically or essentially bad. The Evil One is not powerful enough to make bad what God has made good. His power is always derivative and parasitic. He can only warp and distort, and such warping and distorting are *directional* rather than *structural*. In other words, even after the Fall, God's world remains fundamentally good according to his creational design and is only made bad directionally as human beings orient their social and cultural activities toward false gods and idols rather than toward the one true and living God.

Additionally, this vision unintentionally undermines Christ's universal lordship. Its proponents view the real kingdom work as being done in the realm of the private heart and the four walls of the church. We respond that Jesus' lordship is as wide as creation and his kingly reign extends to the natural realm and every sphere of social and cultural life within it. All authority has been given to him in heaven and on earth, and he will not use that authority to decimate the natural realm, but to renew and restore it so that we can live with him in the midst of it.

Lastly, proponents of this view might find themselves trapped. Because they consider nature so corrupt, they tend to attempt to escape culture. But as humans who are part of the created order and who God created as thoroughly cultural beings, we can no more escape these cultural realities than we can jump out of our own skin. Gospel preaching, church planting, theology writing, political discussion, art creation, scientific research—each of these is profoundly and thoroughly cultural and, at the same time, should be profoundly and thoroughly informed by God's gracious revelation and redemption.

C. Grace in Tension with Nature (Pastors and Educators, Dual Ministers of God)

The third vision is one we will call "grace in tension with nature." Proponents of this vision include Martin Luther, many Lutherans, and a significant number of Reformed evangelicals. Similar to "grace above nature," proponents of this view divide the world into two separate realms, or kingdoms, but unlike "grace above nature," they do not relate the two kingdoms hierarchically in the same manner.

In this vision, the two kingdoms live in an uneasy tension beside one another. Both kingdoms are under the rule of Christ, but he rules them in two

different ways. The *natural* kingdom concerns temporal and earthly matters. God rules it as creator and sustainer and does so through general revelation and common grace. When a Christian finds herself studying philosophy, debating politics, or going to work, she does not need to draw upon special revelation. The natural kingdom is a common kingdom ruled by a common revelation—general revelation—and assisted by common grace.

The *spiritual* kingdom concerns matters of eternal and ultimate spiritual importance. God rules it as redeemer and does so through special revelation and saving grace. This kingdom is already manifested in the life and ministry of the church and will one day be fully manifested on the new heavens and earth. When a Christian finds himself praying, worshiping in church, or doing theology, he should draw upon both general and special revelation and will find God assisting via both common and saving grace. The two kingdoms run on parallel tracks and should not be conflated. Each has its own integrity and both live in tension with one another during this time between the times.

This vision has a distinctive understanding of how a Christian lives in the world. It argues that Christians should not "spiritualize" the natural realm by drawing upon special revelation, or by pursuing cultural activities in the hope that we can transform this world, change the culture, create a distinctively Christian civilization, or bring "healing" to the natural realm. According to this vision, we should respect the natural kingdom as its own autonomous realm. Although our work in the natural realm does have value, it is not "kingdom work" and it is not a part of the Christian mission. Some proponents of this view argue that the cultural mandate no longer holds today and that, when we find ourselves engaging culture, we should do so with a deep sense of detachment.

This vision has a distinctive approach to Christian scholarship. Similar to the "grace above nature vision," proponents of this view take scholarship seriously as a task in the natural realm, but most of them argue that it can be accomplished via general revelation and common grace. Biblical revelation is not necessary for non-religious scholarship. Unlike "grace above nature," however, it does not conceive of the two kingdoms hierarchically.

We reject this vision because it underestimates the power of sin to warp and distort the natural realm. Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen write that this vision "does not sufficiently recognize the twisting power of sin on the creation. Those who hold these views may not see the cultural mission of the church as a life-and-death battle. They may feel that the Christian is free to participate in scholarship, politics, economic life, and so forth in precisely the same way as his or her unbelieving neighbors do."[5] Indeed, our social and cultural activities are affected profoundly by who or what we worship.

Because this vision underestimates sin's misdirecting power, it likewise fails to grasp the epistemological insufficiency of general revelation. General

[5] Michael W. Goheen and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Living at the Crossroads: An Introduction to Christian Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 62.

revelation never was sufficient, even before the Fall. In the Garden, God came down specially to instruct the first couple about good and evil and about the tasks he wished for them to fulfill in this world. After the Fall, the insufficiency of general revelation is multiplied. Instead of relying on general revelation alone, we should interpret the world through the lens of God's word, allowing special revelation to bring general revelation into focus and, of course, to bring additional knowledge of its own. John Calvin writes, "Indeed, man's mind, because of its dullness, cannot hold to the right path, but wanders through various errors and stumbles repeatedly, as if it were groping in darkness, until it strays away and finally disappears. Thus it betrays how incapable it is of seeking and finding truth."[6] Indeed, this vision fails to understand the breadth of the Bible's relevance to cultural tasks, to life in the natural realm.

Finally, this vision can foster an unhealthy social passivism. In *The Question of God*, mid-twentieth-century theologian Heinz Zahrnt tells the story of the German church during the WWII years, arguing that the Lutheran "two kingdoms" theory combined with liberalism to lull the German church into social and political passivity during Hitler's ascendancy.[7] After the war, in what is now known as the *Stuttgart Confession of Guilt*, leaders of the German Lutheran church confessed, "we reproach ourselves that we did not bear witness more courageously, did not pray more faithfully, did not believe more joyfully and did not love more ardently." However, as Zahrnt, Karl Barth, and others pointed out, if this confession would be more than merely an emotional moment, the German church would have to build a theology which espouses Christian responsibility for ordering the world, rather than merely for ordering one's interior life and ecclesial activities.

D. Nature without Grace (A Naked Public Quad)

The fourth vision is one we will call "nature without grace." The primary proponents of this vision are atheists such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Bertrand Russell, and Richard Dawkins, but also include a small number of liberal-revisionist theologians whose theological frameworks are functionally anti-supernatural. Proponents of "nature without grace" envision the world as an entirely natural realm, devoid of divine grace and special revelation. It has a distinctive vision of how a person should live in the world and engage in scholarship, namely, by doing so without the illusion of divine grace and special revelation. We reject this view because of its denial of God's grace and revelation, because of the many logical, empirical, and existential failings of a naturalistic worldview, and because of the way such a view leaves humanity without transcendence.

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[6] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 270.

[7] Heinz Zahrnt, *The Question of God: Protestant Theology in the Twentieth Century* (London: Collins, 1969), 171.

E. Grace Renews Nature (An Educational Preview of a Coming Kingdom)

The fifth vision is one we will call "grace renews nature." In the modern era, its foremost proponents included Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck. Today, proponents of this vision include John Frame, Peter Leithart, Craig Bartholomew, and Michael Goheen.[8] In this vision, there is only one kingdom. God created the world as his *good* kingdom (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). After the Fall, his good kingdom remained good structurally, good in the way it is ordered, even though it is corrupted directionally, as human beings direct their social and cultural activities toward false gods rather than the one true and living God (Rom 1:18–32). Unlike "grace above nature" and "grace alongside of nature," there are not two distinct realms or kingdoms. Unlike "grace against nature," the Fall has not corrupted the world structurally or ontologically. Unlike "grace above nature," the Fall has, however, corrupted the world directionally.

In this vision, God covenanted the world into existence and ordered it a theater for his glory. His covenant word sustains creation in its structured order, an order that provides the framework for our creational-cultural lives. God created humanity in his image (Gen 1:26–28; 2:15), instructing them to be fruitful and multiply (a social command), till the soil (a cultural command), and have dominion (a regal-political command). They would fill the earth with God's glory by multiplying worshipers of God whose cultural activities would reflect God's designs and God's glory. The first couple's sin affected creation and culture, but did so directionally rather than structurally. Satan and sin do not have the power to corrupt God's creation in its very structures.

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[8] This vision finds some interesting and diverse conversation partners in contemporary theology. For example, Henri de Lubac and other Nouvelle Theologians have given sharp critiques of nature-grace dualism. De Lubac pushed back against nature/grace dualism in general, and against the idea of "pure nature" in particular. The idea of "pure nature" is wrong-headed and prepared the soil for modern secularism which makes nature an autonomous realm with no need for grace. Instead of a pure realm of nature, set apart from grace, de Lubac views nature itself as a gracious gift and indeed a gift which longs for something which exceeds itself. This something—God's new gift of grace—reorders and redirects nature. John Milbank and the Radical Orthodox theologians have been influenced by de Lubac and similarly reject nature-grace dualism and the idea of a realm of pure nature. The conversation and debate surrounding de Lubac's work is complex, multi-faceted, and prolix. Two concise articles will benefit readers who wish for a brief initiation to the debate. Nicholas J. Healy, "Henri de Lubac on Nature and Grace: A Note on Some Recent Contributions to the Debate," *Communio* 35 (Winter 2008): 535–64; Reinhard Hutter, "Desiderium Naturale Visionis Dei—Est autem duplex hominis beatitude sive felicitas: Some Observations about Lawrence Feingold's and John Milbank's Recent Interventions in the Debate over the Natural Desire to See God," *Nova et Vetera* 5 (2007): 81–131.

They are not as powerful as God's word and therefore cannot destroy creation, but can only misdirect it. Additionally, after the Fall, God provides a "common grace" that keeps the world from being as evil as it could be and sustains the created realm in such a way that we humans can build a common life together.

In this vision, Christ's atoning work renews creation. Unlike "grace above nature," this vision recognizes the misdirecting effect of sin on the creational realm and the subsequent need for that realm to be renewed and restored. Abraham Kuyper writes:

> For if grace exclusively concerned atonement for sin and salvation of souls, one could view grace as something located and operating outside of nature. . . . But if it is true that Christ our Savior has to do not only with our soul but also with our body . . . then of course everything is different. We see immediately that *grace* is inseparably connected with nature, that grace and nature belong together.[9]

Unlike "grace against nature," it recognizes that the creational realm has not been corrupted ontologically and therefore can in fact be renewed and restored. Through Christ's atonement, we are redeemed from sin in order to glorify Christ by exercising our Christianity and drawing upon special revelation to inform all of our activities, including those which others bifurcate as "spiritual" and "natural." When Christ returns, he will renew the heavens and earth so that it can fully be the theater of his glory, a theater without the misdirection caused by sin and its consequences (Acts 3:21; Rom 8:21–22; Eph 1:10; Col 1:20; Rev 21:1–4). The renewed heavens and earth will be profoundly cultural, replete with language, song, art, and architecture, and its cultural activity will never again be marred by sin. God's original creation was "very good," but the new creation will be "even better."

This vision posits a distinctive way in which a Christian should live in the world. Christ's atonement transforms us in the entirety of our being, across the entire fabric of our lives. God's specially revealed word directs us in the entirety of our being, across the whole landscape of our cultural lives. Christ's Lordship is as wide as creation and therefore as wide as our social and cultural lives. Abraham Kuyper writes, "In short, everything is his. His kingdom is over everything. . . . His kingdom is a kingdom of all ages, of all spheres, of all creatures."[10] The Christian mission, therefore, is correspondingly deep and wide. Herman Bavinck is worth quoting at length:

> Calvin completed the Reformation and saved Protestantism. Calvin traced the operation of sin to a wider extent than Luther, to a greater

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[9] Abraham Kuyper, "Common Grace," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 173 (emphasis original).

[10] Abraham Kuyper, *E Voto Dordraceno. Toelichting op den Heidelbergschen Catechismus*, 4:465–66. Cited by Timothy P. Palmer, "The Two-Kingdom Doctrine: A Comparative Study," in Steve Bishop and John H. Kok, *On Kuyper* (Sioux City, Iowa: Dordt, 2013), 147–48.

> depth than Zwingli. But it is for that reason that the grace of God is more restricted in Luther, less rich in Zwingli, than it is in Calvin. In the powerful mind of the French Reformer, re-creation is not a system that supplements creation, as in Catholicism, not a religious reformation that leaves creation intact, as in Luther, much less a new creation, as in Anabaptism, but a joyful tiding of the renewal of all creatures. Here the Gospel comes fully into its own, comes to true catholicity. There is nothing that cannot and ought not be evangelized. Not only the church, but also home, school, society and state are placed under the dominion of the principle of Christianity.[11]

The resurrection, Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminded us, sends us back to earth in an entirely new manner, affecting all that we do.[12]

This vision takes a distinctive approach to Christian scholarship, a view upon which we will elaborate for the remainder of this essay.

Thesis and Antithesis: Discerning between Real and Imaginative Structurations of the World

In the "grace renews nature" vision, therefore, God's word holds for all of life. God created the world and ordered it normatively by means of his word, he sustains it even today by means of his word, and he will renew it in the future by means of his word. In this vision, God's word is unified.[13] He created the world by means of his word, and that word for creation was confirmed and expanded by the prophets and apostles, by the Son, and by the inscripturated word. His inscripturated word is authoritative, meaning that not only do we hold to his word and read it closely, but we should allow it to have us in its grip as it exegetes us and conforms us to Christ. God's word reveals to us true knowledge of God, humanity, and the rest of the created order. As Runner writes, "The Word of God is the power by which God

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[11] Bavinck, *Katholoiciteit*, 32 (ET 237 ff), cited in Veenhof.

[12] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol. 8 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 447–48.

[13] Scripture is not God's only revelation. He has also revealed himself in creation and in Christ, but Scripture is needed in order to hear clearly his creational word and know personally his incarnate Word. God's word is single and unified, containing, as it does, God's consistent message and unalterable will. Gordon Spykman writes, "God's Word exercises its normatively steadying power from creation, through fall and redemption, onward toward the re-creation of all things in Christ Jesus. The full sweep of cosmic history stands under the holding and healing power of God's Word. In the march of time the mode of revelation changes. But its essential meaning remains constant. There is no inner tension or contradiction between the creational Word, the inscripturated Word, and the incarnate Word." Gordon Spykman, *Reformational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 86.

opens our hearts to see our human situation in the framework of the whole of reality."[14]

Runner encourages us to view God's word as his thesis for the world, his ordering principle for life. *Higher education, therefore, should approach its task as one in which teachers and students seek to discern God's thesis for the world as it relates to their subject matter.* When God created the world, he did so by means of his word. His word ordered the world normatively. One could say that his word served as his "thesis" for the world, his normative declaration of the way things should be. However, the serpent immediately issued an "antithesis," a word against God's word. The first couple, and all of humanity since, succumbed to this antithesis, to an imaginative structuration that presents itself against the real structuration of the world as revealed by God.

That antithesis remains today. We can speak of The Antithesis in the singular or many antitheses in the plural. Sin and evil take many forms. Every human being is born holistically depraved, and as soon as he is able to desire and think, he conjures up for himself a principle of life and an imaginative structuration that suits him. Such antithesis is found in every human heart (including believers, because we are not yet fully sanctified), every sector of society, and every dimension of culture.

Indeed, the antithesis is the great struggle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, Christ and Satan, and between truth and error. This great struggle manifests itself in different ways in human history, and right now, for the Western world, it manifests itself in challenges posed by modernism, postmodernism, secularism, consumerism, Islam, etc. As Christians, it is incumbent on us to resist this totalitarian assault on social, cultural, and political life. We should resist it, not only from the pulpit, but in every sphere of culture, including higher education.

Religion (including false religion) is heartfelt, and because it is rooted deeply in the heart, it radiates outward into all that we do, including our teaching and learning. When we walk into the classroom as teachers or learners, we bring with us into the classroom our alternative principles of life and our imaginative structurations.

> Apostate man is driven by his religious needs to find a substitute to fill in for the true root-unity of his life he is religiously eluding, to *absolutize* one of the relative aspects or sides of our religious life and *elevate* it to the place of the heart. . . . His rational analysis is accompanied by the deeper drive, which in the fallen state requires a distortion of the very 'facts' he is in the process of analyzing.[15]

Sinful people do not always agree on what they are absolutizing—sex, money, power, or any number of other things—but they are always absolutizing something, and that something distorts everything they do, including their teaching and learning.

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[14] Runner, *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*, 56.

[15] Ibid., 70–71.

Christian teaching and learning, therefore, is a process of discerning God's creational design (thesis) in relation to the subject matter at hand and sin's misdirection of that design (antithesis) so that it can redirect the subject matter to its true end in Christ. This sort of teaching and learning would bring about a significant reformation of the Christian university. Professors and students would work hard to excavate the idolatrous underpinnings of their disciplines so that they could redirect that discipline toward its true end in Christ. They do would do this out of a genuine love for learning about and loving the Lord and his good creation and as a witness to the world around them. In other words, they would do this out of love for God and neighbor.

Christian professors and students should draw upon all of the knowledge they have when seeking to understand the subject matter of their discipline, whether that knowledge comes from general revelation or special revelation. We draw upon special revelation in the disciplines because it helps us to read general revelation more faithfully. It provides for us the true story of the whole world, an overarching narrative framework within which the stories of our academic disciplines fit. It teaches truths and provides principles that relate, at one level or another, to our subject matter. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov 1:7). In short, all other variables being equal, faith gives an epistemological edge.

Take, for example, a course in political philosophy. A political philosopher who is not a Christian and who does not draw upon Scripture might provide very helpful insights into the state's right to "wield the sword" against invaders, into the positives and negatives of living in a monarchy versus a democratic republic, or into the different views of distributive justice. However, without special revelation, she would not know that the world we live in and study is in an abnormal state. In its normal state, before the Fall, politics would not have needed the sword because there was no sin or violence. Rather than punishing evil doers within the state, or fighting off invading armies external to the state, politics would have focused on the constructive ordering of our common life. A Christian professor would also know that there is a day coming when politics as we know it will be no more, because the Lord Christ will return to order our common life such that there will be no more crime or war. In sum, the Bible provides for the Christian professor an understanding of the broader framework for understanding politics. Second, Scripture also gives the Christian professor a uniquely helpful perspective on certain specific issues in the political realm. For example, she will be able to fund the notion of human rights in a way that a non-Christian cannot. A Christian professor might note that the Declaration of Independence grounds our rights in the will of a Creator, while the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights grounds human rights in nothing at all. In the former document, it is recognized that human rights are ordained. In the latter document, they are merely posited by a group of humans, and one can question therefore whether they are really "rights" at all. Third, Scripture equips the

Christian professor to teach her students how to live lives of public righteousness. With Christ as their example, her students can carry out their public and political activities with genuinely Christian love and concern even—and especially—when they are faced with opposition.

Does this mean that a person who is unaware of special revelation or who rejects it cannot gain truth from general revelation? Does it mean that he cannot make scientific discoveries, create stunning art, emerge as a premiere political scientist, or produce powerful work in the field of history? Certainly not. Researchers and scholars can make brilliant discoveries and do field-standard work even when they are not drawing upon special revelation. They can do so because of God's common grace to all humanity after the fall. In fact, researchers and scholars might make their best discoveries and do their best work precisely at the point of their greatest idolatry. But their work, at one level or another, will be deficient at the very points where special revelation could have contributed.

Does this mean that it is wrong for a Christian to try to build theories without relating them to special revelation? Again, certainly not. Many professors find themselves in restrictive environments in which special revelation is not considered knowledge and therefore is ruled out-of-bounds in the classroom or in the pages of a journal. In such instances, a professor might draw upon special revelation when conceiving his theory or honing his hypothesis, but might not articulate his theory or state his hypothesis in a way that reveals his epistemological hand.

The Antithetical Nature of Scientism

Challenges to the type of Christian scholarship recommended in this essay come not only from the competing views of nature and grace listed above, nor from isolated objections, but from the atmosphere of scientism that pervades today's academy. Scientism is antithetical to the Christian faith and to true teaching and learning. It consists of an inordinate faith in science, a situation in which too great of a role has been ascribed to science. Scientism "is that faith that science will redeem the world by breaking down boundaries of superstition and gradually setting up a human community in the truth, a faith that conflicts with what Scripture reveals about how Christ will establish His Kingdom of Truth."[16] Western scientism tells the story of the world as having reached its destiny with the rise of scientific modernism; Christian Scripture, on the other hand, "tells the story of the world as having reached its destiny, its climax, when Jesus of Nazareth came out of the tomb on Easter morning."[17] These two narratives, both purporting to be the true story of the whole world, cannot both be true.

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[16] Ibid., 129.

[17] N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Scripture: Engaging Contemporary Issues* (New York: HarperOne, 2014), 137.

The road toward scientism has been paved by evolutionary naturalism and secular humanism. *Evolutionary naturalism* holds that God does not exist and that human beings are merely component parts of nature who originated by genetic mutation and were perpetuated by means of natural selection. *Enlightenment humanism* holds that humans creatively project order onto the universe. Under this view, it is not God but humans who are the architects of the universe as we know it.[18] Taken together, evolutionary naturalism's disenchantment of the world and secular humanism's promotion of creative anti-realism have created a situation conducive to scientism.

In fact, the modern university ceased having to argue for scientism many years ago; now it can afford to assume scientism. A Christian attending public university (or even many private Christian universities) probably will never be exposed to a sustained debate or discussion about the matter. The university "will not only teach him the science he so eagerly covets just at this period of his life, but will also feed him large doses of a *view of life* which sees the pursuit of scientific knowledge as *the* human ideal, leading to human blessedness."[19] Under scientism's reign, the natural and social sciences are viewed as the ideal path to knowledge or, more likely, the only path to knowledge. For this reason, science functions as a cultural authority in the way that Christianity used to. Indeed, the heart of the problem is that scientism views science, instead of God's unified word, as the fundamental principle of our lives.

In the face of scientism's ascendance, Christian scientists and educators have responded in various ways. One response has been to view science and theology as overlapping and warring magisteria. As David Clark notes, some young earth creationists fit this model.[20] On the other side of the coin, atheists such as Richard Dawkins argue that theology is a pseudo-science and therefore cannot yield rational knowledge. Under the warfare model, one is forced to choose between scientific ways of knowing and theological ways of knowing. Another response has been to view science and theology as non-overlapping magisteria. Under this view, held by, for example, Paul Tillich, science and theology have different objects of study and therefore say different things about those different objects. Conflict is not even possible. As Clark notes, although there are various strategies for delineating which phenomena lie in which sphere, as a general rule it is said that science treats rational things while theology treats irrational things.[21]

Proponents of the "grace renews nature" vision will reject both of these models, proposing instead that science and theology are mutually beneficial conversation partners. God created the world, ordered the world, and sustains the world by means of his word. He also inscripturated his word in the

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[18] Alvin Plantinga, "The Twin Pillars of Christian Scholarship," in *Seeking Understanding: The Stob Lectures 1986–1998* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 125–32.

[19] Runner, *The Relation of the Bible to Learning*, 129.

[20] David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2003), 266–70.

[21] Ibid.

book we now know as the Bible. God reveals himself generally through creation and especially through the Bible, but above all, he reveals himself in a unified manner. Although there may be conflict at times between scientists and theologians, there never has been and never will be any final conflict between creation and Scripture, or between theology and science.

Theologians and scientists access overlapping but different dimensions of reality and they use overlapping but differentiated methods to do so. "What we really need," Alvin Plantinga writes, "are answers to our questions from the perspective of all that we know—what we know about God, and what we know by faith, by way of revelation, as well as what we know in other ways."[22] For this reason, dialogue between them is crucial. Without such dialogue, the disciplines are ghettoized and left unable to give fuller and more fecund accounts of the objects they seek to understand. Through such dialogue these frames can be integrated in order to access reality more fully. Such dialogue and integration holds forth the possibility of a unified curriculum, one which will enhance not only science and theology, but the entire curriculum.

Instead of conflict, God's word complements and supplements the best findings in the academy. Consider mathematics. One might have difficulty imagining how God's self-revelation in Scripture might be relevant to this particular college discipline. However, as theologian and mathematician Vern Poythress has demonstrated, it is. Take, for example, the three competing approaches among mathematicians to describe the essence of mathematics. One is *intuitionism*, in which mathematics reduces to human intuition concerning number and space. Another is *logicism*, in which mathematics reduces to logic. A final approach is *formalism*, in which mathematics reduces to the manipulation of formal language systems. But each of these approaches has difficulty explaining why and how mathematics applies to well to our physical world. Each approach is reductionist. A Christian professor, however, would be able to explain mathematics' coherence with the real world by explaining that it finds its source in God. God created the human mind which has *intuitions* about numbers and space, just as he created the *form* of the physical world to be characterized by numerical and spatial order, and as he ordered the world *logically* such that myriad consequences derive from relatively few starting assumptions. This approach avoids the reductionism of an approach that cannot posit God as the source of coherence.[23]

But technically, the former example only illustrates the need for theism of the sort that could be posited by the Qur'an. We need an example that necessitates the self-revelation of Christianity's Triune God. Consider the problem of unity and diversity, which plagues not only mathematics, but other disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, and law. Non-Christian approaches

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[22] "When Faith and Reason Clash: Evolution and the Bible," in *Christian Scholar's Review* 21 (1991): 30.

[23] Vern Poythress, *Redeeming Science: A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 324–25.

to the problem have exceeding difficulty in explaining the relationship between unity and diversity and tend to reduce one concept to the other. On the one hand, philosophers such as Parmenides have argued that diversity is an illusion and that really and truly "all is one." On the other hand, atomistic and nominalistic philosophies tend to reduce the world to diversity. A Christian scholar is able to avoid such reductions because of his understanding of the Trinity. As Augustine, Aquinas, and numerous Christian scholars have done, he can argue that God's nature as Triune demonstrates final coherence of unity and diversity in this world.

How the "Grace Renews Nature" Model Helps a Christian University Be Its Better Self

In light of the antithesis that cuts through every heart, across all of life and through every academic discipline, and in light of the scientism that would perpetuate that antithesis by denigrating and even dismissing knowledge gained by special revelation, it is incumbent upon the Christian community to build Christian universities and to collaborate with and support such universities. These universities will recognize Christ as the clue to all learning and Scripture as his word and accordingly will allow special revelation its rightful place.

The benefits of the "grace renews nature" vision for higher education are manifold, and we will conclude by mentioning only three. *First, the consistent outworking of this vision will enable a Christian university to provide a truly* Christian *education*. In such an education, special revelation will provide for students a framework for understanding the world as a whole and, within that framework, will equip them with distinctively Christian questions and categories to employ within their disciplines. T. S. Eliot put it well when he wrote, "The purpose of Christian education would not be merely to make men and women pious Christians. . . . A Christian education must primarily teach people to be able to think in Christian categories."[24] Whereas in the other visions the role of special revelation is reduced or eliminated, in the "grace renews nature" vision its role is maximized.

It should be noted, however, that this vision pushes back not only against visions that reduce or eliminate special revelation but also against views that diminish special revelation by employing a simplistic biblicism. Biblicism of this sort tends to view the Bible as a storehouse of isolated facts that exist in an apple-to-apple relationship with some corresponding set of facts in a particular discipline. For example, an astronomer who is a simplistic biblicist might read Psalm 19:4c–6 and conclude that the earth is in the center of the universe and that the sun actually rises and sets. This sort of approach parades as a high view of Scripture but in fact actually parodies Scripture by forcing it to answer questions in a way in which it was never intended. The more appropriate insight from Psalm 19 and other passages is that God's creation,

[24] T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1940), 22.

in its entirety, testifies to God. Creation's patterns, including the "rising" and "setting" of the sun, display his glory. A Christian professor might also note how Jeremiah 33:20–21 illustrates this point when it states that nature's regularity points to God's dependability. He also might note that God's dependability is the reason for nature's regularity and therefore is the reason we can even embark upon scientific research (which is based on nature's regularity). But the perceptive Christian professor will not conclude from Psalm 19 that the earth is at the center of the universe and that the sun moves around the earth.

Second, the consistent application of this vision provides for the curriculum the center—Christ, via his word—it has been missing since the rise of modernity. It provides for teachers and students a connected view of their academic intellectual universe. With the rise of scientism, modern universities abandoned their roots, including their Christian metaphysics and epistemology, and embraced a "naked" classroom, a classroom shorn of its religious apparel. The results have been deleterious, and none more so than the resulting loss of a curricular center. Without Christ—via his word—at the center of the curriculum, modern universities have experienced an increasing fragmentation and, with such fragmentation, an intellectual crisis. With Christ at the center, however, teachers and students may once again embrace the entire spectrum of knowledge from the same vantage-point of Christian faith. Stephen Fowl writes:

> While Paul's demand to take every thought captive to Christ is incumbent on all Christians, the ecclesially based university provides a distinct context within which Christians can be introduced to the habits, practices, and dispositions that will enable them to think Christianly across the entire spectrum of knowledge. There is no aspect of knowing that Christians can rule out of bounds.[25]

A Christian university such as this will be able to bequeath to its students a sturdy and holistic education, one which takes into account natural knowledge of the world as well as knowledge gained via special revelation. The "non-theological" and non-ministerial disciplines will draw upon God's special revelation to inform their research and the subject matter of their disciplines, thus being able to see their disciplines in light of the grand narrative of Scripture and, accordingly, in light of the Lord who stands at the center of both Scripture and the universe. In so doing, they will be able to avoid giving distorted and fragmented views of reality, and instead will be able to give their students a truly Christian and unified view of reality. Only this sort of university will be equipped to teach its students to experience reality in its wholeness of meaning, and thus to abstract and research from within that holistic experience.

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[25] Stephen Fowl, "The Role of Scripture in an Ecclesially Based University," in *Conflicting Allegiances: The Church-Based University in a Liberal Democratic Society*, ed. Michael L. Budde and John Wright (Grand Rapids: Brazos), 172.

In other words, a student can only know truth in its fullness when she allows God's self-revelation to get a hold of her in the depths of her heart, uniting her to Christ and enabling that union and revelation to radiate outward into her studies. Allowing Christ and his word to stand at the center of our hearts and the center of the university enables her to be thoroughly equipped, as Paul urges in 2 Tim 3:17.

Third, the pattern of thought operative in this vision will foster in students and teachers alike a reminder of the cosmic battle being waged all around us. A Christian student will learn from his professor how to draw upon the full epistemological resources available to him—both special revelation and other knowledge—in order to subject every theory and concept to a holistic critical analysis from within that theorist's own system of thought. If the theorist being studied is a non-Christian such as Nietzsche or Marx, the student will be able to analyze and evaluate that person's theories and concepts in light of God's word and his world, exposing them for what they are—antithetical theories and concepts at odds with God's truth. He will be able to appreciate significant insights from that theorist, but never without bringing those insights "to the cleaners," divesting them of any antithetical elements. Plantinga writes:

> We need deep, penetrating, thoughtful, informed analyses of the various cultural movements and forces we encounter. . . . Christian scholars have an obligation to discern and analyze these perspectives, to plumb the full extent of their influence, to recognize the way in which they underlie vast stretches of contemporary intellectual life, to note how they manifest themselves in the intellectual projects and pursuits that are currently fashionable. We have an obligation to point out what we see, to react to it, to comment upon it. We must be aware of the broadly religious conflict in which scholarship is enmeshed."[26]

Along the way, as they learn to discern the antithesis operative in their chosen discipline, students will learn by way of analogy to spot it also in their homes and in the streets. As they learn to redirect academic realities toward Christ, they are likewise forming the habit of redirecting personal, ecclesial, familial, and political realities toward him.

Conclusion

Christian professors and students who wish to conduct their studies in this manner will likely find themselves lonely on campus, whether they are at Ivy League universities, public universities, or, regretfully, at any number of Christian colleges. Plantinga writes:

> A student who wants to think seriously about these topics is very much on her own; more than that, she is likely to be thought weird, peculiar, marginal, out of the mainstream. Scholarship is an intensely social activity; we learn our craft from our elders and mentors; but we can't

[26] Plantinga, "Christian Scholarship," 138.

> learn how to do Christian scholarship from our mentors at these universities. That is why it is of first importance that there be Christian universities, institutions where these questions do take pride of place, and where a student can think about the bearing of Christianity on her disciplines in a regular and institutionally sanctioned way.[27]

Indeed, it is incumbent upon the Christian community to commit to the hard work of building distinctively Christian universities. Additionally, it must encourage Christian scholars who find themselves teaching in public universities and other institutions not committed to Christian teaching and learning. Christian scholars in such institutions have a vocation—a calling from the Lord—to be salt and light on their campuses, a vocation which no doubt will require much wisdom and discernment.

Christians can take heart in knowing that many or most of the world's premiere universities gained ascendancy by seeking to do authentically Christian scholarship. For example, the mission statement of the founders of Harvard College (published in a pamphlet in 1643) states: "Let every Student be plainly instructed, and earnestly pressed, to consider well [that] the maine end of his life and studies is *to know God and Jesus Christ which is eternall life*, Jn 17:3, and therefore to lay *Christ* in the bottome, as the only foundation of all sound knowledge and Learning."[28] Like Harvard's founders, we must affirm that Jesus Christ is the foundation of all learning. His Lordship is as wide as creation and therefore as wide as the university's curriculum.

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[27] Plantinga, "Christian Scholarship," 161.

[28] "New England's First Fruits," quoted in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans* (New York: American Book, 1938), 702.

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Rescuing Rahab: The Evangelical Discussion on Conflicting Moral Absolutes

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Evangelical ethicists have perennially debated the topic of conflicting moral absolutes. Understandably, this is an important discussion, for the prospect of internal conflict within an ethical system could result in either an incoherent system or, even worse, moral paralysis. This article gives an overview of the current evangelical discussion over such moral dilemmas by looking at the three most common perspectives on conflicting moral absolutes that have arisen within evangelicalism. By way of illustration and demonstration of praxis this article makes application of each view to the Rahab narrative of Josh 2:1–24. Although the author's own view becomes clear, the goal of this article is not to try and "win" this ongoing debate, but rather to help readers with as-yet unformed moral systems arrive at a viable perspective and to facilitate dialog among those with divergent viewpoints.

The prospect of conflicting moral absolutes is a significant issue within the field of Christian ethics.[1] If moral norms can conflict with one another, resulting in what are sometimes called ethical dilemmas, one must have a means for resolving such conflict, for the alternative is an incoherent ethical system or even moral paralysis.[2] As evangelical ethicists have considered this

[1] Commenting on the importance of this issue for Christian ethics, Thielicke writes, "We have observed that he who thinks through [the coherency of the law] is . . . forced to betray almost all of his dogmatic and ethical secrets: his doctrine of justification, his concepts of the world, of history, and of the Law, and his views on the nature of sin and on natural law." Helmut Thielicke, "The Borderline Situation of Extreme Conflict," in *Readings in Christian Ethics*, vol. 1, ed. David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 128, n. 3. Note that the terms "moral absolute," "moral law," and "moral norm" are used synonymously in this article and by those cited in this article.

[2] Luck observes, "Plural (absolute) rules + their conflict in application = an incoherent (and therefore unacceptable) system." William F. Luck, "Moral Conflicts and Evangelical Ethics," *Grace Theological Journal* 8 (Spring 1987): 20. Similarly, the Feinbergs identify this as an important topic, for the prospect of incoherency within the moral law raises "crucial concerns for people confronted with concrete decisions." John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 29. *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* notes, "If several rules are defended as absolute, it is necessary to work out the boundaries of those

subject over time, a number of possible options have emerged,[3] the three most common of which in the field literature are (1) conflicting absolutism, (2) graded absolutism, and (3) non-conflicting absolutism.[4] This article will present and analyze these three main evangelical perspectives on conflicting moral absolutes and show how each viewpoint, in its own proponents' estimation, deals with a classic biblical example of moral conflict: the Rahab narrative of Josh 2:1–24.

For each perspective presented within this article the specific view will be explained, proponents and their nuanced arguments will be analyzed, and counter-arguments will be explored. By synthesizing, evaluating, and critiquing the major evangelical positions on conflicting moral absolutes, and by making application to the Rahab narrative, this article aims to accomplish two goals. First, for readers who have not yet adopted a particular approach to handling ethical dilemmas, this discussion purposes to clarify the major evangelical options and, in so doing, to aid in systematic moral formation. Second, this article aims to equip all readers better to participate in discussions about conflicting moral absolutes by exposing them to (or reminding them of) the strengths and weaknesses of the orthodox positions that have arisen with evangelicalism.

Conflicting Moral Absolutes

As we begin this review and analysis of approaches to conflicting moral absolutes, two caveats are in order. First, while the issue of the coherency of the moral law is an important and oft-discussed topic in moral literature, in practice ethical dilemmas (in the sense of conflicting moral absolutes) are

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rules in order to avoid conflict." *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (1986), s.v. "Norms."

[3] The phrase "possible options" is used in light of Cambridge ethicist A. C. Ewing's warning, "No philosopher has succeeded in producing adequate general rules for dealing with conflicts of duties, possibly because this is intrinsically impossible." *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (1986), s.v. "Conflict of Duties." Further, it is recognized that some readers may believe one or more of the common evangelical approaches to moral conflict is inherently unbiblical. Indeed, as will be documented, this is the belief of some ethicists cited in this article. Obviously, for those with such a view, not all of the perspectives in this article would be "possible," yet the presentation here is in light of the larger evangelical milieu.

[4] There are, of course, many non-evangelical perspectives that have been suggested by ethicists (e.g., situational ethics, among others), as well as many hybrid evangelical options. Yet, it seems that even the blended perspectives that have been suggested seem to take one of the three main positons covered in this article as their starting point. Thus, many of the strengths and weaknesses mentioned herein may apply.

exceptional, not normative.[5] This topic, then, is addressed not because of its frequency of occurrence, but because of its importance for the discipline of Christian ethics. Second, the possibility of moral laws colliding, resulting in an incoherent system of ethics, assumes the belief in more than one moral norm. Ethical systems that do not affirm the existence of multiple moral laws do not resolve the question of conflicting moral absolutes; rather, they are precluded from it. For this reason, as well as the lack of evangelicals who would self-identify with such ethical systems, the scope of the following discussion is limited to the three most common perspectives, which are conflicting, graded, and non-conflicting absolutism.[6]

Conflicting Absolutism

A popular Christian approach to navigating moral dilemmas is conflicting absolutism, alternatively known as ideal absolutism, tragic morality, or a lesser-evil view of moral conflict. This position holds that there are many universal moral absolutes. As its name implies, this approach teaches that moral norms can and do come into real conflict both in theory and in practice. When such a clash of norms occurs, conflicting absolutism teaches that man must choose sinfully to break one of the moral norms in tension—hopefully opting for the lesser of two evils—and then repent and seek forgiveness. John Warwick Montgomery, a leading contemporary proponent of conflicting absolutism explains:

> The Christian morality fully realizes the difficulty of moral decision [making], and frequently a Christian finds himself in a position where

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[5] Jones observes, "Now there is something to be said for keeping borderline cases in perspective. Ethics courses structured around hard cases easily give the impression that the moral life is just one big quandary, that there are no easy answers to any of its questions." David Clyde Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 126. Seasoned ethicist Robertson McQuilkin makes the telling observation, "I personally have never experienced a moral dilemma that was not resolved by biblical definition and choosing to trust God with the consequences." Robertson McQuilkin, *An Introduction to Biblical Ethics*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1995), 148. For a contrary perspective, see John Warwick Montgomery who writes, "Christian morality fully realizes the difficulty of moral decisions, and frequently a Christian finds himself in a position where it is necessary to make a decision where moral principles must be violated in favor of other moral principles." John Warwick Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1970), 69. Similarly, R. A. Hig writes, "Conflicts of moral duty do occur . . . . Human beings are then obligated to rank one duty higher than the other, to disobey one rule in order to obey another." *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (1995), s.v. "Absolutes."

[6] This is in contrast to Geisler who believes moral systems that deny a multiplicity of moral norms ought to be addressed in a discussion of conflicting moral absolutes. He notes, "Since they challenge Christian ethics, they must be addressed." Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Ethics: Options and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 29.

> it is necessary to make a decision where moral principles must be violated in favor of other moral principles, but he never vindicates himself in this situation. He decides in terms of the lesser of evils . . . and this drives him to the Cross to ask forgiveness for the human situation in which this kind of complication and ambiguity exists.[7]

In addition to Montgomery, other well-known advocates of conflicting absolutism include Helmut Thielicke, J. I. Packer, and Erwin Lutzer.[8] Interestingly, in the Protestant tradition this approach is most often (although not solely) seen among those who have adopted or been influenced by Lutheran theology. It has been suggested that this phenomena is due in part to Martin Luther's doctrine of the two kingdoms.[9] Lutheran scholar Bernhard Lohse explains this teaching: "The intent behind the differentiation between the two kingdoms or two governments, both of which exist side by side in Luther, is to distinguish human existence 'before God' (*coram Deo*) and 'before the world' (*coram mundo*). . . . They are especially to serve the purpose that the spiritual remain spiritual and the temporal temporal."[10] So, whether it was Luther's intent or not, the dualistic nature of this doctrine has produced, or at least allowed for, paradoxes in certain areas of Lutheran moral theology,[11]

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[7] Montgomery, *The Suicide of Christian Theology*, 69.

[8] J. I. Packer, "Situations and Principles," in *Law, Morality, and the Bible*, ed. Bruce Kaye and Gordon Wenham (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1978), 164–65; Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Morality Gap* (Chicago: Moody, 1972); John W. Montgomery and Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: True or False* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1972), 46; Helmut Thielicke, *Theological Ethics: Foundations*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 578–631. Note that some ethicists have traced the origins of conflicting absolutism back to the tragedies of ancient Greek drama. Cf. Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 98; Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 132.

[9] Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 98. Note that the term "two kingdoms doctrine" does not actually appear in Luther, but was evidently coined by Karl Barth to describe this aspect in Luther's thought. Cf. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1999), 154.

[10] Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 315. Observe Luther's own words about the two kingdoms in his 1525 *Open Letter on the Harsh Book against the Peasants*, "There are two kingdoms, one the kingdom of God, the other the kingdom of the world. . . . God's kingdom is a kingdom of grace and mercy . . . but the kingdom of the world is a kingdom of wrath and severity. . . . Now he who would confuse these two kingdoms—as our false fanatics do—would put wrath into God's kingdom and mercy into the world's kingdom; and that is the same as putting the devil in heaven and God in hell." LW 4.265–66.

[11] In his classic work *Christ and Culture*, H. Richard Niebuhr writes of the tension such theology produces, stating, "Man is seen as subject to two moralities, and as a citizen of two worlds that are not only discontinuous with each other but largely opposed. In the polarity and tension of Christ and culture life must be lived precariously and sinfully . . . . [Luther] seems to have a double attitude toward reason and philosophy, toward business and trade, toward religious organizations and rites, as

one of which is conflicting absolutism. An example from Luther's own thought where this tension can be detected comes from a letter to his colleague Philip Melanchton. Here Luther wrote:

> If you are a preacher of grace, then preach a true, not a fictitious grace; if grace is true, you must bear a true and not a fictitious sin. God does not save people who are only fictitious sinners. Be a sinner and sin boldly, but believe and rejoice in Christ even more boldly. For he is victorious over sin, death, and the world. As long as we are here we have to sin. This life is not the dwelling place of righteousness but, as Peter says (2 Pet 3:13), we look for a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. . . . Pray boldly—you too are a mighty sinner.[12]

Advocates of conflicting absolutism support this view by appealing to Scripture passages that address the fallen condition of the world as well as the inevitability of personal sin (cf. Ps 51:5; Rom 3:23). As Geisler notes, the fact that the world is fallen and that moral conflicts will occur is "a central assumption of [conflicting absolutism]."[13] This is one of the strengths and attractions of conflicting absolutism—that is, an emphasis upon the fallen estate of man, the holiness of God, the unbending nature of moral absolutes, and man's need to repent when he transgresses the law.[14] Yet, proponents of this approach are careful to note that unavoidable sinful choices have their root in the corruption of man, not in the design of God. Another benefit of conflicting absolutism is its simplicity when faced with complex moral situations. Indeed, conflicting absolutism can ease the process of dealing with difficult ethical scenarios by teaching that sometimes there is no sin-free option, for sin is inevitable in a fallen world.[15] In such cases man is to freely sin, repent, and then seek forgiveness.

Additional support for conflicting absolutism comes from examples in Scripture that advocates of this view claim demonstrate real conflict between moral norms. Without commenting as to the quality of these examples, key passages cited in the moral literature in support of conflicting absolutism include: Abraham and Sarah's lie before Pharaoh and Abimelech (cf. Gen

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well as toward state and politics. . . . Luther divided life into compartments, or taught that the Christian right hand should not know what a man's worldly left hand was doing." H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951), 43, 171.

[12] LW 48.281–82.

[13] Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 97; cf. Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 132.

[14] Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 233; Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 132.

[15] Frame writes, "We should try to understand, however, why the theory of tragic moral choice is so plausible to many. The main reason, I think, is that many moral decisions are very difficult to make. Sometimes it is hard to find the way of escape, and people are tempted to think that such a way does not exist." Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 233.

12:10–20; 20:2–18), the Hebrew midwives' lie to Pharaoh concerning the birth of male babies (cf. Exod 1:15–20), Rahab's lie about the location of the spies (cf. Josh 2:1–14), Samson's divinely approved suicide (Judg 16:30), Michal's lie about David's whereabouts (cf. 1 Sam 19:14), David's lie about his mission (cf. 1 Sam 21:2), Samuel's lie about his intentions (cf. 1 Sam 16:1–5), Daniel and his companions' defiance of the governing authorities (Dan 3:8–30), and the apostles' disobedience of the religious rulers (Acts 4:13–22).

Despite the appeal of conflicting absolutism, this approach to resolving moral dilemmas is not without its problems. In fact, Frame asserts that this view is "morally confused," even claiming it is "[not] compatible with Scripture,"[16] and Geisler calls it "morally absurd."[17] A major challenge for conflicting absolutism is the Christological implications that stem from the position. To elaborate, this approach seems to make Jesus' incarnation either less authentic or artificially engineered, for Christ never sinned. Scripture is clear that Jesus was fully God and fully man, yet was without sin (cf. Heb 2:14–18; 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5). However, since conflicting absolutism teaches that in certain scenarios man must sin, it seems that during his incarnation Jesus must have been supernaturally preserved from situations in which he would have to sin. Yet, if this is true, in what sense can it be said that Christ "has been tested in every way as we are" (Heb 4:15)?[18] It seems conflicting absolutism must hold that Jesus' humanity in his incarnation was fundamentally different than that of other men in that he never experienced real moral conflict. If so, Jones writes that conflicting absolutism "renders the example of Jesus meaningless . . . [in that he] was not tested in all points like us."[19]

A second problem with conflicting absolutism is its view of the nature of law. Given that there is no conflict within the Godhead (cf. John 17:22), if the law reflects the moral character of God it is difficult to understand how the law could conflict with itself. While proponents of conflicting absolutism may appeal to the fallen estate of the created order in support of their view, the fall of man did not ontologically affect God or his law. Only man and the creation were cursed. Moreover, it is also worth noting that God formally gave his law to mankind *after* the fall. Therefore, in light of divine injunctions to keep the law (cf. John 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 John 5:2–3), it seems reasonable

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[16] Ibid., 231.

[17] Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 103.

[18] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

[19] Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 132. Lutzer's response to this critique, which Geisler labels "the antecedent sin defense," is common among advocates of conflicting absolutism. Lutzer claims that the event of having to choose between conflicting moral absolutes is always the result of previous sinful choices. Since Jesus never sinned, he never faced a moral dilemma. Yet, the teaching that all moral conflicts are the result of others' sins seems suspect. Cf. Lutzer, *The Morality Gap*, 112; Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 107–8.

to expect that redeemed man could in fact do so. While no one will perfectly keep the law, to deny this possibility may have the effect of minimizing personal holiness and creating what could be viewed as a moral duty to sin on some occasions. However, it would seem to make God unjust if he allows mankind to exist in an environment in which he has to sin, and yet still hold man accountable for such necessary transgressions of the law.[20]

A third challenge for conflicting absolutism is that the Bible expressly forbids doing evil that good may result (cf. Rom 3:8; 6:1, 15) and clearly teaches, "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. God is faithful and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape, so that you are able to bear it" (1 Cor 10:13; cf. 2 Pet 2:9). Furthermore, it is interesting to note the Bible nowhere explicitly addresses the issue of conflicting moral absolutes—a surprising omission given that moral dilemmas, if possible, would likely be some of the greatest trials a Christian could face. Indeed, the burden of Scripture is on doing what is right—that is, simply keeping moral norms—not upon committing a lesser evil in the name of avoiding a greater sin. Perhaps, then, conflicting absolutism is open to the charge of being overly simplistic in that when faced with moral dilemmas, it fails to look for a way of escape.

Graded Absolutism

A view of resolving moral conflicts that gained popularity in the late twentieth century is known as graded absolutism. This approach has also been called ethical hierarchicalism, contextual absolutism, and qualified absolutism. In short, graded absolutism teaches there are many universal moral norms that can and do conflict. In this sense, graded absolutism is similar to conflicting absolutism. Yet, graded absolutism differs from other approaches to moral dilemmas, including conflicting absolutism, in its claim that all ethical norms can be arranged in a hierarchy of merit. According to graded absolutism, when moral conflict occurs, resolution can be achieved by breaking a lower moral norm in order to keep a higher moral norm. Yet, the defining characteristic of graded absolutism is its teaching that when a lower moral norm is broken in order to resolve a moral conflict, no sin has been committed. Graded absolutism differs from conflicting absolutism, then, in that it does not focus upon sinfully committing a lesser evil, but upon righteously keeping the greater good. Norman Geisler, the modern architect of graded absolutism, summarizes this approach to moral dilemmas:

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[20] Jones writes, "The idea of being compelled by (providentially governed) circumstances to choose the lesser of two moral evils, that is, the lesser of two sins, is highly problematic on Christian assumptions. It impugns the integrity of the Lawgiver by supposing he has issued conflicting commands, yet holds us responsible for obeying both of them." Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 132.

> The essential principles of graded absolutism are: There are many moral principles rooted in the absolute moral character of God; there are higher and lower moral duties—for example, love for God is a greater duty than love for people; These moral laws sometimes come into unavoidable moral conflict; In such conflicts we are obligated to follow the higher moral law; When we follow the higher moral law we are not held responsible for not keeping the lower one.[21]

As was just noted, the key proponent, if not the originator, of this approach to resolving moral conflicts is Norman Geisler. Certainly shades of graded absolutism can be detected in earlier thinkers such as W. D. Ross;[22] yet, Geisler is the one who crafted and popularized the approach as it is known in modern evangelical ethics. Indeed, while other contemporary ethicists have adopted graded absolutism—including John Jefferson Davis, John Feinberg, and Paul Feinberg, among others—nearly all trace their views, however nuanced, back to Geisler.[23] Interestingly, Geisler shuns credit as the innovator of this view, claiming that it is rooted in the Reformed tradition.[24] Yet, his examples of Augustine and Charles Hodge as past advocates of graded absolutism are not convincing and tenuous at best, a fact Geisler himself seems to concede.[25]

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[21] Norman L. Geisler, *Options in Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 132. Geisler gives a similar definition in an earlier work: "Ethical hierarchicalism is so named because it maintains a hierarchical arrangement or ordering of ethical norms based on the relative scale of value they represent. It implies a pyramid of normative values which in and of themselves are objectively binding upon men. But when any two or more of these values happen to conflict, a person is exempted from his otherwise binding obligation to a lower norm in view of the pre-emptory obligation of the higher norm." Norman L. Geisler, *Ethics: Alternatives and Issues* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 114.

[22] Cf. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1930); W. D. Ross, *Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939).

[23] John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, 3rd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 20–22; Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 30–32. Another name associated with graded absolutism is Stephen Charles Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 154–60.

[24] Geisler, *Ethics*, 113.

[25] Geisler admits that Augustine held "the unqualified absolutist position on the issue of lying" and that his views were only "similar to those of graded absolutism." Moreover, Geisler notes that Hodge's view was "a form of graded absolutism" and that it only has the "essential elements" of the approach. Geisler, *Ethics*, 113–14, 116. Presumably following Geisler, both Davis and the *New Dictionary of Pastoral Theology and Christian Ethics* cite Hodge as a proponent of graded absolutism. Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 21; *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology* (1995), s.v. "Norms." A reading of Hodge's exposition of the ninth commandment, which is the portion

General support for graded absolutism comes from the apparent unavoidability of moral conflicts, both in Scripture and in real life, coupled with the divine expectation of holiness (cf. Matt 5:48). Geisler remarks, "It is both unrealistic and unbiblical to assume that moral obligations never conflict. Real life reveals this kind of conflict daily in hospitals, courtrooms, and battlefields. . . . It is naïve to assume that these kinds of situations never happen."[26] Scriptural examples of moral conflict cited by advocates of this approach are identical to those mentioned earlier in support of conflicting absolutism, including the Hebrew midwives, the Rahab narrative, and the like. Therefore, in view of the divine imperatives to keep God's laws, as well as the aforementioned shortfalls of conflicting absolutism, graded absolutists reason that there must be a way to navigate real moral conflict without creating a necessity to sin in order to avoid moral paralysis and incoherency of the law.

As its name implies, the aspect of graded absolutism upon which the entire system depends is the idea of a hierarchy or a gradation of moral norms. Proponents of graded absolutism generally admit there is not an explicit hierarchy of moral absolutes disclosed in Scripture; yet, they claim such a hierarchy, or what Geisler calls a "pyramid of values,"[27] can be readily discerned and constructed through various allusions in the Bible. Examples of such veiled references include: Jesus' reference to the "least of these commandments" (Matt 5:19); Jesus' citation of "the greatest and most important commandment" (Matt 22:38); Jesus' reference to "the more important matters of the law" (Matt 23:23); Jesus' reference to he who has committed "the greater sin" (John 13:18); and Paul's claim that "the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13:13). Advocates of graded absolutism also cite the idea of degrees of punishment in hell (cf. Luke 10:12–14) and rewards in heaven (cf. 1 Cor 3:12–15) as evidence of there being a hierarchy of moral norms; for, they reason, there must be a hierarchy of norms in order to produce a gradation of punishments and rewards.[28]

That graded absolutism is attractive to some modern evangelical ethicists is not surprising, for this approach appears to offer a way to resolve real moral conflict without requiring personal sin. Yet, graded absolutism is not without its limitations. For example, many have found the idea of a graded hierarchy of moral norms to be problematic, if not entirely unbiblical. While

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of his *Systematic Theology* cited by Geisler, shows that while Hodge's language is undefined in places, he was clearly a non-conflicting absolutist. For example, Hodge writes, "The question now under consideration is not whether it is ever right to do wrong, which is a solecism; nor is the question whether it is ever right to lie; but rather what constitutes a lie." Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1873), 442.

[26] Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 94.

[27] Ibid., 124.

[28] Ibid., 116.

the aforementioned proof-texts for a hierarchy of absolutes may indicate that all moral norms are not to be weighed equally in application, these passages do not provide a working hierarchy of moral absolutes.[29] In view of this lack of an explicit hierarchy of moral norms, Jones comments, "As a method, Geisler's hierarchicalism is too open-ended. Such a theory requires that one know which value is intrinsically higher in the conflict situation."[30] Similarly, John and Paul Feinberg, who themselves are advocates of graded absolutism, admit that they are not "certain that if one did construct a hierarchy, it would be applicable to every situation, regardless of the factors involved in each case."[31] It seems, though, without a working hierarchy of moral norms, graded absolutism ceases to be a viable system of resolving moral conflict.

A second related challenge for graded absolutism is that even if a fixed hierarchy of ethical absolutes could be established from Scripture, proponents of this approach would still need to demonstrate that conflict between higher and lower moral norms actually occurs. It is worth noting again that the examples of moral conflict cited by advocates of both conflicting and graded absolutism are not described in Scripture as explicitly involving moral conflict. Indeed, the Bible does not contain any univocal examples of conflict between moral norms, nor is there any teaching in Scripture on how to resolve hypothetical or interpreted moral conflict. Furthermore, even if advocates of graded absolutism could establish a hierarchy of moral norms from Scripture and show that real conflict between higher and lower moral norms can occur, they would still need to demonstrate that the Lord sanctions breaking lower moral norms as a means of resolving such conflict.

A third limitation of graded absolutism is that in teaching that it is not sinful to break a lower moral norm, albeit at the expense of keeping a higher moral norm, this approach appears to trivialize the concept of moral absolutes. Indeed, in explaining this concept, it seems that at times advocates of graded absolutism are playing a word game or using, as Luck notes, "linguistic

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[29] In his first ethics textbook, Geisler suggested the following hierarchical calculus: persons are more valuable than things; an infinite person is more valuable than finite person(s); a complete person is more valuable than an incomplete person; an actual person is of more value than a potential person; potential persons are more valuable than actual things; many persons are more valuable than few persons; personal acts which promote personhood are better than those which do not. Geisler, *Ethics*, 115–21. For reasons that are unclear, Geisler seems to have abandoned this calculus, as he suggests a different one in his later ethics textbook. Geisler's more recent hierarchical calculus is: love for God over love for man; obey God over government; and mercy over veracity. Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 121–22.

[30] Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 136.

[31] Feinberg and Feinberg, *Ethics for a Brave New World*, 32.

mirrors."[32] For example, Geisler writes, "Not all absolutes are absolutely absolute. Some are only relatively absolute, that is, absolute relative to their particular area. . . . Lower norms are not universal in the broadest sense of the word. . . . That is, lower ethical norms cannot be universally universal but only locally universal. They are valid on their particular relationship but not on all relationships."[33] In another place, Geisler attempts to clarify this concept, writing, "There are no exceptions to absolute moral laws, only exemptions from obeying them."[34] Needless to say, to claim that moral norms are not absolutely absolute, nor universally universal, and that there are exemptions to obeying moral laws, but no exceptions to keeping them, Geisler leaves himself open both to misunderstanding and to criticism.

One final limitation of graded absolutism is that this approach seems to have problems dealing with verses in Scripture that specify breaking one point of the moral law makes one guilty of violating the entire law. For example, Paul taught, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue doing everything written in the book of the law" (Gal 3:10; cf. Deut 27:26; Rom 3:19) and James wrote, "For whoever keeps the entire law, yet fails in one point, is guilty of breaking it all" (Jas 2:10). Rather than teaching that it is permissible to violate one part of the law in view of a greater good, these passages seem to indicate that there is an organic unity of the entire moral law that cannot be violated. A related challenge for graded absolutism is the so-called vice lists in Scripture that seem to present all laws as being equal (cf. Matt 15:19; Gal 5:19–21; 1 Pet 4:3–4). Indeed, it appears there are many more passages in Scripture that present the law as being equal than there are veiled allusions to a hierarchy of moral norms. So, while this approach is creative in its desire to affirm the reality of conflicting moral absolutes, as well as man's duty to avoid sin, as with each of the evangelical approaches to resolving moral dilemmas, graded absolutism is not without its challenges.

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[32] Luck continues, "There simply is no such thing as a nonbinding, yet applicable moral rule. Obligation is part of the denotative meaning of a rule or law. A rule is a statement of obligation. Remove the obligation and you are left with a string of words or at most a descriptive sentence, but not a moral rule." Luck, "Moral Conflicts and Evangelical Ethics," 22.

[33] Geisler, *Ethics*, 132. Rakestraw observes that these statements betray the anthropocentric nature of graded absolutism. He writes that graded absolutism "fatally weakens the binding character of God's ethical norms and, in practice, shifts the locus of authority from the divine lawgiver to the moral agent." Robert V. Rakestraw, "Ethical Choices: A Case for Non-conflicting Absolutism," in *Readings in Christian Ethics*, vol. 1, ed. David K. Clark and Robert V. Rakestraw (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 123.

[34] Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 129.

Non-Conflicting Absolutism

A third Christian approach to dealing with moral conflict is known as non-conflicting absolutism. This view, which Jones observes is "the classic Christian approach,"[35] has also been called unqualified absolutism, case analysis, and casuistical divinity. As with both conflicting and graded absolutism, non-conflicting absolutism holds that there are many universal and absolute moral norms. However, as its name implies, non-conflicting absolutism differs from other approaches in its teaching that conflict between moral norms cannot and does not occur. In other words, non-conflicting absolutism holds that there will never be a case where moral norms collide, resulting in the need to break one moral norm in order to keep another, or vice-versa. Rakestraw summarizes this approach well, writing, "Divinely-given moral absolutes never truly conflict, although there are occasions when they appear to conflict. Non-conflicting absolutism holds that there will never be a situation in which obedience to one absolute will entail disobedience to or the setting-aside of another absolute."[36]

In the preceding citation Rakestraw makes the important observation that sometimes moral norms will appear to collide. Yet, non-conflicting absolutists hold that such conflict is only apparent—the result of either misperception of circumstances, misunderstanding of moral norms, or both; however, according to this approach, true conflict between moral norms does not occur. Advocates of non-conflicting absolutism teach that in order to avoid confusion, as well as the appearance of conflict, in ethical analysis it is important to focus on how moral norms are defined within the biblical record. O'Donovan writes, "If we are to obey any rule, we must understand the scope and meaning of its terms; and that applies no less to God-given rules such as those in the Decalogue."[37] Similarly, Jones comments:

> Analysis of how the commandments apply in typical cases begins with careful consideration of the commandments themselves. Absolutes in the sense of objective, universal, exceptionless moral norms can only be formulated by attending carefully to the whole teaching of Scripture in a given area. Many of the dilemmas posed in the evangelical

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[35] Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 140. Curiously, Geisler claims that non-conflicting absolutism is rooted in the Anabaptist tradition; yet, there does not appear to be any historical evidence or proponents to support this, nor does Geisler offer any proof. Cf. Geisler, *Ethics*, 113.

[36] Rakestraw, "Ethical Choices," 119.

[37] Oliver O'Donovan, "Christian Moral Reasoning," in *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral Theology*, ed. David J. Atkinson and David H. Field (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1995), 125. O'Donovan further explains, "When we deliberate about our moral rules, we aim to make them less general and more specific, i.e., to give them the clarity and precision that they need in relation to distinct kinds of circumstances." Ibid.

literature on moral conflicts are readily resolvable on this basic principle.[38]

This call for careful consideration and defining of moral norms is not a plea for what Kierkegaard called a "teleological suspension of the ethical,"[39] nor is it an attempt to recognize what Ross called "*prima facie* duties,"[40] nor is it to engage in what Geisler critically labeled "stipulative redefinition."[41] Rather, it is a call for critical, biblical analysis of moral dilemmas and the norms contained therein. To illustrate, if a father were to ask his son to steal a pack of cigarettes from a local convenient store, there is the veneer of moral conflict between the duty to obey parents and the law that prohibits stealing. Yet, upon further reflection, there is no real moral conflict here for, as Paul notes, the fifth commandment does not entail blind obedience; rather, it requires obedience "in the Lord" (Eph 6:1). Similarly, if a soldier was ordered by his commanding officer to kill an enemy in a time of war, there would be no actual moral conflict between the duty to submit to authority and the commandment that prohibits killing. This is because the sixth commandment does not prohibit killing *per se*; rather, it forbids murder—that is, the intentional, lawless, and malicious taking of human life. As such, there is a difference between cold-blooded murder and killing in a time of war.

As was observed previously, non-conflicting absolutism is the classic Christian position on dealing with moral dilemmas—that is, it is the view held by the majority of ethicists in the evangelical tradition. Yet, as Rakestraw rightly observes, "It is very difficult to find a clear, systematic, evangelical presentation of non-conflicting absolutism by an advocate of the position. Non-conflicting absolutism is most often assumed rather than argued."[42]

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[38] Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 140. Similarly, McQuilkin notes, "The Bible itself, giving the command, must be allowed to define the limits of that command. . . . When we define the ethical choice in biblical terms . . . most dilemmas are solved." McQuilkin, *Biblical Ethics*, 148. Likewise, Frame observes, "Some alleged examples of tragic moral choice are really questions of priority within the divine law. . . . Others have to do with questions of interpretation." Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 233. Rakestraw, too, notes, "Non-conflicting absolutists pay close attention to the definition and scriptural basis of each moral absolute. . . . [So-called exceptions] are always within the absolute itself! They are part of the absolute and are therefore not exceptions to the absolute." Rakestraw, "Ethical Choices," 119–20.

[39] Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (New York: Class House, 2009), 47–60.

[40] W. D. Ross coined the phrase "*prima facie* duty" in reference to an act that must be done because it is first mentioned, promised, or required, even if it is wrong. The term that Ross uses to describe this confusing concept, *prima facie* duty, has been used by others to describe a duty that appears valid on first view, yet is not required upon consideration. However, this is not Ross's definition of the concept. Cf. Ross, *The Right and the Good*; idem, *Foundations of Ethics*.

[41] Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 92.

[42] Rakestraw, "Ethical Choices," 118, n. 1.

This being true, cogent presentations and examples of non-conflicting absolutism can be found in classic Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Charles Hodge (*contra* Geisler), and in modern ethicists including John Frame, David Clyde Jones, William. F. Luck, Robertson McQuilkin, John Murray, and Robert Rakestraw, among others.[43]

One of the most common arguments offered by advocates of non-conflicting absolutism is that there are no univocal examples of moral conflict in Scripture. While proponents of both conflicting and graded absolutism cite alleged examples of moral conflict in the Bible, it is noteworthy that none of these proof-texts are presented as moral conflicts in the narrative of Scripture itself—either in their appearance or in their resolution. Indeed, it seems clear that the focus of the Bible is not upon conflict between moral norms, but upon conflict between believers and moral norms, including the temptation to sin. In the face of such conflict, Christians have promises such as: "No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Cor 10:13); and "the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Pet 2:9). Additionally, believers have the example and help of Jesus who was "in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15).[44]

Another important argument in favor of non-conflicting absolutism is the nature of moral norms themselves. If moral norms are based upon and reveal the moral character of God, given the fact that there is no conflict within the Godhead (cf. John 17:22), it would seem logically impossible for moral norms to collide—this despite the fact that the world is fallen, for the moral law itself was not affected by the fall. Said differently, if God is absolute and non-contradictory, then his moral norms ought to be absolute and non-contradictory. Rakestraw explains, "The very definition and nature of absolutes argues for non-conflicting absolutism. . . . The character of God argues for

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[43] Cf. Augustine, *On Lying*; Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 437–63; Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 230–34; Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 138–44; Luck, "Moral Conflicts and Evangelical Ethics," 19–34; McQuilkin, *Biblical Ethics*, 148–50; John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957); Robert V. Rakestraw, "Ethical Choices: A Case for Non-Conflicting Absolutism," *Criswell Theological Review* 2 (Spring 1988): 239–67.

[44] Geisler's objection to the biblical teaching that moral conflict is only apparent and that the Lord will provide a way of escape are troublesome. He either misunderstands this tenet of non-conflicting absolutism, or the biblical teaching upon which it is based. Geisler writes, "God does not always intervene and spare all the faithful from moral dilemmas. There is no evidence for this premise of unqualified absolutism either inside or outside the Bible. . . . God may sometimes in his mercy desire to intervene, but there is no reason to believe he must (or will) always do so." Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 93.

non-conflicting absolutism. If God has given numerous moral absolutes, some of which [supposedly] conflict at times, it appears that there is conflict within the mind and moral will of God!"[45]

Of course, not all ethicists embrace non-conflicting absolutism, despite the preceding arguments and evidence, as well as the historicity of the position. Indeed, some have argued that, when taken at face value, real life experience and scriptural examples prove non-conflicting absolutism to be untrue.[46] However, as has been discussed, non-conflicting absolutists respond that such conflict is only apparent, the result of a misperception of circumstances, a misunderstanding of moral norms, or both. In other words, non-conflicting absolutists argue that perceived moral conflict is not the result of a breakdown in either the character of God or his moral law; rather, it is the result of a breakdown in fallen man's perception of moral events.

Another charge that has been leveled again non-conflicting absolutism is that it focuses too much on defining moral norms, to the neglect of the individuals involved in moral events. In so doing, Geisler believes non-conflicting absolutism is tantamount to legalism. He writes, "Another difficulty with unqualified absolutism is that it often tends toward legalism by neglecting the spirit of the law in order to avoid breaking the letter of the law."[47] Yet, it seems Geisler has either misunderstood non-conflicting absolutism or begged the question, for proponents of non-conflicting absolutism would argue their approach does the exact opposite of what Geisler claims. That is, non-conflicting absolutism focuses on defining moral norms and not assuming moral conflict is present in biblical texts where it is not identified, thus avoiding a skewed or legalistic approach to morality. In so doing, non-conflicting absolutism attempts to avoid positing the idea of unavoidable sin, as does conflicting absolutism, or tinkering with the concept of absolute, as does graded absolutism.[48]

A Biblical Example: Rahab and the Spies

Perhaps the preceding approaches to dealing with moral conflict can best be understood by way of application to a biblical example. The account of Rahab's concealment of the Hebrew spies is one of the most well-known examples of apparent moral conflict in Scripture. This narrative is cited in

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[45] Rakestraw, "Ethical Choices," 122–23.

[46] Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 94.

[47] Ibid., 95.

[48] Rakestraw writes, "This is not to say that non-conflicting absolutism is unconcerned with results or ends, or that we value some abstract rule or principle above the lives and real concerns of human beings, but that the moral guidelines of the living God, when followed fully and consistently, will produce the greatest good for those following them. Non-conflicting absolutism is concerned with results, but never at the cost of disregarding God's absolutes." Rakestraw, "Ethical Choices," 121.

almost all Christian treatments of moral dilemmas, regardless of the favored approach of a given volume. For the sake of better understanding conflicting absolutism, graded absolutism, and non-conflicting absolutism, in what follows each view's interpretation of the account of Rahab and the spies will be given without comment or critique. In the conclusion, however, I will disclose my preferred option along with the rationale for my choice.

The details of the Rahab narrative, which is recorded in Josh 2:1–24, are familiar: Rahab, a harlot residing in the city of Jericho, lodges two Hebrew spies who have been sent by Joshua to scout out the city. When word of the foreigners' presence reaches the king of Jericho, Rahab voluntarily hides the men and then willfully deceives the inquiring authorities about the spies' whereabouts. Consequently, when Israel later captures Jericho, Rahab and her family are spared, as the text reports, because "she hid the messengers" (Josh 6:17, 25). The apparent moral dilemma in the Rahab narrative is that when the king of Jericho asked Rahab to turn over the spies, she was faced with two logical options: either assist the authorities and facilitate the spies' capture and presumed murder, or assist the spies by lying to and deceiving the authorities. Given these options, it seems as though there was not a way for Rahab not to sin.

Following the account of the fall of Jericho as is reported in the book of Joshua, Rahab is only mentioned three times in Scripture, all in the New Testament. The first citation is in midst of Matthew's genealogy of Jesus, through his earthly father Joseph. This text reads, "Salmon begot Boaz by Rahab, Boaz begot Obed by Ruth, Obed begot Jesse" (Matt 1:5). The second New Testament mention of Rahab is at Heb 11:31, where the author of Hebrews teaches, "By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace." The third and last mention of Rahab in the New Testament is James' rhetorical question, "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way?" (Jas 2:25). Clearly, one's interpretation of the Rahab narrative must incorporate later biblical commentary; yet, such revelation has not led to a unified view of the morality of the events reported in the Rahab narrative.

Conflicting Absolutism

Advocates of conflicting absolutism understand the account of Rahab to be describing a legitimate moral conflict between the laws prohibiting murder and lying—that is, the sixth commandment and the ninth commandment. Since most people would presumably view lying to be a lesser evil than murder, followers of this approach understand the text to teach that Rahab acted shrewdly, if not wisely, as she fulfilled her moral duty to protect life by lying about the spies' whereabouts. While the text does not record Rahab's repentance for this sin, conflicting absolutists would understand Rahab to have later repented of her willing yet unavoidable deception. Indeed, conflicting absolutists reason this repentance must have occurred between Rahab's sin in

Josh 2:4–7 and the spies' expression of gratitude and promise of deliverance in Josh 2:8–14. J. I. Packer, a conflicting absolutist, writes:

> When one sets out to be truthful, new problems appear. . . . In such exceptional cases [of moral conflict] as we have mentioned, all courses of action have something evil in them, and an outright lie, like that of Rahab (Joshua 2:4–5; note the commendation of her in James 2:25) may actually be the best way, the least evil, and the truest expression of love to all the parties involved. Yet a lie, even when prompted by love, loyalty, and an escapable recognition that if telling it is bad, not telling it would be worse, remains an evil thing. . . . But the lie as such, however necessary it appears, is bad, not good, and the right-minded man knows this. Rightly will he seek fresh cleansing in the blood of Christ and settle for living the only way anyone can live with our holy God—by the forgiveness of sins.[49]

Graded Absolutism

As with conflicting absolutism, proponents of graded absolutism view the Rahab narrative as describing and containing real moral conflict. Davis, a graded absolutist, asserts, "After Rahab the harlot received the Israelite spies, she was met with a choice between telling the truth and preserving life."[50] Geisler concurs, noting, "The point here is that the conflict was genuine and both obligations were moral ones."[51] Graded absolutists conclude, then, that Rahab was caught between her duty to keep the fifth and ninth commandments.

So, graded absolutists view the apparent moral conflict in the Rahab narrative to be real; yet, unlike conflicting absolutists their solution is not to commit the lesser evil and then later to repent. Rather, graded absolutists understand the text to teach that in order to assist the spies Rahab innocently deceived the authorities and kept the greater good. According to graded absolutists Rahab's deception was not sinful, for the truth norm ceased to be normative in this scenario, as it was trumped by the ostensibly higher moral norm of protecting life. Davis writes:

> When Rahab the harlot (Josh. 2:1–7), for example, spoke falsehood to protect the Israelite spies, was she choosing the "lesser of two evils," or a course of action acceptable to God? . . . Her course of action was acceptable to God. In the New Testament, Rahab is cited as an example of faith for receiving the spies and sending them out another way (James 2:25). Nowhere in Scripture is Rahab condemned for her ac-

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[49] J. I. Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 97, 98–99.

[50] Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 18.

[51] Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 118.

> tion. On this construction Rahab fulfilled the moral absolute that applied. . . . Her actions, rather than being the lesser of two evils, were actually good.[52]

Non-Conflicting Absolutism

Non-conflicting absolutists arrive at the same conclusion as do graded absolutists—that is, Rahab did not sin in her deception—albeit via a different route. Whereas graded absolutists hold that Rahab's breaking of the truth norm was not a sin since it was committed in view of a greater good, non-conflicting absolutists teach that the entire event of Rahab's deception, considered in total, was not a violation of a moral absolute at all.[53] Non-conflicting absolutists assert that there is no moral dilemma in this passage. The only duty incumbent upon Rahab was the duty to protect the innocent human lives over which she had become a steward by agreeing to lodge the Hebrew spies.

Non-conflicting absolutists reach this conclusion in view of their understanding of the moral norms in play—specifically, in this instance, the truth norm. In the same context in which he cites the Rahab narrative, Frame, a non-conflicting absolutist, gives a general definition of the truth norm as he asks, "What, then, is a lie? I would say that a lie is a word or act that intentionally deceives a neighbor in order to hurt him. . . . The sin of false witness is that of distorting the facts in such a way as to harm one's neighbor."[54] In view of this definition of the truth norm, non-conflicting absolutists hold

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[52] Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, 21–22. Geisler's comments are similar. He writes, "The Bible indicates that there are occasions when intentionally falsifying (lying) is justifiable. Rahab intentionally deceived to save the lives of Israel's spies and was immortalized in the spiritual 'hall of fame' (Heb. 11). It should be noted that first, nowhere does the Bible condemn her for this deception; second, her falsehood was an integral part of the act of mercy she showed in saving the spies' lives; and third, the Bible says, 'Rahab . . . shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent' (Josh. 6:17). But the real concealment was accomplished by deceiving the authorities at her door. It seems that God blessed her because of it, not in spite of it. Hence, her 'lie' was an integral part of her faith for which she was commended of God (Heb. 11:31; James 2:25)." Geisler, *Christian Ethics*, 122.

[53] Some non-conflicting absolutists have preferred to weigh each component of Rahab's deception individually (i.e., her motives, her spoken words, her actions, etc.) and attempt to discern the morality of each part. While there may be some differences between ethicists' evaluations of the components of the narrative, a non-conflicting perspective of the entire event considered in total would be that her deception did not entail sin.

[54] Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 830–35. J. I. Packer, a conflicting absolutist, similarly defines lying as "false witness against your neighbor—that is, as we said, prideful lying designed to do him down and exalt yourself at his expense." Packer, *Keeping the Ten Commandments*, 98.

that Rahab did not break the ninth commandment by deceiving the authorities, for she did not speak a non-truth for her own glory or to expressly harm the authorities. Rather, in the text Rahab herself explains her actions, which was to include her deception, in view of her knowledge and fear of the Lord (cf. Josh 2:9, 11), whose covenant name she invokes four times in explaining her actions to the spies.

Moreover, advocates of this approach note that not only is Rahab not condemned for her words and actions in the biblical text of Josh 2:1–24, but she is commended for the entire event at Heb 11:31 and Jas 2:25. Rae writes, "[Rahab] is included in God's 'hall of faith' in Hebrews 11 . . . She is praised for her act of faith in providing a safe refuge for the spies. Clearly, part of providing that refuge was deceiving the authorities who were after the spies."[55] In like manner, Frame notes, "With regard to Rahab . . . what Scripture commends is precisely her concealment, her creating a false impression in the minds of the Jericho officials."[56]

Concluding Thoughts

After reviewing various evangelical approaches to resolving moral dilemmas, it seems that Sider was correct in noting, "There is no easy ethical calculus to solve such conflicts."[57] Each of the views on conflicting moral absolutes covered in this article has strengths and weaknesses, a long line of orthodox supporters, and surely deserves a place at the table of moral discussion. As the careful reader has undoubtedly discerned, I personally lean towards a non-conflicting absolutist perspective of resolving moral dilemmas, which shapes my understanding of the Rahab narrative. My rationale for such a stance are the strengths of the non-conflicting absolutist view detailed in the preceding discussion. Yet, three facets of the arguments for non-conflicting absolutism, which I will detail below, have been particularly influential in my own thinking.

First, the fact that non-conflicting absolutism has been the broad path of believers in the Protestant tradition—what my namesake termed the "classic

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[55] Rae, *Moral Choices*, 34. Jones notes, "Certainly concealing the spies from the king of Jericho (treason from his point of view) is approved. Although it is not specifically mentioned in the New Testament retrospectives that extol Rahab's faith, the misdirection of the king's men would seem to be integral to the welcome and protection for which she is commended (Heb. 11:31; James 2:25)." Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 150. McQuilkin writes, "These spies were hidden, in good spy-thriller fashion, by an ancestor of Jesus, Rahab. At that point she began the act of deception, not when she uttered words that further deceived the home troops. For this act she was commended and rewarded by God (Heb. 11:31)." McQuilkin, *Biblical Ethics*, 440.

[56] Frame, *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, 837.

[57] *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (1973), s.v. "Conflict of Duties, Interest."

Christian approach"—is weighty.[58] In regard to debated doctrines, there certainly ought to be room for divergence of thought and charitable discussion among like-minded Christians, yet it seems the burden of proof should rest upon those who want to depart from the "old paths" (Jer 6:16), not those who are on such paths. Second, non-conflicting absolutists' observation that none of the usual examples in Scripture of moral dilemmas, [59] including the Rahab narrative, are described as containing moral conflict. Indeed, one of the reasons why it may be difficult to navigate moral dilemmas is if they are solely the product of our own presuppositions or interpretation. Third, since moral norms are reflective of God's character, which is absolute and non-contradictory, I would expect the appearance of moral laws in any given situation to be absolute and non-contradictory.

In conclusion, then, while God surely rescued Rahab from the destruction of Jericho, it seems unlikely that Rahab will be rescued anytime soon from the divergent views of evangelical ethicists regarding moral dilemmas. Yet, in the end, hopefully this investigation and review of the common evangelical approaches to ethical dilemmas will leave readers better equipped to adopt or synthesize a position on conflicting moral absolutes, to constructively dialog with proponents of alternative views, and to navigate moral dilemmas in the Christian life.

[58] Jones, *Biblical Christian Ethics*, 140.

[59] A related observation is that the majority of the classic biblical examples of conflicting moral absolutes involve the truth norm in conflict with another moral absolute. The disproportional appearance of conflict involving the truth norm ought to give interpreters who find such conflict cause to closely exam this absolute to be sure that one's understanding of this norm is biblically faithful.

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"What Is Sexy?" Exploring the Question of How a Biblical Ethic of Worship Shapes One's View of Sex and Sexuality

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"What is sexy?" is arguably the most frequently asked question (directly or indirectly) in contemporary culture. One need only consider the many and varied businesses, media outlets, celebrities, and industries that rely on the adage "sex sells" to see the ubiquitous nature of the question. Further, when one considers that the cultural upheaval related to questions of sexuality, sexual preferences, gender identity and gay marriage, all rely on how one answers the question "what is sexy?" it is not difficult to see why exploring an answer to this question is so culturally important. This essay explores the biblical foundations for understanding "sexiness" and then develops nine ethical principles related to properly answering the question "what is sexy?" in everyday life.

Introduction: Is "Sexy" in the Eye of the Beholder?

Perhaps the question that is implicitly asked more than any other in our culture is "What is sexy?" I say implicitly because it was not until recently that the lingerie company *Victoria's Secret* explicitly made the question the central element of their ad campaign.[1] And, of course, that same company answers the question (and then capitalizes on it) with an overly physicalistic definition of "sexy" that parades silicon and Botox enhanced, surgically altered, semi-anorexic women around in the company wares. But aside from this explicit ad campaign, the question lingers behind and drives advertising for everything from toothpaste to shampoo, from cars to cookies.[2] It is the dominant idea behind the front covers of myriads of tabloids and magazines and recently even a major network television company ran an ad campaign describing NASCAR as the "most sexy" sport.[3]

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[1] For an interesting discussion of the entire industry related to the exploitation of women, see Ariel Levy's *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2006). While certainly not written from an evangelical position, Levy's insights into the exploitation of women by women in the name of the feminist movement are fascinating.

[2] Nonnis Inc. has recently begun to market Nonni's biscotti cookie on television as "The Sexy Cookie" (Fall, 2008).

[3] Fox Broadcasting, Summer 2007.

Interestingly enough, when one seeks to find a definition for sexiness at the pop culture level it is virtually impossible to discover any discussion of substance. Instead, one finds publications, like *People Magazine*, that annually creates a list of "the 50 most beautiful people," or like *Victoria Secret's*, that publishes a list of the people with the most sexy eyes, smile, curves, etc. but none of which actually spell out specific criteria by which such lists are determined.

Indeed, a person need only do a brief study of fashion trends and models to discover that the iconic views of "sexiness" that prevail in culture have changed rather dramatically over time. For example, Marylyn Monroe, who was considered to be a "sex symbol" in the late 50's and early 60's, would by today's modeling standards be considered overweight and in need of an extreme makeover.

Are we reduced then to think that "sexiness" is a fluid term? Like the old saying "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" is "sexiness" just a relative concept to be entirely determined by the personal whims of individuals or the fickle winds of public sentiment?

In an age of relativistic thinking and/or postmodern epistemological assumptions that erode universal norms and notions of truth, there are those that argue because a man perceives them as sexy—they are "sexy" to him and we should not judge. But are they actually "sexy"? In other words, is "sexiness" in the eye of the beholder, or is there a standard for what is actually sexy to which we ought to conform our ideas?

Overly Physicalistic Notions of "Sexy" That Dominate Culture

What complicates the quest to understand sexiness even more in our present age is the strong influence of Darwinian Evolution together with atheistic assumptions that now are dominant in cultural ethos. The denial of the existence of God coupled with the denial of a human soul leaves us with a reductionist view of the human person that is merely physical in nature. It is no surprise, then, that such a context would produce an anemic view of sexuality in which human persons and sexual drives are nothing more than instinctual desires and chemically induced response patterns.

In our day and age these philosophical assumptions do not result in some benign reality that we as Christians must put up with. Rather, they function as a powder keg of ideas needing only a match to explode into a world of sexual craziness and moral vertigo. And of course, the match lighting the powder keg is pornography.

A few statistics demonstrate the staggering pornification of culture taking place now in the U.S. and world-wide. For example in the United States alone, the annual revenue generated by the porn industry in 2006 was a staggering $13.3 billion. That is a larger revenue stream than ABC, NBC, and CBS combined. Worldwide, the porn industry generates a staggering $100 billion in revenue, a total greater than Microsoft, Google, Amazon, eBay, Yahoo, Apple and Netflix combined. There are over 4.2 million porn sites and over 68

million daily pornographic search engine requests—*daily*. 42.7 percent of all internet users view porn, 34 percent of all internet users receive unwanted exposure to sexual material, 89 percent of kids in chat rooms are solicited for sex, and 1 in 7 of all youth have received sexual solicitation via the internet. The average age of a child's first exposure to pornography is 11 years old and a heartbreaking total of 90 percent of children 8–16 have viewed pornography intentionally or unintentionally online. Out of all the countries in the world, the U.S. is the top producer of both pornographic websites and pornographic videos. In fact, the United States has produced 89% of the pornographic web pages world-wide.[4]

Obviously this massive intake of pornography feeds off of the prevailing materialistic assumptions about the nature of human beings and the universe they inhabit. But in addition to feeding off it, it also fuels reductionist views of sex, sexuality, and sexiness. Not only does it work to reduce one's understanding of sexiness to the mere physical, it also presents human beings (and especially women) as nothing more than objects meant to be consumed, not loved; used, not respected; lusted over, not cared for and cherished.

Perhaps one of the clearest indicators of the moral insanity that results from combining a materialist world view and the pornification of culture is seen in the confused way Feminist thinkers weigh in on the problem of pornography. Indeed, pro-feminist thinkers tend to find themselves in a complete conundrum when dealing with the porn industry for, on the one hand, some abhor the objectification of women, while others are willing to laud the women posing for pornography as "bold" and "courageous" and "self-empowering" women unafraid of their sexuality.[5]

Of course praising such women is all nice and easy in the ivory tower, but when one considers the mixed messages this sends to our little girls and young women (not to mention the men), such ideas can be seen for the hypocritical and tragic lies they are.[6] The reality is that the porn industry is connected to vast and almost unimaginable human suffering and oppression. For every playboy bunny that parades her body as a form of "self-empower-

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[4] Internet Pornography Statistics, http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/internet-pornography-statistics.html (accessed 4/7/16).

[5] For an interesting article delineating the contours of this "dilemma" among feminists, see "Feminism and Pornography: Building Sensitive Research and Analytic Approaches" a paper presented by Natalie Purcell of the Department of Sociology, University of California, Santa Cruz on May 8, 2009 at Sexual Ontogeny: A Lifelong Work in Progress, The Western Regional Conference of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality. This article was published in the *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality*, Volume 12, May 11, 2009. http://www.ejhs.org/Volume12/Feminism%20and%20Porn.htm (accessed 3/8/12).

[6] For further discussion, see Peggy Orenstein, *Girls and Sex: Navigating the Complicated New* Landscape (New York: HarperCollins, 2016).

ing," there are hundreds and perhaps thousands of little girls forced into human trafficking and prostitution somewhere in the world.[7] The same lust fuels both engines! Both come from the headlong pursuit to experience something viewed as "sexy."

But porn is not merely problematic in that it reflects a materialistic world view or fuels the objectification of human persons as sex objects to be consumed. It also serves to literally reshape the neurological structures of the brain that perceive sexual input and shape sexual behavior.

One of the more interesting and wretched problems we run into with regard to the effects of the pornification of culture that directly relates to the question "what is sexy?" is the actual effect that viewing of pornography has on the biological and physiological structure of the human brain. Recently, William M. Struthers, a bio-psychologist and Associate Professor of Psychology at Wheaton College, demonstrated how pornography hijacks the male brain functioning and reorders the hard wiring of a man's thinking process as he gazes on pornographic images.

In his book, *Wired for Intimacy*, Struthers shows that in addition to moral, legal, and spiritual matters, pornography is also a *physical* matter, "rooted in the biological intricacies of our sexual design."[8] He demonstrates in the book how men in particular are neurologically "hardwired" to see and understand sexuality in a particular way. He then goes on to show that "Men seem to be wired in such a way that pornography hijacks the proper functioning of their brains and has a long-lasting effect on their thoughts and lives."[9] He concludes that through prolonged and consistent exposure to pornography men "have unknowingly created a neurological circuit that imprisons their ability to see women rightly as created in God's image. Repeated exposure to pornography creates a one-way neurological superhighway where a man's mental life is over-sexualized and narrowed. It is hemmed in on either side by high containment walls making escape nearly impossible."[10]

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[7] Estimates vary greatly as to the exact number of women and girls forced into sexually exploitive situations. The FBI estimates 700,000 women and children are trafficked each year. For an interesting discussion on human trafficking and the related statistics see http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/slaves/etc/stats.html.

[8] William M. Struthers, *Wired for Intimacy: How Pornography Hijacks the Male Brain* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 15. For further discussion on this topic, see Belinda Luscombe, "Porn and the Threat to Virility," in *Time*, April 11, 2016: 42–47. For a more clinical analysis, see "Brain Structure and Functional Connectivity Associated with Pornography Consumption: The Brain on Porn" by Simone Kühn & Jürgen Gallinat *JAMA Psychiatry* 71, no. 7 (July 2014): 827–34. Also accessible via http://archpsyc.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1874574&resultClick=3.

[9] Ibid, 11.

[10] Ibid, 85.

In other words, a man literally reshapes his mind so that he no longer sees women as a God-created gift, but in the image of sexual fantasies created by the porn sites he visits.

So, we see the view of sexiness championed by *Victoria's Secret*, and accelerated by the pornification of culture, is actually a reductionism of the human person to an overly physicalistic portrayal of human personhood and animalistic sexual expression. It is a perspective that emphasizes the physical nature of human sexuality to the exclusion of every other aspect of personhood.

Christian Gnosticism and Hypocrisy

So "what is sexy?" Testing to see whether my graduate seminary students might have some insight into this question, I tasked them to write papers giving a biblical answer to the question. Fascinatingly, the vast majority of the papers I received betrayed Gnostic understandings of human anthropology that predictably emphasized internal/spiritual qualities and almost completely neglected all substantive discussions of external/bodily elements. No doubt many felt such thinking is what they were "supposed to write" for a seminary class, when in fact many of these same students admitted in private conversation that they really defined sexiness mostly in physical terms.

Unfortunately, because evangelicals are interested in sex but give little attention to biblical, theological and philosophical dimensions shaping our views on sexuality, it should be no surprise our answers are convoluted and even tend toward hypocrisy. That is, while many of us have a spiritually syrupy Gnosticized definition on our lips, we actually function using the physically reductionist answer given by *Victoria's Secret*.

It is my fundamental contention that it is not by choosing between these extremes that a Christian will most honorably and faithfully be able to answer the question "what is sexy?" Rather, while Scripture does not spell out all the details of sexuality, a biblical view of sex and sexuality helps us understand that sexual allure is not ultimately something relative to individual perception but rather incorporates both spiritual and physical aspects of human nature.

The remainder of this paper will do three things. First, it will lay out elements of a biblical ethic of worship from which to engage the question of sexiness. Next, it will identify nine biblical and theological principles that ought to shape our view of sexiness in light of an ethic of worship.[11] Finally, it will apply these principles to answer the question "what is sexy?" providing a foundation for redeeming sex and sexuality.

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[11] As I understand it, the discipline of ethics is the Spirit-filled use of the intellect, will and affections to discover truth given by God's grace in both general and special revelation and then the application of that knowledge wisely to particular situations and issues in hopes of conforming our actions, character, community, and ultimately our culture to the image of Christ as an act of worship. Thus, because as evangelicals we recognize that the highest source of authority is Scripture, it is proper to begin with an analysis of God's word to develop an ethic of worship that is theologically grounded as well as philosophically coherent and consistent.

Biblical Foundations of "Sexiness"

First, a comment about the word "sexy." Grammatically, it is an adjectival form of word "sex." That is, it is a descriptive term meant to point out something that epitomizes a gender sex or sexual expression. Thus, when we ask the question "what is sexy?" what we are in essence asking is "what qualities or characteristics epitomizes a gender?" and/or "what expressions or forms of sexual expression best inhabit the highest order of that gendered sex or sexual expression by these gendered sexes?" Here the discussion will touch on the former but focus more heavily on the latter. And as a result, it will have correlative implications for how each of us can evaluate culturally popular categories of "sexiness." In addition, it should also point us in the direction of discovering biblical categories by which to cultivate right thinking and practice related to what we find alluring and enticing with regard to sexual identity and practice.

Hopefully this short discussion about the basic meaning of the term "sexy" already indicates the absurdity of advertising agencies describing cookies and car races as sexy. Obviously these things do not have genders and do not directly depict something about sex. But the ubiquitous nature of advertising related to sexual things points out our culture's fascination with the topic. Thus, if we are to discover what epitomizes sex and sexual expression, we must consult the one who created sex and sexuality to discover what things or expressions would properly represent at the highest level the sexual form represented by the genders God created as well as the expression of those genders in actions and/or behaviors.

In his lectures on Christology Dietrich Bonhoeffer rightly argued that theology must give priority to the question of *Who* over *how*, and that the best and most proper way to understand *how* must be determined in light of *Who*.[12] The first step, therefore, in answering the question "what is Sexy?" from a distinctly Christian point of view must begin where all good theology and ethics begin—with an inquiry about God and his purposes for the world.

From the very first words of the Bible—"In the beginning God"—the reader is oriented to the fact that not only is God the ground of all existence, but that what follows is a grand narrative that displays the wonders of the Creator. Properly understood, the first two chapters of the Bible place God, the Creator, as the focus of the story. This simple reality, then, ought to shape our understanding of the Bible in a manner that transforms our reading of it from an anthropocentric perspective where human experiences and needs are central to one in which humans (indeed, all things) are meant to exist for the purposes and glory of God.

The creation account that follows in the remainder of Genesis 1, then, is meant to offer a panoramic view of creation that displays in general terms how God pieced into existence each vital component of what was to be a faultless world. And as the narrative in chapter one moves toward its summit,

[12] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Christology* (London: Collins, 1971), 37–39.

one discovers that it is the creation of man and woman that emerges as the crowning jewel of the masterpiece of God's glory.

> Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness." . . . And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it" . . . and God saw all he had made and it was very good. (Gen 1:26–30)[13]

What we learn from these verses is that God set human beings apart from the rest of creation in at least two significant ways. First, He gave them a special nature distinct from all other parts of the creation as *image bearers*. Second, God gave to Adam and Eve a distinct blessing and task. They were to be *fruitful and multiply* in order to fill creation, and they were to *subdue* the creation *and rule* it as benevolent stewards. The clear implication from the passage is that it would be in the fulfilling of God's agenda for them that they would experience the promised blessing and presumably its accompanying joys.

In Genesis 2 the scene moves from a panoramic view of all creation to a close up of the creation of Adam and Eve. In zooming in on the final element of creation God not only allows the reader to get a more particular look at the finer details of how humans were created but also to see more clearly the reason and purpose for which He created them. Genesis 2:15 and 18 are most helpful for this purpose and read as follows:

> Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.
>
> Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

First, regarding Gen 2:15, Old Testament scholar John Sailhamer highlights an important linguistic and contextual nuance about the verse that is often lost in translation from ancient Hebrew to modern English. Many English translations, he argues, overlook the "specific purpose for God's putting man in the Garden. In most [English versions] man is 'put' in the Garden 'to work it and take care of it."[14] Sailhamer objects, however, and argues that from the perspective of the language and context of the entire creation narrative it is clear that Adam was not put in the Garden merely to be a farmer. Rather, as Sailhamer comments, "Man is put in the Garden to worship God

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[13] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

[14] Sailhamer, John H. "Genesis" in The Expositor's Bible Commentary vol. 2, *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser and Bruce K. Waltke (Grand Rapids: Regency, 1990), 45.

and to obey him. Man's life in the Garden was to be characterized by worship and obedience" as he cultivated and kept it.[15]

In the safety of the perfect environment God created for humanity, the Creator not only created Adam to reflect His image in the world, God also gave to Adam an overriding purpose and life orientation: to worship the Creator and fully express proper worship through obedience to His commands and purposes as he took care of the world in which he lived.

Genesis 2:18 indicates that Adam was *alone* in the Garden and God declared that this condition was "not good." So in His wisdom and grace God decided to create a "helper suitable" for Adam.[16]

Why is this important? Because it highlights the reality that God wanted Adam to have a partner uniquely created and gifted to complement Adam's own nature and assist him in God's purpose. As his "helper" she is both uniquely similar to Adam in comparison to all other beings in creation and yet particularly different: she is female, he is male. And as such, she can partner with Adam and join with him in pursuing the existence for which he was created in a manner that no other being in creation could do.

Piecing these ideas together, we know from Gen 1:26–28 that a central element of God's purposes in creating Eve was to help Adam "be fruitful and multiply." It would certainly be difficult for him to fulfill this task alone! Thus, his "aloneness" was "not good." He needed a companion—a "suitable helper"—with whom he could accomplish God's desires. Sailhamer's comments about this passage are once again helpful. He writes, "in what sense was the women created to be a 'helper'?" It is in "light of the importance of the blessing ('Be fruitful and increase') in the creation of the man and woman in 1:28, it appears most likely that the 'help' envisioned is tied to the bearing of children."[17] Clearly, then, God remedied Adam's aloneness not simply (or even primarily) because he was "lonely" but because remaining "alone" would make it impossible to complete the task of filling and subduing the earth.[18]

Second, consider the following line of reasoning:

If God created Adam and Eve and placed them in a Garden of perfect safety and peace in order to worship and obey, and

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[15] Ibid.

[16] For further discussion, see Ray C. Ortlund Jr., "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 95–112 (esp. 99–105).

[17] Sailhamer, 46.

[18] This is not to say that the companionship of Eve and the vital role of marital union was not a crucial factor in the motive of God to create man and woman together. Surely Gen 2:24 indicates that oneness is vitally important to marriage and that human companionship is central to the creation of male and female.

if that worshipful obedience transcended the realm of duty and was instead the highest form of fulfillment and thus joy, and

if God created Eve as Adam's perfectly complementary helper so that together they could fulfill His agenda to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it,

then one has to wonder what the world would have been like if Adam and Eve never gave in to Satan's temptations in Genesis 3 and plunged the world into sin.

To put it in question form: "What would have happened if they had remained pure, obeyed God, and fulfilled the task to be fruitful and multiply and to rule the world and subdue it? What kind of people would have filled creation? What would Adam and Eve's sexual and fruitful oneness have accomplished?"

The answer is a world filled with God-honoring, sinless worshippers united under one purpose: to subdue and rule the world for the glory of God! From the point of creation on, human beings were created not only to worship but to be about the mission of spreading that worship to the ends of the earth.

It is not a difficult step from this point to see that, based on the very nature of the created order, the purpose of *all* human life is to bring glory to God. As Romans 11:36 puts it, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen." And it is in fulfilling that purpose that we will find ultimate value and fulfillment in *all* venues of life (including sex). Every element of creation, simply because it *is* His creation, is meant to reflect back to God the glory He is due. As Jonathan Edwards rightly affirms in his classic work *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World,* the glory of God is the chief end of *everything*.[19] This is why the apostle Paul instructs both the Colossian church and the Corinthian believers that whatever they do, whether in word or deed or in eating or drinking (or having sex), all is to be done to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17). Therefore, we can state that the primary purpose of marriage and our sexuality is directly linked to the missional purpose of extending the glory of God to the entirety of creation. Marriage and sex are ultimately about worshipping God and bringing Him glory.

Nine Biblical Principles Shaping "Sexiness"

Having grounded the purposes for which God created the whole cosmos (including marriage and sexuality) in a comprehensive ethic of worship, we are a step closer to answering the question "what is sexy?" The next step is to explore the Scriptures to address more particularly how sex, sexuality, and

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[19] Jonathan Edwards, *Concerning the End for Which God Created the World* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 1 (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), See sections 2.3.142; 2.4.221; 5.10.238–9; 7.264–285.

sexual expression fit in this ethic of worship so as to bring maximum glory to God. In order to discover this we must return to Gen 1:26–28 as well as engage Gen 2:7 and Gen 2:24–25.

1. The Difference between Male and Female Is Sexy

As for the nature of human sexuality, note that Gen 1:26–27 indicates that God created human beings in His image and then more specifically in verse 27 it is stated that maleness and femaleness are both designed to bear God's image.

> Then God said, "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness". . . And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

The text indicates that the *imago Dei* is foundational to humanness and that each human being—by God's design—was created to bear the image of God according to an assigned gender. Maleness and femaleness is written into our very nature.[20] This does not suggest that the *imago Dei* is defined by maleness and femaleness, rather, that one can only bear the *imago Dei* as either a male or a female and that being male or female expresses the *imago Dei*.[21]

Thus, because human sexual identity is a gift from God closely linked to the *imago Dei*, we can unabashedly state that sexual identity is an inherent quality of humanness and not a social construct. A man is male not only because his body has male parts and his society then constructs a pattern for how he is to behave. Rather, he is male and has male parts and ought to behave a certain way because God made him a man and desired for him to reflect His image as a male and then gave instructions about how to function as a male. The same is true for women. God created them female with female parts and made them so that they ought to behave as women in accordance with the instructions He gave regarding womanhood. Our sexual identity, then, finds its ultimate grounding in God's creation order and is an inherent part of our make up as image bearers. It is not a construction of societal norms or ideas.

Now if this interpretation of Gen 1:26–27 is a fair representation, then the first principle of sexiness is that God created only two genders: male and female. While some modern behaviorists and social constructionists would want to suggest that empirical data from human sexual behavior or abnormal

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[20] Gilbert Meilaender, "The First Institutions," *Pro Ecclesia* 6, no. 4 (1997): 444–55.

[21] For a fuller discussion of this point, see Jack W. Cottrell, *Gender Roles and the Bible: Creation, the Fall, and Redemption: A Critique of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1994), 70–76. Maleness and femaleness do not constitute the image of God—but male humans and female humans express the image of God by God's design. Thus, ontologically they are equal in value, but ontologically, they are also distinct in nature.

genital formation might indicate anywhere from 4 to 7 genders exist, we know this to be a misapplication of fact and value categories.[22] The mere fact that many people do act homosexually or bisexually and further claim an inherent orientation based on experience does not make it right or moral. Rather, God built each human with a particular sexual nature: male or female. The irregularities that may come in various desires or even the deformed body parts (such as that of a hermaphrodite) are the devastating effects of the Fall that come to life in our desires, our bodies, and even our social structures and ideas.

2. The Complementarity of Maleness and Femaleness Is Sexy

Second, and closely related, God made male and female to correspond to one another. Thus, as the full context of Genesis 1, Genesis 2, and the entire Bible indicate, the clear default position is that sexuality is designed by God to be heterosexual in nature. Therefore, it is proper to find members of the opposing gender as "sexy" but one ought not be aroused sexually by persons of one's own gender. Neither should one be aroused by the viewing of two other people of the same gender engaged in sexual behavior as much pornographic material and an increasing number of television shows and movies portray. Simply put, homosexuality and homosexual behaviors are *never* sexy. Indeed, if they appear to be to us, then we can conclude that our perception of sexiness is deformed and needs to be redeemed by the renewing of our mind through the washing of the word and the help of the community of saints known as the local church.

3. Understanding the Value of Each Gender (Male and Female) Is Sexy

Third, because males and females are both image bearers, men and women also carry an equal dignity or inherent value before the Lord. The fact that they will display the *imago Dei* differently does not negate this fundamental equality of value. Likewise, because God gives them both the task to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it, we ought to understand that while the part they will play in the grand design will be different, the value of each part is equally important to God. It is sexy, then, when a person understands their inherent value, is comfortable in his or her gender related tasking or role, and is confident in the importance of living within these differences before God—in the manner God describes—as an act of worship.

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[22] For example, see Anne Fausto-Sterling, "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough" *The Sciences* (March/April 1993): 20–24. See also M. Kay Martin and Barbara Voorhies, "Supernumerary Sexes" in *Female of the Species* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), 84–107.

4. God Designed the Physical Part of Our Selves to Be Sexy

In addition to these three principles, Gen 2:7 gives added insight into the constitution of men and women as sexual. The text says,

> . . . then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (ESV)

This text reveals that human anthropology involves both a material/physical element and an immaterial/spiritual or soul element. Not only are we bodies, but we are bodies made alive by the "breath of God." What sets humans apart from other living creatures is not that we have physical life, but that our life is "God breathed" in a way that give us a unique "soul" that bears the image of God.[23]

In regard to our discussion of sex, sexuality and sexual behavior, what Gen 2:7 helps us to understand is the fact that when God created human beings and gave us life, he made us what Paul Ramsey described as "ensouled bodies" or "embodied souls." That is, the immaterial and the material elements are integrally and necessarily linked.[24]

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[23] The Hebrew word נְשָׁמָה (*nÿshamah*, "breath") is used for God and for the life imparted to humans, not animals (see T. C. Mitchell, "The Old Testament Usage of *Nÿshamah*," *VT* 11 [1961]: 177–87). Its usage in the Bible conveys more than a breathing living organism (חַיָּה נֶפֶשׁ, *nefesh khayyah*). Whatever is given this breath of life becomes animated with the life from God, has spiritual understanding (Job 32:8), and has a functioning conscience (Prov 20:27). Human life is described here as consisting of a body (made from soil from the ground) and breath (given by God). Both animals and humans are called "a living being" (חַיָּה נֶפֶשׁ) but humankind became that in a different and more significant way. The Hebrew term נֶפֶשׁ (*nefesh*, "being") is often translated "soul," but the word usually refers to the whole person. The phrase חַיָּה נֶפֶשׁ (*nefesh khayyah*, "living being") is used of both animals and human beings (see 1:20, 24, 30; 2:19).

[24] This passage, then, highlights a clear point of contrast with Platonic thought regarding the interaction between the body and soul. In Greek anthropological understanding, Plato likened the soul to a bird and the body to a cage. As he understood it, not only was the soul the more important element, but it existed independently of the body. His anthropology was a full blown dualism. Thus, as a bird is trapped in a cage, so also is the human soul trapped in the body. This perspective, obviously, renders the body to a status of significantly less value than the soul. In Greek philosophy, then, there was a tendency either to neglect the body and concentrate on soulish matters (asceticism), or over-indulge the body because only the soul mattered (hedonism). Christian theology, however, understands that while there is a duality that exists with body and soul, Scripture indicates an understanding that is clear and distinct from that present within Platonic thought. While each of us has both a body and soul, these elements are not meant to function independently. There is an integration of body and soul, material and immaterial. And it is this integration of the body and soul that God describes in the Genesis text as "very good." Clearly the

From this we can identify a fourth principle of sexiness, which is that if God made bodies with a sexual nature, and if God declared these sexual bodies to be "good," then God must intend for there to be a bodily element to sexiness. By God's declaration the body is good, and it is right for us to appreciate it as good. To some degree we can say that *Victoria's Secret*, while inadequate and often perverted, is not completely wrong.

Thus, when we (in appropriate ways) appreciate the physical qualities of the other gender and (in appropriate contexts) enjoy the physical pleasure that God built to accompany the proper expressions of our sexuality, we can rejoice in the goodness of our Maker's design. The question, then, is not *if* we can appreciate the body and bodily pleasures as "sexy" but *how* and *when* it is right to do so.

5. God Designed the Spiritual Part of Our Selves to Be Sexy

A fifth element of sexiness we must see is that there is a non-physical component to "sexiness" that it is also good and right to appreciate. That is, contrary to what *Victoria's Secret* ads indicate, issues of spirituality and holiness, character and virtue, personality and disposition are also very important elements in determining "what is sexy." As Paul expresses it in 1 Tim 4:8: "while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come" (ESV). Thus, because godliness is of such great value, then we ought to find the expression of godliness in and through gender appropriate behavior to be very "sexy" indeed.

6. God Designed Marriage to Be Sexy

In addition to these elements, the Gen 2:24–25 narrative of God's creation of Eve and the establishment of the marital union indicates several more characteristics of God honoring sexual expression and human sexuality. The text reads:

> Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

As the passage indicates, a man is to leave his father and mother and join with his "wife." Thus, a sixth important element of human sexuality is that sexual coitus is meant—by its very nature—to take place within a marital context that is permanent. The only context in which God finds physical

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implication from this point is that not only are spiritual matters important to God, so also are bodily matters. God is pleased to give us both body and soul. For further discussion see Paul Ramsey, *Patient as Person* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), xiii. For a fuller discussion on this topic, see Allen Verhey, *Reading the Bible in the Strange World of Medicine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 68–98. This chapter in Verhey's book has an interesting comparative analysis between the work of Joseph Fletcher and Paul Ramsey on the question of personhood.

genital sexual expression to be "sexy" is a lifelong marriage covenant between one man and one woman. Put simply, adultery and adulterous behavior is *never* sexy.

7. God Designed Monogamy to Be Sexy

Seventh, not only is the context of that which is sexy regarding sexual behavior supposed to be marital, God designed sexuality to be monogamous. Not only does Deut 17:17 indicate that it was wrong for the kings to "multiply wives," but throughout both the Old and New Testaments we see a number of prohibitions on adultery, fornication, prostitution, divorce, and remarriage after a divorce. Not only this, but the tradition of the Christian church consistently affirmed this perspective for all people throughout its history.[25] Therefore, it is sexy for a man to remain married to one woman all of his life and likewise for a woman to stay married to the same man as long as they both shall live. Further, and by direct implication, the only proper viewing of nakedness in a sexual context is within this marital covenant.

8. God Designed Childbearing and Raising to Be Sexy

Eighth, sexual intercourse or "becoming one flesh" is an element of sexuality designed by God and given as a gift to a man and his wife. Thus, sexual intercourse with one's spouse is supposed to be "sexy." Directly related to this, of course, is the fact that sexual intercourse is designed to lead to both procreation and a marital bond and companionship in the God given task to fill the earth and subdue it. This oneness is sexy not only because it unites bodies physically and begets children; it also brings a "oneness" or unity between two image bearers that is meant to depict something about the relationship of Christ's love for his bride the Church. All of these elements and consequences of oneness (pregnancy and rich marital companionship), then, are likewise proper expressions of human sexuality and thus by definition "sexy."[26]

9. God Designed Nakedness to Be Sexy

Finally, a ninth implication from the Genesis 2 account is that unashamed nakedness is appropriate to find attractive. In regard to being unashamed the text indicates both a comfort and friendship with God and with each other. In the context of marriage these two friendships would be the foundation for a willingness to bare the entire self to one another. Because of this, then, physical nakedness is also a beautiful and designed element of a biblical view of sexiness. It is an unfortunate reality that the fallen human heart often looks outside of the marital context to find shameful things to entice us when, by

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[25] David P. Gushee, *Getting Marriage Right* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 40–41.

[26] John Piper, "Sex and the Supremacy of Christ: Part One" in *Sex and the Supremacy of Christ*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2005), 26. See also Gilbert Meilaender's "Homosexuality in the Christian Perspective" in *Things That Count* (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1999), 59–76.

God's gracious ordering, He designed to offer us joy and freedom in our sexual pleasures and expression without shame. From a biblical point of view, the naked lives and bodies of a husband and wife together is "sexy" in the eyes of God.

"What Is Sexy?" A Biblical Summation

This brings us, finally, to a place where we are able to make a more particular application of the general principles and guidelines offered by asking very specific versions of the question "what is sexy?" Because our culture's default understanding of the word "sexy" is heavily geared toward outward appearances, I believe it is wise to first attempt to answer the question in terms of sexiness as it relates to physical appearance before summarizing the non-physical elements.

The Physical Elements of Sexiness

It is important to note the Bible *does* indicate that there are things that are beautiful. For example, it describes several women as beautiful (Sarah [Gen 12:11, 14]; Rebecca [Gen 24:16]; and Esther [Esther 1:11]) and men as handsome (Joseph [Gen 39:6], Saul [1 Sam 9:2], David [1 Sam 17:42], Absalom [2 Sam 14:25], Adonijah [1 Kgs 1:6]). It *does not* lay out, however, the particulars in regard to physical form and beauty of either a woman or a man. Even in the Song of Songs where the writer goes to great lengths to describe how he perceives his lover's beauty there is nowhere to be found a universal or clear standard of what physical beauty should be for all of us. This reality leaves room for individual tastes regarding particular attributes that reflect the larger category of beauty without deifying any one aspect. In a world that was created by God as inherently diverse in physical form and in which, because of the Fall, our physical forms are decaying through time and with age, we ought to be glad we are given freedom and grace in this manner.

But this is not to say that beauty or sexiness is merely in the eye of the beholder or that it is a social construct. Rather, because the Scriptures do not lay out for us the particular dimensions, shapes and forms of physical beauty, we are then given freedom within the larger constructs already provided to enjoy particular elements of beauty related to personal taste.

The one unfortunate caveat we must make to this freedom in taste is the fact that when we feed our lusts and tastes with ideas that are contrary to the biblical principles described in the previous section, our tastes can indeed become warped and twisted. Beauty is not determined by the eye of the beholder, but the *perception of beauty* is. And that perception can be wrong. Therefore, in a *Playboy* infested, *Victoria's Secret* enticed, pro-homosexual pornified context, we must be diligent to constantly guard our hearts and minds, take every thought captive, cast down ideas contrary to those of God, and renew our ideas of sex and sexual expression to conform to that which glorifies Christ.

If this is true, then, perhaps what is sexy in terms of physical appearance is more definable by stewardship and function than particular elements of shape, color, or form. That is, we are told in Genesis 1 and 2 that part of Adam and Eve's worshipful obedience was to cultivate and keep the Garden as an act of worship. Perhaps we can find in this command the principle of stewardship towards all of creation—including our bodies. Indeed, as we have seen in 1 Timothy 4 physical conditioning is of value, and we learn in 1 Cor 6:19 that the body functions as a "temple" of the Holy Spirit. What appears to be the mandate about our physical bodies is that a sexy body is one that is in good physical condition relative to the body type that we have been given and the age that we are.

Further, Scripture instructs us to use our sexual body within marriage both to have children (procreation) and to grow in oneness with our spouse (unitive bond). Thus it follows that the body parts particularly associated with these ends (our genitalia) are also "sexy." Thus, it is entirely appropriate for a husband to find his wife "sexy" all through the pregnancy and childbearing as her body incarnates the proper design of marriage related to procreation. Likewise, because God invented pleasure, those parts of the body in the opposite sex that are pleasure zones in sexual expression are likewise created by God and are appropriately appreciated as "sexy" in as much as they are designed to draw a husband and wife together toward a unitive bond with one another.

This would mean that regardless of whether a person is tall or short, whether they have black skin or lighter skin, whether they are blond or brunette, whether they are big chested or small chested, muscular or thin framed, none of those sizes, shades, or shapes are inherently essential to being "sexy." Rather, whatever version of these body parts one has, when they are displayed appropriately in light of one's gender and life context, they can all be sexy for another person of the opposite gender. Beyond this, what is sexy in terms of physical form in sizes and shapes and colors does not seem to be of great concern in the Biblical text.

But what about those images and ideals portrayed by *Victoria's Secret* ? Is it okay to wear lingerie or find it attractive? Much of the answer depends on the context in which they are displayed and adorned and for what purposes they are displayed and adorned. As we discovered above, "what is sexy?" is that God designed human sexuality to have a male and female correspondence that is inherently marital and monogamous in nature. Thus, what is absolutely right about *Victoria's Secret* is that men are, and ought to be, attracted to women. What is flawed is the public and sexually charged public display outside of the context of marriage. Not only does this type of advertising produce a phantom image that shapes the perspective of a man regarding sexiness, it also excites sexual lust in men. For women, these types of advertisements project a phantom image of particular body type that not only has the potential to distort a woman's view of herself when she compares herself to these particular body types, they also subtly communicate the dangerously

idea to women that they ought to use their bodies as commodities of exchange for the attention of men.

In sum, regarding physical appearance, it appears that God allows for a wide variety of tastes and "turn-ons." But the things we perceive as "hot" and "inviting" all must be placed under the rubric of how we were created, what all of us were created for, and the proper context in which we are meant to express and explore "sexiness." Tantalization, flirtatiousness, and visual arousal are all created for the marital context and may—by the grace of God—be appropriately pursued with great vigor there.

This does not mean that a man or woman (whether single or married) cannot find a person of the opposite gender that is not his or her wife attractive, but that each person must work hard to understand sexuality from a larger perspective than personal wants and mere physicality. Each of us must guard our eyes and hearts from roaming toward that which is not meant for us to possess or indulge. The unfortunate reality is that in this ever increasing world of immorality such contexts are harder and harder to avoid.

This also means that both men and women ought to be carefully aware of how they dress so as to protect their sexuality for the context of the bedroom. In a manner that is increasingly true for both genders, Christians ought to seek to protect others who are naturally built to appreciate the opposite gender from needless temptation. Indeed, contrary to the messages of today's world, modesty is very beautiful and can be very appropriately enticing without provoking lust. Indeed, when it comes to the public portrayal of our sexuality in regard to dress, what we ought to find most sexy are those who guard the physical elements of their sexuality for the proper context through modesty and propriety.[27]

The Spiritual Element of Sexiness

It is appropriate to reiterate the earlier point that humans are sexual beings both in body and soul. And given the teaching of 1 Tim 4:8, it is very possible that, because of the fallen nature of the world in which we live, the point of greater emphasis ought to shift in favor of discovering and appreciating the non-physical elements of sexiness in others. That is to say, we do not neglect or downplay the physical element—in fact we enjoy it greatly—but because it is dependent upon an element that will decay and break down in time (the body), it is vital to recognize that it is only a part of a greater whole. And so we ask the question now, "What ought we find sexy in terms of non-physical elements of a person?"

Certainly we can begin by affirming that, regardless of one's gender, basic characteristics of the moral and spiritual self that align with and reflect godly attributes should be attractive. In this sense, even non-believers ought to recognize goodness, kindness, justice, love, and other such qualities as attractive.

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[27] The best discussion of this point that I am aware of can be found in Daniel Heimbach's *True Sexual Morality* (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2007). Heimbach has an excellent discussion of the idea of allurement that is very helpful (see pages 243–50).

But our question is not just what is attractive about non-physical qualities in a person, but what qualities in a person are particularly sexy? Because we live in a fallen world, a major problem is that as a result of the Fall much of our perspective and portrayal of particularly male or female character qualities are terribly bent and defiled both from the structural sin that shapes our society and the personal sin choices we make that shape our character. Thus for this reason, the most basic and fundamental quality that a man or a woman should find "sexy" about a person of the complementing gender is if he or she has been rightly aligned with the One who created him or her as a sexual being. That is, if a man has become a Christian, he now has begun to be properly realigned with the way God created him as a man. Likewise, if a woman has become a Christian, she now has begun to be properly realigned with the way God created her as a woman. Thus, the most fundamental element of sexiness is whether or not one loves Jesus and then strives to live under His lordship.

An obvious implication of this is that while a non-believer may exhibit other qualities both physically and non-physically that are aligned with natural law or general revelation, fundamentally they are disordered to the Creator and the ultimate purposes for which God created men and women. In essence, they do not even have the capacity to become sexy as God ultimately defines maleness or femaleness. Thus, even dating such a person (and certainly marrying one) is the pursuit of foolishness and a journey down a dead end road. If the question of sexiness is primarily a question of bringing maximum glory to the King of the Universe in and through both our physical and spiritual elements of sexuality, then the pursuit of someone who is not a believer is quite simply "not sexy."

What about a person who is a Christian? What character qualities ought we to find sexy in them? Certainly the qualities of discipleship such as the fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:22) and the beatitudes (Matt 5:3–12) are foundational to discipleship and therefore ought to be generally attractive, but once again we are not asking the question of general attraction, but of what is "sexy."

This is where we once again recognize the goodness of the principles discussed above relating to the fact that God created each image bearer not only with a particular gender, but that He also affirms that these genders are equal in inherent value even though they have distinct functions and roles. Keeping these truths in mind, we can search the Scriptures to discover what qualities and functions one ought to consider as "sexy" relative to each gender.

Beginning with men, we see two very clear passages in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. In these passages, Paul lists the characteristic for men who are qualified to shepherd and lead the body of Christ. Because worship is the purpose of the created universe, it follows that these character traits that qualify a man to lead in worship would be those qualities that are most "sexy." Further, regarding male sexiness, we find that Ephesians 5 indicates clearly that a man ought to take the role in his marriage and family life of leadership (headship) in which he serves his wife, seeks to present her to Christ more holy and

pure, and brings the family into a context of more profound life oriented worship of God. Too often the modern man is simply afraid to rise up to these callings from Scripture. The wise woman is the one who waits and seeks this man out. The wise man is the one who fights passivity in an attempt to become the sexy man these passages describe.

For women we see in I Timothy 3, Titus 2, and Proverbs 31 beautiful discussions of what biblical womanhood is and therefore what inner qualities would embody sexiness. Likewise, in Ephesians 5 we see that submission and respect are key elements of the fulfillment of a woman's sexuality. We must be careful here not to suggest that such character traits are equivalent to "doormat status." Nor do we want to place relative cultural forms of these qualities from previous eras or decades on women as scriptural norms. Nonetheless, in a world in which women are being encouraged to play the role of sexual predator, assert their place as relational leader and usurp the role of men (who are far too often wimpy and passive) as leaders in the home and church, the wise woman, the truly sexy woman is the one who seeks the wisdom of Scripture to mold her character and values. Likewise, the wise man is not fooled by the counterfeit picture of womanhood championed by the culture but waits and then strongly pursues in his masculinity the woman who embodies these traits.

One last comment needs to be added regarding this spiritual element of sexiness. Part of the beauty of God's design is that even in a fallen world in which our bodies break down and decay with time and age becoming less "sexy," the spirit can become more and more sexy as it conforms to the image of Christ. Therefore, it is indeed a biblical truth that for an old man the sexiest woman on earth is the woman he's been married to for 50 years and who has grown in her love for the things of God. And for an old woman, the most sexy guy on the planet is the man she's been married to for 50 years and who walked with Jesus throughout their marriage. Indeed, even when time or circumstances take their toll and a body is reduced to a wheel chair or sickbed, these inner qualities that are more and more conformed to the image of Christ are rightly perceived as incredibly sexy to the one who understands a biblical view of sexiness.

Conclusion

How ought we Christians answer the question of "what is sexy?" and what are we to do with the claims of *Victoria's Secret*? In regard to the latter question, the problem is not that we like to see human bodies or that we have particular tastes, but that we take them out of proper contexts, we make them primary in our understanding, and most tragically, we do not evaluate them in light of the overall and dominating purposes for which we and our sex and sexuality were created.

Victoria's Secret is not wrong in claiming that the human body is attractive and sexy. Indeed, in many ways they are exactly right. God did make humans physical and sexual. Further, as Scripture indicates, in the right contexts, the

experience and pleasures of sex and sexuality are meant not only to bring us great joy but are also seen as *very good* by God himself. In fact, one could say that when we rightly pursue and express our sexuality it not only brings us great pleasure and joy, it makes the Father joyful as well.

But where the perspective of *Victoria's Secret* is woefully inadequate and tragically deceptive is in the utter shallowness of their depiction of what "sexy" is. Its depiction of sexy is divorced from the fuller biblical context. It is offered without reference to the great task God created humans to fulfill. It separates the physical dimension of sex from a richer and more holistic biblical understanding of embodied selves. Finally, it roots the physical desire and enticement God linked to our sexuality in selfish forms of lustful wants. For these reasons, the *Victoria's Secret* version of "sexy" strips a true biblical understanding of its essentials and prostitutes a cheap and anemic imitation in its stead. As such, it promotes a view of "sexy" that appeals to (and creates?) self-oriented lusters who ever consume and never find satisfaction.

The great tragedy is not that *Victoria's Secret* celebrates the human body, but that it does so by taking that which is most subjective and most temporal from the larger, grander picture of sexiness and parades it about as if it were the final goal and highest expression. Thus, it is not the body form that is evil, but the context and exploitive nature of its uncovering as well as the disoriented expression of its use that is the counterfeiting thief. In truth, the secret Victoria is not telling us is that she is taking a good and beautiful element out of the beauty of its context, twisting it in a selfish direction, and undermining the higher and more satisfying pleasure.

But God offers something of far exceeding excellence for us to discover to our great and lasting joy. For it is God, the one who created sex and sexual expression, it is God who invented pleasure, it is God who gave this great gift to the human race, and it is God who also provides contexts, purposes, and guidelines to enable its fullest expression and meaning. God understands "sexy" better than anyone, and it brings Him great joy when we trade in our petty and anemic views of "sexiness" for a much more enticing one.

Thus, if there is a higher and better definition of sexy than the one paraded around in our culture, then even if it is at first hard for us to see or accept, we must trust the Maker of all good things and seek to alter our perspective in light of His. After all He is the One who declares in Ps 16:11 that in His presence there is fullness of joy and in His right hand there are pleasures forever. If this verse is true, then it must be God's definition of "what is sexy" that is actually the most tantalizing. And what God finds sexy, we ought also to find sexy.

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A Recommendation to American Evangelicals: Focus on the Trinity as an Alternative to Arguments about "Islamic Terrorism"

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This essay notes why American evangelicals may feel beleaguered after a string of perceived losses in cultural contests. The US media's use of the term "evangelical" to mean cultural conservatism may woo them on to other such arguments, for example, about jihadism and "Islamic terrorism." Even if there is a benefit to being more informed about such matters, it is argued here that any cultural contests, even arguments over Islam, are unproductive if the real distinctiveness of Christianity is not advanced. The key issue is the deity of Christ and thus the doctrine of the Trinity. How can Christians gain access to this doctrine that is perhaps the most difficult one to understand? A recommendation is offered: Gather Scripture texts that ground the doctrine of the Trinity and summarize how they work together for the proclamation and defense of Christianity.

Introduction

American evangelicals in the twenty-first century face an identity crisis. "American" is increasingly burdened with a negative connotation having little to do with geography and "evangelical" suffers from the media's use of it to designate a Republican voting bloc. But "beleaguered" might express what they *feel* identifies them. Evangelicals see their world "turned upside down" in just the opposite way that Acts 17:6 meant it, when Thessalonian Christians so influenced their culture that such a charge could be made. Now it is evangelicals who sense their influence diminishing and it is their world that seems to have toppled. Older evangelicals find that their younger counterparts reject denominational identity and seem not to rely on clear biblical parameters for defining gender, marriage, family, sex, morality, sin, religion, tolerance, citizenship, property, education, security, and even the meaning of life itself. Consider as well the antagonism directed at evangelical views on such matters. One study concludes:

> There is evidence that within the U.S. strong disparities in religious belief versus acceptance of evolution are correlated with similarly varying rates of societal dysfunction; the strongly theistic, anti-evolution south and mid-west having markedly worse homicide, mortality, STD, youth pregnancy, marital and related problems than the northeast where societal conditions, secularization, and acceptance of evolution approach European norms . . . . It is the responsibility of the research

> community to address controversial issues and provide the information that the citizens of democracies need to chart their future courses.[1]

What the study means by "controversial issues" are those commitments that evangelicals do tend to make, and the study concludes such commitments are the cause of societal dysfunction. The "research community" is called upon to help before things get "markedly worse." So, this is no "war on Christmas." This is a scientific study arguing that evangelical views are dangerous to democracy!

Odd, since many evangelicals tend to think it is the "war on terror" that has been defending democracy. Since 9/11 designations such as "war on terror" have been bandied about as a *shibboleth:* not to use it means one is weak on national security, to use it reveals one's cultural insensitivity. Such is the state of affairs in the eyes of this inside observer of both the evangelical and political movements of twenty-first century America.

American evangelicals need not lose hope. These cultural contests are not hills to die on. Evangelicals, whoever they are, should define themselves not by stances taken on various issues that arise. They are defined by the evangel, the good news. It is that which gives them the means to make a defense for the hope that is found in Christ (1 Pet 3:15). But who is Christ? We have the answer to that question as well. It is in the doctrine of the Trinity, and that is the hill to die on. Cultural contests are entirely secondary by comparison. So we do not lose hope in defending that doctrine as the crux of Christianity. The thesis here is that the doctrine of the Trinity must be foremost in the minds of Christians for evangelism, and to express it is best done by having familiarity with the biblical texts which reveal it.

This essay highlights pitfalls found in the pursuit of one cultural issue, "Islamic terrorism." A pivot is then made to challenge evangelicals to have at hand a biblical summary of why we argue that Jesus Christ is God the Son, the second Person of the Trinity. This is not meant to be a guide to evangelizing Muslims, nor a treatise on the development of Trinitarianism. But even if a typical American evangelical never has an evangelistic encounter with a Muslim, it is argued that any Christians living out the New Testament should want everyone to accept Jesus Christ as Lord. The Trinity need not be the only topic of conversation, and terrorism need not be avoided in an assessment of Islam. The point is that the doctrine of the Trinity stands at the heart of Christianity, so understanding it is not just a matter of orthodoxy, it is how one should be preparing for any and every evangelistic encounter.

Of course, when news accounts identify Muslims as the ones committing acts of extreme violence in America some might say the doctrine of the Trinity is not really a pertinent issue, "Islamic terrorism" is. Yet, consider the

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[1] Gregory S. Paul, "Cross-National Correlations of Quantifiable Societal Health with Popular Religiosity and Secularism in the Prosperous Democracies," *Journal of Religion & Society* 7 (2005): 8.

Christians in Acts 17:6. It is hard to imagine they "turned their world upside down" making arguments against Roman violence. Luke's message seems to be that they were spreading the good news of the risen God-Man Jesus Christ, and that is what upset the prevailing culture. Evangelicals today should not hesitate to follow their example and relate what the Bible reveals as the real distinction between Christianity and all other religions and life views. Scriptures on the Trinity are that doctrine's best argument, so use them to share the One to whom they refer, for "how will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?" (Rom 10:14).

Beware of Unproductive Arguments against Islam

The designation "Islamic terrorism" can be an important issue to discuss, yet may be unproductive as the focus when comparing Islam and Christianity in an evangelistic encounter. Consider how that argument might be made: If *jihadists* derive from Islam their justification for acts of terrorism, then Christianity is preferable as the true "religion of peace" when compared to Islam. Evangelicals may feel that this scores a point, and it is hard to ignore the fact that a string of atrocities can be listed to bring that point home. Yet, what is gained if a refutation is made listing a number of Christian atrocities? But that is not the real reason evangelicals should be wary of initiating such arguments. The "New Atheists" employ the very same approach to condemn all religions. In their view, extreme religion rises directly out of moderate religion, so acts of violence by radical religionists are *religious* acts, not just aberrations from the religion's norm. Richard Dawkins put it this way:

> The take-home message is that we should blame religion itself, not religious extremism—as though that were some kind of terrible perversion of real, decent religion. Voltaire got it right long ago: "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities." So did Bertrand Russell: "Many people would sooner die than think. In fact they do."[2]

If evangelicals make this same case against Islam—that the religion is what leads to the acts of violence—then what strange bedfellows evangelicals have made for themselves.

Consider as well the broader public's perception of such disputes. They seem to have a Schleiermachian notion that all religions can be cooked down into a pluralistic stew with moral equivalence the best sauce to serve with it.[3]

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[2] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Mariner Books, 2008), 345.

[3] See D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 80–81; Carl Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 48; Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, "Beyond Foundationalism: Theology after Modernity,"

"One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" they might say, for at their core all religions are the same. If that is true, then the only wrong view is the view that says one's view is right. Weight is given to this public perception at the highest level of American culture. In 2015, President Obama compared the terrorist tactics of groups such as al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Boko Haram with acts done "in the name of Christ" during the crusades or in the Jim Crow South.[4] His point was to warn Christians not to get on a "high horse" that might fuel anti-Islamic sentiments. He then called on Christians to be humbled by Christianity's history of abuses.[5]

The cognitive disconnect in the President's remarks was striking: Islam is *not* to be tainted by the acts of some Muslims because Christianity *is* tainted by the acts of some Christians. Still, a lesson for evangelicals might be garnered from the President's statements. Focusing on the acts of individuals is not an accurate way to judge a religion. Generally speaking, religions are top down systems, so throwing a spotlight on bad actors at the bottom hardly deconstructs the religion itself. In other words, religions transcend the foibles of individual followers. The argument that Christianity is the better religion because of bad actors in Islam would imply Christianity has no such problem, and that is hardly true. Besides, evangelicals themselves ask not to be judged on the basis of bad actors in those cases when someone actually has bombed or murdered "in the name of Christ." Christians quickly condemn them as *mis*representing Christ's teachings. Focusing on *jihadists* acts would need the same courtesy, it would seem, at least in the eyes of the public. So it may be that a focus on *jihadists* is not productive in conveying any real distinction between Christianity and Islam.[6]

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in *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 35, as well as the entire section "Liberal and Evangelical Modernists," 35–38.

[4] Barak Obama, "Remarks by the President at the National Prayer Breakfast," National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC on February 5, 2015, WhiteHouse.gov (accessed 2/7/15), http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/ 02/05/remarks-president-national-prayer-breakfast. A video version is available on YouTube.com (accessed 2/7/15), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XU7RuilNq4w&feature=youtube_gdata.

[5] For a focus on the historical issues, see Rodney Stark, *God's Battalions: A Case for the Crusades* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009). For a focus on the theological discussion, see Nabeel Qureshi, *Answering Jihad: A Better Way Forward* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016). The latter is by a former Muslim answering questions on Jihad, Sharia, Al-Qaeda, ISIS, God vs. Allah, etc.

[6] A full treatment of the issue is found in David Cook's 2005 work *Understanding Jihad*. His Introduction contrasts the common notion of *Djihad* found in the *Encyclopedia of Islam:* "In law, according to general doctrine and in historical tradition, the jihad consists of military action with the object of the expansion of Islam and, if need be, of its defense," with the other extreme, *jihad* as spiritual "striving" (David Cook, *Understanding Jihad* [Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005],

Evangelicals might hone their argument that it is *jihadism,* rather than *jihadists,* that is the problem. The argument would be that the Qur'an commands acts of violence against non-Muslims[7]—*jihadism*—but no verse in the New Testament promotes such acts. Is this a more effective approach? Perhaps, but evangelicals would have to investigate more fully the variety of views on such texts within Islam itself. And if the Bible, not just the New Testament, is the authority for evangelicals' doctrines,[8] they must be ready to

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1–2). Cook notes of the latter religious meaning: "This position, predominant among Muslim apologists writing in non-Muslim (primarily Western) languages, is disingenuous." He adds, "Given the complexity and sensitivity of jihad's associations—the term is at once at the heart of polemics against Islam and of apologetics for Islam—it is easy to slip away from the facts and fall into polemics oneself" (ibid., 2). The fact that an extensive exposition (such as Cook's) is needed for a full appreciation of what the word jihad means makes a point. As such, it would be a misplaced priority for evangelicals to wade into waters at that level if they have not first prepared to defend the doctrine at the foundation of their own belief, the deity of Jesus Christ.

[7] The "sword verse" in Surah 9, *At-Taubah* "Repentance," says non-believers who refuse to pay the *Jizyah* tax must not remain alive: "Kill the *Mushrikun* [i.e., non-Muslims] wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in each and every ambush. But, if they repent and perform *As-Shalat* [the Islamic statement of faith], and give *Zakat* [alms required of Muslims], then leave their way free" (v. 5). All citations of the Qur'an are from *The Noble Qur'an in the English Language*, trans. Al-Hilali and Khan (Madinah, Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Qur'an, n.d.). Cook states that this "is one of the most important verses on the subject of jihad. It is usually called the 'Verse of the Sword' and is said to abrogate all other verses in the Qur'an on the subject of war and peace. While its immediate subject is the pagan Arabs—a narrow application sustained by early commentators—later Muslim jurists would use the verse to proclaim a universal jihad against all non-Muslims" (*Understanding Jihad*, 10).

Also in Surah 9: "Fight against those who (1) believe not in Allah, (2) nor in the last day, (3) nor forbid that which has been forbidden by Allah and His Messenger [Muhammad], (4) and those who acknowledge not the religion of truth [i.e., Islam] among the people of the Scripture [Jews and Christians], until they pay the *Jizyah* with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued" (v. 29). It is interesting in Cook's commentary that "This sura is the only chapter of the Qur'an that is not preceded by the phrase 'In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful,' which in itself indicates the martial nature of the text" (ibid.).

[8] George M. Marsden, "Introduction," *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), ix, 43. Marsden notes that historical, social, political, educational, and doctrinal factors typically define "evangelicalism" compared to mainline Protestantism or Roman Catholicism, for example, but the role of scriptural authority in evangelicals' theological formations is clear. See also Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship and the Bible in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 6; and Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 59. Evangelicals see "correct" doctrine correlating to biblical texts in a derivative way because the text is revelation from God. This view

answer a similar charge that it too advocates violent acts. "Holy war" passages such as 1 Sam 15:3 say that God directed the utter destruction of people. We would respond that there is no directive for the church to do such a thing today, and excellent academic sources deal with this issue, but even they voice a variety of perspectives.[9] So, do Islamic interpretations of the "sword verse" likewise vary? I would argue that Christians engaged in such discussions can address this question biblically and effectively, but wonder where it would lead in the end. Would any real distinction between the two religions on this issue prepare evangelicals for evangelistic encounters?

Holy war passages in the Bible do seem applicable to Israel's founding as a theocratic state: God sanctioned military activity for that purpose. Now, however, evangelicals do not call for a Christian state while Muslims do call for an Islamic state.[10] According to a BBC program in 2014, most Muslims do want a caliphate, a single Islamic nation that joins together all Muslims under one political structure: "The last caliphate—that of the Ottomans—was officially abolished 90 years ago this spring. Yet, in a 2006 Gallup survey of Muslims living in Egypt, Morocco, Indonesia and Pakistan, two-thirds of respondents said they supported the goal of 'unifying all Islamic countries' into a new caliphate."[11]

Does the fact that Muslims have this aspiration necessarily mean that the Qur'an sanctions violent acts against others? Do Christians aspire to see God's kingdom manifested on earth as it is in heaven? What does each side mean by such aspirations? Of course, to ask these questions is to make the point. Any arguments focused on Islam's aspirations may be countered by similar aspirations on the part of Christians and vice versa. And what does

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of the Bible, and the doctrine of the Trinity derived from it, are co-requirements for membership in the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS): "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs. God is a Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, each an uncreated person, one in essence, equal in power and glory" ("Doctrinal Basis," in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 57, no. 4 [December 2014]: inside front cover).

[9] Christians should be engaged in the argument that defends the authority of the entire Bible, even those OT texts containing "holy war" passages. It is not, however, lightly done. For an excellent treatment of the issues, and the admission that they are not quickly resolved, see the essays edited by Heath Thomas, Jeremy Evans, and Paul Copan in *Holy War in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

[10] The acronym ISIS refers to *Islamic State* in Iraq and Syria. President Obama's administration prefers ISIL, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, a term used by 15th c. Europeans to mean lands east of Italy (L. *levare* "to rise" indicating lands toward "the rising" of the sun). As a synonym for "the middle east," the Levant connotes Crusade lands: Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt. To use ISIL acknowledges their goal to consume Israel.

[11] BBC.com, "What's the Appeal of a Caliphate?" October 25, 2014 (accessed 3/5/15), http://www.bbc.com/news /magazine-29761018.

the watching public gain from such a debate? If the Hebrews conquered Canaan under Joshua's sword and Christian armies retook the Iberian Peninsula in the Reconquista, why should not Muslims have the right to conquer the lands they believe that Allah has given to them?

In the long run, it seems that a focus on *jihadist* acts or *jihadism* in the Qur'an would frustrate evangelicals who wish to promote the difference between Christianity and Islam (or any other religion). Debating such matters does tend to reaffirm only what each side already believes, and the general public, with a keen eye for fair play, would not be convinced by some evangelicals' attempts to draw distinctions on these matters.

Again, there is no reason why some Christians should not prepare to engage in these discussions. There is one argument, however, that should never be made. It is the one that conflates America's interests with Christianity's core concerns. No nation-state, no matter how exceptional, rises to that level. In the opening paragraph it was said that the term "American" suffers from a negative connotation. American corporatism[12] is denounced as the new imperialism sapping the wealth of non-white lands and leaving those people in poverty.[13] Western values in general, and American greed in particular, are the cause of social and economic inequities and that is what creates the conditions for violent extremism, whether by Muslims or others. And this view has also been voiced at the highest levels of American culture.[14] So, when

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[12] Robert Locke, "What is American Corporatism," Frontpage.com, September 13, 2002 (accessed 3/16/15), http://archive.frontpagemag.com/readArticle.aspx?ARTID=22594.

[13] Sam Muhho, "The Neo-Imperialist Corporatist Order and the 'Men Behind the Curtain,'" Centre for Research on Globalization, November 18, 2013 (accessed 3/16/15), http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-neo-imperialist-corporatist-order-and-the-men-behind-the-curtain/5358572. Most standard texts on Liberation Theology by its advocates will express this perspective as well.

[14] US State Department deputy spokesperson Marie Harf, interviewed on MSNBC's *Hardball* with Chris Matthews on February 16, 2015, explained the cause of "violent extremism" in response to Matthews's reference to the video of 21 Egyptian Christians beheaded by ISIS members in Libya the day before:

> It's not just a fight about dropping bombs on terrorists. It's really how we stop the causes that lead to extremism. . . . We need, in the longer term—medium and longer term—to go after the root causes that lead people to join these groups, whether it`s lack of opportunity for jobs. . . . We can work with countries around the world to help improve their governance. We can help them build their economies so they can have job opportunities for these people. . . . There is no easy solution in the long term to preventing and combatting violent extremism, but if we can help countries work at the root causes of this—what makes these 17-year-old kids pick up an AK-47 instead of trying to start a business—maybe we can try to chip away at this problem, while

evangelicals think they might want to identify Christianity with America's success as a means to elevate Christianity over Islam or its people, its lands, or its sacred text, then they should think again. Such an argument has little to do with what Christianity is or with the mission Christ has given his church. It would only offer Christianity in the same way the "Prosperity Gospel" does, as a "better option" based on observable results. Scripture warns, however, that a commitment to Christ may not be a "better" life at all. It may mean participation in his suffering (2 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 1:8; Jas 5:10; 1 Pet 2:19; 5:9). It would seem the same would apply to a "Christian nation" as well, if such a thing exists. The mission of the church is to offer the biblical gospel, the good news for everyone that Christ is the *only* way to *any* life with God (John 14:6), not just a "better" life of ease, pleasure, or success.[15]

The Real Distinction between Christianity and Islam

What, then, is the approach that Christians should take when engaging an increasingly hostile culture? What should be in the minds of evangelicals who want to distinguish between Christianity and Islam? I would argue that the answer to both questions is the same. The secular American and the follower of Islam reject, at some level, the Lordship of Jesus Christ and, by extension, the doctrine of the Trinity. And who is Jesus Christ? The answer is in the biblical revelation of the one God's triune nature: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is true that many learned Christians seem not to understand the Trinity, or at least seem not to convey it well enough for the average believer to repeat it. That is why the recommendation is made that the basis for the doctrine be familiarity with what God's Word says on the matter. And even if Muslims reject Christ for a different reason than the secular American does, they both still need him as the doctrine of the Trinity reveals him to be.

For Muslims, the *Shahada* is the first of the "Five Pillars" of Islam. It says, "There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is His messenger." Jesus cannot be accepted as Christians proclaim him, for that foundational premise, "There is no god but Allah," would mean the divine oneness, *tawhid,* excludes

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at the same time going after the threat, taking on ISIL in Iraq, in Syria, and helping our partners around the world.

Transcribed from the video of MSNBC's *Hardball* with Chris Matthews found on TheBlaze.com (accessed 2/28/15), http://www.theblaze.com/stories/2015/02/16/obama-admin-spokeswoman-says-u-s-cant-defeat-islamic-state-by-killing-them/.

The US State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki confirmed Harf's perspective the following day, February 17, 2015 as found in the "Daily Press Briefing" transcript from the US State Department at www.State.gov (accessed 3/1/ 15), http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb /2015/02/237553.htm.

[15] An important focus in Hebrews is the "better" covenant administered by Christ, but the end of the "faith chapter," Hebrews 11, does describe a "worse" life for some who lived by faith. The point is that our eyes must be fixed on Jesus Christ (Heb 12:2), not anything "better" or "worse" that we experience in this life.

any others, including 'Isa (Arabic for Jesus in the Quran).[16] This served Islam's cause in the seventh century AD, the formative years of Islam, when Arab tribes were required to put away their pagan polytheism.[17] And this kind of absolute monotheism is why Muslims today would reject what Christians believe about Jesus Christ. Yet, this is where evangelicals need to make their stand. Why focus on *jihadism?* If the deity of Christ is Christianity's core claim, if Jesus Christ truly is "*God* with us," and if believing in him is to have eternal life (John 17:3), then how is this not the real issue? Is this not what the world needs to know, whether Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, secular humanist, or neo-atheist?

A recommendation follows that can help evangelicals understand what makes Christianity different from any and all religions: The nature of God as one, yet known in the distinction of Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To understand and to convey this doctrine of the Trinity, the best method for evangelicals is to begin with a collection of Bible texts that ground it. Other approaches delving into church councils and the creeds they formulated, or plumbing theories about *perichoresis* and *coinherence,*[18] eventually can

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[16] Al-Hilali and Khan, Appendix II, "*Shahada*—(Confession of a Muslim)," 894, *The Noble Qur'an*: "All kinds of worship are meant for Allah alone (and none else, whether it be an angel, Messenger, Prophet 'Isa [Jesus]—son of Maryam [Mary], 'Uzair [Ezra], Muhammad, saint, idol, the sun, the moon and all other kinds of false deities)." Islam allows that Jesus was virgin born, a prophet, and a miracle worker, but the Qur'an specifically states that "the son of Maryam," meaning Jesus, was not like Allah, nor Allah's partner to be worshiped, nor to be associated with Allah's nature (cf. Surahs 5:17, 72, 116; 19:34–35).

One polished and winsome approach to the denial of Jesus's deity is the "Jesus in Islam" page on the OneReason.org website (www.onereason.org,http:// www.onereason.org/interfaith/jesus-in-islam/ [accessed 3/1/15]). Although directed at young, western, media-savvy minds, Christians familiar with the attacks on the deity of Christ from theological liberals to Jehovah's witnesses will find the arguments here very familiar.

Discussions with Muslims about God's oneness can be a starting point for a credible engagement since Christians reject the charge that Trinitarianism = Polytheism. Cristopher Evan Longhurst, Professor of Philosophy in the School of Humanities and Social Studies at Al Akhawayn University, Ifrane, Morocco, makes such a case in his short article, "*Tahwid* and *Homoousios:* Narrowing the Gaps between Muslim and Christian Understanding of God's Divine Oneness," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 48, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 255–58.

[17] Willard G. Oxtoby, "Rivals, Survival, Revivals" in *World Religions Western Traditions,* ed. Willard G. Oxtoby (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1996), 499–500.

[18] *Perichoresis* is from the Greek preposition *peri-* "around" with the verb *chorein* "to contain" to mean, in Torrances's view, a "mutual containing," or "enveloping of realities" specifically attempting to convey the *inter*-relatedness or innate communion of the Persons of the Trinity as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is also discussed

have their place. First, however, texts must be gathered which speak about the nature of God, the deity of Christ, and the personhood of the Holy Spirit. This is the sequence undertaken below.

A Recommended Approach for Evangelicals: A Biblical Summary of the Doctrine of the Trinity

If the Bible reveals the truth about God, then the doctrine of the Trinity is one of those revelations. Detractors would point out that the word "Trinity" is not a biblical term at all, and of course it is not, *per se*. It is a coined Latin term based on "tri-unity," so it is not a Hebrew or Greek word in the original texts. Nevertheless, it was used in the early church to encapsulate a truth that the Bible reveals: there is one God (monotheism), yet this one God's nature is uniquely known in three Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father is the one God, the Son is the one God, and the Spirit is the one God; but the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father.[19]

Early believers in Jesus Christ were committed to the fact that he died, as a mortal being, but he was also God, the eternal Being, with power over death. His death and his resurrection revealed he was able to die as man, able to rise from death as God (John 10:17–18), and therefore he was worshiped to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:5–11). If Father and Son share the same nature, the nature of God, that was the critical first step in establishing what became known as the doctrine of the Trinity. Similar arguments were then made concerning the Spirit.

Below are many of the Bible verses that ground this doctrine of the Trinity. Some are quite direct. Others are more subtle, not seeming to address the doctrine directly until placed alongside others verses. Taken together these verses show that the doctrine is derived from the text itself. The effort begins with one of the clearest truths derived from Scripture, the doctrine of monotheism found in the declaration that "the Lord is one."

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under the Latin *circumincession* to convey notions of "interpenetration" or "co-inherence" when expressing how God's unity is upheld while the distinction of each Person is not diminished by the presence of the others. Thomas F. Torrance, *The Doctrine of God, One Being Three Persons* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 102.

[19] Many theology texts present this kind of statement in summarizing the doctrine of the Trinity. Grudem, *Systematic Theology,* 231–39, is followed here. For a full treatment of the doctrine of the Trinity, see Torrance, *Doctrine of God,* cited above. Other excellent works over the last two decades include Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993); Millard J. Erickson, *God in Three Persons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); Bruce Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relations, Roles, and Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Crossway, 2000); Timothy George, ed., *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006). Of interest to some would be John Thompson, *Modern Trinitarian Perspectives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

God's Unity—Christians Are Monotheists

Monotheism, There Is One God

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! (Deut 6:4).[20]

The section that follows is probably the most difficult part of the entire enterprise to work through. It begins with the wholehearted affirmation that the Bible teaches the *oneness* of God. Christians are monotheists, committed to the fact that deity is that *single* self-existent One responsible for all else that exists. In the context of the original revelation of Scripture, this commitment would set God's people apart from the polytheism and henotheism[21] surrounding them. However, Scripture reveals more than the mere fact that there is only one deity. It reveals the nature of that one deity as a unity that entails a plurality of Persons. For early Christians, Messiah was one who also had God's nature. Thus, God is the Sender, and the One sent is also God, *Immanuel* "God with us" (Matt 1:23). But subsequent discussions clouded the issue.

Historically, the church has expressed the notion that God is "one" in metaphysical terms, using the ancient concept of *simplicity*—God's essence is simplex rather than composite.[22] That idea is somewhat analogous to the way the human soul is not lessened even if, for example, the body's limbs are lost. The soul is one *kind* of thing, so any of it is all of it. Regarding God's essence, simplicity guarded against the idea that God was made up of disparate parts. God is one *kind* of essence, so any of God is all of God.

The Bible reveals more, however. The Bible reveals the fact of the Persons of God. It might seem that these persons are each "parts" of God, each a third, like the lobes on a clover leaf. It might seem that the Persons are three gods (polytheism). It might seem just one Person is God, but showing

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[20] Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), The Lockman Foundation (Anaheim, CA: Foundation Publications, 1996).

[21] Henotheism, from the Greek *heno-* "one" (cf. Latin *unus*), is the notion that only one God should be worshiped (i.e., "monolatry"), but does not, like *mono*theism, reject out of hand the fact that multiple deities may exist. A discussion of this belief can be found in Ralph L. Smith, *Old Testament Theology* (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 232–33; cf. Steven W. Holloway, "Monotheism" in *Eerdman's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freeman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 916–17.

[22] In Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 3, Article 7: "Whether God is altogether simple?" he argues: "There is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body; nor composition of matter and form; nor does His nature differ from His 'suppositum' [individual existing substance]; nor His essence from His existence; neither is there in Him composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is nowise composite, but is altogether simple" (New Advent.org, 2nd and rev. ed., 1920 by Fathers of the English Dominican Province Online Edition, 2008 (accessed 3/21/15), http://www.newadvent.org/summa/).

up in different modes (modalism). So, there is a real benefit to the notion of simplicity, for it reminds us that any of God is all of God—the three distinct Persons are each fully God. By itself, though, simplicity only indicates something about *what* God is in essence, which is insufficient. Scripture's focus is to reveal *who* God is, and it does so in God's Persons. The Father sent his Son, the Son died for our sins, the Holy Spirit indwells those who receive him, and all of this to the glory of God the Father—this is how we *know* the one God through the Persons.

Christianity's offer of a relationship with God is not, therefore, an offer to understand divine simplicity. Gerald Bray expresses it well in his comments on Christianity's movement away from that metaphysical notion to Scripture's invitation to a relationship with God's Persons:

> As a concept, simplicity has played an important historical role which continues to manifest itself in the field of comparative religion. Christianity has always been obliged to explain the Trinity by positing a level of objective reality in God which is not governed by simplicity. This distinction has failed to penetrate Judaism, and it has been decisively rejected by Islam, so that both these religions, and especially the latter, tend to regard Christianity as a form of concealed polytheism. Both cling to the belief that true monotheism means the worship of a God who is a simple being. To this Christians reply that we worship not the essence of God, but his persons. Of course, both Jews and Muslims would say that God is personal, but in their understanding, personhood is really an attribute of the divine essence. Christianity denies this, maintaining that the persons are subsistent realities in their own right. At the level of the person, which is the point at which we enter into relationship with God, Christians insist that there is a plurality in unity, which is not to be confused with the simplicity of God's impersonal essence. The result is that everything which belongs to God's fixed and immutable essence is mediated to us through the relationship which we have with the persons.[23]

In this view, then, Christians affirm the biblical statements regarding the essential oneness of God, monotheism, but God's revelation provides more.

Scripture also uses both a singular noun (*YHWH*) and plural noun (*Elohim*) to refer to the one God, as well as singular and plural pronouns used by God in a self-referential way: "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen 1:26). Anti-Trinitarians object, of course, that no theological import is intended, or that God is speaking to angels, or that God employs the "royal we."[24] Such explanations are not easily reconciled with

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[23] Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 95.

[24] The Qur'an uses the plural pronoun of majesty, the "royal we."

the intention of biblical verses, however, for humans are created in God's image, not angels', and the "royal we" is not a biblical method for statements made by either God or kings. Furthermore, the implication that the expulsion from the Garden was related to becoming "like God" (Gen 3:22), would be difficult to reconcile with such options.[25] Still, textual arguments at this level would be shaky ground for the entire doctrine of the Trinity to stand on if no other evidence were available. What these texts do is begin the argument that the doctrine is derived from the text itself and *never* makes an appeal to the existence of three gods. Christians are monotheists. Though God's essence is one, that oneness is uniquely three Persons. This is not an irrational, mystical, or inconceivable notion. It is a biblically derived notion about what is *God's* nature, thus different from anything else.

God Self-identifies as Both "I" (sg.) and "Us" (pl.)

> Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (Gen 1:26)
>
> Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me." (Isa 6:8)

God, Who Is One, Speaks to Another Who Is "God"

> Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; A scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of joy above Your fellows. (Ps 45:6–7)

Messiah's Title Is "God with us"

> The Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel. (Isa 7:14; *Immanuel* in Hebrew is "with us *El*" [God]; Matt 1:23 translates, and in English, is "God with us.")

Messiah Is "Mighty God" in Isaiah's Prophecy

> For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. (Isa 9:6)

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[25] Expulsion from the Garden, thus the issue in the fall, was that humans strove for God-likeness, not royalty or angelic likeness. For a full treatment of such issues see, John S. Feinberg, "OT Intimations of Plurality in the Godhead" in *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 448–56.

These verses reveal more than what we might suppose Deut 6:4 to mean when it says "the Lord is one." They convey more than a denial of polytheism or a theological notion of God's simplex essence. Scripture reveals that God's unity is a plurality of distinct Persons.

The Persons Are Distinct

There are distinct Persons in the unity of the Godhead. Deniers object in some way to this integral aspect of the doctrine. Modalism is the heretical view that the unity of God allows for only a single "person" manifested in three forms or modes at different times: Yahweh in the Old Testament, Jesus Christ in the New Testament, the Holy Spirit in the church age. Matthew 3:17 makes this view untenable since all three Persons are present in distinct ways at Christ's baptism (see also Matt 17:5 and Peter's commentary at 2 Pet 1:17). Others object by saying only one of the three Persons actually is God, the others are some lower class of being. They point to some of the terminology in the New Testament, such as the greetings in Paul's letters where "God" refers to the Father but "Lord" to Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:3; 2 Cor 1:2–3; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2–3, 17; 5:20; Phil 1:2). They argue for subordinationism here, that Jesus is a lesser being compared to "God," for Jesus is only "Lord." But these greetings are not indicating subordinationism, the heresy of Arius.[26] These greetings affirm what the Trinitarian doctrine says about the distinction of co-equal Persons in the Godhead. There is no ontological hierarchy buried in the terms "God" and "Lord," for the essence of Father and Son is the same (the deity of Christ will be established below). So Paul's terms highlight the *unity* in the Godhead enjoyed by the *distinct* Persons. He is not describing a single Person in different modes or an ontological hierarchy of dissimilar beings:

Jesus, Spirit, and Father Are Distinct as Persons at Christ's Baptism

> After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and lighting on Him, and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Matt 3:16–17)

We Baptize in "the name" (sg.) of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (pl.)

> Go . . . and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Matt 28:19)

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[26] Richard C. Kroeger and Catherine C. Kroeger, "Subordinationism" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elseel (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 1153. This is also the concern for the Nicene perspective utilizing the terminology of *homoousios*. See Craig Blaising, ibid., s.v. "Homoousios."

One God, One Lord: Not Different Categories of Being

> There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. (1 Cor 12:4–6)

Paul's Letters Close with a Unified Concept of the Persons: Lord Jesus Christ, God, Holy Spirit

> The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. (2 Cor 13:14)

Paul's Default Concept of God Is of One Spirit, One Lord, and One God and Father

> There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:4–7)

The Work of God Is through the Three Distinct Persons: Father, Spirit, and Jesus Christ

> . . . chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. (1 Pet 1:2)

Even if the terminology is at first awkward, the doctrinal focus is clear. Believers know God in three Persons, "the Holy Spirit," "God," and "the Lord Jesus Christ":

> But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. (Jude 20–21)

The Son Is God—Scripture Reveals the Deity of Christ

The distinction of the Persons in the Godhead is not subordinationism if the deity of the Son of God is revealed, for then Father and Son have the same nature: deity. If that premise stands, the foundation of the Trinity is laid, so it is attacked as the bedrock issue for Christianity.[27] But if it is not true, and the deity of Christ is not revealed, then more than the doctrine of the Trinity falls, the very meaning of the atonement falls as well. Consider the question: If Jesus Christ were *not* God, what effect would his death have? Anselm's argument in *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why God [became] Man") was an early attempt to answer the question. Anselm argued that sin so devastated creation that the punishment for it could not be less than the effect it pro-

[27] Longhurst, "*Tawhid* and *Homoousios*," 255–56.

duced, so total annihilation would be the only recourse unless a greater sacrifice could stand as a substitute. Evangelicals now speak of Christ's atonement as "vicarious" or "substitutionary" to indicate that he died in our place.

If Christ were only a man, even a perfect one, his death would not have atoned for all of humanity's sin for all time. That is too great a leap, for only God could bear such a load. That is why it is such good news that "[Christ] Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross" (1 Pet 2:24). So, if Christ is *not* God, there is no good news for there is no substitutionary atonement, only the vain hope to be saved from the wrath of God by the blood of one who is nothing other than a creature as we are. If that is what it takes to appease the wrath of God for sin, then someone has exaggerated how bad sin is. The biblical view of sin and salvation is different, however, revealing that the atonement was accomplished only through the Son who himself "existed in the form of God," yet he humbled himself, taking our form, and taking our place (Phil 2:5–8). The glory of God's grace is that God would die for us and some of the verses that reveal the deity of the Lamb who was slain are featured below.

The Word Is God

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

The Word in Flesh, Jesus Christ, Is therefore God "Incarnate" (Latin "in flesh")

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

Jesus Addressed by Thomas as "God"

Thomas . . . said to Him [Jesus], "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28)

Jesus Responds to Being Addressed as "God," Affirming It

Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed." (John 20:28–29; Scripture prohibits treating as God anyone who is not God, thus the angel corrected the Apostle John in Rev 22:8–9)

The Son Identified with God's Radiance, Glory, Nature, Power, and Saving Work

He [the Son, v. 2] is the radiance of His [the Father's, v. 1] glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. (Heb 1:3)

The Father Addresses the Son as "God"

> Of the Son He [God, v. 1] says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, And the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom." (Heb 1:8)

The "blessed hope" Is the Return to Earth of One Who Is "God," Jesus Christ

> . . . looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 2:13)

Jesus Christ Is Both God and Savior

> Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. (2 Pet 1:1)

Paul, in Reference to Christ's Ancestry, Refers to Christ as "God"

> [Paul speaks of his kinsmen, the] Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Rom 9:5)

Christ Is Deity in Bodily Form

> For in Him [Christ, v. 8] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form. (Col 2:9)

The Holy Spirit Is a Personal Being— Scripture Reveals His Personhood

The doctrine of the Trinity must also defend the third Person, the Holy Spirit. The issues, however, are different than when defending the Second Person of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is God's Spirit, as the text of Scripture makes clear. Yet, many deniers of the Trinity claim that the Spirit of God is nothing more than God's activity or a force coming from God. Muslims deny the personhood of the Holy Spirit in a different way, arguing that Jesus's promise of a "comforter," another like him who is to come, is a prophecy about Muhammad.[28] The following verses show the falsity of such claims,

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[28] Al-Hilali and Khan, Appendix II, "Biblical Prophecy on the Advent of Muhammad," in *The Noble Qur'an,* pp. 909–10. The New Testament passages cited in this Appendix are John 14:15–16; 15:26–27; 16:5–8; 16:12–14, 16. The first refers to "the Father" giving "another Comforter" who would "abide with you forever." The translators explain: "Muslim theologians have said that 'another Comforter' is Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah; and him to 'abide forever' means the perpetuity of the laws and way of life (*Shariah*) and the Book (*Qur'an*) which was revealed to him."

for they reveal the Holy Spirit is God, having the attributes of deity (not those of a human, even a prophet), and they reveal the Holy Spirit is a Person, just as the other Persons of the Trinity (he does what one with personhood does).

To Lie to the Holy Spirit Is to Lie to God

> Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." (Acts 5:3–4)

Believers Are God's "temple," and the God within Is the Holy Spirit

> Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you. (1 Cor 3:16)

The Holy Spirit Is Omnipresent, an Attribute of Deity

> Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. (Ps 139:7–8)

The Holy Spirit Is Omniscient, an Attribute of Deity

> For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. (1 Cor 2:10)

The Holy Spirit Does What a Person, Not a Force, Does

> I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment. . . . But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, for He will take of Mine and will disclose it to you. All things that the Father has are Mine; therefore I said that He takes of Mine and will disclose it to you. (John 16:7–8, 13–15)

Other Actions of the Holy Spirit as a Person

Regenerating, giving "new birth" (John 3:3–5; cf. Rom 6:4 and Col 2:13); justifying (1 Cor 6:11); baptizing into Christ (1 Cor 12:13, which is how we are "in Christ," 2 Cor 5:17; cf. Eph 4:4–6; and thus have Christ's eternal life, 1 John 5:11–12); sealing believers in Christ as well as being that seal of God's saving work (1 Cor 6:16–17; Eph 1:13; 4:30; 2 Cor 1:21–22); being grieved by believers' refusal to live in a Christlike way (Eph 4:30).

Putting It Together

The doctrine of the Trinity, at its core, is the claim for the deity of Jesus Christ, that the Son of God is God the Son. Once this truth is understood, we can accept that the *oneness* of God is not merely a simplex essence, but God's unity is a plurality of Persons, and this is so because Scripture reveals it. That God the Holy Spirit is a co-equal member of the Godhead, as a Person, follows without further argument if Scripture's claims of his deity and personhood are accepted as well. If Scripture's claims are rejected, however, any doctrinal stance can be summoned.

Christians should make known these texts from the Bible that ground the doctrine of the Trinity. But there are other verses that some might have missed. These are verses separated from each other textually, such as one from the Old Testament and one from the New, yet when put together are parallel conceptually. In other words, together, they reveal something neither did separately. Of interest here are parallel texts that reveal the deity of Christ. For example, the Old Testament says Yahweh/Jehovah is the only savior, yet the New Testament says the same of Jesus Christ. Together they refer to what only God can do, save from sin, but they also reveal that this applies both to Jehovah *and* to Jesus Christ, establishing the deity of Christ. To put it simply, both have the same saving nature that only God has.[29] Several such parallels are offered below.

Who Is Savior?—No One Other Than Jehovah <u>and</u> the Son?

> "I, even I, am the LORD (literally, Jehovah), and there is no savior besides Me." (Isa 43:11; cf. also Isa 45:21, 49:26; 1 Tim 4:10, 14)
>
> We have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. (1 John 4:14)
>
> By the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead . . . is the stone which was rejected. . . . And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:10–12)

Similar comparisons of texts also bring together an understanding of the one divine nature in the distinct Persons. What is true about Jehovah applies as well to Jesus Christ:

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[29] The transitive property in algebra states this: If $a = c$ and $b = c$, then $a = b$. The point is simply that Scripture uses such a pattern to express that the Father and Son have the same saving nature, both do that which only God does. Thus, even though Father and Son are distinct, coexisting, coequal Persons, they are the *one* God.

Who Claims the Personal Name of Deity, YHWH [Yahweh/Jehovah], "I AM"?

Jehovah identifies himself as "I AM." (Exod 3:14)

Jesus identifies himself with the name "I AM." (John 8:58, cf. the response to this in v. 59, the Jews hearing this understood his claim as blasphemy.)

Whose Is the Glory?

I am the LORD [Yahweh/Jehovah] that is My name; I will not give My glory to another. (Isa 42:8)

Both God the Father and the Lamb are worthy to receive "honor and glory." (Rev 5:11–14)

Honoring the Father Is Honoring the Son, and to Dishonor the Son Is to Dishonor the Father

For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, so that all will honor the Son even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. (John 5:22–23)

Knowing/Seeing Jesus = Knowing/Seeing the Father

If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:7–9)

Other Summary Statements about Christ's Equality with the Father Found in John's Writings:

To know Christ is to know the Father. (John 8:19)

To believe in Christ is to believe on the Father. (John 12:44)

To confess the Son is to have the Father. (1 John 2:23)

To deny the Son is not to have the Father, to hate the Son is to hate the Father. (John 15:23)

Finally, perhaps the most direct revelation of parallel concepts for YHWH/Jehovah and Jesus Christ is from texts that answer the question, Who is properly worshiped? Scripture reveals clearly that God alone is to be worshiped. The Ten Commandments states, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exod 20:3) and "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I the LORD your God, am a jealous God" (Exod 20:5). A similar command is reiterated in Exod 34:14, "You shall not worship any other god, for the

LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God." Jesus himself likewise affirms it: "For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only'" (Matt 4:10). The book of Revelation teaches the same when John bowed before an angel in awe but was rebuked for even taking the posture of worship (obeisance) before a created being: "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; worship God!" (Rev 22:8–9). Yet, Scripture reveals Jesus Christ is rightly worshiped:

Jesus Christ Is Worshiped

> And when He [God the Father, v. 5] again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, "And let all the angels of God worship Him." (Heb 1:6)

All Things Worship Jesus Christ the Lamb

> Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped. (Rev 5:11–14)

It Is Not Blasphemy, but Glory to the Father, When the Son Is Worshiped

> That at the name of Jesus every knee will bow . . . and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:10, 11)

Other Instances of Christ Being Worshiped in Matthew

> The magi (2:11); the Gadarene demoniac (5:6); a leper (8:2); a Jewish ruler (9:18); the disciples (14:53); a Canaanite woman (15:25); the mother of James and John (20:20); two Mary's at the Resurrection (28:9); and the eleven disciples at the Ascension (28:17).

What conclusion can be reached? From these passages it is clear that only God is rightly worshiped. From these passages it is clear that Jesus Christ is rightly worshiped. So the logic is undeniable:

One rightly worshiped is God.
Jesus Christ is one rightly worshiped.
Therefore, Jesus Christ is God.

The logic is sound and verifies what Scripture reveals. Deniers of the Trinity can reject the logic or the revelation or both when they warn believers that worshiping Jesus Christ is somehow improper, like polytheism or idolatry. But with love, Christians must warn them that treating God profanely is, by definition, blasphemy, and that is the desperate position they have put themselves in by denying the deity of Christ.[30] They are profaning God the Son.

Conclusion

A summary of biblical texts has been presented in the pages above highlighting the verses from Scripture that any Christian can both know and convey regarding the doctrine of the Trinity. The Bible provides for us God's own statements that the *one* God exists eternally, yet uniquely as three distinct Persons who are the one God we know: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. No paradox exists in this claim. Each of the Persons of the Godhead has divine glory, is worshiped, creates, saves, and so forth—it is God who is doing what any Person of the Godhead does. Therefore, Christians can and should accept the reasonableness of this truth found in Scripture and commit to expressing it as the doctrine of the Trinity when called upon to answer for what is unique about the Christian faith.

When I came to Christ in the mid-1970s, I was confronted with these very issues. Searching for help at a Christian bookstore I found a pamphlet written by Arthur Wallis offering the simple comparison of verses that became a model for much of what was presented above. I even typed out the verses and his summation to tape them into the back cover of my Bible. My first witnessing encounter soon followed and using them helped, in part, to bring a Christian Science friend to Christ. During the last 40 years, every Mormon and Jehovah's Witness who has come to my door has heard Wallis's summary of the Apostle John's texts on what those verses mean:

> If you know Christ, you know the Father also [John 8:19; 14:7]; if you believe on Christ, you are in fact believing on the one who sent him [John 12:44]; if you confess the Son, you have the Father also [1 John 2:23]. On the other hand, if you honour not the Son, you honour not the Father; if you hate the Son, you hate the Father also [John 5:23]. It is therefore a moral and spiritual impossibility to have one attitude to God, and quite a different attitude to Christ. You cannot acknowledge the deity of the Father and deny the deity of the Son, for a denial of the Son constitutes a denial of the Father. Whether or not you understand it, whether or not you believe it, your attitude to Christ *is* your attitude to God. "What think ye of Christ?" is now the acid test of your relationship to God, and your answer will determine

[30] The Qur'an actually calls it blasphemy to believe in the Trinity. Surah 5:73 says, "They do blaspheme who say: Allah is one of three in a trinity."

> the destiny of your soul. Listen to his own solemn words, "Except ye believe that I am, ye shall die in your sins" [John 8:24].[31]

The good news is that whoever calls upon the name of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved (Rom 10:13; Joel 2:32), and that doing so is to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:11). This is where evangelicals must stand, for it is only through Jesus Christ that it is possible to have eternal life, as he himself said: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father, but through Me" (John 14:6).

[31] Arthur Wallis (1922–88), *Jesus of Nazareth: Who Is He?* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1956), 49.

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"Oh That All Bigotry Was Rooted Out of the Earth!" The Evangelical Catholicity of Oliver Hart and the Regular Baptists

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This article argues that Regular Baptist leader Oliver Hart (1723–95) embraced the "evangelical catholicity" of the Great Awakening. Following revival leaders like George Whitefield, Hart's emphasis on evangelical piety (especially the new birth, gospel holiness, and the desire for sinners to be converted by the Holy Spirit) allowed him to partner with Christians across the denominational spectrum to advance revival. Hart's friendships with evangelical Presbyterians, Methodists, and Anglicans are all explored, while his continued commitment to Baptist church order is also noted. Hart's catholicity is significant for understanding the Regular Baptist movement, indicating that the Regular Baptists shared in the revival spirituality of the Great Awakening to a far greater degree than has traditionally been acknowledged.

On October 27, 1754, Richard Clarke (1723–1802), rector of St. Philip's Anglican Church in Charleston, South Carolina, took ill. Scheduled to perform a funeral that afternoon, Clarke relayed a message to Oliver Hart (1723–95), pastor of the Charleston Baptist Church. In an apparently unprecedented move, Clarke asked the Regular Baptist minister to conduct the service for him, in his "own way." Though worlds apart ecclesiologically, Clarke recognized in Hart a fellow evangelical, and trusted him to preach Christ to his people. Hart later reflected,

> In the evening I buried a child in the church burying ground, and spoke extempore, perhaps the first instance of this nature ever known in this province. The church minister was sick and could not attend himself; therefore, gave me free liberty to speak in my own way; which discovered an extraordinary catholick spirit. Oh that all bigotry was rooted out of the earth; then would there subsist a greater harmony between persons, than what does; it is indeed a pity that our little outward differences should cause such a shyness between us.[1]

[1] Oliver Hart, diary, October 27, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman University.

The incident captures the spirit of evangelical "catholicity" which swept the north Atlantic Protestant world during the Great Awakening.[2] The experience of new birth, the hunger for gospel holiness, and the desire to see many converted to faith in Jesus Christ by the Spirit's power united Christians who differed over issues of church order. Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins have recently observed that Hart, along with most Regular Baptists, adopted the revival's catholic spirit. "Like his mentor [George] Whitefield, Hart took denominational boundaries lightly and focused primarily on promoting a vital relationship with God," they write.[3]

This observation is significant in discussions of Baptist identity, for the Regular Baptists of the colonial South are not remembered for their support of the Great Awakening. Their contributions to the revival have been overshadowed by the meteoric rise of the Separate Baptist movement in the same period. In the twentieth century, William L. Lumpkin and Walter B. Shurden argued that the Separate Baptists were responsible for bringing the spiritual "ardor" of the awakening to the Baptists of the South, while the Regulars, chiefly concerned with "order," stood aloof from the revival.[4] This thesis has been widely received at all levels of Southern Baptist life. Yet, while important cultural distinctions existed between the Regular and Separate Baptists, the "order-ardor" dichotomy is a misleading oversimplification.[5] Regular Baptists in fact shared the spirituality of the revival, and labored for awakening in the South before the Separates arrived in 1755. One key element of Regular Baptist revival spirituality is their evangelical catholicity, exemplified in the ministry of Oliver Hart.

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[2] I am aware that some recent scholarship has argued that the Great Awakening was in fact an "interpretive fiction," as in Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction," *Journal of American History* 69, no. 2 (September 1982): 305–25, and Frank Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). While these scholars offer a provocative thesis and have made important contributions to the field, I ultimately find their conclusions unsatisfying. I am more convinced by the position taken by Thomas S. Kidd in *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

[3] Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 28–29.

[4] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South: Tracing through the Separates the Influence of the Great Awakening, 1754–1787* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961); and Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?," *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (April 1981): 2–11.

[5] For a full-length treatment of the revival spirituality of Hart and the Regular Baptists see my "Order and Ardor: The Revival Spirituality of Regular Baptist Oliver Hart, 1723–1795" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

The Roots of Evangelical Catholicity

The catholicity of the awakening had its roots in a number of earlier movements. Among the most significant were the Continental Pietists, led by Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705), August Herman Francke (1663–1727), and Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714). The Pietists believed that heart-devotion to Jesus Christ served as the true basis of unity for all Christians, not doctrinal formulations or worship forms. Consequently, they emphasized the priority of the invisible church of all regenerate souls, rather than the visible church of any particular denomination. In the following generation, Moravian Pietist Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf (1700–60) argued that every Christian tradition offered a *tropos paideia*, or "type of teaching." As the beauty of a diamond can be appreciated only when viewed from all angles, so the various traditions each offered their own needed and beautiful views of Christianity.[6]

Many English Puritans shared the Pietist burden to unite Christians around practical godliness. The non-conformist Richard Baxter (1615–91) famously referred to himself as a "meer Christian"[7] and warned Christians of being "counfounded by the noise of sectaries, and divers opinions in religion." He prioritized the "one universal church of Christians in the world," which every believer entered "by being born of the Spirit." Like the Pietists, Baxter's chief concern was a life of vibrant holiness: "if then thou hast faith, and love, and the Spirit, thou art certainly a Christian, and a member of Christ, and of this universal church of Christians."[8] Among American Puritans, Cotton Mather (1663–1728) was an outspoken proponent of "the unity of the godly" at the turn of the eighteenth century. In Richard Lovelace's words, Mather believed "the key of a vitalized Christian experience was sufficient to unlock all the doors built up between genuine Christians through misunderstanding."[9] Indeed, to require precise doctrinal conformity of others was both unrealistic and uncharitable. "We must first forbear to impose one upon another. It is impossible for any but God who forms the Spirit of man within him, to form the understandings of men, into a belief of every Christian doctrine," Mather preached. He urged against "a Samaritan sort of crabbedenss, churlishness, forwardness, towards all that are not in everything just jumping with us," for this was "not the Spirit of the Gospel." Mather warned that "we must beware how we ever monopolize all godliness

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[6] See Arthur Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf: An Ecumenical Pioneer," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36, nos. 3–4 (Summer-Fall 1999): 297.

[7] See the memorable quotation in Richard Baxter, *Church-History of the Government of Bishops and Their Councils Abbreviated* (London: John Kidgell, 1680), [xiv].

[8] Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2008), 52–53.

[9] Richard F. Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 274.

to our own little party . . . wherever we can see, *Alliquid Christi*, anything of Christ, let it be dear to us."[10] For Mather, unity was the essential prerequisite for the worldwide revival that would usher in the millennium: "There will be no revival unless there is unity, and the converse is equally true."[11]

By the late 1730s, Mather's dream appeared to have reached its fulfillment in the ministry of George Whitefield (1714–70). Like his predecessors, Whitefield believed in the unifying power of heart religion over doctrine, the priority of the invisible communion of regenerate souls, and in evangelical harmony as essential to revival. What distinguished Whitefield was his unparalleled, firsthand experience of Christian diversity. Whitefield kneeled at the altar with Oxford Anglicans, preached in the fields to unlearned Methodists, served at the communion seasons of Scottish Presbyterians, and attended meetings of American Congregationalists, Baptists, and Quakers. Bruce Hindmarsh argues that Whitefield's unique experience as the grand itinerant raised his catholicity to previously unknown heights, causing him to "minimize church order, in order to maximize spiritual solidarity with individuals who had been born again."[12] As Whitefield wrote of himself, "Though I profess myself a minister of the Church of England, I am of a catholic spirit; and, if I see any man who loves the Lord Jesus in sincerity, I am not very solicitous to what outward communion he belongs."[13]

In 1740, Whitefield explained his ecumenical policy to five Anglican interrogators in Boston, Massachusetts. When asked about his endorsement of non-Anglican ministers, Whitefield asserted that "a catholic spirit was best," and that "it was best to preach the new birth, and the power of godliness, and not to insist so much on the form: for people would never be brought to one mind as to that; nor did Jesus Christ ever intend it." Bishop Timothy Cutler (1684–1765) pressed him here: surely Christ's prayer "that all may be one, even as Thou Father and I are one [John 17:21]," demanded a single, visible church (namely the Church of England). Whitefield offered a different interpretation. Echoing his Pietist forbears, Whitefield insisted that the reality of regeneration trumped all external expressions of the Christian faith. "That was spoken of the inward union of the souls of the believers with Jesus Christ, and not of the outward Church," he countered. "I saw regenerate souls among the Baptists, among the Presbyterians, among the Independents, and among the Church folks—all children of God, and yet all born again in a different way of worship: and who can tell which is the most evangelical?"[14]

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[10] Cotton Mather, *Blessed Unions* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1692), 72–79.

[11] Mather advances this idea in his *Shaking Dispensations* (Boston: B. Green, 1715).

[12] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "The Spirituality of George Whitefield" (paper presented at Whitefield and the Great Awakening, Andrew Fuller Conference, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, October 22, 2014).

[13] George Whitefield to Ralph Erskine, January 16, 1740, in *Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 1:140.

[14] George Whitefield, *Journals*, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), 458.

As Whitefield corresponded with a diverse range of Christians, he allowed differences of church communion to fade into insignificance before the all-important reality of the new birth:

> What a divine sympathy and attraction is there between all those who by one spirit are made members of that mystical body, whereof Jesus Christ is the head! . . . Blessed be God that his love is so far shed abroad in our hearts, as to cause us to love one another, though we a little differ as to externals: for my part, I hate to mention them. My one soul question is, *Are you a Christian?* Are you sealed by Christ's spirit to the day of redemption? Are you hungering and thirsting after the perfect, everlasting righteousness of Jesus Christ? If so, you are my brother, my sister, and mother.[15]

These remarks demonstrate Hindmarsh's observation that a major shift in Protestant spirituality was taking place in the dawn of the Great Awakening. Eighteenth-century evangelicals like Whitefield "abandoned the Puritan-Reformed question, 'what constitutes a true church?' for the Evangelical-Pietist question, 'What constitutes a true Christian?'"[16] In some places, Whitefield almost treated church order as a taboo subject, as with one Baptist minister:

> If the Lord gives us a true catholic spirit, free from a party sectarian zeal, we shall do well. I am sorry to hear that there is so much narrowness among some of the brethren in Wales. Brother [Howell Harris] complains sadly of it. I hope dear Mr. O. will be kept free, and not fall into disputing about baptism, or other non-essentials. For I am persuaded, unless we all are content to preach Christ, and to keep off from disputable things, wherein we differ, God will not bless us long. If we act otherwise, however we may talk of a catholic spirit, we shall only be bringing people over to our own party, and there fetter them.[17]

As the Awakening wore on, however, Whitefield found this evangelical unity increasingly difficult to maintain. He experienced painful, public splits with John Wesley (1703–91), for instance, as well as with the Moravians. Still, Whitefield strove valiantly to hold evangelicals together, appealing to their common, heavenly destiny. "The divisions among the brethren sometimes grieve, but do not surprise me," he wrote. "O how do I long for heaven! Surely, *there* will be no differences, no strife there, but who shall sing with most affection to the Lamb that sitteth upon the throne."[18] Whitefield's tireless promotion of evangelical catholicity for the sake of revival deeply influenced the Regular Baptists of the eighteenth century.

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[15] George Whitefield to Mr. P., November 28, 1739, in *Works*, 1:126 (emphasis original).

[16] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 322.

[17] George Whitefield to Mr. [John] O[ulton], May 27, 1742, in *Works*, 1:394.

[18] George Whitefield to Mr. J. H., in *Works*, 1:224 (emphasis original).

Regular Baptist Catholicity

On the whole, Regular Baptists in the American colonies embraced the catholic spirit of the awakening. One early example is Jenkin Jones (c.1686–1760), pastor of the Baptist congregations at Pennepek and Philadelphia, and a leader in the Philadelphia Baptist Association from 1726–60. Whitefield sought Jones out on his first visit to Philadelphia on November 5, 1739, and quickly identified Jones as a fellow evangelical. "I was visited in the afternoon by the Presbyterian minister, and went afterward to see the Baptist teacher who seems to be a spiritual man," Whitefield wrote. The next night, Jones and the Presbyterian minister went to hear Whitefield in the Anglican Church, and were reportedly "much rejoiced to hear Jesus Christ preached in the Church."[19] When Whitefield returned to Philadelphia in April of 1740, he was delighted to find that Jones had been promoting the revival in his absence:

> It is impossible to express the joy many felt when they saw my face again. O how did they comfort my heart with the account of what God had done for their own and many other people's souls. The Baptist minister in particular, who has been instrumental in watering what God has planted, recounted to me many noble instances of God's power of free grace shown in the conviction and conversion of some ministers as well as common people.[20]

A few weeks later, it was Whitefield's turn to hear Jones. Greatly pleased, Whitefield reported that Jones "preached the truth as it is in Jesus." In fact, Whitefield called Jones "the only preacher that I know of in Philadelphia, who speaks feelingly and with authority. The poor people are much refreshed by him, and I trust the Lord will bless him more and more." For Jones, these experiences with Whitefield established sufficient grounds for an alliance. On May 9, he had Whitefield preach at the Pennepek meetinghouse, to over two thousand people.[21] In the days to come, Jones extended similar invitations to other revivalists outside the Baptist circle, including Presbyterians Gilbert Tennent (1703–64) and John "Hell-fire" Rowland (d.1745).

The people of Jones's churches generally received the awakeners with enthusiasm, but Jones did meet resistance from his assistant minister, Ebenezer Kinnersley (1711–78). Kinnersley, who later taught English at the University of Pennsylvania and assisted Benjamin Franklin in his research of electricity, found the emotionalism of the awakening disgusting. When filling Jones's pulpit in his absence, Kinnersley sharply criticized Whitefield, Rowland, and the whole revival. The church was deeply offended. Many walked out on Kinnersley's sermon, and later brought charges against him for undermining

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[19] Whitefield, *Journals*, 342.

[20] Ibid., 406.

[21] Ibid., 419.

Jones's leadership. When Kinnersely refused to apologize, he was excluded from the Lord's Table. Matters turned uglier still when Kinnersley aired his grievances in Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*. He accused Jones of lying and showing ungodly favoritism toward Rowland, a fellow Welshman, and attacked the church for ill-treating him.[22] Incensed, the church responded by publishing its own letter, which exonerated Jones, condemned Kinnersley, and called the latter to repentance.[23] Kinnerseley responded in print once more before the controversy died out.[24] Kinnerseley was something of an outlier among Regular Baptists in his opposition to the revival, but the incident reveals the conflict which Baptist leaders like Jones could invite through their evangelical partnerships.

Whitefield travelled south after leaving Pennsylvania in 1740, and by July 7 was in Ashley Ferry, South Carolina, fourteen miles outside of Charleston. He had been invited by Regular Baptist Isaac Chanler (1701–49), who he called "a gracious Baptist minister." Whitefield preached at the Ashley Ferry meetinghouse "to the conviction of some and the comfort of others," though "the violent heat of the weather, and great expense of sweat," forced him to lie down afterwards. The next day, he preached twice at the Independent Presbyterian Church before lodging with Chanler for the night, still "very weak." On July 9, Whitefield awoke weaker still, but kept his appointment to preach for Chanler at ten in the morning. This time the meetinghouse could not contain the crowd, so Whitefield preached under a tree. "People seemed to come from all parts, and the Word came with convincing power," he wrote. By July 20, Whitefield was convinced that revival had come to Charleston. "Though the heat of the weather, and frequency of preaching, have perhaps given an irrevocable stroke to the health of my body; yet I rejoice, knowing it has been for the conviction, and I believe conversion of many souls," Whitefield wrote. "Numbers are seeking after Jesus."[25]

Before leaving, Whitefield advised the local pastors to establish a weekly lecture to carry on the work of the revival. Chanler's first address at these meetings was published as *New Converts Instructed to Cleave to the Lord* (1740).[26] It stands as a remarkable testimony of the Regular Baptists' revival catholicity.

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[22] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 15, 1740.

[23] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 14, 1740, appendix D.

[24] See Thomas Ray, "Jenkin Jones (c. 1686–1760)," in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2006), 200–10.

[25] Whitefield, *Journals*, 440–44.

[26] Isaac Chanler, *New Converts Exhorted to Cleave to the Lord. A Sermon on Acts XI 23 Preach'd July 30, 1740 at a Wednesday Evening-lecture, in Charlestown, Set Up at the Motion, and the Desire of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield; With a Brief Introduction Relating to the Character of that Excellent Man . . . With Preface by the Reverend Mr. Cooper of Boston, N.E.* (Boston: D. Fowle for S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1740).

Chanler introduced the sermon by celebrating the revival, searching for adequate words to describe his "holy pleasure, as well as wonder" at God's "raising up and sending forth such eminent instruments of good to the souls of men, crowning their labour with so great and uncommon success." Here he could not restrain his enthusiasm over Whitefield, who he called "very dear unto all such as have felt the power of the word preached by him reaching their hearts." Chanler called his listeners to imitate Whitefield's virtues, particularly his "catholic spirit." "Let our love like his be catholic, breathing in a free and open air, abstracted from all bigotry and party zeal, loving the image of God on whomever we may see it impressed . . . that is to say, all the regenerate sons and daughters of God, howsoever they may be distinguished by different denominations amongst men."[27] The body of Chanler's sermon focused on the great evangelical themes Whitefield preached: the sovereign grace of God in salvation, the priority of conversion, and the call to evangelical holiness. Chanler warned new believers against returning to their worldly ways, recommended sound Puritan books for their edification, and closed with a fervent evangelistic appeal for those who had not yet closed with Christ.[28] Interesting enough, Chanler at no point instructed the young converts on issues of baptism or proper church order.

A mutual friend of Chanler and Whitefield at this time was Regular Baptist William Tilly (1698–1744). A native of Salisbury, England, Tilly came to America in 1721, was called to ministry at the Charleston Baptist Church, and ordained at Edisto Island Baptist Church (later Euhaw) in 1731.[29] Tilly travelled to Whitefield's orphanage in Savannah with a group of friends on July 31, 1740. The following Sunday, Whitefield found himself so sick that "I was struck, as I thought, with death." Several guests had arrived, eager to hear Whitefield, but he was so weak that he asked Tilly to preach for him instead. Tilly did not consent, encouraging Whitefield that "God would strengthen me if I began." Whitefield began. As he prayed, one guest fell to the ground, "as though shot with a gun." From there, "the influence spread." As the congregation listened, "Tears trickled down apace, and God manifested himself much amongst us at the Sacrament."[30] To Whitefield's astonishment, Tilly partook of communion with the Anglican guests. In a letter the next week, Whitefield commented, "The word runs like lightning in Charles-Town. A serious lively Baptist minister, named *Tilly*, is here also; he has preached often

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[27] Ibid., 1–2, 4–5.

[28] Ibid., 38–42. Whitefield wrote to Chanler the following year, sending his love to the flock at Ashley Ferry. See George Whitefield to Isaac Chanler, February 17, 1741, in *Works*, 1:237–38.

[29] For Tilly, see Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists, 1670–1805* (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2003), 38; and David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World* (New York: Lewis Colby and Company, 1850), 703.

[30] Whitefield, *Journals*, 447.

for me, and last Sunday received the sacrament in our way—O bigotry, thou art tumbling down a-pace!"[31] Jones, Chanler, and Tilly exemplify the catholicity that characterized Regular Baptists during the early days of the evangelical revival. They were willing to unite on the basis of evangelical piety to advance the gospel in the revival, though, as will be seen, this catholicity had limits. In the next generation, Oliver Hart carried on the Regular Baptist catholic spirit.

Oliver Hart's Catholicity

Hart would have observed a remarkable example of evangelical catholicity in the city of Charleston during the mid-1750s. A monthly society formed for prayer and the discussion of "some literary or religious topic which had been previously agreed on."[32] This ecumenical "holy club" counted among its members some of the leading figures of Charleston society, including the French Huguenot Gabriel Manigault (1704–81); Henry Laurens (1724–92) and Christopher Gadsden (1724–1805) of the Anglican church, both of whom would later serve the Continental Congress; and the eminent lawyer John Rattray (d.1761) of the Presbyterian Church. Among the ministers known to belong to the society were Richard Clarke, rector of St. Philip's, and the Presbyterians William Hutson (1720–61) and John J. Zubly (1724–81). Whether or not Hart participated in "Charleston's holy club" is unknown, though his prominence in the religious community and his friendship with virtually all of the above makes this plausible. At any rate, Hart certainly counted himself part of a transdenominational revival movement, one he had been immersed in from his childhood days in Jenkin Jones's Pennepek Baptist Church. This is evidenced by the catholic quality of his friendships in Charleston.

Hart and the Presbyterians

Presbyterians represented the shortest theological leap for a Regular Baptist, whose own Second London Confession consciously followed the Westminster Confession so closely.[33] So when two young Rhode Island College graduates were sent by their Presbytery "on a preaching excursion" to the

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[31] George Whitefield to Mr. N., August 15, 1740, in *Works*, 1:203.

[32] See David Ramsay, *The History of South Carolina, from its first settlement in 1670, to the year 1808* (Charleston: David Longworth, 1809), 2:452–53; Frederick Dalcho, *An Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina, from the first settlement of the province, to the war of the Revolution* (Charleston: E. Thayer, 1820), 180–83; and Samuel C. Smith, "Charleston's Holy Club," in *A Cautious Enthusiasm: Mystical Piety and Evangelicalism in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 94–107.

[33] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 235–38.

Carolinas, Hart happily broke bread with them.[34] One Presbyterian Hart especially admired was Samuel Davies (1723–61), who established an evangelical presence in Virginia from 1748–59. In 1759, Davies accepted the presidency of New Jersey College, which had already trained several of Hart's Regular Baptist colleagues. Tragically, Davies died less than two years into his administration, at the age of thirty-seven. In a letter on April 27, 1761, Hart mourned Davies's death as a blow to the evangelical movement. The remarkable letter is worth quoting at length:

> I lament with you (and surely all the friends of Zion must mourn) the loss of the justly celebrated President Davies. Oh, what floods of sorrow must have overwhelmed the minds of many, when it was echoed from house to house and from village to village, as in the dismal sound of hoarse thunder, *President Davies is no more!* Oh, sad and melancholy dispensation! Arise, all ye sons of pity, and mourn with those that mourn. And thou, my soul, let drop the flowing tear while commiserating the bereaved and distressed. Alas for the dear woman, whose beloved is taken away with a stroke! May Jesus be her husband, her strength, and her stay. Alas for the bereaved children! May their father's God be their God in covenant. Alas for the church of Christ! Deprived of one of the principal pillars, how grievous the stroke to thee! But Jesus, thy head and foundation, ever lives.
>
> And thou, Nassau Hall, lately so flourishing, so promising, under the auspicious management of so worthy a President—what might we not have expected from thee! But alas! How is the mighty fallen in thee! How doth the large and beautiful house appear as a widow in sable weeds! And thy sons, lately so gay and pleasant, as well as promising and contented—how do they retire into their apartments, and there with bitter sighs, heavy groans, and broken accents, languish out, My Father, my Father!—the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! But I can write no more.[35]

Hart also worked closely with Presbyterian William Tennent III (1740–77) during the American Revolution. They travelled the Carolina Backcountry together in 1775 on a special mission from the South Carolina government and afterward petitioned the congress for religious liberty under the new constitution. These shared labors under such intense circumstances forged a strong friendship between the two men. When Tennent died on August 11, 1777, Hart preached a memorial sermon for him in the Baptist

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[34] Oliver Hart, December 12, 1778, *A Copy of the Original Diary of Rev. Oliver Hart of Charlestown, Pastor of the Baptist Church of Charlestown*, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

[35] Oliver Hart to James Manning, April 27, 1761, Manning MSS, Brown University.

meetinghouse.[36] He based his message on a popular eighteenth century funeral text, 2 Sam 3:38, "Know ye not that there is—a great man fallen this day in Israel?" He considered how Tennent displayed five essential qualities of "a great man": a distinguished pedigree, good natural parts and abilities, intelligence and learning, a benevolent heart, and devotion to religion. Hart dedicated the sermon, "preached from pure regard to his memory," to the bereaved mother, wife, and congregation, "with much affection."[37]

Hart also counted William Hutson among his Presbyterian friends. Hutson had been converted under Whitefield in 1740, while a stage player in New York. Hutson went on to teach in a slave school on the estate of Hugh Bryan (1689–1753), served a brief stint at Whitefield's Bethesda Orphan House, then helped pastor two Independent Presbyterian churches in the Charleston area. At every post, Hutson actively promoted revival, including publishing his late wife's letters and diaries under the title *Living Christianity, Delineated* (1760).[38] Hart was often "much refreshed" by Hutson's visits.[39] He invited Hutson to preach from his pulpit on several occasions and supported Hutson when he stood against Charleston's vices. Hart praised Hutson for his "plain excellent discourse" from Matt 22:5, as the former actor, now walking in evangelical holiness, "bore his testimony also against stage plays." The sermon stirred Hart, though Hutson's other listeners "made light of it."[40]

Hart and Hutson also shared a friendship with John J. Zubly, pastor of the Independent Presbyterian church. Zubly later gained infamy for switching to the Loyalist position during the Revolution, but Hart valued him as a trusted gospel partner in Charleston.[41] In August of 1754, Hart spent a week at Zubly's home "very agreeably" and commented, "Oh how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity!"[42] The next month, Zubly returned the favor, staying with Hart and preaching several times, as "the Lord owned it for comfort to many souls."[43] Zubly returned again the next month, proclaiming

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[36] Oliver Hart, *The Character of a Truly Great Man Delineated, and His Death Deplored as a Public Loss: A Funeral Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. William Tennent, A.M.* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1777).

[37] Ibid., 4.

[38] William Hutson, *Living Christianity, delineated, in the Diaries and Letters of two Eminently pious Persons, lately deceased; vis. Mr. Hugh Bryan, and Mrs. Mary Hutson, Both of South Carolina. With a Preface by the Reverend Mr. John Conder, and the Reverend Mr. Thomas Gibbons* (London: J. Buckland, 1760).

[39] Hart, diary, October 16, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman University. For the Pauline theme of "spiritual refreshment" through friendships, see Rom 15:32; 1 Cor 16:17–18; 2 Cor 7:13; Phlm 7, 20.

[40] Hart, diary, October 18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman University.

[41] See Randall M. Miller, *"A Warm & Zealous Spirit": John J. Zubly and the American Revolution: A Selection of his Writings* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982).

[42] Hart, diary, August 17, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman University.

[43] Hart, diary September 17–18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman University.

Christ from the Prodigal Son parable and bearing "a faithful and excellent testimony against the stage plays."[44] When Hart's congregation experienced revival that fall, Zubly helped Hart to discern it as a true work of God.[45] Despite differences in ecclesiology, the mutual concern for conversion, revival, and holiness united Hart with many Presbyterians.

Hart and the Methodists

In the fall of 1769, as Whitefield was preparing for his final journey to America, John Wesley's Methodists were also making plans to send their first missionaries. In the Conference at Leeds on August 3, 1769, Wesley announced that two of their number, Richard Boardman (1738–82) and Joseph Pilmoor (1739–1825), would soon depart for the colonies, and he took up a collection for them as "a token of brotherly love." Whitefield also sent for the two young men. "As he had long been in America, he knew what directions to give us, and treated us with all the kindness and tenderness of a father in Christ," Pilmoor wrote. "Difference of sentiment made no difference in love and affection."[46] After Whitefield "prayed heartily for us," the two men sailed for America on August 21, 1769, believing "we had full power, according to the New Testament, to preach the everlasting gospel and do all possible good to mankind."[47]

Pilmoor eventually journeyed south, arriving in Charleston after a "very rugged" passage on January 19, 1772. He received a dismal first impression when he inquired about family prayers in the house where he lodged. Pilmoor's host informed him that the practice "might not be agreeable" to "the mixed multitude" in his house because "family prayer is very uncommon in Charleston."[48] Taking his leave of these "sons of Belial," Pilmoor struck out for the General Baptist meetinghouse. Knowing they would share his Arminian theology, Pilmoor offered to preach for them, and the next day delivered his first sermon in Charleston. The crowd was small on short notice, but "two ministers were present all the time, and behaved very well." One was Oliver Hart. Pilmoor recorded that "the Baptist minister, Mr. Hart, returned me thanks for my sermon and invited me to preach in his pulpit." Hart's invitation encouraged Pilmoor that God had work prepared for him in the city. After preaching to the General Baptists the following Sunday morning, he travelled to Hart's meetinghouse. Pilmoor stuck with standard evangelical subjects: the salvation of God from Psalm 18 in the afternoon, and the unity of the regenerate from Rom 8:14, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Pilmoor reported the Baptist meetinghouse was

[44] Hart, diary October 17–18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman University.

[45] Hart, diary, August 30, 1764, Hart MSS, Furman University.

[46] Albert Micajah Shipp, *The History of Methodism in South Carolina* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1834), 123.

[47] Ibid., 124.

[48] Ibid., 127.

"as full as it could hold" and that "the Lord was remarkably present."[49] He preached several more times from Hart's pulpit before leaving Charleston and even stayed in the home of a Baptist church member.

Given Hart's commitment to Calvinism, his acceptance of the Arminian Pilmoor into his pulpit is striking. Their partnership was possible for the same reason that both Wesley and Whitefield could send Pilmoor out with their full blessing: all viewed themselves as part of the same international, trans-denominational, evangelical revival movement. Pilmoor preached the gospel, called for conversions, and prayed for awakening, just as Hart did. After addressing Hart's congregation on "the law as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ," Pilmoor commented, "I am not so much satisfied with preaching the Law, as I am with the gospel; but it is necessary, and therefore I must submit for the good of mankind and glory of God." Hart could have made the same statement, and for this he received the young Methodist warmly. Pilmoor, in turn, left Charleston remembering Hart as "not only sensible, but truly evangelical, and very devout."[50]

Hart and the Anglicans

Anglicanism historically represented the furthest stretch for a Baptist's ecumenism. In a 1751 tract *The Dissenters' Reasons for Separating from the Church of England*, English Baptist John Gill articulated eleven matters of conscience that kept Baptists and other dissenters from uniting with the established church. These included the Church of England's man-made constitution, its national rather than congregational form and order, its unregenerate membership, its corrupt and unbiblical doctrines, its wrongly-administered ordinances, its creation of unbiblical ecclesiastical offices, its recognition of the King as head of the church, its pagan and Judaistic rites and ceremonies, its imposition of the Book of Common Prayer, and finally its "persecuting spirit" against all dissenters. Gill's pointed work left no doubt that disagreements between Baptists and Anglicans were numerous and significant. Indeed, Gill did not hesitate to announce, "we cannot think such a church is a true church of Christ."[51] *Dissenters' Reasons* resonated with nonconformists of all stripes, seeing multiple editions in Gill's own lifetime. Baptists in Virginia, for instance, knew firsthand the "persecuting spirit" of established Anglicanism, as David Thomas's *The Virginian Baptist* (1774) clearly demonstrates.[52]

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[49] Ibid., 128–29.

[50] Pilmoor's diary during this period is reproduced in Shipp, *History of Methodism*, 128–34.

[51] John Gill, *The Dissenters' Reasons for Separating from the Church of England. Which were published at the end of Dr. Gill's Answer to a Welch Clergyman, and Occasioned by the said writer*, 4th ed. (London: 1760), 14.

[52] David Thomas, *The Virginian Baptist, or A View and Defence of the Christian Religion, as it is professed by the Baptists of Virginia* (Baltimore: Enoch Story, 1774). See also

Despite the historic enmity between the two traditions, Hart was happy to work with clergymen who shared his evangelical commitments. This began with Whitefield, under whose preaching Hart had been converted. As a pastor, Hart supported Whitefield whenever he came through Charleston, as when the two men partnered in the conversion of future black evangelist John Marrant (1755–91).[53] Whitefield admired Hart and once advised a correspondent, "I would have you write to Mr. H[ar]t by the bearer, who is an experimental Baptist preacher from the northward. O that he may say something, that may do my dear family some good."[54]

Hart also befriended Richard Clarke, who served St. Philip's in Charleston from 1753–59, during which time he strongly supported the revival. In later years, Clarke gained notoriety for his wild apocalyptic predictions, as when his "enthusiasm rose to such a height that he let his beard grow and ran about the streets crying, Repent, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, but on the 25th he resigned his Benefice and embarked for England."[55] Clarke sadly ended his life impoverished and espousing universalism,[56] but in his Charleston years, Hart loved Clarke's evangelical fervor and enjoyed a most cordial relationship with him. "Waited, this afternoon, on the Rev. Mr. Clark, Rector of this place, who received me with all possible expressions of kindness; and after we had spent some time agreeably together, he took me in his chair to a funeral," Hart wrote. "I am heartily pleased to see the catholic spirit of which this man is possess'd; and I hope, and believe, he will be a blessing to this town."[57] For the rector of St. Philip's to invite the Regular Baptist minister to ride in his carriage was unusual enough, but Clarke later outdid this gesture by inviting Hart to conduct a funeral at the church cemetery in his place. This, to Hart, "discovered an extraordinary catholic spirit."[58]

The variety of personal friendships Hart maintained across the denominational spectrum testifies that the same "extraordinary catholic spirit" resided in him. By focusing on a mutual commitment to the gospel and a shared experience of evangelical piety, Hart was able to establish effective gospel

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Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 161–77.

[53] For this story, see John Marrant and William Aldridge, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (London: Gilbert and Plummer, 1785), 12–13.

[54] George Whitefield, *Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 2:116.

[55] William Henry Lyttleton to Board of Trade, September 1, 1759, British Public Record Office, Transcripts of records relating to South Carolina, 1663–1782, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, 28:213, cited in Little, *Southern Evangelicalism*, 148.

[56] See Dalcho, *Protestant Episcopal Church*, 183.

[57] Hart, diary, September 23, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman University.

[58] Hart, diary, October 27, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman University.

partnerships with Christians of sometimes vastly different doctrinal convictions. As David Bebbington has written, Hart's life demonstrates that the "experience of the revival brought Baptists closer to other Christian traditions. Evangelicals were sure that what united them, the gospel of salvation, was far more important than what divided them."[59] Hart's catholicity provides one clear signal of the revival's influence on Regular Baptist spirituality.

Oliver Hart's Regular Baptist Convictions

Hart's ecumenism had its limits. Kidd has called Hart "less a precisionist Baptist than a revivalist and moral reformer," but his Baptist convictions should not be undersold.[60] While Regular Baptists affirmed their solidarity with other evangelicals, they also remained passionate about biblical church order. This is evidenced by the Charleston Baptist Association's adoption of *A Summary of Church Discipline* (1774) which Hart and Francis Pelot had prepared for use in the churches.[61] The Charleston Confession asserted that "the catholick or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible" included "the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into One, under Christ."[62] Yet, Hart also declared that membership in a local church, ordered according to the Scriptures, was vital to Christian spirituality. He described "a particular gospel church" as consisting of "a company of saints, incorporated by a special covenant into one distinct body and meeting together in one place for the enjoyment of fellowship with each other and with Christ their Head in all his institutions to their mutual edification and the glory of God through the Spirit."[63] With other Regular Baptists, Hart continued to care deeply about biblically-ordered local church life, especially the issues of baptism, communion, and church membership.

"Agreeable to the Ancient Practice"

The ordinance of baptism was "the defining rite of the Baptist religion" and represented the most obvious point of difference between Regular Baptists and their evangelical friends. Unlike virtually all other participants in the Great Awakening, Baptists rejected the sprinkling of infants as a sign of cov-

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[59] David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 80–81.

[60] Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 257.

[61] *A Confession of Faith, Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of Many Congregations of Christians (Baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country. Adopted by the Baptist Association in Charlestown, South-Carolina. To which is annexed, A Summary of Church Discipline* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1774).

[62] Ibid., 71.

[63] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 2.

enant membership, insisting instead that biblical baptism was only "by immersion, upon a profession of their faith, agreeable to the ancient practice of John the Baptist and the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ."[64] Other traditions looked on immersion as a radical, offensive practice, as David Thomas wrote in *The Virginian Baptist*:

> [D]ecency one might think, would constrain you to administer that ordinance, in a more agreeable and becoming manner than you do. What need dipping of people? Is not a drop or two of water as good as the whole ocean? And is not pouring or sprinkling much better modes of baptism, than plunging; especially in such a freezing cold country as this is? Why then are you so bigotted to such an obsolete, unfashionable, odious ceremony, as to differ with all the rest of the Christian world about it? It is your obstinate attachment to this ridiculous manner of baptizing your converts, that chiefly serves to render your sect odious, so contemptible in the eyes of every other denomination that practices water baptism at all. There is no peculiar mode essential to the ordinance, therefore one will answer as well as another, and it is very impudent not to choose that which is the easiest, the latest and of greatest reputation. How vain must you then be to persist in your odd way! When there are so many learned remonstrances made against it; since it exposes you to universal derision and makes your very name a laughing stock; surely it would be your wisest course to alter it immediately and bear the reproach of so needless a deviation from the common custom of Christians no longer.[65]

Baptists were unmoved by these scoffs. For them, only the immersion of a confessing believer conformed to Scripture's pattern of baptism and communicated the rich symbolism "of our fellowship with Christ, in his death, burial, and resurrection—of the remission of our sins, and of our resurrection from the death of sin to new and holy life."[66] And so Hart rejoiced with Richard Furman over the significance of the baptisms of his wife and daughter: "But when you had the happiness of leading a wife and a daughter into the water and burying them with Christ in baptism; and having thus symbolically washed away their sins, of receiving them into Christ's sheepfold, methinks your soul was in raptures."[67]

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[64] Ibid., 17.

[65] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist*, 50.

[66] Oliver *Hart, An Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple, shewing the business of officers and private members in the church of Christ, and how their work should be performed; with some motives to excite professors ardently to engage in it* (Philadelphia: Aitken, 1785), 16.

[67] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, November 26, 1793, Hart MSS, Furman University.

Hart did not shrink from trying to persuade non-Baptists of his position. In 1780, Hart preached for several weeks to the people of Stoney River Presbyterian Church. One night, Captain John Stephenson, a member of the church, told Hart he was "convinced of the invalidity of infant sprinkling and the validity of believer's baptism, to which he desired to submit." Hart examined Stephenson, who satisfied Hart with his "gracious experience and knowledge of gospel doctrines."[68] A few weeks later, Hart gathered "a large congregation" for a service "under the shade of trees, near the banks of N. River." Though all were "professed Presbyterians," Hart preached for half an hour from Mark 16:16, "from which first I endeavoured to prove that believers are the only proper subjects of baptism, and that dipping is the mode of administration." He confessed that "How the people felt I don't know," though they all "behaved decently, and heard with much attention." After the sermon, Hart stepped down into the river. There, "in the face of the whole congregation, I baptized Capt. John Stephenson, a man of good character, and member of the Presbyterian Church." The ritual held the pedobaptist crowd spellbound: Stephenson was "the first person ever baptized in these parts or in this river, hope numbers may follow the example, though a new and strange thing to almost all who saw it. Never did I see people behave with more decorum." Afterward Hart added, "I hope he will not disgrace the Baptists by embracing their principles."[69]

"Though We Walk Not Together"

Hart's convictions regarding baptism carried significant implications for church membership. As he noted in the *Summary of Church Discipline*, all who are received into church communion "ought to be truly baptized in water, i.e., by immersion, upon a profession of their faith, agreeable to the ancient practice of John the Baptist and the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ."[70] Requiring baptism before membership and communion at the Lord's Table was not unique to Baptists; it was a fact "allowed by all," Baptist and pedobaptist alike. Baptists simply did not recognize pedobaptists to have been "truly baptized in water" and were convinced that "there is not one instance in the Word of God of any being admitted without it."[71] Thus, while Hart felt free to invite the Methodist Joseph Pilmoor or the Presbyterian John Zubly to preach in his pulpit, he could not admit them to church membership or to the Lord's Table.

This position did not square with the ecumenical ethos of the revival and Whitefield regularly confronted his Baptist friends over their "narrowness."

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[68] Oliver Hart, diary, July 14, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[69] Oliver Hart, diary, August 3, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[70] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 17.

[71] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 17. Hart cited Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:15; 18:8; 19:5; Rom 6:3–4; Gal 3:27; and Col 2:12 as establishing the biblical pattern of baptism preceding church membership.

He pleaded with Jenkin Jones, "Oh admit of a *mixed communion*. I think the glory of God requires this at your hands. May the Lord give you a right understanding in all things."[72] The Philadelphia Association would, in fact, speak to this issue at their meeting just months later. Prompted by the catholicity of the revival, the Cohansie Baptist Church inquired if a pious pedobaptist may be admitted to communion without baptism, and, furthermore, "doth not refusing admittance to such an one, discover want of charity in a church so refusing?" The association unanimously answered in the negative.[73]

The discussion was not new in Baptist life, as Whitefield pointed out in a 1767 preface to the *Works of John Bunyan*. Bunyan (1628–88), beloved by all evangelicals for his *Pilgrim's Progress*, had served as a Baptist pastor in Bedford, England, in the late seventeenth century. He invited controversy in 1672 by publishing *A Confession of my Faith, and A Reason of my Practice; or With who and who not, I can hold church-fellowship, or the communion of saints*. Here he announced that while he dared not fellowship with the openly profane, he would "with those that are visible saints by calling: with those that, by the word of the gospel, have been brought over to faith and holiness."[74] In classic Pietist fashion, Bunyan prioritized the invisible church of all the regenerate over any visible church form. Differences over water baptism should not bar God's children from communion in the local church, for "the edification of souls in the faith and holiness of the gospel, is of greater concernment, than an agreement in outward things."[75] When Christians differed over baptism, Bunyan advised, "love them still, forgive them, bear with them, and maintain church communion with them. Why? Because they are new creatures, because they are Christ's: for this swallows up all distinctions."[76] Bunyan even accused those who made baptism grounds for separation in church communion of being "carnal," "babyish Christians."[77] Several Particular Baptist ministers immediately "fell with might and main" upon Bunyan. Unmoved, he

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[72] George Whitefield to Jenkin Jones, May 12, 1740, in *Works*, 1:175 (emphasis original).

[73] A. D. Gillette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, from 1707 to 1807* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 42–43. The association cited three reasons for this ruling: first, they found in the commission of Christ no unbaptized persons admitted to communion (Matt 28:19–20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 12:13); second, it is the church's duty to maintain the ordinances as delivered in Scripture (2 Thess 2:15; 1 Cor 11:2; Isa 8:20); and third, "because we cannot see it agreeable, in any respect, for the procuring that unity, unfeigned love, and undisturbed peace, which is required, and ought to be in and among Christian communities (1 Cor 1:10; Eph 4:3)."

[74]John Bunyan, *Works*, ed. George Offor (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 2:604.

[75] Ibid., 2:611.

[76] Ibid., 2:612.

[77] Ibid., 2:613.

responded with *Differences in Judgment About Water Baptism No Bar to Communion*[78] and *Peaceable Principles and True*.[79] He maintained that "baptism with water, is neither a bar nor bolt to communion of saints, nor a door nor inlet to communion of saints."[80] He prayed, "God, banish bitterness out of the churches and pardon them that are the maintainers of schisms and divisions among the godly."[81] Whitefield praised Bunyan for his stance:

> But this, I must own, more particularly endears Mr. Bunyan to my heart; he was of a catholic spirit, the want of water adult baptism with this man of God, was no bar to outward Christian communion. And I am persuaded that if, like him, we were more deeply and experimentally baptized in to the benign and gracious influences of the blessed Spirit, we should be less baptized into the waters of strife, about circumstances and non-essentials. For being thereby rooted and grounded in the love of God, we should necessarily be constrained to think, and let think, bear with and forbear one another in love; and without saying "I am of Paul, Apollos, or Cephas," have but one grand, laudable, disinterested strife, namely who should live, preach and exalt the ever-loving, altogether lovely Jesus most.[82]

While Hart celebrated the unity of the universal church, he did not believe Scripture permitted him to adopt these more liberal standards of local church communion. In 1782, Hart and the rest of the Philadelphia Association responded to the question, "what measures ought to be taken with a sister church who holds and actually admits unbaptized persons to the Lord's Supper?" Again, their response was unequivocal: "We observe, that such a church may and ought in the first instance, to be written to by a sister church, exhorting them to desist from such a practice, and to keep the ordinances as they were delivered to them in the word of God."[83]

Hart addressed this issue at length in a 1790 letter to Furman. [84] The Charleston Association, led by Furman, had recently approved the admittance of some Baptists into membership in a pedobaptist congregation. From his home in Hopewell, New Jersey, Hart vigorously objected. He noted that both Baptists and pedobaptists agreed that baptism was "essential to church membership and communion." With this point established, "it naturally follows that no society of Christians, however pious, can impose a regular orderly church, upon a gospel plan, without baptism." From this ground, Hart concluded that "it cannot be consistent with good order to dismiss our mem-

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[78] Ibid., 2:616–47.
[79] Ibid., 2:648–57.
[80] Ibid., 2:656.
[81] Ibid., 2:657.
[82] Whitefield, *Works*, 4:307–8.
[83] Gillette, *Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 200.
[84] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, March 2, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman University.

bers to any church whatever which is so disorderly as to set aside an ordinance, which Christ in his gospel holds as essentially necessary to church communion and fellowship." Hart believed that pedobaptists were consistent in their position, and that Baptists should be, too. Pedobaptists would "never do" what the Association had done and dismiss their members into communion with a Baptist church. This would legitimize believer's baptism, which "would end to bring down their infant-sprinkling." In the same way, Hart argued, the Association's approval of its members joining pedobaptist churches comprised "a tacit acknowledgement that infant sprinkling is equally valid with believer's baptism" and opened the door for its members to "slide into the bosom of pedobaptist churches." He closed by emphatically stating that "there need be no dismissing of members to churches with whom we are not in communion; for we ought to hold communion with all 'true Christian churches.'"

Hart realized that his strong ecclesiological statements did not savor of the catholic spirit he exhibited on so many other occasions. Hart did not intend to be sectarian, simply obedient to Christ's commands:

> I hope nothing that I have said will be construed into bigotry, or the want of Christian regard to pedobaptists. I think the whole tenor of my conduct acquits me from such a charge. I sincerely declare, that I esteem a number of pedobaptists as Christians, in preference to many Baptists, and could freely commune with them at the Lord's Table, if my Master did not forbid by making Baptism an *essential* prerequisite to church membership; and we are to walk by this. With regard to our pedobaptist brethren I wish them well and forbid them not, though they walk not with us.[85]

Hart's letter to Furman supplies valuable insight into the ecumenical tensions Regular Baptists experienced in the wake of the revival. Evangelical piety provided sufficient grounds for cooperation in preaching the gospel and spreading the revival. Yet, sincere piety did not set aside what to him were clear biblical directives regarding "a regular orderly church, upon a gospel plan." Regular Baptists held church order to be far more significant than did Whitefield or Bunyan. On the other side of the new birth, both Baptists and pedobaptists must walk in obedience to Christ as best they both knew how, even if they could not walk together.

"Associating with the Humble Baptists"

Though Hart enjoyed a wide acceptance in Charleston society, he understood that a stigma was attached to being Baptist. He wrote to Furman, "I wish for the interest of the religion we profess, we may all grow in grace, knowledge, and understanding, that the Baptists may be distinguished by

[85] Ibid. (emphasis original).

something superior to folly and meanness."[86] This negative perception was more pronounced in Virginia, but Baptists everywhere occupied a lower rung on the social ladder.[87] This is clearly seen in the journals of Charles Woodmason (1720?–89).[88] In 1766, Woodmason took ordination vows in the Anglican Church and accepted an itinerant mission to the Carolina backcountry. During this mission, Woodmason regularly skewered the "New Light Baptists" in his journal, including Regulars and Separates alike. He condemned Baptists for revival enthusiasm: "They set about effecting in an instant, what requires both labour and time—they apply to the passions, not the understanding of the people." He also accused them of hypocrisy and immorality: "does your assembling together to see a few worthless wretches dipp'd in water, and viewing their nakedness (which some have purposely expos'd to your view) tend to edification?" he asked his congregation. The Baptists did not help the relationship. Among other abuses he suffered, Woodmason reported, "The people took up two others for entering the house where I was when in bed—stealing my gown—putting it on—and then visiting a woman in bed, and getting to bed to her, and making her give out next day, that the Parson came to bed to her—this was a scheme laid by the Baptists—and man and woman prepared for the purpose." Still, Woodmason did not condemn all Baptists. "I know, and greatly respect, many worthy persons among them and I wish that there were many more such," he admitted; "it is very plain that the errors of some of our neighbors do not so much proceed from a bad heart (as is the case with another sect) as from a wrong head . . ."[89]

Hart appears to be one of the wrongheaded Baptists Woodmason tolerated, for he records delivering a parcel of letters and books to "the Reverend Mr. Hart" in Charleston on September 7, 1766.[90] Nevertheless, Hart happily identified himself with the frontier Baptists Woodmason despised and accepted the scorn that came along with it. He remembered his hero, Whitefield, scoffing at immersion. "The great and good Mr. Whitfield exclaim'd—'These Anabaptists are stealing sheep, they wash my sheep and they fleece my sheep,'" Whitefield clearly intending "'washing'" as "a term of aspersion."[91] On one occasion, Hart mentioned a young woman whom he feared was "perhaps raised too high to associate with the humble Baptists." In reflecting on the young lady's hesitancy, he remembered a similar case from his

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[86] Ibid.

[87] See Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 161–71; David Thomas, *The Virginian Baptist: or A View and defence of the Christian religion, as it is professed by the Baptists of Virginia* (Baltimore: Enoch Story, 1774).

[88] See Richard J. Hooker, "Introduction," in Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution*, ed. Richard J. Hooker (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), xi–xxxix.

[89] Woodmason, *Carolina Backcountry*, 117, 45.

[90] Ibid., 6.

[91] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, March 2, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman University.

past experience: a lady who became convinced of Baptist principles, yet remained unwilling to hold communion with the Baptists. She "wished me to baptize her, that she might join the Church of England. I could not find a freedom to do it," Hart recalled. "It is a pity that grandeur should have so much influence on the minds of those who would be deem'd followers of that humble Jesus, who had nowhere to lay his head."[92]

Conclusion

In the end, Furman was right to remember Hart as "a consistent, liberal Baptist."[93] Hart described his own principled ecumenism when he praised his friend William Tennent III:

> It may not be amiss to observe, that his religious sentiments were open, free and generous, built upon principles of true catholocism [sic]; not influenced by bigotry or party spirit. He thought that religion should be left entirely free, and that there should be no manner of constraint upon the conscience. He was of opinion, that there was a wise providence in permitting people to think differently about modes of worship, and therefore valued good men of every denomination.[94]

The evangelical catholicity of Oliver Hart and his Regular Baptist friends stands as a lasting testimony to their participation in the Great Awakening. This should cause readers to reconsider the popular perception of Regular Baptists as standing outside the revival tradition. The stories of Hart, Jenkin Jones, Isaac Chanler, and other Regular Baptists reveal a rich, revival spirituality demonstrated not only by their catholicity, but their commitment to the Spirit's work, love of revival narrative, and vigorous evangelistic and missionary activity, to name a few prominent themes.[95] In truth, theirs was a piety of both order and ardor.

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[92] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, November 9, 1791, Hart MSS, Furman University.

[93] Richard Furman, *Rewards of Grace Conferred on Christ's Faithful People: A Sermon, Occasioned by the Decease of the Rev. Oliver Hart, A.M.* (Charleston: J. McIver, 1796), 24.

[94] Hart, *Great Man*, 26.

[95] I explore each of these themes and more in "Order and Ardor."

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Interview with Professor Grant Macaskill of Aberdeen University

***with* Ray Van Neste**
Union University

Professor Grant Macaskill recently came to Aberdeen University to fill the Kirby Laing Chair of New Testament Exegesis, the chair which was first held by Howard Marshall. I had the privilege of meeting Grant at the service of thanksgiving for the life of Howard Marshall and was greatly encouraged. So, I jumped at the opportunity to interview him and introduce him to our readers.

So, tell us about your academic journey. What led to your interest in pursuing academic biblical studies as a vocation? When did you know this was what you wanted to do? Where did you receive your degrees?

I never really intended to become an academic. I think my story is really one of God's providence working to place me where he wanted me to be, both through and in spite of my own bad decisions. When I first started university, it was with a view to becoming a veterinarian; I came from a rural background (specifically, a crofting one) and was more interested in working with animals than with people. So, when I was 17, I began my studies at the School of Veterinary Medicine at Glasgow University. But I knew pretty soon that it wasn't for me, and by my second year I was spending more time reading theology than studying histology. I decided (with all the arrogance of a 19 year old) that I was called to the ministry, shifted over to complete a degree in General Science, in order to finish more quickly, and began the process of applying to become a candidate for the ministry in my church. I was accepted for this and started my training at the Free Church College in Edinburgh (the institution now known as Edinburgh Theological Seminary) in 1995. With hindsight, I realize that I was probably attracted to the ministry for the wrong reasons and that what I told myself was "God's leading" was actually just my own interests and desires. But God was undoubtedly at work in and through it all, for that process led me into a course where I was rigorously schooled in the biblical languages and robustly trained in the classical doctrines of systematic theology, especially as these were developed in the Reformed tradition.

Towards the end of the course, I began to recognize that I was not a good fit for the ministry. Various things prompted the conclusion, but probably the key was a period of time when I realized that my walk with God was not what it should be and that my moral life was quite unhealthy. In the first instance, it prompted me to re-evaluate myself with a new measure of honesty, including my sense of call to the ministry, but it also kick-started a longer

period of reflection on how my theology shaped (or failed to shape) my identity. At the core of those reflections was the question of whether my personal identity as a Christian was really and properly shaped by my union with Christ, or whether I was substituting something else, perhaps just conforming to a set of cultural expectations. Those questions have followed me ever since.

Thankfully, I was given the opportunity at that time to work with a church in Dundee, the church that had once been pastored by Robert Murray M'Cheyne, doing a combination of youth work and teaching, while I tried to work out what I was going to do (and, as importantly, who I was). It was a pleasantly eclectic congregation, in one of Scotland's quirkier cities, and the folks there were good to me. So, for about 4 years, I worked there, largely involved in the teaching side of things but also doing some outreach youth work with some of the kids who hung around on the streets. (I also had a sideline as a singer-songwriter, which has left some embarrassing traces online). The side of the job I enjoyed the most, though, was the teaching side, and it often pushed my knowledge of biblical studies, in particular, to the limits. Not quite sure why, I began to entertain the idea of pursuing a PhD on apocalyptic literature, which many of the conversations concerned. I originally approached Dr. Alistair Wilson at the Highland Theological College, but he (very graciously) thought I would be better to look at St. Andrews and to talk to Richard Bauckham about whether he would be willing to supervise me. I really didn't think Richard would be interested in supervising someone whose training in biblical studies was at the seminary level, and not university level, and didn't expect the conversation would go anywhere, but he turned out to be quite enthusiastic about my proposal and encouraged me to apply. A few months later, I was a newbie doctoral student at the University of St. Andrews.

Most of my fellow students were very clearly set on pursuing academic careers, but I still wasn't sure what I wanted to do. I was enjoying the studies and was happy to leave it at that. Every year, they would go back to the States for the SBL Annual Meeting, partly to ensure that they were visible when the time came for hires, and I would stay in St. Andrews. When I entered my final year, I was quite open to the possibility of going back into farming, but Richard encouraged me to apply for the British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme. I put together a proposal to develop a critical edition of the *Slavonic Texts of 2 Enoch* but didn't really expect to be successful, since the award rate is so low; only about 6 percent of applicants are awarded the fellowship. Again, though, things worked out and I was given the fellowship, which allowed me to continue in St. Andrews, but now as a staff member. A year and a half into the fellowship, the University advertised a lectureship (the equivalent of an "assistant professor" role in the States), which I applied for. I wasn't actually on the original shortlist, as my first book hadn't been released yet, but it came out about 10 days before the interviews were due to take place and, as a result, the University added me to the shortlist. I got the

job and at that point the penny dropped that perhaps this was what I was meant to be doing. I taught at St. Andrews until September 2015, when I moved to Aberdeen.

What is your church background?

My family is from the Isle of Lewis, one of the Gaelic-speaking islands off the north-west coast of Scotland, and the strongest denomination there is the Free Church of Scotland. It's a Presbyterian denomination with a rich history of Reformed theology, and one of its strengths has been the place of serious theological reflection in the day to day life of the church, especially in the Gaelic-speaking communities. In particular, there is a real importance attached to reflection on Christology: after-church fellowships would often involve long conversations about the two natures of Christ and how they bear on our salvation. Sermons, which were often lengthy, were seldom pristine exercises in oratory, and they would probably not win many prizes for homiletics, but often evinced a richly theological engagement with the text. I feel that I learned as much about theological interpretation from some of those sermons and fellowships as I ever learned from a textbook. John Webster actually told me recently that a sermon he once heard from a Free Church pulpit in the islands was one of the best works of theology he had ever encountered. It wasn't confined to ministers, either; it was simply part of the culture that we talked about and read theology, particularly that of the Reformers and the Puritans. In fact, when I was searching online recently for John Owen's *Christologia,* the first thing I found was a scan of a Gaelic translation of Owen that I had seen on the bookshelves of a few of the old worthies on the island. The Free Church traditionally practiced exclusive psalmody, too, which fostered a particular way of thinking about canon and Christian life: to sing psalms exclusively as Christian praise requires a certain communal sense of what it means to read the Old Testament "Christianly" and a certain core competency in reading the Old Testament theologically.

Over the years, I've really come to appreciate that theological depth, particularly when I compare it to the general state of evangelical theology today. It worries me that the range and depth of the theological tradition that I come from is increasingly narrowed and emptied of its depths, as evangelicals focus (often rightly) on certain issues, usually those that mark boundaries, but consequently neglect others that are actually more central or fundamental. The result can be something that is disturbingly Christless. My wife and I were so troubled by one example of this in the congregation that we attended (and had helped to plant) in St Andrews that we felt we had to leave, along with a number of others. That was something we never thought we would ever do. I don't like to discuss it, but I mention it here because it was an example to me of how a theologically deficient ministry can be pastorally toxic. We can probably all think of examples of this that we have encountered, just as we can probably all think of examples to the contrary, of ministries that were

vibrant, mature, and effective. That is something that I feel burdened over in my current position.

So, for our last year in St. Andrews we worshipped with a wonderful independent evangelical congregation (Cornerstone: www.cornerstonestandrews.org) that is very serious about theology. It was a nourishing and challenging home for us and we were quite sad to move on. We have only just moved home to be nearer Aberdeen and haven't yet worked out where we should settle.

What are some of the key academic influences on you?

As my doctoral supervisor, Richard Bauckham was, and continues to be, a big influence. Richard has never particularly compartmentalized areas of research: he writes on theology and Christian ethics as easily as he does on biblical studies, and for a pastoral as well as an academic readership. It's been really important to me to have an academic mentor who demonstrated such a natural integration. He has also been wonderfully kind to me over the years, and that has also left its mark: it is easy to be sucked into the self-importance of the academic world, and having a supervisor who was humble and kind—who acted like a servant—really helped to keep me grounded.

There have been others who have shown a similar level of kindness to me over the years and who have likewise embodied a particular kind of academic humility. They may come from different traditions, but I've found them to be incredibly supportive of me and always willing to talk, and sometimes argue, about the interpretation of Scripture. People like Loren Stuckenbruck, Philip Esler, John Barclay, John Collins, and Philip Alexander all fall into that category. I had the opportunity to get to know Howard Marshall a little before he passed away, too, which really meant a lot to me. As a student, I had a number of Howard's books on my shelf: he was a real hero for evangelical academics. It's hard to put into words what it means to be in what was Howard's chair: it's very special.

Over the years, I have also been quite significantly influenced by those involved in the "theological interpretation" movement. When I was a doctoral student in St. Andrews, Christopher Seitz was still there. He ran a weekly seminar on Scripture and Theology, to which a number of us were drawn. It was my first exposure to the contemporary academic discussion of theological interpretation, including its criticisms of historical criticism and the underlying modernism of much "conservative" exegesis and biblical theology, and it proved to be quite significant for my development. What I found fascinating was how much of the theological material we were looking at resembled the interpretation of Scripture that I remember from sermons in the Free Church, which was so different from the way that we are typically trained to read Scripture in the academy. It's not that I want to jettison the latter, or to minimize its importance, but that seminar really helped me to see something of the tendency to "naturalize" our interaction with Scripture and to reduce theology to historical criticism.

As a result, I've also benefitted richly from some great conversation partners who work on the systematic theology side of things, and these have been really pivotal to my own development. Probably the most important of these is Ivor Davidson, with whom I worked in St. Andrews and who was endlessly willing to talk about systematic and historical issues when I was working on my study of Union with Christ. Although I had a good classical theological formation in my church background, my training in modern theology wasn't as thorough and my knowledge of patristic literature was patchy. Ivor is always a great conversation partner, with a remarkable knowledge of the scholarship. Towards the end of my time in St. Andrews, John Webster arrived and also became part of those conversations; to have a leading theologian who was willing to talk positively about the Puritans was a real gift. Now that I am in Aberdeen, I am deeply grateful to have colleagues like Tom Greggs, Paul Nimmo, Phil Ziegler, John Swinton, and Brian Brock: what I love about them is that they want to do theology in a way that takes Scripture seriously, and they want to do theology for the church. They model something really special on that level and have really encouraged me to do academic work that is true to the gospel.

At the end of the day, though, I would say that the biggest academic influence on me was my minister for over 10 years, Rev. Alasdair I. Macleod. Alasdair was my minister for a year or two when I was a student in Edinburgh and then again for the best part of a decade in St. Andrews. Every week, he would wrestle with the text of Scripture and would bring that into the pulpit. He read widely, stayed abreast of developments in biblical studies and academic theology, and grappled with what these might bring to the reading of the text; his sermons were enriched by that erudition, but remained as accessible (and powerful!) to the old man who wandered into the church one week, and then came every Sunday until he passed away, as they did to the doctoral students in the congregation. Alasdair is one of the reasons that I really believe in the idea of the pastor as public theologian.

Describe your approach to biblical studies.

In some ways my approach is quite variegated: I do a lot of work on Jewish backgrounds/contexts, I do work on the interface with systematic/historical theology, and I do work on theological ethics. On the surface, these can look quite different, but they are all integrated by what, for me, is basic: the proper identification of my object of study. To identify it as "New Testament," rather than *just* as something in or behind the text (e.g., Paul), is not just about breadth of focus, but about the recognition that the New Testament matters as an object of study because it is *Scripture*. That demands a very different mode of engagement, one that necessarily articulates with the theological disciplines and with the life of the church. None of that takes away from the historical particularity of the New Testament and its constituent parts, and I think it is a mistake for those who want to engage in theological

interpretation to neglect proper historical-critical engagement, but it fundamentally resists any idea that such historical analysis fulfills the requirements of New Testament study. Historical criticism is only ever one element in a more complex engagement. That's not to disparage any historical-critical work, even when practiced by those who see it as an end in itself, but to recognize that the proper study of the New Testament *qua* New Testament demands further levels of engagement and submission.

One of the particular dangers facing evangelicals involved in biblical studies is that we see ourselves as having a strong commitment to Scripture, but we don't necessarily engage with it *as* Scripture. We see our task as one of practicing some kind of faithful equivalent of historical criticism, rather than one that necessarily moves beyond it. So, we generate what we see to be faithful accounts of Paul or of John, but to engage with New Testament as Scripture requires us to read our authors canonically, as part of the living word of God to the church. Again, I think we often reduce that vitally theological issue to something naturalistic: we see a canonical reading of Paul, John, etc., as simply a matter of locating their writings in the bigger narrative that runs from creation to eschaton. That's part of it, sure, but it's still a long way short of what we encounter in the great exegetes like Calvin, who take seriously the fact that they are dealing with a living voice and that its reception by the church has been subject to divine providence. So, even when applying the principle of *semper reformanda*, the history of theological reception of the text is never simply jettisoned, since that would be potentially contemptuous of providence and the working of the Spirit, but is instead *sifted*.

That has been a big part of my more recent work, whether on Union with Christ or Intellectual Humility. In both cases, I feel that I have been very dependent on the legacy of the great interpreters of Scripture that have gone before, particularly Calvin, but through him some of the medieval and patristic interpreters.

What are some of your current and recent research projects?

My last monograph was a study of *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). I wanted to trace the ways in which the union between God and those he has redeemed is represented across the New Testament, not just in individual books, and to trace the distinctive representation of Jesus as the one by whom this union is mediated. I was quite heavily influenced by both patristic and Reformed accounts of union, with chapters devoted to each, and consequently quite attentive to the place that finely grained Christological discussions have in understanding the nature of our union with God, through our union with the mediator. At some stage soon, I want to develop a more popular version of the study, as I think there are some really important pastoral issues at stake.

My current research project is on The New Testament and Intellectual Humility. I was given a grant in 2014 by Saint Louis University and the John Templeton Foundation to develop the study, as part of a bigger international

project looking at the *Philosophy and Theology of Intellectual Humility*. It is very much at the theological and ethical end of New Testament studies and oriented towards the life of the church. To a large extent, my interest in the life of the mind came out of my work on union with Christ, since the epistemic and noetic dimensions of the union (basically, the way in which being united to Christ changes the way we see and think about the world) were a big part of that study. It was nice to be funded specifically to do something theological on the New Testament, and the conferences hosted by the project were pretty fascinating exercises in interdisciplinary research.

I have two further projects on the horizon. One is a joint study with my former colleague David Moffitt, on the place of the ascension of Jesus in New Testament soteriology. The other is a long standing interest in autistic spectrum disorders and the church. There is a lot of research on autism here in Aberdeen, and I think we can develop a really important study. It's something I have felt burdened about for a long time but couldn't really explore meaningfully until I came here.

What is your vision for the work of biblical and theological studies at Aberdeen University?

I obviously want Aberdeen to maintain its reputation as home to critically rigorous biblical and theological work. All of my predecessors in the New Testament chair have been known for such work, as have our colleagues in Old Testament and in the theology disciplines. But Aberdeen also has a reputation for being a place where the sub-disciplines are well-integrated, where theologians and biblical scholars converse and have some shared identification of what their task is. While they were in Aberdeen, Howard Marshall and Francis Watson both exemplified this, though in quite different ways; on the theology side of things, so did John Webster. Among many of the current staff, such an attitude towards the natural integration of the disciplines is just part of the atmosphere, reflected in the joint seminars that are a regular feature of the life of the school. I had a sense when I was interviewed for the job that my own instinct to integrate was one of the reasons I was considered a good fit for the department. So, in some ways, my vision for biblical and theological studies at Aberdeen is simply that they continue to do what they have done for a long time. At the same time, that sense of fellowship between the sub-disciplines (like all fellowship) can easily be allowed to grow cold, if it is not deliberately maintained. My vision, then, would be one of a school that *continues* to see such integration of Bible and theology and to recognize it as a core part of our identity.

Within this, Aberdeen's reputation for robust practical theology, especially through the work of John Swinton and Brian Brock, has a particular significance and it's an important one to highlight. Their work is centrally concerned with the life of the church, and I think one of the keys to Aberdeen's identity is a widely shared sense that what we are doing matters—has academic significance—because of the church. We're not just a sub-discipline of history, or of philosophy, or of religious studies, even though all of those

things are parts of our activity. For many of us, our academic work is something we see as "calling," as service. That may not be true of us all, but it's certainly true of many of us, and it really shapes the identity of the department. I don't think it needs to be seen as being at odds with the robustly critical character of what we do, either.

I have heard you express an interest in training pastor-theologians. Tell us what you have in mind and why this is important. What makes Aberdeen a good place for this sort of training?

The fact is that, through the centuries, most of the truly great scholarship on the Bible and theology has been done in the church, by those who serve in some capacity as pastors. That's true of the celebrated figures of biblical and theological scholarship, but it's also true of the humble ministries that have "rightly divided the word of truth" for Christian communities week after week. Through the modern period, though, church and academy have had a messier relationship, often driven by the principled exclusion of confessional concerns from "scientific" study of the bible, which in turn has fostered a suspicion of academic theology. One of the legacies of this has been that the genre of doctoral research in biblical studies has become characterized by certain kinds of research, done in certain kinds of ways.

Part of my vision, then, is simply that those who see their vocation as pastoral, rather than academic, recognize that they may have the gifts to allow them to develop a significant piece of research based on the New Testament that may be a gift for the church when it is eventually published. This may well involve a different kind of project from the one that the career academic would develop, perhaps one more obviously aligned with the disciplines of practical theology, but it will be no less critical or robust.

On the other side of that equation, though, the process of developing a research based doctorate is one that fosters a different kind of learning from taught programs. Students will acquire a range of skills and knowledge through their own work of identifying relevant needs and will typically do so under their own steam. That means that a particular kind of self-knowledge is acquired, often by exposure to radically different viewpoints to the ones we hold to ourselves. I think the pastor-scholars who emerge from such processes of formation have distinctive gifts to offer the church.

I saw this with one particular candidate in St. Andrews who became the Senior Pastor at the church that we attended towards the end of our time there. His doctoral thesis involved a study of Union with Christ in Ephesians (specifically, on Christ as the messianic builder of the temple), and it has continued to be deeply influential on his pastoral work. While the thesis itself has continued to be a gift to the church, he would probably say that what he learned from the process was as important. He found the doctoral process to be grueling (probably because of my supervision . . .), but the challenge left him with an incredible depth of resources.

So, while doctoral work is not for everyone, I think it is important for some pastors to consider it, as part of their calling to be pastor-theologians. I think they should recognize that they have real scholarship to offer both church and academy.

There are a couple of factors that make Aberdeen a good option for those interested. The most important is probably that of ethos, as I mentioned earlier. Aberdeen is a place where the connectedness of the disciplines is recognized and where the place of the church is taken seriously, not just in practical theology, but in all the theology and biblical disciplines. For a leading research university, that is an unusual set of characteristics.

The other factor is more mundane, though perhaps very significant for many who are interested. Aberdeen can accommodate both part-time and full-time, distance-taught doctoral research. We have a number of students who are based overseas, particularly in the States, working on both a part-time and a full-time basis. For many pastors, this can be a really big factor: it means they don't have to leave their ministries entirely, and it makes the possibility a more affordable one. We've been working hard to make sure that those who are not residential in Aberdeen still feel part of the community and still have access to resources: we record all our seminars and post them to a secure website, and we try to have as many of our library resources as possible available electronically.

Thank you, Grant, for taking the time to do this interview with us. I greatly appreciate your personal story and your vision for academic work and ministry. May your tribe increase!

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Book Reviews

L. Michael Morales (ed.). *Cult and Cosmos: Tilting toward a Temple-Centred Theology*. Biblical Tools and Studies 18. Leuven: Peeters, 2014. xiv + 429 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-9042930254. €78.00 (Hardback).

The cultic texts of the Hebrew Bible have received increased attention during the past three decades. One major avenue of research has been exploration of the literary, theological, and social links that tie together creation and cult. L. Michael Morales, in a doctoral dissertation completed under Gordon Wenham, made his own significant contribution to the field (subsequently published as *The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus* [Biblical Tools and Studies 15; Leuven: Peeters, 2012]). Now in this edited volume, Morales brings together twenty-four seminal publications that have shaped the wider discussion. The authors represented are, as Morales states, "major voices in one particular conversation taking place at the cultic studies banquet—that discussion pertaining, for the most part, to the interface between temple cult and cosmos" (p. 9). The explicit purpose of this volume, therefore, is to enable readers to better understand a vital aspect of ancient Israel's (cultic) culture and literature (p. 1).

The articles, essays, and excerpts reprinted in *Cult and Cosmos* parade a veritable who's who of Old Testament scholarship. The first section of the collection focuses on comparative studies. The six contributors here—William Albright, Eric Burrows, John Lundquist, Ronald Clements, Richard Clifford, and Lawrence Stager—demonstrate the temple ideology shared across the ancient Near East. Lundquist, for instance, argues for the presence of a common conceptual understanding of temple that transcended language, culture and political boundaries. He continues to outline a nineteen-point typology associated with ancient shrines (pp. 52–54). This wider cultural milieu forms a conceptual backdrop against which to compare and contrast the Israelite understanding of sacred space.

Part two is more closely concerned with the biblical texts. Each of the publications reproduced here examines connections between creation and cult either within the Pentateuch or across the Hebrew Bible more broadly. Examples include Peter Kearney's exploration of intertextual connections between Exod 25–40 and Gen 1 (pp. 119–31), and Gordon Wenham's frequently cited essay which makes a case for the utilization of sanctuary symbolism in the Garden of Eden narrative (pp. 161–66). Again, the caliber of the scholars represented is obvious. In addition to those just mentioned, contributors include Walter Vogels, Moshe Weinfeld, Joaquim Azevedo, Steven Holloway, Joseph Blenkinsopp, Jon Levenson, Robert Luyster, Herbert May, Bernard Batto, and Kyle McCarter.

The final section of *Cult and Cosmos* is more abstract and theological. Mircea Eliade, Terence Fretheim, Bernard Och, Frank Gorman, Gary Anderson, and Michael Fishbane explore, from different angles, the concept of sacred space and its relation to a theology of creation—both within the Hebrew canon and in reception history. Along these lines, Fishbane argues that the symbolism of "sacred centre" forms the framework of the wider biblical narrative that stretches from Eden to postexilic restoration (pp. 389–408).

Needless to say, in a review of this length it is impossible to interact with and assess each of the publications represented. All is not lost, however, for the twenty-four scholars included frequently cite, discuss, and disagree with one another. In fact, as one reads though the collection the overwhelming feeling is of stepping into a lively conversation. That is one of the real merits of Morales's work. The bringing together of these various pieces—some of which are difficult to obtain—allows readers to fully immerse themselves in the debate (even if some transcription errors are apparent—e.g., pp. 168, 171). The cumulative effect is palpable; the presence of a cult-cosmos connection seems by the end of the volume to be self-evident.

Cult and Cosmos thus has potential to readjust thinking with respect to a sorely neglected segment of Old Testament theology. The need for such readjustment is readily evident. Although many of Julius Wellhausen's conclusions have been challenged or even rejected outright in recent scholarship, his disparaging conception of Old Testament legal and cultic material lives on, encouraging, at least indirectly, the continuing disregard of these texts in both academic and popular thinking. Indeed, Morales lays the blame for the neglect of cultic studies squarely at Wellhausen's feet (pp. 3–4). The various writings gathered here, however, act as a panacea which in turn offers the opportunity to refocus hermeneutical lenses so as to better enable interpretation of the Old Testament.

With respect to the potential ramifications this resurgence of interest has for Old Testament studies Morales makes a suggestive claim:

> The temple cultus, living up to its primordial mound *mythos*, has emerged from the waters of twentieth century criticism as an *axis mundi* for biblical studies, an *omphalos* for the discipline of biblical theology. . . . The cosmic mountain is indeed the matrix for every major biblical theme—perhaps even the end towards which the discipline of biblical theology gropes. (pp. 4, 10)

Whether Morales is correct remains to be seen. What this volume makes patently apparent, however, is that ignoring a concept so integral to the world and word of ancient Israel must inevitably result in hermeneutical loss for the interpreter.

G. Geoffrey Harper
Croydon, New South Wales

G. Scott Gleaves. *Did Jesus Speak Greek? The Emerging Evidence of Greek Dominance in First-Century Palestine*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2015. xxvi + 214 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1498204330. $27.00 (Paperback).

Did Jesus Speak Greek? had its origins in G. Scott Gleaves's doctoral dissertation, written under Rodney Cloud at Amridge University. In it, Gleaves argues against the prevailing assumption of the dominance of Aramaic in early first century Palestinian culture and posits instead that Greek was the dominant spoken and written language of first century Galilee.

In his first chapter, "Did Jesus and His Disciples Speak Greek?" Gleaves directly confronts the "Aramaic Hypothesis" that prevails in biblical studies, which assumes an Aramaic background of some sort for the Greek New Testament. The exact nature of this Semitic background varies among scholars, from those who posit that at least some of the New Testament was originally composed in Aramaic, then translated into Greek, to the view that Aramaic sources were used in the composition of the New Testament writings, or the more basic assumption that the words of Jesus and others in the New Testament narratives were originally spoken in Aramaic and later translated by the New Testament authors. Gleaves reexamines the biblical evidence, including the preference for the LXX (Septuagint) in Old Testament citations by the evangelists, and the preservation of Aramaic words and phrases in the Gospel narratives, which he interprets as indicative of the rarity of Jesus conversing in Aramaic (p. 24).

The second chapter broadens the focus to examine the "Emerging Dominance of Greek in First Century CE Palestine." He examines the linguistic environment of the New Testament environs, and notes four languages, which he concisely categorizes as Latin (administrative), Hebrew (sacred), Aramaic (declining), and Greek (common). It is the characterization of Aramaic as declining that needs the most scrutiny. He acknowledges Aramaic as the mother tongue of Jesus and His disciples, and the natural influence it exerts on the Greek of the New Testament, but he denies its linguistic dominance in the region in this era (p. 52).

Gleaves's argument for the increasing dominance of Greek begins with his examination of the date and origin of the LXX. Recognizing the historical problems with the surviving accounts, he nonetheless believes we can ascertain that in the century-and-a-half preceding Jesus' birth, Jerusalem priests had sufficient facility in Greek to produce the translation, which was widely used by the Jews of Jesus' day, and adopted by the earliest Christians. He then summarizes the widespread Hellenistic influence in Galilee during Jesus' lifetime. From this he concludes that while most Jews would have been bilingual, or even trilingual, Greek would have been the language of choice for widespread communication (p. 79).

Chapter three focuses on "The Linguistic Proficiency in Greek for Some of the Primary Disciples of Jesus." After surveying the broader use of the term "disciple," Gleaves examines the twelve who were chosen to a special

role in Jesus' apostolic mission. He concludes that Jesus carefully selected those who were comfortable in both Jewish and Hellenistic cultural settings, and for whom bilingual communication ability in both Aramaic and Greek would have been very natural (p. 129). He goes on to note that this is something they would have shared in common with other early church leaders, including Jesus' brothers James and Jude, John Mark, Luke, and Paul.

The final substantive section provided by Gleaves turns to the question of the linguistic character of the New Testament, "Aramaic and Portions of the Greek New Testament." Here he notes that in spite of the undeniable Semitic influences on the New Testament and the preservation of Aramaic words, a careful analysis of the linguistic characteristics show it to be original composition Greek, not translation Greek. He deals with the question of the patristic evidence for the origin of Matthew's Gospel, particularly Papias's *logia* statement, and concludes this is best understood as a statement of literary style, not the language of composition (p. 181).

Concluding, Greaves helpfully summarizes his arguments, outlining the problems with the theory of Aramaic oral and written sources underlying the Greek New Testament. He argues instead that what we have is a document which was influenced most directly by the LXX, a thoroughly Semitic, yet Greek work. His final conclusion is that the New Testament evidences its own distinct dialect which he describes as "a hybrid *Palestinian* Greek—*Koine* Greek with a Semitic flair" (p. 186). This surprising and somewhat troubling characterization concludes his argument.

Gleaves provides a helpful well-written book on an important subject, the question of both Jesus' favored language for teaching, and the linguistic character of the New Testament. He offers evidence to bolster his conclusion, without being so technical as to be inaccessible, allowing those interested to dig deeper into the material he has mined. In the end, he correctly offers critiques of a too-often assumed consensus that Aramaic is the linguistic background for the New Testament documents. However, his argument for Greek being the primary language for Jesus' own teaching and dialogues is less convincing. On the probability range, he challenges the reader to consider this as a possibility, without convincing this reviewer that it is probable.

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Paul Rainbow. *Johannine Theology: The Gospel, the Epistles, and the Apocalypse.* Downers Grove: IVP, 2014. 496 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0830840564. $32.00 (Hardback).

While the Gospel of John, 1–3 John, and Revelation have often been read in concert throughout the church's history, such a reading strategy has not prevailed in modern, post-Enlightenment, New Testament scholarship. Paul Rainbow, professor of New Testament at Sioux Falls Seminary, acknowledges yet pushes against this trend. In his recent work, *Johannine Theology: The*

Gospel, The Epistles, and the Apocalypse, Rainbow observes that these writings evince a coherent, personal theology that binds them together. He argues, "The Johannine universe is essentially personal; it consists of persons divine and human and their relationships" (p. 31). This personal or relational theology, then, represents one of John's chief contributions to New Testament theology.

Accordingly, Rainbow organizes his book according to the key persons and their relationships as found in John's Gospel, Epistles, and the Apocalypse (p. 32). Chapter 1 contains a thorough introduction in which Rainbow surveys other approaches to Johannine theology, as well as the critical questions of origin, authorship, date, and audience. Significantly, he sees a single mind, John the Son of Zebedee, as the most plausible person responsible for these works (pp. 39–51). He also challenges the Johannine community hypothesis and related mirror readings that divorce the Fourth Gospel from the history it purports to narrate (pp. 62–71). For Rainbow, John's writings present a coherent and powerful theology precisely because they convey an authentic, not hidden, history.

In chapters 2–10, Rainbow presents his case for John's theology of persons. God the Father (chapter 2), the world (chapter 3), the Son who is the Christ (chapters 4–5), the Spirit (chapter 6), the believer (chapters 7–8), and the community of disciples that lives in the world (chapters 9–10) each receives close attention. By tracing these persons or theological themes through the Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse, Rainbow provides readers a clear entrée into and careful exploration of John's theology. On the symbols of the world (a key character), for example, he provides a succinct list with memorable statements that summarize a large swath of material (p. 127). His approach thus differs from a literary-theological one that treats each book separately. It also enables him to offer specific reflections on John's contribution to New Testament theology in general.

For instance, Rainbow sees theology proper as the governing reality for Christology, often held to be the "center" of New Testament theology. He writes, "New Testament scholarship rightly recognizes Christology as the 'center' of Johannine theology, but it has not always emphasized that the doctrine of God is the sphere that has such a center: the Christology is inextricable from the theology proper, and serves it" (p. 113). This classically theological orientation of *Johannine Theology* proves, I think, to be one of its major contributions to the field.

Rainbow's analysis of the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, a crucial issue in biblical theology, marks another contribution. While rightly acknowledging theological and historical fulfillment, especially in the Gospel and Apocalypse, he observes an underlying continuity between the Old and the New according to John. In his discussion of salvation (ch. 8), for example, Rainbow describes the relation between law and grace in terms of fulfillment not replacement (see John 1:16–17). He states, "What distinguishes the new covenant from the old is not a repeal of stipulations, but

rather God's commitment to renovate his subjects so that they will fulfill them" (p. 317). What is more, Rainbow argues that John's theology and Christology emerged from the Old Testament and Judaism in such a way that John kept in step with and drew out the implications of his Jewish heritage better than the later rabbinic literature (e.g., p. 108). The various persons in John's universe, then, are manifestly biblical theological characters. Rainbow is quite strong on this point.

Many other strengths of *Johannine Theology* could be mentioned, but space is limited. One weakness, though, ought to be mentioned. The synthetic or thematic approach taken by Rainbow requires a level of familiarity with John's writings that some students or other readers may not yet possess. Thus, beginning students may want to start with a literary-theological, or book-by-book approach. This point, though, is not a weakness of *Johannine Theology* as much as an inherent limitation in Rainbow's approach. Still, for this book by this author, the approach is quite interesting and helpful. Rainbow has applied his synthetic (perhaps "relational-theological") approach with aplomb. Moreover, he engages significant and, at times, overlooked secondary literature with care in numerous in-depth footnotes. For these and many other reasons, *Johannine Theology* should serve scholars, pastors, and students with biblical-theological clarity and integrity for years to come.

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Thomas R. Schreiner. *Commentary on Hebrews*. Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner. Nashville: B&H, 2015. vii + 539 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0805496130. $39.99 (Hardback).

Biblical theology is the gift that keeps on giving to the world of evangelical biblical scholarship. Biblical theology examines the theology of the writers of each biblical book and then attempts to integrate it within the theology of the whole Bible. It benefits the task of exegesis and theology by giving careful attention to how an author makes use of existing Scripture, how a book's message fits within the overarching metanarrative of redemptive history, how it relates to its historical context, how it develops particular theological themes and even how it has impacted the church over the centuries. Despite the gains made by evangelicals in the area of biblical theology, very little of it has profited the church directly because most of the publications are geared toward an academic audience. The *Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation* commentary series represents a much needed contribution in this regard. It masterfully links biblical theology and biblical interpretation in an accessible commentary, written with pastors in view. Given the all-encompassing nature of a biblical theological reading of the text, there is no better book than the

epistle to the Hebrews to inaugurate this ground-breaking commentary series. What is more, there are few scholars, if any, better suited for this task than Tom Schreiner.

This commentary on Hebrews includes all the standard features of such a work, but it also has characteristics giving it a distinctive contribution in the area of biblical theology. It is comprised of three major sections: (1) Introduction (pp. 1–49); (2) Exposition (pp. 51–433); and (3) Biblical and Theological Themes (pp. 435–99). The introduction discusses questions of authorship, date, destination, genre, structure, religious-cultural background, and outline, but breaks new ground with a section relating Hebrews within the biblical storyline as well as a fascinating examination of biblical and theological structures (i.e., promise-fulfillment, already-but-not-yet eschatology, typology, and the spatial orientation of Hebrews). Exposition owns the lion's share of real estate in this commentary, offering a surprisingly detailed treatment of every chapter and verse. Each section of the exposition includes an outline of the passage, a translation of the scripture, a discussion of the literary context, a verse-by-verse exegesis, and a bridge summarizing the main arguments. When it comes to exploring the theology of Hebrews, however, the most distinctive and valuable feature is the section devoted to tracing biblical and theological themes. Schreiner examines the themes of God, Jesus Christ, the new covenant, the Holy Spirit, warnings and exhortations, sojourners and exiles, faith and obedience, assurance, and the future reward. This section is a veritable goldmine, enhancing the rich theological contribution of Hebrews to the Bible.

While Hebrews is one of the most theologically robust letters of the New Testament, it has also proven to be one of the most exegetically complex. Nowhere is this more evident than when it comes to the warning passages, especially 6:4–8 and 10:26–31 (cf. 2:1–4; 3:12–4:13; 12:25–29). The crux of the debate surrounding the warning passages is whether true Christians can lose their salvation. Schreiner adequately addresses these passages exegetically within the exposition section, but he discusses the matter more comprehensively as a biblical and theological theme. He helpfully frames the key issues for interpretation in terms of the ones addressed (genuine believers or almost believers), the sin addressed (apostasy or lack of fruitfulness), and the consequences (loss of salvation, loss of rewards, or absence of salvation). He approaches this theme by reading the warning passages "synoptically" so that they mutually interpret each other (p. 485). Schreiner argues that the author addresses genuine believers because the terminology he uses implies a conversion experience (e.g., "brothers," "once enlightened", "shared in the Holy Spirit," and "tasted the heavenly gift"). The warnings, then, are intended to dissuade believers from committing apostasy. Apostasy is a falling away from the faith or a renunciation of salvation. The consequences of apostasy, according to Schreiner, are far more serious than a simple loss of rewards, but rather entail condemnation in final judgment (p. 487). Schreiner does justice to the warnings as actual, rather than merely hypothetical. The real warnings

do not affirm the possibility that Christians could lose their salvation though. He contends, "the warnings are always effective in the lives of those elected and chosen by God. The admonitions and warnings are prospective, not retrospective" (p. 489). The author does not say they have lost their salvation, but rather he is encouraging believers to persevere in their faith despite all difficulties.

I largely concur with Schreiner's interpretation of the warning passages although it does not resolve all the tensions in the text. There will be those who find it unconvincing. He does not fully explain how a real warning against apostasy precludes loss of salvation (p. 489). So, I find his treatment of the warning passages to be very good, but he may constrain his options too narrowly, to only four (p. 481). I tend to think the focus on "loss of salvation" may distract from how these warnings relate to other themes, such as the establishment of the new covenant in Christ and the wilderness wandering motif.

Regardless of how one may interpret the warning passages, Schreiner, yet again, has produced an outstanding commentary. It is extremely well written and peppered with footnotes citing the best of recent research. It easily earns a place on the shelf as a faithful companion for interpreting Hebrews. Overall, what makes this commentary so remarkable is that it manages to bridge the gap between the academy and the church in such a way that it is at home in both.

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Constantine R. Campbell. *Advances in the Study of Greek: New Insights for Reading the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 253 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0310515951. $34.99 (Paperback).

Developments in the study of the Greek New Testament are taking place left and right in the present day. In *Advances in the Study of Greek*, Constantine Campbell (Associate Professor of New Testament, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) offers students of the New Testament—from novices to the more advanced—a survey of where and how modern linguistics is impacting the field of Greek studies. Over two decades have passed since David Alan Black, in his *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek*, argued as follows: "Not long ago, Greek students lived in a stable, protected world where the rules were known, where there were established methods, and where traditional grammars made up the bulk of teaching materials. Today, this closed and protected world is opening up and branching out, rediscovering the outside world" (2nd ed., p. xiii). Campbell's book introduces readers to just how much this world has opened up and branched out.

The book is divided into ten chapters. The first two chapters are foundational. Chapter one is a diachronic analysis of Greek studies beginning with Georg Winer and extending to the present day. In chapter two, Campbell

offers an overview of the major linguistic theories from which modern Greek studies are launched. This is by far the most difficult chapter in the book. It is a field that uses very technical vocabulary, often an Everest whose ascent few seem to survive. Campbell, however, who does an excellent job simplifying concepts and vocabulary, focuses largely on one "school," known as Systemic Functional Linguistics. The remainder of the book then spotlights seven areas where Greek studies are intersecting with modern linguistics: lexical semantics, deponency and the middle voice, tense and verbal aspect, the implications of style and genre, discourse analysis, pronunciation, and pedagogy.

There is more to studying the Greek New Testament than looking up words in a lexicon. Much more. Sadly, for many who have studied Greek, their exposure to using it extends not far beyond a word study here and there. This area is probably the most misinformed and abused in Bible teaching and scholarship. Campbell's discussion on lexical semantics (chapter three) does not give his audience the fallacies to avoid. They will still need Carson's *Exegetical Fallacies* for that. But he points out significant issues for evaluating a lexeme and wrestling with matters like ambiguity (a hotbed of discussion), synonymy, and context. After walking through lexical semantics, Campbell tosses his audience back into the deep end of the pool (fitted with a life-preserver) as he discusses deponency (chapter four). The overview is well balanced, but lacks an example of where it really matters in exegesis.

Chapter five covers verbal aspect, the area for which Campbell is most widely known. And Campbell is certainly correct in calling verbal aspect "the most controversial issue within Greek studies in the last twenty-five years" (p. 105). This chapter introduces the audience to tense, *Aktionsart*, and aspect, and the major ways people are thinking about the relationship of time and kind of action when looking at Greek verbs. Chapter six (on style and register) is very interesting, though it receives the shortest treatment. Every New Testament author has his own style and collection of lexemes from which he assembles his literary work. It really is critical for those who use Greek in their study to consider that style and to pay special attention to how context dictates as much *how* an author says something as it does *what* he says.

The larger section of the book is devoted to discourse analysis. This is perhaps the arena where advances are most visible in Greek studies. Campbell hones in on Hallidayan approaches and the four "schools" of discourse analysis (chapter seven) before devoting a whole chapter to the methodology of Stephen Levinsohn and Steven Runge (chapter eight). Both chapters are priceless for getting familiar with some of the vocabulary (e.g., cohesion and markedness). While Campbell does show the audience some examples of what discourse analysis does with a text (e.g., Runge's treatment of Rom 6:1–6 beginning on p. 186), it is not representative of some of the better contributions discourse analysis has offered to Greek studies. Anyone interested should check out some additional analyses, such as Black's on Philippians or Hebrews, Clendenen's on Jer 10:1–16, or Longacre's on 1 John.

This book is unique, well written, and simplifies much of what causes students to have nightmares, if they go beyond their first year of Greek. It is highly recommended. There really is more to using Greek than just looking up words in a lexicon. Whether or not we should call all that is taking place "advances" is up for debate. Perhaps the word "developments" would be more fitting. But whoever reads this book will definitely be up-to-date in what is going on in the world of Greek studies.

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Michael Augros. *Who Designed the Designer? A Rediscovered Path to God's Existence.* San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2015. 250 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1586179694. $17.95 (Paperback).

For many people, including academic philosophers, the scholastic philosophy characteristic of the medieval era seems obscure and impractical. Philosophical arguments from this period are often couched in strange Latin terms and categories of causes that are not commonly used today, even in technical works of philosophy and science. So, when I saw that *Who Designed the Designer* was written to popularize a scholastic (or more specifically Thomistic) argument for the existence of god (yes, lowercase "g"—see below), I was preparing myself to slog through arcane metaphysics. To my surprise (and delight!) Michael Augros has succeeded in writing about abstract Thomistic thought in an accessible and (dare I say it?) plausible light.

The aim of this book is to provide a reasonable case for the existence of god that does not rely on detailed knowledge of contemporary science, unlike virtually all recent defenses of the cosmological and teleological arguments. Augros sees this as a positive feature of his distinctive approach. After all, most of us are not able to evaluate firsthand scientific claims concerning the complexity of DNA, the plausibility of different theoretical models of the big bang, or the data in support of the fine-tuning of the universe. We have to accept this evidence on the basis of authorities. Augros is not against arguments that rely on authority, but a proof based on self-evident first-principles provides a stronger reason to believe than one that depends on trusting an expert.

It is important to note that he is only arguing for the existence of god. By god, he means a supernatural, personal intelligence that is responsible for designing and creating the world and all it contains. When used with a capital "g," "God" implies more than this. Proving that God exists, entails proving the existence of a more specific being with a certain history. Augros does not claim to prove that God exists, but he is right to think it is no small feat to show that god exists.

Perhaps the greatest virtue of *Who Designed the Designer* is its inviting prose. Augros manages both to write in an engaging way that keeps the reader's

interest and to explain difficult abstract ideas with clear, memorable examples. Moreover, the text is not written in a polemical style that pokes fun at atheists' claims. Rather, it has been composed to engage atheists and agnostics in a charitable, winsome way. Well-known objections from critics like Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, Christopher Hitchens, David Hume, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Bertrand Russell are considered and refuted by Augros respectfully.

At the same time, the argument in *Who Designed the Designer* is not presented as new, and it does not interact with any recent literature in philosophy or science. In fact, the book has little to offer as a work of original scholarship. For this reason, the book should not be used in graduate classes or even upper-level undergraduate courses. Nonetheless, it may be a good resource to recommend to high-schoolers and anyone else who wants to think about the existence of god but who may not have any previous education in philosophy. Also, those who teach Thomistic proofs will find the book a treasure trove, full of helpful examples that can be used to improve one's own teaching.

While the book as a whole is highly commendable, there are some parts that are weaker than the rest of the text. For instance, in his discussion of the suffering of innocent people as part of the problem of evil, he presents a skeptical theistic approach that challenges non-theists to consider the possibility that God is justified in permitting this suffering because the infinite good of a heavenly afterlife could outweigh an individual's suffering of this life. This seems problematic for two reasons. First, many find that some of the evils in this world cannot be justified by any sort of "balancing out" compensation. Rather, what is needed is the ultimate defeat of evil in such a way that its existence plays a role in the ultimate good that is later achieved in a person's life (see Roderick Chisholm's "The Defeat of Good and Evil"). Second, this response must assume that all innocent people who suffer unjustly will become citizens of heaven and partakers of the beatific vision. While this is a lovely sentiment, it seems unlikely to be true.

If nothing else, Augros has done a great service to philosophy by writing an accessible text that shows some of what can be accomplished through careful philosophical thinking on its own. However, readers who would like to see an argument in defense of God (rather than just god), will need to rely on other arguments, like those that employ good non-deductive reasoning to establish the Resurrection of Jesus on the basis of historical data.

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Stephen C. Evans. *Why Christian Faith Still Makes Sense: A Response to Contemporary Challenges*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015. ix + 145 pp. Paperback. ISBN: 978-0801096600. $19.99 (Paperback).

Stephen Evans's book offers a fresh approach to natural theology for apologists who know that fundamentalism typically breeds fundamentalism. This approach cuts sharply across the thin veneer of the philosophically weak arguments typical of the New Atheists and exposes the intellectual credulity of their thinking. With fresh insight and acuity, Evans quite ably challenges the New Atheists' epistemic and ethical claims that religious faith is irrational, not only because it is not based on evidence, but also because it is said to be harmful to our rational faculties by giving us the false impression that we have a rational right to believe what we have no good evidential reasons for believing (pp. 7–8).

Evans begins his eight fluid chapters by suggesting that natural theology can give us increasingly better reasons for favorable belief in God by following a slightly modified version of Reformed epistemology, one that makes use of both propositional and non-propositional evidence. While rational belief in God is often produced in us by way of our faculty of the *sensus divinitatus*, we are still free to go on and consider additional propositional evidence that may shore up and sustain that belief. Evans's reasons for following this approach are simple and lucid. First, argues Evans, the goal of natural theology is not to deliver "adequate, positive knowledge of God" but to support what he calls "anti-naturalism" (p. 20). Evans's point is that many who initially reject theism nevertheless recognize serious problems with a strict naturalistic conception that limits our metaphysical grasp of reality to only the physical universe. Anti-naturalists suggest instead that there is something beyond nature, even if it is unclear what the full extent of that reality might be like (p. 20).

Second, Evans suggests that natural theology can be intuitively informed by the non-propositional evidence of natural signs (e.g., cosmic wonder, purposive order, moral accountability, recognition of human dignity, and the experience of joy) which fall under two Pascalian constraints of what he calls the "Wide Accessibility Principle" and the "Easy Resistibility Principle" (pp. 24–25). The former principle is invoked as an acknowledgment that the non-propositional evidence of natural signs is generally available to ordinary people, and that this evidence is "fairly pervasive" and "easy to recognize." The latter principle is employed as an indication that, although positive non-propositional evidence for God is widely available, it is nonetheless easy for people to resist. Recognizing that people could go either way, natural theology works within these constraints and values natural signs both for their initial non-propositional evidence in favor of God's existence, and for the way in which that evidence can be reworked into propositional arguments for positive knowledge of God.

In subsequent sections, Evans introduces us to still other features of a natural theology guided by anti-naturalism. Such features not only help to flesh out a fuller account of anti-naturalism but are also intriguing in their own right. Reasonably compelling, for example, is his advancement of particularism in epistemology. Like many other things that we do in the human condition, the acquisition of knowledge should reflect our ordinary human experiences. Particularists claim that knowledge is acquired because we first know particular things. Again, similar to other aspects of his anti-naturalist approach, one can later reflect on how knowledge is acquired and offer an account for it (p. 61).

With respect to the tension between science and religion, Evans takes an approach similar to Alvin Plantinga's in arguing that the naturalist has no good reason to trust that his cognitive faculties are reliably aimed at the acquisition of true beliefs. To the contrary, on a strict naturalistic account of evolution, truth is not necessary for survival (p. 66). And on the rational merits of God's self-revelation, Evans's appeals to the "Revelation-Authority Principle," in which he offers a rational account for how it is possible for persons to rationally hold truths not discoverable through human reason alone (p. 85). Thus, part of the criterion of the authenticity of revelation is not whether its content lines up with what can be independently confirmed through human reason, but instead, the recognition that part of what makes revelation significant is found precisely in the awareness that the lion's share of its content speaks to truth that we cannot find out for ourselves.

More particular is the elegance and creativity with which Evans presents his case. For example, by appealing to what he calls the criterion of paradoxicality as a way of complementing favorable reasons for trust in God's self-revelation, Evans convincingly argues that the so-called "discoveries" of the apparent absurd in the paradoxes of Scripture are not original discoveries of reason at all, but part of the quite intentional content of revelation. Consequently, this is not an objection reached by human reason but instead a "faint echo of what the Paradox claims about itself" (pp. 107–8). When we reflect on this phenomenon, reason reveals to us the somewhat surprising and existential marvel that such evidences *can* serve to increase our affective capacities in favor towards God.

Why Christian Faith Still Makes Sense is appreciably more than just another popular piece on natural theology. The several features Evans nuances throughout the book are thoughtfully selected for their specific contribution to a compelling case for his anti-naturalist approach. Intriguing features like these make the book well worth its salt. Evans gives us a valuable resource for further reflection in natural theology, and it is highly recommended reading for those who enjoy the fine balance between the analytic and the imaginative when considering the reasonableness of the Christian faith.

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Allan Chapman. *Stargazers: Copernicus, Galileo, the Telescope, and the Church.* Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2014. xxi + 440 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0745956275. $17.95 (Paperback).

Allan Chapman's book goes well beyond his subtitle, covering not merely Copernicus and Galileo but also hundreds of other scientists and ecclesiastics spanning three centuries of history. It is the story of the birth of modern astronomy—and in a sense of modern science. Chapman succeeds in producing an engaging and coherent work on this extremely broad subject by focusing on Copernicus and Galileo, or more specifically on the heliocentric theory that both espoused and that was ultimately proven correct. The origin and outworking of the heliocentric theory—that the Earth is not stationary but rather orbits the Sun—determines both the book's logical structure and the beginning and end of its historical narrative. *Stargazers* begins with Copernicus, who published his heliocentric *De Revolutionibus* in 1543 at the age of 70—and ends in the 1830s with the long-sought discovery of stellar parallax, which finally proved that Copernicus had been right.

Chapman seeks to dispel the idea that the Church (whether Catholic or Protestant) was the enemy of science. He argues that Copernicus' hesitation in publishing his theory was not due to fear of heavy-handed repression by the Catholic Church, but rather to the dubious *scientific* status of heliocentrism at the time. In contrast to Copernicus' reasonable caution, Galileo was an ingenious but confrontational character whose political missteps and bombastic approach to public dialog—rather than the content of his theories themselves—eventually brought upon him the wrath of the Catholic authorities: "The still scientifically conjectural status of Copernicanism, his layman's forays into biblical interpretation, and his not infrequently mocking tone in argument meant that Galileo never lacked for people who would leap on the chance to take [him] down a few pegs" (p. 173).

In making these arguments, Chapman's own style remains approachable and courteous. He has an abundance of evidence on his side and does not need to resort to critical attacks on people who have made opposing claims. He builds his case by citing numerous examples of scientifically-minded contemporaries and successors of Galileo both within and outside the Church hierarchy itself, who made important scientific advances (and in many cases openly entertained heliocentric views) without incurring any rebuke or persecution whatsoever from the Church authorities.

Remarkable stories from the lives of these little-known scientists help make *Stargazers* a deeply satisfying read. For example, Jesuit missionary-astronomers in China, under the leadership of Father Ferdinand Verbiest, built replicas of Tycho Brahe's precision instruments for use by Chinese court astronomers. Many of these instruments survive to this day in China, while the great Danish astronomer's own prototypes have long since perished (pp. 196–98).

Chapman also describes the scientific challenges of proving heliocentrism. At the time of Galileo, Tycho Brahe had already proposed an alternative system in which the planets Mercury and Venus circled the Sun, while the Sun itself and all of the other planets circled Earth. In the absence of any evidence that the Earth moved, this Tychonic system explained all observable phenomena better than Copernican heliocentrism. Knowing this, Galileo ignored the Tychonic system, and wrote as though the only debate was between Ptolemaic geocentrism and his own heliocentric theories. Over the following two centuries heliocentrism gained traction, but a huge problem remained: the stars still showed no parallax due to Earth's orbit around the Sun. This meant either that Copernicus had been wrong or that the stars were almost unimaginably distant. At such distances, however, the size of stellar images as viewed through telescopes implied that the stars were bigger than the entire Solar System. The truth was too strange even for brilliant and dedicated scientists to grasp at first: the stars *were* incredibly distant, but not as big as their images seemed to imply. The images were blurred and expanded by optical effects that were not yet understood. The real parallaxes of stars are so small that they were not measured until the 1830s, when telescopes of a power Copernicus could not have imagined finally validated his 300-year-old theory.

At times the fascinating details about hundreds of individuals can be overwhelming, making it hard to follow what is most relevant to the central, heliocentric thread of the narrative. Mild errors mar Figures 1.4 (the right angle should be located at the Moon), and 8.1 (the Sun is too near the center of the ellipse). These minor imperfections, however, detract very little from a fascinating and engaging book. Chapman's thesis is a timely one, given the increasing animosity and contempt with which Christians are viewed in modern America—a contempt based partly on popular misrepresentations of the same history covered with depth and scholarly integrity by *Stargazers*.

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Bob Kauflin. *True Worshipers: Seeking What Matters to God.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2015. 176 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1433542305. $12.99 (Paperback).

Having addressed worship leaders in *Worship Matters: Leading Others to Encounter the Greatness of God* (Crossway, 2008), Bob Kauflin now writes to "true worshipers" to clarify the essence of worship, address specific aspects of corporate worship, and encourage Christians to anticipate the worship of heaven. The book addresses a series of topics and questions that have arisen over Kauflin's thirty years as a songwriter, worship leader, and elder at Sovereign Grace Churches. However, the main argument that both begins and

ends the book is that the Christian's ultimate aspiration is "to be found numbered among the worshipers of God," both here in the gathered assembly and in heaven for eternity (p. 21, quoting Calvin on Ps 52:8).

Kauflin's main points are summarized by his pithy chapter titles. Chapter 1, "True Worshipers *Matter*," expounds on Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman to show that "God is seeking true worshipers" (p. 26). He makes clear that true worship is more than song, lamenting that "worship has been reduced almost universally to what happens when we sing" (p. 20). In contrast, Chapter 2 ("True Worshipers *Receive*") affirms that "knowing God through his Word enables us to receive what we need to worship him" (p. 41).

In Chapter 3, Kauflin summarizes the worshiper's response in one verb: "exalt." He states that "*true worshipers, enabled and redeemed by God, respond to God's self-revelation in ways that exalt his glory in Christ in their minds, affections, and wills, by the power of the Holy Spirit*" (p. 53, italics original). He expands this statement by articulating multiple ways worshipers exalt Christ in their hearts and in their actions (pp. 54–67), affirming that ultimately "*Everything* we do can be done to exalt God's greatness and goodness in Jesus Christ" (pp. 60–61).

Chapters 4–8 focus on aspects of corporate worship. In Chapter 4, "True Worshipers *Gather*," Kauflin confirms that "Thanking and praising God . . . [is] what true worshipers were made for and central to what God is doing on the earth" (p. 71). Chapter 5 clarifies more specifically what gathered worship is for, arguing from an exposition of 1 Corinthians 12–14 that "the purpose of our meetings isn't *worship*, but *edification*" (p. 86). Here Kauflin demonstrates his ability to explain key passages in their biblical context.

In chapters 6 and 7, Kauflin asserts that "True Worshipers *Sing*" and "*Keep Singing*." He builds his case by claiming that there are over 50 biblical exhortations to sing (e.g., Ps 47:6), and that "all three persons of the Trinity are connected with song" (p. 101, see Zeph 3:17; Heb 2:12; Eph 5:19). He continues by summarizing "What Singing Does" for the believer and the Church (pp. 101–13). Most convincingly, he changes the rhetorical question—"Do I have a voice?"—by one word to "Do I have a *song*?" (p. 98), referring to "The Song of Redemption" exemplified from Exodus to the Psalms to Isaiah to Acts to Revelation.

In Chapter 8, Kauflin bravely tackles the perennial question of "Worship and the Presence of God," acknowledging that, for some, "The Holy Spirit seems a bit like an appendix. He's there for something, but we're not quite sure what" (p. 130). His encouragements are to acknowledge God's omnipresence ("because he's already there" [p. 132]); to expect God's promised presence; and to pursue God's experienced presence through "desperate dependence, eager expectation, and humble responsiveness" (p. 137). Kauflin clarifies that "only Jesus can lead us into God's presence;" there is no need for another mediator. Specifically, "God . . . doesn't need music to make himself known to us" (p. 134).

In the final chapter, Kauflin encourages Christians to anticipate the worship of heaven. He asserts that "No worship gathering in this life will ever rival the splendor of what's to come [in eternity]" (p. 145). This emphasis helps rearticulate the book's thesis: "true worshipers" aspire to the telos of worship—an eternal encounter with the actual, unveiled presence of God. However, in his eagerness to answer "What Will Heaven Be Like?" Kauflin indulges his "sanctified imagination" to excess in at least one statement: "We'll hear [Jesus'] voice singing over us and perhaps watch him create new worlds for us to rule over" (p. 147). This level of specificity goes beyond scriptural revelation.

Despite brief imaginative flights, *True Worshipers* is commendable as a practical, yet inspiring work *for the church*. It includes substantive quotes from major theologians (e.g., D.A. Carson, John Stott, Michael Horton, and David Peterson) and is replete with scriptural references. It can be used as an accessible guidebook for a church-based study on worship, especially with the study guide available at the publisher's website. In this book, Kauflin serves the church as a gifted teacher, addressing the nature and practice of biblical worship through stories, appropriate metaphors, and memorable statements.

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A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee. *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. 336 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0801049200. $39.99 (Hardback).

I received this second edition of Moreau, Corwin, and McGee's *Introducing World Missions* with great anticipation. The first edition came out in 2004, and as the authors observe, much has changed in the world of missions in the past decade. Along with the inclusion of updated information, the entire book has been updated. The most obvious update is the use of four colors printing on glossy paper. The book is aesthetically pleasing; however, the glossy pages proved problematic. There is a strong glare that was quite annoying and made it difficult to read for a long period of time. Also, the pages did not readily accept ink. Many of my notes smeared as I turned the page or dragged a hand across them. I fear that this choice of paper might be detrimental to the use of this as a textbook, which is a shame because the actual content makes this book one of the best introductory texts for teaching Evangelical missions.

Moving to matters of substance, *Introducing World Missions* was written as a textbook for college and seminary missions classes. The material is intended for those considering a missionary career but it also contains helpful information for missions senders as well. The book is organized in five sections; each is divided into four or five relevant chapters. The first section explores biblical and theological teachings about missions. This section provides the

reader with insight into how world missions fits into the biblical narrative and affects (or is affected by) Christian theology. The book follows the contours of Evangelical theology without bogging down in denominational issues that divide. These chapters also provide definitions of key missiological terms and concepts.

Section two traces the sweep of missions history. The authors provide an adequate description of key figures and missionary movements. Teachers will find this section helpful because the authors seem to have gone to great lengths to provide enough detail to keep the story interesting while at the same time demonstrating how key figures and key events shaped missiological thought and practice. Even though these two sections, biblical/theological and historical, are standard in all intro texts, professors and students will appreciate the depth and structure of these chapters.

The next two sections explore personal aspects of missionary service. Section three leads the reader through important questions of understanding and discerning missionary callings, how and why to prepare for missionary service, as well as actually getting to the mission field. Section four discusses life on the mission field. These discussions are targeted at the missionary as well as his/her stateside supporters. The authors highlight important family/singleness issues, teaming issues, and even explore some missionary strategy. In many intro texts, these important topics are relegated to an appendix or to small sections in a "missions strategy" chapter. However, the authors do the readers/students a great service by working through these issues in detail and showing how they connect to the entire missionary task. These chapters should prove helpful for anyone considering missions as a calling or career and they will also be helpful in the classroom as they will allow the professor to address a range of important topics.

The final section the book explores contemporary missions issues. Issues of culture, worldview, and religion are considered in light of the missionary task. The authors also look to the future and anticipate issues missionaries will likely face as a result of a changing geopolitical landscape, shifting theological concerns, and missiological practices. The book is hopeful and helpful as it introduces readers/students to the mammoth subject of world missions.

Alongside the basic text, the book includes four additional learning devices. Each chapter includes missions case-studies, encouraging students and professors to dig deeper into the material. Each chapter is filled with "sidebar material," providing detailed explanations and questions for further discussion. In addition to these textual learning tools, the authors have also developed a website which includes helpful articles and other learning tools. Finally, and perhaps most creatively, the book is filled with non-western, artistic depictions of different biblical stories. These color pictures introduce each chapter and are intended to encourage the reader to meditate thoughtfully on cross-cultural ministry and living.

The book's goal is to capture the heart, as well as the mind, of the student. There is no reason to think that this cannot happen with *Introducing World*

Missions. This book will be a helpful addition to academic missionary literature and a useful tool for teaching a new generation of students.

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Jayson Georges. *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures*. USA: Timē Press, 2014. 80 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0692338018. $ 8.99 (Paperback).

Jayson Georges, an experienced missiologist, shows how the good news of Jesus applies to a wide variety of cultures in *The 3D Gospel*. Drawing on insights previously articulated by Eugene Nida, Roland Muller and Timothy Tennent, Georges argues that three dimensions (or dynamics), guilt, shame and fear, play differing roles in any given culture. Understanding these dynamics is crucial to anyone seeking a modicum of cultural understanding in general, and to believers seeking to make disciples of the nations in particular.

Whoever you are, you need to "access the basic necessities of life—food, protection, information, health, work, etc." (p. 27). This inevitably takes place in a social context, since none of us is an island. Different societies grant (or withhold) access to the resources we need differently, and this is where guilt, shame or fear play essential roles. Depending on the broad social group one belongs to, "people must be: *innocent* before [formal] institutions by obeying the rules and laws, lest they be reckoned guilty, *honorable* in the community by respecting the group's expectations and playing the appropriate roles, lest they be shamed, or *powerful* in the spiritual realm by observing the proper rituals and techniques, lest they be powerless and vulnerable," thus succumbing to fear (p. 29).

Every culture deploys these dynamics to some extent, and Georges admits that generalizations (to the effect that a culture is characterized by one dynamic in particular) may be oversimplified. However, by pointing to "the prominence of shame-honor and fear-power dynamics in global cultures" (p. 13), he seeks to highlight the prevalence of blind spots in a Western Christian theology influenced primarily by guilt versus innocence. In fact his most valuable contribution is to demonstrate "that the Bible is one narrative in which forgiveness, honor, and power are woven together" (p. 35). He cites numerous passages to illustrate this tapestry, but Acts 26:18 captures the three dimensions well. Paul tells King Agrippa that the Lord was sending him to the Gentiles "that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (ESV). God's gifts of power, forgiveness, and positional sanctification thus address the problems of fear, guilt and shame.

As Georges notes, "These three strands of the gospel never function in isolation, but the driving forces of a particular culture may warrant an emphasis on one approach above others" (pp. 60–61). In particular, the benefit

of understanding a shame-honor approach is underlined by the estimate that two-thirds of the global population was influenced by this dynamic in 2010, the vast majority of them unreached by the gospel (p. 32). Such societies place a premium on community, and the gospel must be presented to them in such a way that embracing God's everlasting honor (and being embraced by a Christian community now) "replaces false shame ('I am a worthless nobody.') and false honor ('My group is best!') with true honor from God" (p. 67). Quite simply, "The church functions as a surrogate family whose gracious welcome frees people to unmask their shame" (p. 67). All too often though, church as welcoming family is more ideal than real: Westerners are notoriously weak at doing community. So let this be a challenge to individualistic, guilt-innocence-oriented folks like myself: "Before we proclaim a 3D gospel, we must experience and represent it in our own life" (p. 74).

Challenge or no, Georges's brief volume helpfully points the way to doing ministry across a spectrum of cultures. Before concluding though, I have two quibbles. He asserts that people's cultural orientation (along the lines of guilt, shame or fear) shapes them more than their individual personalities do (p. 11). I believe this is true, but would have appreciated a reference to empirical research that demonstrates it. He also considers longstanding theories of the atonement in the light of the three dimensions. In principle, this is helpful, since he seeks to relate theology to cultural realities. However, despite its pedigree, I'm not convinced the Ransom Theory (that God paid Christ as a ransom *to Satan* to save us) captures the biblical evidence. Fortunately, Georges stresses Christ's victory over Satan in his discussion, and that legitimately addresses concerns of folks swayed by fear who seek power.

I recommend this book to anyone seeking to fulfill the Great Commission (and that should include all believers), but especially to folks working in cross-cultural contexts. However, if readers would like to do a little more research first, a good place to start is Georges's website, honorshame.com. It has a wealth of resources and expands on many of the ideas presented in *The 3D Gospel*.

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Jackson Wu. *One Gospel for All Nations: A Practical Approach to Biblical Contextualization*. Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2015. xxvii + 268 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0878086290. $19.99 (Paperback).

Contextualization of the gospel is as inescapable as it is necessary. In his *One Gospel for All Nations*, Jackson Wu provides a thoroughly biblical treatment of contextualization theory and a practical model for its application. Wu helpfully summarizes the contents of each section and chapter in his introduction (pp. xxii–xxvii). Each section of this work builds from a guiding premise and a related question. Wu's premise is that people often reject the "gospel" because "from their perspective, [it] lacks any significant meaning"

(p. xviii). His related, yet foundational question is, "Are we biblically faithful if our gospel message is not culturally meaningful" (p. xvii)?

Wu goes on to argue that evangelicals in particular limit contextualization to communication, thereby exposing the need for a new perspective (pp. 5, 36). In his working definition, communication is only one aspect of contextualization (p. 8). He further breaks down the big idea of contextualization into multiple perspectives which include exegetical and cultural contextualization. The former refers to "one's personal interpretation of Scripture from a cultural perspective" (p. 13) and the latter refers to "the interpretation of culture using a scriptural perspective" (p. 13). This perspectivalism is unavoidable when one reads the Bible, since everyone has a contextual perspective.

Related to the common evangelical understanding of contextualization as communication is the pitfall of bare principalism. Wu, writing from a thoroughly evangelical position, makes the following observation: "Many people agree that Scripture must be central and decisive in contextualization. Unfortunately it has proven more difficult to move beyond this basic principle" (p. 29). While Scripture is the plumb line, contextualization is more nuanced than simply communicating the biblical message through bridges and around barriers. To combat this truncated understanding of contextualization, Wu advocates for a *firm* gospel framework with a *flexible* presentation that takes seriously the variety of cultural contexts found around the globe. With this *firm-flexible* model of contextualization, Wu delineates three themes that he argues "the Bible consistently uses" to frame the gospel (pp. 40–53). These themes are Kingdom, Covenant, and Creation. While some may quibble over the chosen themes, Wu ably demonstrates that using this three-part framework leverages the entire Bible while simultaneously ensuring the centrality of the gospel message and allowing for the flexibility of cultural presentations of the gospel message.

Section III may be the most important section of the book. In this section he proceeds to demonstrate his proposed model of contextualization through both an exegetical and a cultural perspective, bringing together all of the theoretical elements from the previous chapters. One finds in these chapters an example of a contextualized theology that Wu then uses to present a contextualized gospel focusing on key themes within a Chinese context. He adeptly employs his model to combat "false gospels" in China. It is in this section that one appreciates Wu's deep understanding of Eastern and Western contexts.

In the concluding chapter of the book Wu addresses a prevalent question within contextualization discussions about the use of contemporary culture to interpret Scripture. He correctly observes that there is indeed a continued role for long-term missionaries if this level of contextualization is to take place (p. 189). Furthermore, he is right to call for continued development of global theologies that push humility and cooperation among theological formulations (p. 190). Wu ends the chapter and the book where he began. He

reminds the reader that while context is king, having a global perspective actually offers one richer biblical insight, since everyone reads and interprets the Bible with certain cultural blind spots (p. 197).

This book is commendable on many levels and is a valuable addition to the contextualization conversation. Wu pushes evangelicals to reconsider contextualization as more than a communication method. Contextualization is part of a broader mosaic of biblical theology, cultural contexts, interpretation, and application. His work is a fine example of that which he advocates. He demonstrates a humility throughout that invites the reader to learn from other contexts while keeping Scripture as the controlling influence in contextualization.

While especially profitable for those working in non-Western contexts, I highly recommend this book to missiologists and students for both its thoroughness and its accessibility. Let me end with this quote, "We must not fear contextualization, nor should we assume that good contextualization happens without intentional reflection" (p. 11). Not everyone will agree with Wu's observations or conclusions, but this work is definitely intentional in its reflection on the gospel and contextualization.

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Bruce Ashford and Chris Pappalardo. *One Nation Under God: A Christian Hope for American Politics*. Nashville: Broadman and Holman Academic, 2015. ix + 160 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1433690693. $14.99 (Hardback).

In the American workplace, conversation around religion and politics is considered taboo. Often, heated arguments develop, feelings are hurt, and, if people are Christians, witnesses are damaged. Challenges arise between balancing "being all things to all men" and "not being ashamed of the gospel" when discussing politics from a Christian worldview. Bruce Ashford, provost and professor of theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and Chris Pappalardo, lead researcher and writer at The Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina, attempt to bridge this gap with *One Nation Under God: A Christian Hope for American Politics*. Divided into two parts, with a total of thirteen chapters of around ten pages in length, the book proposes that Christians should engage politics "Christianly," neither withdrawing from politics completely nor engaging in political activism. Rather, Christians should participate in politics in a way that glorifies their creator.

The first chapters address basic Christian issues in politics. Ashford and Pappalardo remind the reader that the Bible is the context from which Christians should interpret society (chapter 1); provide several interpretations Christians have of culture (chapter 2); explain church and state issues (chapters 3 and 4); and address challenges Christians face (chapters 5 and 6). The latter chapters then tackle key practical topics in politics, including life issues

such as abortion and euthanasia (chapter 7), marriage (chapter 8), economics (chapter 9), environment (chapter 10), race (chapter 11), immigration (chapter 12), and war (chapter 13).

There is little to disagree with in the first six chapters. Ashford and Pappalardo's explanations of how one views grace and nature provide a useful ideological grid through which practical issues are interpreted later (pp. 16–23). Their description of Christianity and modernity being at times competing "missionary faiths" is also helpful (p. 26) and would not counter French philosopher Paul Ricoeur's explanation that ideology, whether religious or secular, is not value neutral but is faith-based (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action, and Interpretation*, trans. by Paul B. Thompson [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 241).

One concern in the beginning chapters though, is that Ashford and Pappalardo leave open the possibility for "politicking in the pulpit" (pp. 62–63). While they argue doing so should be rare, adherents of non-Christian faiths see Christianity as a political religion already; when politics is preached from the pulpit, sharing the gospel becomes more difficult. A bit more elaboration on this point would be helpful.

Where there could be significant disagreement with Ashford and Pappalardo is in the second more practical section (chapters 7–13). This is not necessarily a conservative versus liberal dispute. Although those who are conservative socially and politically will agree more with Ashford and Pappalardo than those who are liberal socially and politically, it does not follow that those who are theologically conservative or theologically liberal will move in the same direction as social and political conservatives or liberals. This holds true for Ashford and Pappalardo themselves. While they may agree with C. S. Lewis or Martin Luther King Jr.'s views on aspects of society and culture, for example, they will disagree with them on certain theological matters.

Since disagreement with Ashford and Pappalardo lies along socially and politically conservative and liberal lines, what becomes important is Ashford and Pappalardo's statement in the interlude (the transition between parts one and two) that dissent among Christians in politics should be tempered with the love of Christ (p. 65). As Ashford and Pappalardo imply, this is because understanding and commenting on politics is all about the gospel (pp. 136–38). It is from this mentality that practical issues of politics can be addressed.

Combined with Ashford and Pappalardo's comments on "Choosing Between Thick and Thin Discourse" (pp. 139–41), on the need to be faithful yet flexible in our Christian communication, the work's strength is its ability to attend to matters judiciously with respect while still maintaining conviction, not forgetting that the message of Jesus Christ is paramount. If the work were longer and more comprehensive, Ashford and Pappalardo could have elaborated on matters they raise. Brevity is thus the weakest point of the book; issues are mentioned, but thorough explanations are not given. Nonetheless, it is a nice précis to Christian involvement in politics and should help Christians interested in this difficult and controversial subject.

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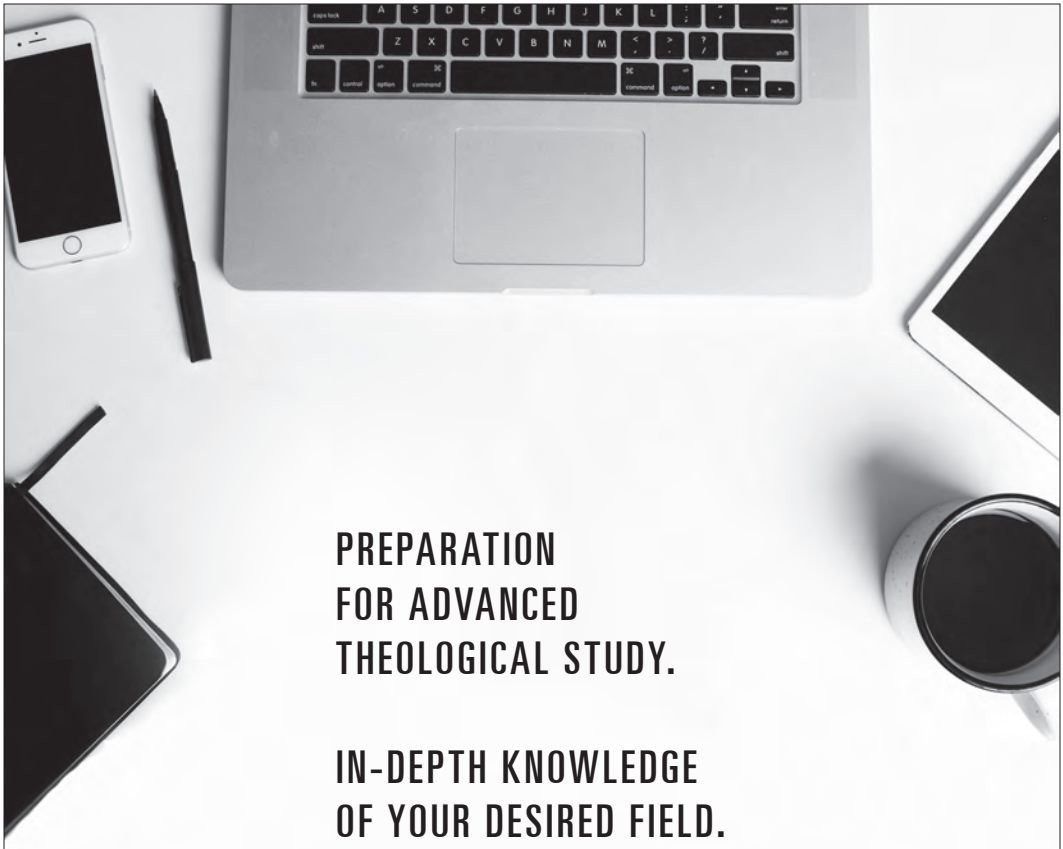

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