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Introduction: Cracks and Light in Christian Counseling

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Guest Editor

> The very idea of **truth** implies a unified field of knowledge and meaning. Such a unified field also implies the practical need for some explicit or tacit **first truth discourse** that enables us to organize disparate types of knowledge into a single framework of meaning. This does not, of course, imply that we can master the true field of knowledge and meaning with our tiny minds. At the level of immanent reality, our knowledge constructs are inherently incomplete, contingent, and contextual. And blessedly so. For, as Leonard Cohen might put it, it is the cracks in our pretension to complete knowledge mastery that enable the light to get in. Even so, we try to fix the cracks.[1]

I came to Southeastern Seminary twenty-four years ago to try to fix some cracks. I'd spent a decade in private practice as a licensed clinical psychologist and could see some cracks in the notion that psychotherapy should be a God-free zone (especially free of the Christian God). So, I started reading every systematic theology text I could get my hands on (M. Erickson, L. Berkhof, W. Grudem, Lewis and Demarest, etc.) and some light began to shine. And then I ran into a couple of "biblical counselors" (David Powlison and Sid Galloway) and the light began to pour in. So, I left my practice and came to SEBTS to think, read, teach, and write about what this particular issue of the journal is about: Christian counseling that actually merits the adjective Christian. "Christian," the adjective that modifies the noun counseling, signifies a distinctive type of counseling that resembles or follows Christ. Of course, that makes great sense. This is what everything in life is about for us as Christians: following, resembling, and belonging to Jesus the Christ.

This issue of Southeastern's journal (particularly the contributions by SEBTS professors) aims to identify where the SEBTS counseling program is on the Christian counseling spectrum. We want to do this charitably. We want to respect the different position of others, while also outlining our key convictions in this realm and why we have chosen to be where we are on the Christian counseling spectrum. I've seen various pushes for unity by Christian counselors.[2] These calls for unity are a very welcome development in our fractious age. I would like to take the opportunity to follow suit here.

In this issue of the journal we hope to avoid the not so salutary characteristics of some forms of fundamentalism (whether on the left side or the right side of the spectrum): unwarranted epistemic certainty and merciless ferocity. James 2:13 says that "mercy triumphs over judgment" (ESV), and that is the kind of attitude we aim to evince. Of course, that doesn't mean we don't exercise ethical judgment and theological deliberation, but it does mean that we hope mercy wins in the tone you find in this issue. We are deeply convicted about some things, but we hope to be civil at the same time.

Here are a few of our convictions:

1. The Bible is necessary for Christian counseling to be Christian, and Christian counseling must in some significant, comprehensive, and relevant (properly contextualized) way be about what the Bible is about—the good news of Jesus the Christ.

2. As an important ramification of our presupposing the primacy and finality of Scripture, we posit Christian theology as our first truth discourse. Entailed in our conviction regarding the necessity of Scripture is a dependence upon our best theologians and philosophers in helping us develop an epistemological platform that is necessary for a theological anthropology. In particular, one that is anchored by the image of God, on the one hand, and the challenges (to put it lightly) of sin and suffering, on the other hand.

3. We believe Scripture is necessary in orienting us both to our origins and our telos (end goals). The Bible is profoundly teleological and eschatological, such that it functions as a compass revealing true north. Consequently, it orients all we do as counselors, urging us to love God and our clients, and to be examples to our clients of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

4. Christian Counseling must be properly related to the body of Christ—his church—which must appropriately figure into the

[1] Paul Tyson, *A Christian Theology of Science: Reimagining a Theological Vision of Natural Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022), 1 (bold text original).

[2] See Robert Kellemen, "Are We Reasonable or Unreasonable in Our Interactions in the Biblical Counseling Movement?," rpmministries.org/2024/03/reasonable-or-unreasonable; Mark R. McMinn, *Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling: An Integrative Paradigm* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008).

Christian counseling project. That is not to say that all Christian counseling must take place in the church, Rather, the church (and its parachurch organizations, such as a seminary) should function both as a *center for* and a *sender of* Christian counselors.

5. Christian counselors must also be properly and intentionally missiological. Just as missionaries don't consider any countries as "closed," there are no "closed" mental health contexts or professions. We aim to take the Great Commission seriously in the mental health sector of our world. Christian counseling must resemble, belong to, and follow Jesus by embracing the sent-ness of Matt 28:19–20.

6. We recognize that all counseling and counselors are culturally and vocationally embedded. Counseling occurs in a particular place, with a particular person, at a particular time in their life, and with particular struggles and challenges. Of course, all this occurs in a particular culture, with particular ideas and customs about counseling, personal problems, and mental health. Furthermore, the counseling act itself is situated in some unique setting (in a church, an outpatient clinic, a hospital, a group home, a residential treatment center, etc.). So, to love our clients well, it is crucial to consider their spiritual life and to consider their unique context.

The first article by Nate Brooks aims to fix a crack in some versions of biblical counseling that, according to Brooks, operate under a "maximalist" understanding of the sufficiency of Scripture. He proposes this can be repaired by a reappropriation of the many benefits of God's common grace, applied by means of a "theologically robust theory of integration." He contends, "Integration is no less reliant upon a theological method than is biblical counseling, and biblical counseling is no less reliant upon a method of integration than is Integrationism." From our perspective, it doesn't seem to be much of a theological stretch to assert that because both special grace or revelation and common grace or general revelation are divine, they are intended by God to be integrated, to cooperate with, and to complement one another. Yet we must preserve Scripture as our "first truth discourse," always granting it epistemic primacy and finality.

In his essay, Alex Wendel issues a call for "Gospel-grounded, clinically informed, and sufficiently sapiential" counseling and care in our world where there has been an explosion of "moral/spiritual options" for fixing one's soul and finding the good life. His missiological vision is consistent with ours at SEBTS: "Christian counselors are on the front lines of being able to bear witness to the truth of who God is, who God says people are,

and what God intends for his most beloved creation. Because of this great need to demonstrate the dignity of people and their dire need for God, there is an apologetic register to Christian counseling, especially in the 'secular' or licensed arenas. Rather than pursuing a conflictual stance with regard to 'secular counseling' there is a need for Christians to inhabit and help to shape the broader world of counseling."

On the epistemological front, Wendel's article collaborates with Brooks's article, contending that "all of God's revelation can play a part in helping people heal when we understand that all true knowledge is a reflection of God's knowledge." He finds a crack in Christian counseling that operates under an "incomplete or underdeveloped theological anthropology that fails to recognize the importance of the body in soul care." Wendel reminds us that in fact the body does keep the score as the Bible emphasizes the critical importance of the body in our spiritual health (cf. 1 Cor 6:12–20; 9:24–27). Finally, he applies his concerns to the care and counsel of those who have been traumatized, highlighting the safety of God the Father, the empathic suffering of the Son ("a high priest" that can "sympathize with our weaknesses"), and the powerful and restorative presence of the Spirit. Therefore, the church as the body of Christ can indeed be the hands and feet and heart of Jesus, "a place of refuge and restoration."

Wendel's article and the next one by Kelsey Hamilton helpfully remind us that systematic theology, biblical exegesis, and preaching are not equivalent to the one-on-one ministry of counseling. Of course, this is obvious and evident in the stories and teaching of Jesus in the Gospels. His teaching was often directed to common people at various stages of life in a variety of cultures. People need both practical help and real hope. Wisdom sees, hears, knows, understands, walks, sits with, agonizes, and protests with real people in real time in real places.

Hamilton's article aims to rebalance ultra-cognitive, hyper-intellectual responses to the types of suffering that come at us rather than from us, the pain and evil for which we are not culpable. She advocates for a more practical, embodied, and affectively attuned response—whether that would be tears of compassion, flint-faced righteous anger, or empowerment and encouragement. It is noteworthy in 1 Thessalonians 5 that Paul instructs the church to admonish the unruly or idle, encourage others who are fainthearted (think, depressed, and/or, anxious), and just help or hold on to the weak. With all these, Paul says, "be patient" (v. 14). We serve the father of mercies and the God of all comfort who comforts us so that we can pass the comfort we have received on to others who are going through hard circumstances. Hamilton properly encourages us to balance

"orthodoxy with orthopraxis and compassion for the afflicted." Her concerns are a good reminder about the importance of presence and patience, the limited nature of words, and the great need in these moments for a transcendent and immanent God who, in his good time, will do what only he can do in his inimitable ways.

Not only are people disordered, but so are our families. Kristin Kellen's article contends that Christian counseling brims with hope because of the relational healing that redemption in Christ can bring into our families and our churches. She unpacks the first verse of the New Testament, Matt 1:1, and finds within it both dysfunction and restoration. She highlights the redemptive and progressively sanctifying power of Jesus as he rescues individuals from both the penalty and the power of sin. Then, by his Spirit, he re-orders their loves, bringing about the fruits of the Spirit that push back the effects of dysfunction in a family, enabling us "to speak lovingly and constructively." In addition, she discusses the renewal Jesus can bring into conflicted family relationships which provides us a model for confrontation, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Then, recognizing the impact of our families of origin, she reminds us of the spiritual family we could and should have in his church. It is a family that transcends the limitations of our biological families and gives us new brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers with whom we can be transparent and find both encouragement and accountability. Finally, Kellen points us to the future, to the eschatological hope forecast in Revelation when generational dysfunction will come to an end. Maranatha, come Lord Jesus.

The last article in this issue by Colin McCulloch reminds us that while suffering is a big problem on this planet, Christian counselors that merit the name of Christ must realize that our sin problem is even bigger. As McCulloch asserts, reckoning with the problem of sin in our personal and relational problems has been one of the helpful retrievals by Jay Adams and subsequent authors in the biblical counseling movement. But he finds a crack in a lack of depth in Christian counseling's understanding of the function of the law. He proceeds to shed light from a historic reformed perspective on the use of the law of God in the Christian life, especially its capacity to illuminate the gospel of Jesus the Christ.

McCulloch's pastoral heart is reflected in his article, wherein he writes, "As counselors we must be like skillful surgeons who wield the law with precision. It should be used more like a surgical scalpel than like a club… There is a danger in being quick to apply the law without having an adequate understanding of the person. When we do this, we are like 'one who gives an answer before he hears,' thus bringing about our own 'folly and shame' (Prov 18.13)."

Finally, McCulloch emphasizes the importance of having an experiential knowledge of God's law and our predicament in view of it. He reminds us of what Paul reminds us of in Romans 7, that the law is not in itself a problem. *Au contraire*, it is holy, just, good, and spiritual. The psalms likewise continually remind us that the law is intended to bring joy to our hearts and enlighten our eyes (Ps 19:8). Referencing John Owen, he writes, "In order for true conversion and sanctification to occur, one must have a sense of his own sinfulness that is active and efficacious." He helpfully reminds us of the Spirit's work in writing the law on our hearts, such that we have an experiential, affective apprehension of God's good law (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10). Christian counseling is new covenant counseling.

Following these articles is an interview of three SEBTS counseling professors: Nate Brooks, Brad Hambrick, and Kristin Kellen. Psalm 36:9 says, "In Your light, we see light." We submit this issue of the journal to you for thoughtful consideration of a few cracks we find in contemporary soul care. We hope we have shed some light to encourage and further the development of Christian Counseling that does indeed merit the name of Christ.

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Everybody Integrates: Biblical Counseling and the Use of Extrabiblical Material

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Abstract: *Biblical counseling as a discipline has often identified itself as being an approach to counseling that stands opposed to integration. This article draws a distinction between Integrationism as a theoretical approach to Christian counseling and the actual process of integrating extrabiblical material into one's practice of counseling. It then shows that Jay Adams, Wayne Mack, and Heath Lambert, past and current leaders within the traditional-nouthetic approach to counseling, all integrate significant amounts of extrabiblical material into their counseling, including material derived from secular psychology. Given that all counselors must integrate material from Scripture and from sources external to Scripture, the article concludes by affirming the need for biblical counselors to have a robust theory of integration*

Key Words: *biblical counseling, common grace, Heath Lambert, integration, Jay Adams, psychology, skills, theology, Wayne Mack*

The word "integration" is not a friendly word within the discipline of biblical counseling. Biblical counseling literature often portrays "Integrationists" as those who err by believing that "the biblical text" is little more than "a shallow and imprecise psychology" for counseling.[1] Integrationists' compromised viewpoint stands in contradistinction to biblical counselors whose approach to counseling is based on the faithful belief that "the Bible is a sufficient counseling resource."[2]

The labels of "Integrationism" and "biblical counseling" are helpful in distinguishing between two different theoretical approaches towards Christian counseling.[3] However, I wonder if these names can serve to cloak an important reality for both perspectives: Integrationism is no less

[1] John Street, "Why Biblical Counseling and Not Psychology?," in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 35.

[2] Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 30.

[3] See Eric Johnson, ed., *Psychology and Christianity: Five Views*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

reliant upon a theological method than is biblical counseling, and biblical counseling is no less reliant upon a method of integration than is Integrationism.[4]

The assertion that both biblical counseling and Integrationism are dependent upon theological method is well-attested within relevant literature. Biblical counseling understands itself as an explicitly biblical-theological discipline, an affirmation that can be seen in its very name, and biblical counselors have written on this point extensively.[5] While Integrationists have been slower to develop an explicit theological backing for their practices, recent years have seen an increase in this kind of work.[6] Biblical counselors and Integrationists come to different theological conclusions in both theory-building and in clinical application at times. However, current literature in both fields acknowledge the centrality of robust theology for a healthy approach to counseling no matter one's theoretical orientation.[7]

[4] Throughout this essay I will use a capitalized term (Integration) to refer to the discipline and an uncapitalized term (integration) to refer to the act of integrating material from multiple domains of knowledge.

[5] For a representative sample, see Jay Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) and Ed Hinson and Howard Eyrich, *Totally Sufficient: The Bible and Christian Counseling* (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2004).

[6] Callaway and Whitney note, "Much of the psychology/theology integration literature is not only *not* integrated … but also suffers from somewhat thin and underdeveloped notions of the available theological resources and of the possible contributions that theology might make to psychology." Kutter Callaway and William B. Whitney, *Theology for Psychology and Counseling: An Invitation to Holistic Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 5. See also Mark McMinn, *Sin and Grace in Christian Counseling: An Integrative Paradigm* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 11–48.

[7] Compare, for instance, the agreement between Kutter Calloway and Heath Lambert. Calloway writes to psychologists, "Psychologists … are always … doing theology. As a result, they are, in fact, already theologians…. So the question isn't so much about whether you are doing theology…. Instead, the question is about the depth, rigor, and critical self-awareness you bring to a task in which you are always already engaged." Heath Lambert writes, "Counseling is a theological discipline…. The only question is whether a counselor adopts a theological vision of reality that God believes is faithful—or unfaithful. We cannot chose to have a vision of reality that is *not* theological" (*Theology for Psychology*, 2). Lambert writes to biblical counselors, "Understanding that counseling requires some vision of life is crucial to understanding the theological nature of counseling. The reason is that such a vision of reality is *always* theological" (*Theology of Biblical counseling*, 17; italics original).

Turning to the topic of integrative method, Integrationists have unsurprisingly produced a great deal of literature regarding the relationship between Christian practice and psychological theories.[8] Biblical counselors, on the other hand, have most commonly approached secular psychology with a hostile posture. Because the default stance has historically been one of rejection under the banner of Scriptural sufficiency, biblical counseling is largely devoid of published self-conscious reflections regarding the integrative process.[9]

This article will argue that biblical counselors of necessity incorporate material drawn from domains of knowledge outside of Scripture, thereby requiring biblical counseling to establish its own robust theory of integration.[10] "Integration" used in this way must be understood as an act and not theoretical perspective—it is the process of drawing material together from a variety of sources, including but not limited to secular psychology, into a coherent and helpful approach to counseling. I will demonstrate that the act of integration is performed by all biblical counselors by demonstrating pervasive use of knowledge sourced from domains other

[8] See John D. Carter and Bruce Narramore, *The Integration of Psychology and Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Mark R. McMinn and Clark D. Campbell, *Integrative Psychotherapy: Toward a Comprehensive Christian Approach* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2017); Megan Anna Neff and Mark McMinn, *Embodying Integration: A Fresh Look at Christianity in the Therapy Room* (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2020).

[9] David Powlison provides one of the only self-aware discussions of biblical-counseling-as-psychology in David Powlison, "A Biblical Counseling View," in *Psychology and Christianity: 5 Views*, 2nd ed., ed. Eric Johnson (Grand Rapids: IVP Academic, 2010), 245–73. James Hurley and James Berry press David Powlison and Ed Welch over biblical counseling's lack of interest in developing specific processes for using material found in domains outside of Scripture in their 1997 dialogue. See James B. Hurley and James T. Berry, "Response to Welch and Powlison" *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 16.4 (1997): 350–62.

[10] I acknowledge that the term "biblical counseling" has a certain amount of elasticity to it. Significant discussion exists over whether biblical counseling is a unified field, or if there are fundamentally different approaches grouped together under an overarching banner. This discussion falls outside the purview of this article; however, I find Eric Johnson's distinction between traditional-nouthetic biblical counseling and progressive biblical counseling helpful. See Eric Johnson, *Foundations for Soul Care* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 109–11. Heath Lambert provides an alternative perspective in Heath Lambert, *Biblical Counseling After Adams* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 121–36. I address the specifics of David Powlison's writings on psychology in Nate Brooks, "What Did David Powlison Teach about Scripture and Psychology?," *Biblical Counseling Coalition*. https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2023/10/20/what-did-david-powlison-teach-about-scripture-and-psychology/ (accessed 2/5/24).

than Scripture throughout the work of three traditional-nouthetic biblical counselors: Jay Adams, Wayne Mack, and Heath Lambert. I have chosen these three authors because they stand in the stream of biblical counseling thought that most actively resists the incorporation of material outside of Scripture into counseling. If even traditional-nouthetic biblical counselors integrate extrabiblical material into their counseling practice, other streams within biblical counseling certainly do so as well.

To be clear, this article is not a clandestine assault upon biblical counseling. I write not as an outside observer, but as practitioner and professor within the biblical counseling tradition. My aim in this article is to highlight a weakness in biblical counseling's philosophy that leads to confusion in hopes that further work will be done to close a gap that reduces the quality of care offered to God's people.

The Sufficiency of Scripture

The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture has long been a watchword within the biblical counseling movement. Most major biblical counseling organizations use the term in their doctrinal or methodological commitments to explain the relationship between Scripture and counseling.[11] Interestingly, Jay Adams infrequently used the term within his major writings. His landmark 1970 work *Competent to Counsel* never uses the term or its derivatives, and within *More than Redemption*, *A Christian's Counselor's Manual*, and *Shepherding God's Flock* the only use is a scant reference to the Bible being "sufficient" for understanding what we need to know about God's will.

Adams first significantly used the term in his 1986 book *How to Help People Change*. Here Adams understands 2 Tim 3:17 to declare that a counselor "need never feel inadequate so long as he has the Bible. If he is inadequate, it is not because the Bible is inadequate but simply because he does not know his Bible adequately. The Bible has what he needs to meet all demands in counseling."[12] Adams quickly acknowledged that the Scriptures do not contain all pieces of knowledge available to humanity, as it is not a "textbook for electrical engineering, shipbuilding, aeronautics, or a

[11] See Biblical Counseling Coalition, "Confessional Statement;" Association of Certified Biblical Counseling, "Standards of Conduct," I.A; International Association of Biblical Counselors, "IABC Statement of Faith."

[12] Jay E. Adams, *How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 30. In this book, Adams quotes his 1982 journal article, "Integration" within the Journal of Pastoral Practice. The focus of his 1982 article is integration, and the 1986 book expands his article's discussion of sufficiency.

hundred-and-one-other disciplines." However, because the Scriptures are written as a "textbook for living, and for changing our living to conform to God's requirements" a counselor can know that "in the pages of Scripture are stowed every principle [they] might ever need to perform [their] tasks."[13] For Adams, any piece of information that could be discovered within secular psychology was already in the Scriptures: "If it is a truth that is *necessary* to counseling, it will be found already *in a purer form* in the Bible…. What it may serve the function of doing is alerting the counselor to the need to study the matter to which it pertains more fully *in the Scriptures*."[14]

Many later biblical counselors followed in Adams's footsteps regarding their understanding of the doctrine of sufficiency. Wayne Mack declares, "I reject the idea that Biblical counselors need extrabiblical insights to do truly effective counseling…. Scripture is not silent about the matter of its sufficiency for both understanding man and his non-physical problems, and resolving those problems."[15] Heath Lambert insists that "God gave us a Bible that is sufficient for counseling and does not need to be supplemented by the findings of common grace."[16]

This formulation of the doctrine of biblical sufficiency is maximalist in nature. Common grace, and therefore the subcategory of secular psychology, is ultimately irrelevant to the practice of counseling. According to these authors, the Bible contains everything necessary for theory building and for the practice of counseling. Because counseling is a spiritual

[13] Adams, *How to Help People Change*, 31.

[14] Adams, *How to Help People Change*, 39 (italics original).

[15] Wayne Mack, "What Is Biblical Counseling," in *Totally Sufficient*, ed. Ed Hindson and Howard Eyrich (Ross-Shire: Christian Focus, 2004): 25–51, 17, 25.

[16] Lambert, *Theology of Biblical Counseling*, 100. Lambert develops this further in his book *Biblical Counseling and Common Grace* (Wapwallopen: Shepherd Press, 2023). Here Lambert writes specifically of one trauma-informed practice: "I … see no reason to quibble with the claim that ice cubes could have a 'grounding' effect in keeping traumatized individuals from disassociating" (p. 65). However, despite his acknowledgement that such practices could be useful and helpful, he affirms that "Nothing about the existence of approaches outside of Scripture does anything to erode the sufficient resources in Scripture…. Scripture addresses counseling-related problems to such an extent that no other resources are required for counseling content" (p. 67). Indeed, it appears he views such strategies as a waste of time, as "Time in counseling is a zero-sum game. The more time we spend in counseling working with secular resources, the less time we will be able to spend unpacking the glorious truths of the Scriptures…. I am ready to promise that eternity will reveal countless counselees who would gladly trade their time engaging such therapies, regardless of any common grace value they may hold, for time spent lingering over the Word of God" (pp. 73–74).

discipline, material from non-Christian approaches is largely irrelevant as "Jesus Christ was the world's wonderful Counselor. In no way was His counseling dependent on the 'findings of psychology.'"[17]

I have provided a more detailed theological discussion about common grace and the nature of counseling elsewhere.[18] Rather than reduplicate this discussion here, this article will remain focused on demonstrating that a formal rejection of common grace insights for counseling cannot be sustained in the actual practice of counseling, thus necessitating a theologically robust theory of integrating material from the Scriptures and other domains of knowledge.

The Ad-Hoc Importation of Extra-Biblical Material

Every counseling theory must be made practicable, and this practice of necessity involves using material not explicitly taught within the pages of Scripture. Even those advocating a maximalist version of biblical sufficiency incorporate vast amounts of material from other domains than Scripture itself. This task requires integration—the placing together of material from multiple domains into a coherent, workable schema.

Jay Adams

The reality of integration can immediately be seen within the work of Jay Adams.[19] While the core of Adams's transformational system was drawn from the exegesis of biblical texts, the actual practice of nouthetic counseling is littered with processes and practices drawn from domains other than Scripture.[20]

[17] Adams, *How to Help People Change*, 35.

[18] Nate Brooks, "Herman Bavinck, Patron Saint of Biblical Counselors: How an Old Dutch Theologian Helps Us Make Sense of Biblical Sufficiency" (Convocation, Reformed Theological Seminary Charlotte, 08.30.22), https://rts.edu/resources/herman-bavinck-patron-saint-of-biblical-counselors/.

[19] Adams's work here is surveyed in depth because of the breadth of his writing on practical counseling topics.

[20] Bob Kellemen has recently raised the question of how much Adams was influenced by O. Hobart Mowrer rather than simply exegeting texts of Scripture to develop his system of Nouthetic Counseling. I find Kellemen's preliminary work to be a helpful extension of this conversation, recognizing that Adams's own reading of texts happened within the context of his own psychological influences. See Bob Kellemen, "Meet the Man Who Influenced the Early Nouthetic Counseling Movement: O. Hobart Mowrer," RPM Ministries. https:// rpmministries.org/2023/10/o-hobart-mowrer-the-man-who-influenced-the-early-nouthetic-counseling-movement/ (accessed 2/5/24).

Consider the breadth of Adams's suggestions to counselors. He suggested that pastors (the primary practitioners of nouthetic counseling in Adams's mind) "chalk out certain hours for counseling," especially afternoon hours since "men … can take off from work to see other [professionals]; they will do the same for you."[21] Adams's work is littered with references to a secretary who handles various kinds of counseling-related matters and phone calls—which presupposes that having a secretary is normal within nouthetic counseling environments.[22] Adams gave detailed suggestions and instructions on the need to review homework at the beginning of sessions,[23] interpreting body language and nonverbal cues,[24] taking notes,[25] how to ask relevant questions,[26] transitioning between stages of counseling, and ending the counseling relationship.

Adams believed quite strongly in the usefulness of intake documents, which he labeled the Personal Data Inventory (P.D.I.). The P.D.I. covered a wide range of topics, including an individual's familial and spiritual backgrounds, prior counseling experiences, understanding of the problem, and relevant medical issues, amid other things. "Let me suggest," Adams adjured, "that you *always* use a P.D.I. in *every* counseling case …. as you do, you will discover that *in most cases* you actually have far less information than you may have supposed."[27] (Quite naturally, this advice did not apply in cases of suicide or other crisis scenarios).[28]

Built into nouthetic counseling was the expectation that homework would be assigned to counselees. Adams was quite insistent that homework be completed, urging counselors, "One simply may not barrel ahead toward his next counseling goal, giving new homework, when the previous week's homework is yet incomplete. Better to stick to what has been assigned already, discover what got in the way, lay plans for getting it done this time, and reassigning it."[29]

A full review of all material used by Adams that originated from domains outside of Scripture exceeds the limits of this article. However, this representative sample demonstrates that Adams's approach to counseling

[21] Jay Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 40.

[22] Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling*, 42.

[23] Jay Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 235.

[24] Adams, *Counselor's Manual*, 257–58.

[25] Adams, *Counselor's Manual*, 263–66.

[26] Adams, *Counselor's Manual*, 274–76.

[27] Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling*, 42.

[28] Jay Adams, *Lectures on Counseling* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1977), 105.

[29] Adams, *Update on Christian Counseling,* 62–63.

pervasively incorporated material from outside of Scripture. Adams rejected what he saw to be unbiblical, and used what he found to be consistent with the teachings of Scripture.[30]

Wayne Mack

Though not as verbose as Adams, Wayne Mack also wrote extensively on the practicalities of counseling. He penned the seven core methodological chapters in the John MacArthur Library volume on pastoral counseling. There he notes that in order to help people with their problems, counselors must gather data "in at least six areas: physical state, resources, emotions, actions, concepts, and historical background."[31] In order to gather this data, Mack follows Adams in recommending the use of a Personal Data Inventory form and provides a sample form for his readers.[32] Data gathering by questioning should focus on "what" questions rather than "why" questions, and open questions are preferred over closed questions.[33]

Speaking of nonverbal data, Mack notes that the way a family positions themselves in a counseling room can communicate relational alliances.[34] Physical actions such as squeezing chair handles or looking at the floor when a particular issue is raised likewise "reveal information that will be useful to help counselees change."[35] Likewise "paralinguistic communication" such as "tone of voice" and a counselee's willingness or unwillingness to talk about particular issues "can provide as much information as merely concentrating on what the counselees say."[36]

Counselee resistance may be categorized as "overt and covert." While overt resistance is rather obvious, Mack sees covert resistance as demonstrated through absenteeism, failure to complete homework assignments,

[30] More debated is the influence of O. Hobart Mowrer on Jay Adams. Bob Kellemen outlines the case for Adams being significantly influenced by Mowrer in his counseling model. Kellemen quotes David Powlison as saying, "Mowrer had given Adams the contours of a counseling model and had set him in motion…. Adams began implementing what he had learned from Mowrer and what he was discovering in his Bible" ("Meet the Man Who Influenced the Early Nouthetic Counseling Movement").

[31] Wayne Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 132.

[32] Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," 140.

[33] Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," 141–42.

[34] Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," 144–45.

[35] Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," 145.

[36] Mack, "Taking Counselee Inventory," 145.

distancing from the counselor, threat making, intimidation, and manipulation through tears or flattery.[37]

In addition to the incorporation of all these extrabiblical observations, Mack also frequently employs the use of "scaling" as a technique within counseling. His *Preparing for Marriage God's Way* is largely centered around ranking oneself and one's partner across hundreds of various metrics. Mack's use of scaling is consistent with the use of scaling in secular counseling manuals.[38] Like Adams, Mack's practice of counseling is replete with examples of using material drawn from sources other than the Scriptures, with Mack serving to arbitrate whether a given strategy or tool conformed to biblical truth or ran afoul of it.

Heath Lambert

Heath Lambert's book on pornography addiction contains many interventions that exceed the data found within text of Scripture. The chapter on "Radical Measures" insists that a man or woman caught in sexual sin must give their accountability partner any device that can play movies and give them total access to their home— including keys and a permission to "enter at any point to do a spot-check of your residence and your car."[39] GPS locations should be shared with the accountability partner, as well as receipts.[40] To be clear, these moral imperatives are a biblical mandate to Lambert—punctuated by words like "should" and "need" throughout the text of his book. Lambert clearly lays out his rationale for such interventions, noting that "You will think twice about visiting a place you shouldn't if you know your accountability partner can tell you were there."[41] In other words, the purpose of these measures is to create an aversive environment for negative behavior. Once again, this parallels common secular techniques.

[37] Wayne Mack, "Biblical Counseling and Inducement," in *Counseling: How to Counsel Biblically*, ed. John MacArthur (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 183–84.

[38] Wayne Mack, *Preparing for Marriage God's Way: A Step-by-Step Guide for Marriage Success Before and After the Wedding*, rev. ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013). See Bradley T. Erford, *45 Techniques Every Counselor Should Know*, 3rd ed. (New York: Pearson, 2019), 19–33 for an example of scaling taught in a secular counseling skills book. In a personal anecdote, my wife and I used Mack's marriage guide as part of our premarital counseling. While it darn near killed us off by its thoroughness, it also proved to be very helpful in building a strong foundation for working through challenges in our married life.

[39] Heath Lambert, *Finally Free: Fighting for Purity with the Power of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 67.

[40] Lambert, *Finally Free*, 68.

[41] Lambert, *Finally Free*, 68.

Elsewhere Lambert writes of caring for a woman suffering from postpartum depression and homicidal ideation towards her newborn. Lambert triages the situation by declaring, "This was not the time for much of anything on her part except for sleep and nourishment."[42] He also relieves the wife of any childcare responsibilities immediately for the rest of the day, asking the husband to take the next day off.[43]

Lambert's work on ACBC's *Truth for Life* podcast demonstrates a similar pattern of using material from domains outside of Scripture. Speaking of suicide intervention, he insists that an individual must "not leave [a suicidal] person alone." The friend or counselor "may need to call 911 if this becomes an emergency situation" and "depend on the emergency medical intervention of the state."[44]

Lambert suggests that counselors work to build trust with reticent clients by stepping forth first in trust by disclosing some kind of personal interest in their case.[45] Likewise, counselors may know that it's time for formal counseling to be concluded when the counseling agenda has been successfully completed or when a counselee establishes a pattern of failing to complete their homework.[46]

[42] Heath Lambert, "Sarah and Postpartum Depression," *Counseling the Hard Cases: True Stories Illustrating the Sufficiency of God's Resources in Scripture*, ed. Heath Lambert and Stuart Scott (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 97.

[43] Lambert, "Sarah and Postpartum Depression," 97.

[44] Heath Lambert, "Helping My Friend Who's Suicidal," Truth in Love Podcast 56 (published 4/5/17; accessed 3/14/23). https://biblical counseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/til-056-helping-my-friend-whos-suicidal/.

[45] Heath Lambert and Sean Perron, "Answers to Your Counseling Questions," Truth in Love Podcast 145 (published 3/12/18; accessed 11/1/22). Specifically Lambert says, "When I let you trust something of mine, then there is a growing chance that you'll let me trust something of yours. I don't mind with folks being very personal. I don't mind telling them, 'Let me tell you why what you came to talk to me about is so important to me.' and then it could be that I've had something similar happen to me or maybe not something similar, but something terrible, and they'll realize that, 'Hey, I know what you're talking about.' Or I'll tell them something personal in the sense that, 'Hey, I've struggled with this sin too or I've struggled with a sin like it.' I want to serve them by opening up my heart and showing them something of me and praying, hoping, trusting, and believing that when I do that to them, they'll do it back and let me help."

[46] Heath Lambert and Sean Perron, "Answers to Your Counseling Questions," Truth in Love Podcast 144 (published 3/5/18; accessed 11/1/22). https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes /til-144-answers-to-your-counseling-questions/.

Stepping into a very different topic, Lambert comments on the relationship between people and animals:

> There's not a thing in the whole world wrong with having an animal that you love. If you come home from a hard day of work, or if you're going through a hard time and there is an animal that, because of the connection that you have with that animal and the love that you feel for that animal, it gives you some comfort in a hard time, that is not controversial and that is not wrong at all.[47]

At the same time, Lambert rejects the use of animals for therapy, arguing that doing so overturns the creation mandate, inflates pride, and can serve as substitutes for our need to rely on Jesus.

Lambert thus follows the pattern set forward by Adams and Mack—Lambert's practice of counseling is a mix of material drawn from Scripture and from domains outside of Scripture.

A Question of Origin

The primary question that emerges from this survey is, "Where did the techniques and assertions employed by these biblical counselors come from?" Undoubtedly these authors will assert that all are applications of the biblical text, and therefore fall within their maximalist sufficiency position on Scripture and counseling. But at issue in this article is not the faithfulness or wisdom of their advice, but rather origin of that advice. Adams, Mack, and Lambert clearly source much of the content of their counseling from the Scriptures. However, other significant aspects of the system they endorse and many of the strategies they employ are nowhere to be found within the biblical text.[48]

[47] Heath Lambert and Sean Perron, "Emotional Support Animals," Truth in Love Podcast Episode 155 (published 5/21/18; accessed 3/14/23). https://biblicalcounseling.com/resource-library/podcast-episodes/til-153-emotional-support-animals/.

[48] There is some disagreement over exactly how independent Adams's nouthetic model is from secular approaches. His approach has been described as a nontechnical variant of cognitive-behavioral therapy from those outside the realm of biblical counseling. Even among biblical counselors, there is acknowledgement that O. Hobart Mowrer had a significant influence on Jay Adams's conception of what counseling ought to be, although the extent of that impact is up for debate. See George R. Ross, *Evaluating Models of Christian Counseling* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 89–91. Greg Gifford, "Jay Adams' Heritage: How Jay Adams Is Connected to the Father of American Psychology," Biblical Counseling Coalition (published 5/3/19; accessed 10/21/22). https://www. Biblicalcounseling coalition.org/2019/05/03/jay-adams-heritage-how-jay-adams-is-connected-to-the-father-of-american-psychology/.

Where Did This Stuff Come From?

Two primary possibilities exist for where the extrabiblical material employed by these authors comes from. First, it is possible that their material comes from the domain of common grace, and, at times, the subcategory of secular psychology. Some biblical counselors frequently bemoan the reality that American culture is "psychologized." Yet, these authors too inhabit this psychologized environment. While biblical counselors have long guarded the front door from the intrusion of secular methods, methods found in secular counseling such as scaling, hour long appointments, and PDIs have slipped through the back door. It will not do to say that these are acceptable because they are consistent with biblical teaching, as the maximalist sufficiency position affirms that the Bible alone provides all necessary content for wise counseling. The very form of counseling adopted by these traditional-nouthetic biblical counselors mirrors not that of the biblical text, but rather the Western therapeutized culture it inhabits. It is difficult to understand why the superstructure of counseling may be sourced from secular psychology but specific, targeted practices may not.

Additionally, there are many different forms of "secular psychology." The information used by Adams, Mack, and Lambert tends to be more observational rather than clinical. But if observational data may be used, then empirically validated counseling strategies should be able to be used, as empirically validating them consists of observing how they effectively help human beings change. Those that are consistent with a biblical worldview should also be able to be employed, as secular-sourced interventions are not categorically against the grain of Scripture (see Mack's use of scaling and Lambert's use of creating an adverse environment). After all, once one has cracked the door open to using material from outside of Scripture, the question becomes not "Is this in the Bible?" but rather "Is this consistent with the Bible?" Once one is asking the second question, which must be asked by all biblical counselors, one is practicing integration.

A second possibility is that these techniques were generated from within the theorist themselves. Counselors tend to learn what works and what doesn't work through counseling, and any experienced counselor knows the feeling of having a fresh new approach or method suddenly emerge in their minds during a session. What's useful tends to be repeated, and what's not useful tends to be discarded. Yet even self-generated techniques are still a form of integration, as material is drawn from one's own reason and evaluations. The mind of the counselor is shaped by Scripture, but also broad cultural forces, education, ethnic experiences,

biological factors such as genetics, family history, and a whole host of other factors. The mind of a counselor is constantly integrating material from many domains and synthesizing it into a package that is hopefully both helpful to the counselee and in harmony with Scripture.

Conclusion: The Need for a Robust Theory of Integration

This article has demonstrated that all biblical counselors use a system of counseling that combines material from the Scriptures and other domains of knowledge. This has been accomplished through evaluating the writings of traditional-nouthetic biblical counselors who have most strongly affirmed a maximalist view of sufficiency. Our evaluation has demonstrated that even these authors routinely use material from outside of Scripture, whether sourced from their own experience, the psychologically informed culture they inhabit, or direct learning.

Without a theologically robust theory of integration, biblical counseling is particularly susceptible to being swayed by the idiosyncratic evaluations of its leaders. Why is it that the hour-long meeting format, governed by forms and homework, is acceptable but drawing from empirically validated treatments such as systematic desensitization tends to be seen as unacceptable? Both can be seen as an application of the Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15 for homework, 1 Cor 9:27 for desensitization). In truth, no counselor can consistently hold that the Bible contains all information necessary for counseling because counseling is an inherently anthropocentric discipline. Its focus on human transformation traffics in everything that involves being human, topics that exceed the specific teachings of Scripture. While Scripture helps us evaluate all things, it does not explicitly teach us all things necessary to offer the best form of care for our counselees. A theologically robust theory of integration will go far towards establishing a solid substrate for engagement with material derived from common grace sources, material God has given to us in his goodness for our betterment.

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Sufficiently Sapiential Soul-Care: A Working Paper in Therapeutic Theology

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Abstract: *This article examines what is required for the work of soul-care to be sufficiently sapiential. Sapiential knowledge is understood as the practical wisdom that comes from God's self-knowledge that he reveals in and through creation to his creatures: namely, human beings. I propose that in order for soul care to take place in a sufficiently wise manner, there are several subjects that need to be considered, properly ordered, and appropriately applied. First, it is incumbent upon the sufficiently sapiential soul care provider to understand the socio-epistemic contexts in which they work and in which the people they work with exist. Accordingly, this essay discusses what it means to live, move, and have our being in a secular age. Second, sufficiently sapiential soul care involves understanding humanity holistically. In order to be sufficiently sapiential, then, soul care providers take into consideration all relevant facets of human functioning and flourishing when attempting to make sense of what people in their care need from them, from others, and from God. Finally, a proposal is made for what a sufficiently sapiential case conceptualization entails for someone who has endured complex traumatic experiences that have impacted their life in various ways. The essay concludes with an invitation for collaborative work with Christians across the spectrum of counseling and soul care in order to see more people within and outside of the Church not just function but perhaps also flourish.*

Key Words: *counseling, practical wisdom, soul care, theology, therapy*

My initial argument is a simple one: the object of theology is God and the aim of theology is to understand all things in relation to God. This lays the groundwork for showing that Christians can make the knowledge of God and his relationship to all things understandable, articulable, and even therapeutic without bending the nature and task of theology so far that it becomes anthropology or sociology masquerading as proper theology. To narrow the focus a little further, I will discuss three major topics: (1) the subjective elements of divine revelation, (2) the inherent systematicity of theology by virtue of its object, and (3) how both of these together can lay a foundation for approaching psychology and therapy from

a theological perspective because of theology's inherently systematic register when done with God as its object of study. The article progresses into a practical discussion of how we can make theological sense of trauma in a therapeutic way and how this is a component of being sufficiently sapiential. Finally, the paper concludes with a call for continued collaborative work in providing care and counsel for all.

A Preface Concerning Counseling in our Secular Age

In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor argues that our typical understanding of what it means for society to be secular is at best incomplete or at worst just plain wrong.[1] Taylor approaches the subject of secularism as a complex movement that cannot be simply understood as a separation of church and state or as a triumph of science over faith. The situation is far more complex and Occam has no razor to apply. If Christians are going to grapple with and live out their faith and convictions within a secular context, they need to know precisely what this means—cheap definitions will lead to cheapened engagement with rival theories of human nature and human flourishing.

Inhabiting the Supernova of Our Secular Age

The explosion of different views of human flourishing that we see all around us today is what Taylor calls the "Nova Effect," which is meant to conjure up images of a star going supernova and "spawning an ever-widening variety of moral/spiritual options, across the span of the thinkable and perhaps even beyond."[2] When situated in the middle of this supernova, people feel pulled between the poles of faith and doubt, transcendence and immanence, despair and hope. Living in a so-called secular age involves more than mere intellectual doubts, it involves emotional *distress*; distress that Christian counselors can help alleviate with competent counsel and care that is gospel-grounded, clinically informed, and sufficiently sapiential.

Significant to Taylor's vision of what it means to live in a secular age are specific distinctions regarding what secularism entails and embraces. Briefly, Taylor's Taxonomy of secularism involves three categories:

Secular One: Medieval Ministry

> In Medieval life, the secular was not inherently against the sacred. Instead, the secular referred to more earthly, material concerns whereas the sacred dealt more with religious devotion and

[1] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007).
[2] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 299.

obligation. The terms were not (and currently are not) mutually exclusive, however, as one can still find "secular priests" in the Catholic Church, for example.

Secular Two: Subtraction Stories

Taylor argues that the most common version of secularism relies on subtraction stories, which tell a tale of "human beings having lost, or sloughed off, or liberated themselves, from certain earlier, confining horizons, or illusions, or limitations of knowledge." This understanding of secularization is less about the *addition* of new thoughts or new beliefs and more about the *uncovering* of "underlying features of human nature which were there all along, but had been impeded by what is now set aside."[3]

Secular Three: Changes in Conditions of Belief & the Rise of New Social Imaginaries

More constructively, Taylor argues that secularism is a change in "the conditions of belief" that are the result of "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace."[4]

Taylor speaks of society becoming "disenchanted" and shifting the location of meaning from the *external* world and *into* the mind. This shift leads to the loss of the "idea that God was planning a transformation of human beings which would take them beyond the limitations which inhere in their present condition."[5] Once transcendence is lost and collapses into the immanent frame, humanity becomes alone in the world and must devise their own way out of the despair of their current state with no God to help them should they be unable to do so.

From here we can move into the major premise of this article: what it means for theology to be systematic and what it means for us to be sufficiently sapiential in our practices.

The Case for Therapeutic Theology

The Object and Aims of Theology

In his *Prolegomena*, Bavinck pays significant attention to the subjective

[3] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 22.
[4] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3.
[5] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 224.

elements of revelation (which is conceived as the human experience of God making himself known to creation). When Bavinck talks about the subjective element of revelation, he has in mind "the illumination of the Logos (John 1:9), or of the Spirit of God, in intellect, conscience, heart, and mind of human beings, such that they can understand God's general revelation in nature and history."[6] Furthermore, those who "live in the light of the gospel, by the Spirit of God" are able to "recognize and know the special revelation that comes to them in Christ and more specifically in Scripture as the special revelation of God."[7] This dynamic of subjective and objective revelation provides a balanced approach to the conversation concerning knowledge, sufficiency, and the like. Rather than subjective or natural revelation being something foreign or detrimental to the task of soul care, all of God's revelation can play a part in helping people heal when we understand that all true knowledge is a reflection of God's knowledge. Pairing this view of revelation with Taylor's view of secularism involving "a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others" means that Christians can maintain a seat at the table of public discourse concerning mental health and mental illness rather than intentionality removing themselves from the discussion.[8]

The Breadth of Theological Systematicity[9]

Theology as a field of study is one that necessarily reflects the object that is in view; namely *and named* God. It is God's rationality that makes theology inherently systematic by virtue of God being its object. Anna Williams states that "the systematicity of theology is a direct consequence of its subject matter…. Theology mirrors, or perhaps we might say, partakes of, the character of its divine subject."[10] For Williams, systematicity is not the mere man-made ordering of doctrines in relation to each other. Rather, systematicity arises from the object of theology and is an overflow of the rationality of God and the comprehensive knowledge he has of creation. This is the sapiential knowledge that is sought after by theologians seeking to mirror God to all of creation.

[6] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 1: Prolegomena*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 350.
[7] Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, 350.
[8] Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 3
[9] I have explored this idea in further detail in Alex R. Wendel, "Trauma-Informed Theology or Theologically Informed Trauma? Traumatic Experiences and Theological Method," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 16.1–2 (2022): 3–26.
[10] A. N. Williams, "What Is Systematic Theology?," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11.1 (2009): 48.

If we understand that theology is inherently systematic by virtue of its object, we have grounds to argue that theology has something to say about every subject. Furthermore, we have grounds to argue that every subject—falling as it does within the domain of God's creation—can be brought into theological discourse. Therapy does not need to be brought into theology because theology already has grounds to speak about it. Williams states this idea clearly saying that "if all that is not the Trinity is necessarily related to the Trinity, then the scope of Christian Theology cannot be less than comprehensive, and in virtue of their common relation to the Trinity, created things are necessarily related to each other in some way, just as God is related to them."[11] More pointedly, "nothing created can be off limits, inasmuch as its creaturely status entails relation to its creator, and nothing uncreated can be off limits, inasmuch as the uncreated is that with which theology is most fundamentally concerned."[12]

Because theology has God as its object, theology is intrinsically systematic in its breadth and depth. As such, psychology and therapy do not need to be *forced* into the discussion of theology because they are subsumed into the purview of theology naturally when God and his relation to all things are maintained as the object and aim of theology.

Systematicity & Sapiencia

To be sufficiently sapiential is to know not just that "all truth is God's truth," but to know *why* this is the case in the first place as a first principle of theology. In recognizing the systematicity of theology, we are also able to recognize its sapiential register. Taylor's understanding of what it means to live in a secular age provides Christians with a strategic place within the broader discussion of mental health. Because there is no *real* divide between the so-called secular and the sacred, there is actually *more* room for integrative collaboration across disciplines, not less. Because all claims to truth are open for discussion in a truly "secular society," Christians are not removed from (and shouldn't remove themselves from) public discourse. If Christian counselors assume and tacitly endorse an understanding of what it means for society to be secular that simply means a separation of church and state (or even church *against* the state), then they miss the opportunity to speak truth to and provide counsel for people feeling stuck in the Nova. The final question explored has to do with what Christians have to contribute to the discussion of mental health not just within the church but within the world also.

[11] A. N. Williams, *The Architecture of Theology: Structure, System, and Ratio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

[12] Williams, "What Is Systematic Theology?," 46.

Trauma-Informed Theology or Theologically Informed Trauma?[13]

Trauma is a reality faced by many people, and the church needs adequate responses if we are going to be able to meet the needs of what Diane Langberg has called the mission field of the twenty-first century: trauma.[14]

The Hole in Our Soul Care

In *The Logic of the Body: Retrieving Theological Psychology*, Matthew LaPine comments that, unfortunately, "there is a path out of the church that runs through the counselor's office."[15] As a Christian and a counselor, I have seen this to be true, and I wish that it were not the case. One of the reasons for this departure from the church and into a counselor's office has to do with some Christian counselors' incomplete or underdeveloped theological anthropology that fails to recognize the importance of the body in soul care.

To be sufficiently sapiential in our practice of counseling means we need to acknowledge the importance of the body as a qualifier of our emotions, beliefs, and behaviors.[16] LaPine argues that we risk becoming "emotional voluntarists" when we think that "we are responsible for emotions as intrusive mental states that show what we truly believe. Moreover, the illicit desire or false belief may be overcome by applying the Gospel through voluntary mental work."[17] In short, if you want to *feel* better, you need to *think* differently. In this emotionally voluntaristic perspective, there is no path towards understanding and changing emotion that passes through or even detours the body.

With an emaciated theological psychology and anthropology, it is easy to fall into the trap of emotional voluntarism which leads to people inevitably feeling not just *trapped* in their emotions but *guilty* because of them as well. If we understand ourselves as embodied beings with the capacity for upward causation of emotion coming from the body, we can better understand how to utilize the plasticity that God has created us with to work *with* our emotions rather than always *against* them. Our embodied

[13] See Wendel, "Trauma-Informed Theology," for further depth to this discussion.

[14] Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2015).

[15] Matthew LaPine, *The Logic of the Body: Retrieving Theological Psychology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 36.

[16] For more on how the "body qualifies" our lives, see LaPine, *The Logic of the Body*, 4–40.

[17] LaPine, *The Logic of the Body*, 25.

anthropology is also not foreign to Scripture in the first place. Long before Polyvagal Theory or clinical research into somatic interventions, the authors of Scripture were highlighting the importance of the body to spiritual health. This embodiment can be seen pointedly in many psalms including references to the body. Just one example is seen in Psalm 22 which speaks of bones being disjointed and the heart being melted (Ps 22:14). Understanding that the body qualifies emotion, belief, and behavior helps to clarify how and why the body keeps the score of trauma. As LaPine concludes, "we need a theological anthropology that sees a mother rocking her baby as a deeply spiritual act that knits shalom into the brain and nervous system of the child."[18]

A Trinitarian Treatment of Complex Trauma

As a reflection of the true Comforter, Christians are called to provide comfort for those in any affliction with the same comfort by which we ourselves have been comforted (2 Cor 1:4). Bavinck has stated this well and it is worth quoting him at length:

> Correspondence between a religion and the moral needs of human beings are of great significance. The satisfaction of the human heart and conscience are the seal and crown of religion. *A religion that has no consolation to offer in times of mourning and sorrow, in life and in death, cannot be true religion … a religion that has nothing to say at sickbeds and deathbeds, that cannot fortify the doubting ones, not raise up those who are bowed down, is not worthy of the name* [*of religion*]. The contrast often made between truth and consolation does not belong in religion. A truth that contains no comfort, which does not connect with the religious-ethical life of human beings, ceases by that token to be a religious truth. Just as medical science in all its specialties is oriented to the healing of the sick, so in religion people have a right to look for peace and salvation.[19]

If the church is not going to be a place of refuge and restoration for those who have endured traumatic experiences, then those individuals will have to look elsewhere in their contexts or cultures.

Timothy Keller notes that western, secular culture is one of the worst in history at helping people face terrible evil and adversity because "in the secular view, this material world is all there is. And so the meaning of life is to have the freedom to choose the life that makes you most happy.

[18] LaPine, *The Logic of the Body*, 307.

[19] Bavinck, *Prolegomena*, 552 (italics added).

However … suffering can have no meaningful part. It is a complete interruption of your life story."[20] Because of this shortcoming, Keller concludes that secular culture is forced to "smuggle in resources from other views of life … even though their beliefs about the nature of the universe do not line up with those resources."[21] Ashley Jamison has demonstrated evidence regarding this relationship between faith and suffering noting that understanding suffering to be a random event or being due to karma-like retribution is statistically correlated with higher difficulties in emotional regulation.[22] Christians do not need to smuggle in piecemealed truisms and decontextualized verses of religious texts to communicate answers to the question of suffering and to provide comfort to people. Rather, because the systematicity of theology is a reflection on the knowledge of God, Christians are able to point to the God of *all* comfort as the source of *all* counsel and care.

Towards a Therapeutic Trinitarian Theology of Trauma

God is worthy of praise because he is inherently glorious, not *just* because of his glorious acts in creation. David Kelsey reminds us that God's glory is intrinsic to himself and that "God's 'worth for us' is not the basis of the praise of God … because it is response first of all to God for God's own sake, the response to God for 'who' and 'what' God intrinsically is."[23] God's intrinsic glory is relevant to understanding the potential for theology to be therapeutic because it is only by drawing near to *this* glorious God that humanity is able to be made new, to heal, and to flourish regardless of what trauma has befallen them.

The Safety of the Father

Psalm 57:1 opens by saying "be gracious to me, God, be gracious to me, for I take refuge in you. I will seek refuge in the shadow of your wings until danger passes over me" (CSB). God provides safety to his people when they seek refuge in him.[24] For trauma survivors, safety is one of the

[20] Timothy Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 13, 16.

[21] Keller, W*alking with God*, 17.

[22] Ashley R. Jamison, "The Impact of Views of Suffering on Trauma and Emotional Regulation" (Ph.D. diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 67.

[23] David Kelsey, *Human Anguish and God's Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 21.

[24] At the risk of calling out C. S. Lewis, the notion that God is good but perhaps not safe is a little misguided, and we should probably avoid developing our doctrine of God from a beaver.

realities and feelings most missing from their lives. Accordingly, safety is one of the most important features of recovering and healing from traumatic experiences. In most trauma counseling models that rely on a "sequenced" approach, establishing safety is the first step of treatment. Understanding and establishing safety with God is the most powerful experience of safety people can have. In therapeutic terms, the most important relationship that one needs to feel safe in is with God.

God's providential care for humanity is revealed in Scripture and demonstrated throughout history. Scott Harrower says that "God's providence, the incarnation of God the Son, Jesus' victories over horror makers, and his resurrection all historically demonstrate God's concern and powerful care towards his images. These are important objective events that secure a worldview post-trauma."[25] Christians are not left needing to speculate about how God provides for his beloved creatures because God has demonstrated that he is trustworthy and safe. It is this safety that enables worldview recovery for people who have experienced trauma and allows them to not view the world as without order and chaotic. God has long since calmed the chaotic seas (Gen 1:2; Matt 8:26). From a place of safety and security, people who have experienced life-altering trauma are able to approach and appreciate the safety of God.

The Suffering of the Son

The Incarnation and subsequent suffering of Christ on the cross served to both enable humanity to draw near to God and to have God draw near to humanity. Hebrews 4:15–16 traces this out saying that "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who was tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (CSB). In the Incarnation, Christ suffered and died to bring people back into union with God and to be able to sympathize with humanity through his suffering. Christ's suffering can bring people who have endured trauma nearer to God in salvation and God nearer to them in comfort. Rather than simply displaying *empathy* with humanity, Jesus enables *victory* over death and the promise that death will be ultimately defeated.

The Sanctifying Power of the Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is involved in bringing people nearer to God by the

[25] Scott Harrower, *God of All Comfort: A Trinitarian Response to the Horrors of the World* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 138.

Spirit's role in illumination and is involved in bringing God nearer to people by his restorative and sanctifying power. In Bavinck's view, the Spirit was initially "mainly the author of extraordinary gifts and powers, but from the beginning he also called into being in the church diverse virtues of faith and patience, *comfort* and *joy*."[26] As believers who have endured trauma undergo the process of sanctification and learn to imitate Christ, they are not left to do it alone or without the possibility of the Spirit's indwelling comfort and joy. They are not left to progress in their Christ-likeness alone because they partake in the fellowship of the Triune God's love as well as partake in fellowship with other believers in the Church.

A Mosaic of Care: Collaborative Christian Care and Counseling in Our Secular Age

When Christians articulate an account of humanity, of God, and of the gospel that is beautiful, good, and true, they push back against worldviews that seek to distort, demean, and diminish what it means to be human and what it means for God to be a creator, comforter, redeemer, and healer. Christian counselors must be involved in deciding which views of humanity will shape our own counseling practices, our own professional cultures, and broader society as a whole. Christian counselors are on the front lines of being able to bear witness to the truth of who God is, who God says people are, and what God intends for his most beloved creation. Because of this great need to demonstrate the dignity of people and their dire need for God, there is an apologetic register to Christian counseling, especially in the "secular" or licensed arenas. Rather than pursuing a conflictual stance with regard to "secular counseling" there is a need for Christians to inhabit and help to shape the broader world of counseling.

However, the reality of the real world means that there is a great need for church-based counselors to continue to help those in need of compassionate care and counsel that might not otherwise seek out care elsewhere or that have struggles that are more spiritual in nature. Christians across the spectrum of counseling and care need to remain sapiential in their practice of caring for those in need of Christ's care. Licensed counselors need to remain grounded in the truth of Scripture and be conversant with theological literature on a variety of topics such as anthropology, pneumatology, and soteriology. The church-based counselor needs to rec-

[26] Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 236 (italics added).

ognize that being practically wise in their care and counsel involves recognizing the relevant "clinical" research and evidence-based practices that are used to treat individuals with the assortment of afflictions people will face. Finally, being sufficiently sapiential in our practice of counseling also means we all need to recognize our limits and collaborate with others when we find ourselves overwhelmed and underwater. In the end, it is Jesus who calms the storms, pulls us out, and holds us all together.

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The Problem of Human Affliction: Towards a Theology of Suffering

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Abstract: *Intellectual discussions on the problem of evil and human suffering abound. Counselors, however, do not minister in the realm of the abstract, but with embodied image bearers who experience affliction. This article surveys human suffering which does not clearly emanate from active, volitional sin, incorporating the biblical narrative of Job as an illustration. As a result, exclusively cognitive attempts to construct a theodicy or rationalize away suffering often fail in counseling and practical ministry contexts. Rather, ministers of the gospel do well to humbly listen, withhold their own explanations for suffering, and assist the afflicted as they integrate their felt experience with their embedded theology.*

Key Words: *counseling, finitude, Job, lament, pain, practical theology, suffering, theodicy.*

Suffering poses a universal problem to the human race and, by extension, to those who minister and counsel inside and outside the church. Theologians often agree that a discussion on suffering demands attention due to its relevance for ministry as well as apologetics.[1] Theologian Os Guinness writes, "Suffering is the most acute trial that faith can face, and the questions it raises are the sharpest, the most insistent, and the most damaging that faith will meet."[2] Professor and pastoral counselor Phillip Zylla argues that "The biblical depiction of suffering is not a philosophical category but a confluence of situations and realities to be confronted in compassionate protest."[3] A robust theology of suffering will necessarily intersect with numerous fields of study due to the inherent connection of pastors and counselors with the afflicted.

[1] John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008); Os Guinness, *God in the Dark: The Assurance of Faith Beyond a Shadow of Doubt* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996); Phillip Charles Zylla, *The Roots of Sorrow: A Pastoral Theology of Suffering* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012).

[2] Guinness, *God in the Dark*, 178.

[3] Zylla, *The Roots of Sorrow*, 132.

Towards developing a theology of suffering, this article will summarize definitions, origins, and responses to human suffering, weaving a case study from the life of Job throughout.[4] Fyall's work in biblical theology summarizes the narrative succinctly:

> The book opens (chs. 1 and 2) with a patriarchal figure named Job who is a wealthy landowner in "the land of Uz." As well as being wealthy, he is notably pious and a man of integrity. Yet in the prologue to the book, in a series of hammer blows he is deprived in quick succession of his possessions, his family, his health and almost his sanity. As if this were not bad enough, we learn that these events on earth are orchestrated in the heavenly court and in that court there is an adversary who is anxious to destroy Job. Three friends of Job, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar, come to commiserate with him, but before a word is spoken, the group sit in silence for seven days and nights.[5]

The narrative closes: "[Job's] prosperity is restored, indeed increased. Thus, God publicly replies to Job's pleas and to his suffering, and the Judge of all the earth is seen to have done right."[6] Job's story follows a path of affliction, lament, discouragement, and a powerful response from God before he exonerates Job and blesses him once again. Job's story introduces the reader to suffering, its origins, and how we—and God—respond, serving as an illustration and tutor for our benefit.

Defining Suffering: A Myriad of Views

Prior to addressing suffering's origins and our responses, one must establish a definition of suffering itself. Jay Adams, a founding father of the biblical counseling movement, highlights this common experience, stating, "Suffering is universal because the fall and its effects are universal…. Had Adam, our representative, not sinned, there would be no suffering."[7] Within an evangelical biblical framework, the singular origin of

[4] There are other applicable biblical texts and characters with significance for a discussion of suffering. In an effort to honor the scope of the article, Job has been selected because this narrative highlights suffering of an unknown cause [from Job's perspective] and because it is often the most-referenced biblical book on this topic.

[5] Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 12 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 31–32.

[6] Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You*, 54.

[7] Jay E. Adams, *A Theology of Christian Counseling: More Than Redemption*, The Jay Adams Library (Grand Rapids: Ministry Resource Library, 1986), 271.

suffering came from the fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. Thus, all sources of suffering trace their roots back to this act. Regardless of the endless examples of human sin, all of creation still groans beneath the weight of original Adamic sin (Rom 8:26–27).[8] Consequently, the relevant literature takes two primary approaches to define the inherent nature of suffering either as good—or neutral with good potential—or as bad by its very nature.[9] These trite descriptions simply assist the development of a theology of suffering in establishing the inherent ontological quality of suffering.

Suffering as Good or Neutral[10]

Authors differ in their description of suffering as inherently good, neutral, or bad. Many seem to articulate a form of utilitarianism when it comes to the potential good that can come from suffering. The argument often works backward from a positive result emerging out of suffering, thus deducing that the suffering itself has some inherent good—or at the very least neutral—quality to it. Carson provides an example saying, "Illness, bereavement, and suffering actually shape us; they temper us; they mold us. We may not enjoy the process; but they transform us."[11] This emphasis on the transformative results of suffering dominates popular level works by Christian authors. It seems many of these perspectives functionally equate the nature of suffering with the good or godly outcomes which it can produce ask they seek to define suffering.[12]

Suffering as Inherently Bad

In *A Grief Observed*, C. S. Lewis states, "Talk to me about the truth of

[8] Zylla, *The Roots of Sorrow*, 142. A full discussion of this concept falls outside the scope of this project.

[9] Such as D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991); James G. Emerson, *Suffering: Its Meaning and Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986); Gerald W. Peterman and Andrew J. Schmutzer, *Between Pain and Grace: A Biblical Theology of Suffering* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016); Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, eds., *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, Theology in Community, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008); Elisabeth Elliot, *Suffering Is Never for Nothing* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2019); among others mentioned below.

[10] Here, the views on suffering as good and neutral fall in more alignment with one another than the opposing view of suffering as bad. Because of this, these views will be juxtaposed closely in this section because of their similarities in contrast to the latter.

[11] Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 121.

[12] A full critique of this view will follow in the section which discusses the problematic uses of theodicies.

religion and I'll listen gladly. Talk to me about the duty of religion and I'll listen submissively. But don't come talking to me about the consolations of religion or I shall suspect that you don't understand."[13] Morgan and Peterson base their understanding of suffering in Genesis: "First, we discover that suffering is not something created or authored by God…. Second, we learn that there was a time when there was no suffering. Suffering is not original; it has not always existed."[14] We cannot divorce the existence of suffering from an understanding of the original, good creation and the sin-ridden world in which we minister. Zylla articulates, "Suffering is not a problem to be solved or a riddle to be explained, but rather it is a reality to be confronted in cooperation with God's own expressed intentions in the world."[15] Thus, Guinness concludes, "Outrage is an appropriate response to genuine wrong, tears in response to grief, shock in response to unexpected disaster. We mustn't force ourselves to thank God for these things or we will be harder on ourselves and softer on evil than God is."[16] This statement directly contradicts many popular level works,[17] such as those by Elliot,[18] Tripp,[19] and Keller.[20] While the believer can glorify God regardless of and even through seasons of suffering, this cannot equate to celebrating the suffering itself. Considering these contributions, this article will assume that suffering is inherently antithetical

[13] C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 23.

[14] Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 121.

[15] Zylla, *The Roots of Sorrow*, 8.

[16] Guinness, *God in the Dark*, 194.

[17] The popular level books critiqued in this article were selected in the literature survey based on their relevance for the topic, level of engagement within the scope of this work, and relative popularity within mainstream American evangelical circles.

[18] Elliot states, "The response of a Christian [to suffering] should be gratitude. Thank you, Lord. I'll take this" (*Suffering Is Never for Nothing*, 60).

[19] Tripp comments, "God gives us everything we need so that we will live with realistic expectations and so that moments of difficulty will not be full of shock, fear, and panic, but experienced with faith, calm, and confident choices" (*Suffering*, 30).

[20] Keller says, "we are called not to waste our sorrows but to grow through them into grace and glory," even though he later critiques this view, saying how "some books on suffering take the direct approach, telling you to 'make use' of your sorrow, to learn from it" (Timothy Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering* [New York: Dutton, 2013], 188, 306).

to God's intentions for this world at its creation, regardless of its transformative potential or impact.[21] As argued previously, "the Bible never confuses evil with good, nor does it attempt to bleach pain from the fabric of suffering."[22] Neither should we.

Origins of Suffering

Numerous sources of suffering cause great distress for God's image bearers, such as the result of individual sin or being sinned against by others. Due to the established scope of indirect origins of suffering, however, the primary focus will be the impact of sin upon human bodies and the fallen state of the world at large.[23]

The Impact of Sin Upon the Body

When considering the ways that sin impacts the human body, one must recognize the deviance from God's original intentions for his image bearers. Lambert articulates, "God created human beings to live forever in health. Sin ruined that ideal, creating physical weakness and, ultimately, death."[24] As a result, seemingly infinite ailments interrupt our physiological processes and injure our human bodies, demanding that we attend to our embodied existence. Kapic argues, "The way to live amid our physical pain and struggles is not to minimize our body's importance but to discover how God views our bodies."[25] Peterman and Schmutzer echo this: "A theology of suffering must work with the entire embodied experience of personhood…. Suffering marks our bodies, so healing must also work with the physical realities of our bodies, with the dignity and design that creation gives it."[26] We cannot deny that pain is inherently "a tremendous

[21] An extensive discussion on the intersection of suffering and lament—as well as the role of gratitude within lament—falls beyond the scope of this article but deserves acknowledgement here.

[22] Heather Davediuk Gingrich, ed., *Treating Trauma in Christian Counseling*, Christian Association for Psychological Studies (CAPS) (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 49.

[23] These particular origins have been selected because they emphasize suffering which does not directly emerge from active, volitional sin committed either by the sufferer or at the hands of another person. Such origins of suffering merit further discussion, although they tend to receive more attention in the literature than the origins enumerated in this article.

[24] Heath Lambert, *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 223.

[25] Kelly M. Kapic, *Embodied Hope: A Theological Meditation on Pain and Suffering* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 45.

[26] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain and Grace*, 45.

source of anguish as persons struggle through the physical trauma of injury, illness, sickness, and pain."[27] Such empathetic considerations cannot be overlooked when considering a theology of suffering and physical brokenness. Otherwise, we could resort to celebrating the existence of pain because it also yields pleasure and protection, thus potentially missing the sufferer's legitimate grief and sorrow.[28]

The Fallen Nature of the World

Additionally, we must address the general fallen nature of the world. Langberg explains, "Sin has tainted every aspect of our world, our lives, and our very beings. The basis of life in our fallen world is tragic. It is irrational…. Things are not just or fair in this world. Sin is at large, and all the created world is captive to it."[29] The believer's current residence in such a fallen world inherently implies they will not be spared from all instances of suffering in this life. Furthermore, Jones, Kellen, and Green argue this inherently challenges our attempts to live faithfully. They state, "It is our fallen, groaning, cursed creation that brings on natural disasters and physiological problems. While these do not cause us to sin, they can make having faith and living in obedience more difficult."[30] Yancey addresses a common retort: this seems unfair. He comments, "Any discussion of the unfairness of suffering must begin with the fact that God is not pleased with the condition of the planet either."[31] Such is the context of a world existing contradictory to its created purpose and in a state of brokenness.

Briefly, it is worth noting that several authors mention an inherent desire for meaning in suffering. Carson argues, "For in a fallen world, pain

[27] Zylla, *The Roots of Sorrow*, 59.

[28] In this discussion, one must consider the way God created human beings and the role of physiological pain in embodiment. Philip Yancey provides, by far, the most extensive explanation of the utility and protective nature of pain through a theological perspective. In the same way that our skin responds to touch that is gentle and comforting, it also responds to pressure that is so forceful to be painful; we cannot have one without the other. In this way, Yancey connects God's intentions for sensory pain to our awareness of a need for him in this broken world (*Where Is God When It Hurts?* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 34, 77).

[29] Diane Langberg, *Suffering and the Heart of God: How Trauma Destroys and Christ Restores* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2015), 54.

[30] Robert D. Jones, Kristin L. Kellen, and Rob Green, *The Gospel for Disordered Lives: An Introduction to Christ-Centered Biblical Counseling* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2021), 73.

[31] Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?*, 67.

and suffering can be God's megaphone, to an individual or to a nation, distracting our attention from the selfishness of a life that functionally disowns God, no matter what we say in our creeds."[32] This perspective aligns with a sort of transformational telos, as suffering has implications for the world at large. However, it still emphasizes that suffering yields opportunities for change, a conclusion which is not altogether incorrect or unbiblical, just underdeveloped within the scope of counseling ministry. In contrast, Yancey says, "Maybe God *isn't trying to tell us anything specific* each time we hurt. Pain and suffering are part and parcel of our planet, and Christians are not exempt."[33] Yancey's point contrasts with Carson's; suffering is not *always* communicative or trying to get our attention, although it can be.

Job: Unknown Suffering or Spiritual Warfare?

While popular application of Job's narrative often addresses "unknown" suffering,[34] the biblical account articulates spiritual warfare as the specific origin of his suffering: attacks of Satan permitted by Yahweh. Carson emphasizes that by the end of the book, "Job still … knows nothing about the wager between God and Satan. He must simply trust God that something far greater was at stake than his own personal happiness."[35] Piper and Taylor note of all of Job's losses, "God did not do them; Satan did. But the evils that Satan did, he did only with God's permission."[36]

In the realm of suffering precipitated by spiritual warfare, the biblical account defies a dualistic perspective, as Keller explains, "in which there are two equal and opposite forces of good and evil…. The Bible shows us no such world. God is completely in charge. He has total control over Satan. Satan can go so far, and no further. God is clearly sovereign."[37] Considering a human perspective, Harris captures the notion aptly:

> What we in our human limitations fail to understand is that God had the power and capability to stop Satan from such an attack. Yet for Job, and perhaps in other cases as well, God chose not to restrain him…. Again, it does not match our understanding of God nor His promise to protect His own.[38]

[32] Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 121.

[33] Yancey, *Where Is God When It Hurts?*, 34 (italics original).

[34] That is, suffering whose cause is unknown or, at least, unknowable to us.

[35] Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 176.

[36] John Piper and Justin Taylor, eds., *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 64.

[37] Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, 275.

These authors identify the challenging gap between biblical promises of God's protection for his beloved and the words of Christ that suffering is certain for his followers.

Responses to Suffering

Many resources, especially at the popular level, emphasize the individual's response to their suffering, at times conflating proper response with the inherent nature of suffering. Taken together, many of these resources unintentionally burden the afflicted to suffer "correctly." For example, Elisabeth Elliot defines suffering as "having what you don't want or wanting what you don't have," as if suffering arises from unmet desires primarily, rather than the impact of sin upon our world.[39] Tripp's book on suffering elevates the role of the sufferer's heart as the most influential source on their suffering.[40] Keller articulates a similar notion, highlighting the idolatrous interpretation of suffering: "When something is taken from us … we are disproportionately cast down because the suffering is shaking out of our grasp something that we allowed to become more than just a good thing to us."[41] Zylla critiques these positions: "A theological explanation, even a weak one, often substitutes for a careful analysis of the source of suffering itself and the complexities of the suffering situation."[42] Therefore, this article assumes that platitudinal responses and flat definitions are contraindicated for counseling ministry to suffering people.

Human Responses to Job's Plight

Throughout the progression of the story, Job "intuitively recognizes that nothing of the sort could have happened to him without God's sanction," the intellectual result of a man steeped in theological understanding and love of Yahweh.[43] Job's response defies expectations as "he did not 'make nice' with God, praying politely. He was brutally honest."[44] The written narrative of Job provides a significant contribution to biblical writings on the practice of lament. However, the unnamed author introduces

[38] Greg Harris, *The Cup and the Glory: Lessons on Suffering and the Glory of God* (Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian, 2006), 96–97.

[39] Elliot, *Suffering Is Never for Nothing*, 9.

[40] Paul David Tripp, *Suffering: Gospel Hope When Life Doesn't Make Sense* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 31.

[41] Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, 306.

[42] Zylla, *The Roots of Sorrow*, 19.

[43] Carson, *How Long, O Lord?*, 158.

[44] Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, 242.

other speakers after calamity strikes Job. Initially, his companions sit in ashes and mourn with him for seven days; this act of grieving unfortunately then progresses into counsel which further wounds Job. Numerous authors address the shortcomings of their rhetoric. By way of example, Keller comments, "Even though Job's friends can piece together strings of technically true statements, their pastoral mistakes stem from an inadequate grasp of the grace of God."[45]

One particular companion draws exclusive attention in the literature. Fyall discusses the response of one particular friend, Elihu, saying he "is brash and angry and his words often sound too much like a Ph.D. thesis on suffering,"[46] and "he fails to detect any compassion in God."[47] As a result, the perspective of Job's friends further wounds him rather than encouraging him in endurance and faith. Many mainline evangelical writings, primarily at the popular level, follow the pattern of Elihu.

God's Response to Job

Ultimately, Job receives a response from God, although the Lord never reveals the actual source of Job's misfortunes. First, God's orientation to Job raises questions as to why God allows time for Job's wrestling.[48] One must wonder how each subsequent loss and corresponding lament from Job created an increasing sense of forsakenness as he pleaded for intercession; yet God remains silent. But then, Elliot highlights that "when God finally breaks His silence, God does not answer a single question…. God answers Job's mystery with the mystery of Himself."[49] Notably, his goodness and care for Job is evident, as Kapic expounds:

> God's response to this chaos and sin and suffering is that God takes responsibility…. God concerns himself for us in our sin and pain, neither because it was required of him nor because he had personally done anything wrong, but because he loves us and is the only one who could restore what was lost…. He alone could save us from the mess we had made of ourselves.[50]

Rather than leaving mankind to the consequences of original sin, the Creator stoops down, rescues, redeems, and remains with his people. The significance of this unexpected response cannot be overstated. Finally,

[45] Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, 277.

[46] Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You*, 33.

[47] Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You*, 53.

[48] As Kapic says, "God, it appears, is okay with giving us time to wrestle, not only with other people but even with God himself" (*Embodied Hope*, 66).

[49] Elliot, *Suffering Is Never for Nothing*, 23.

[50] Kapic, *Embodied Hope*, 74.

God's response defies Job's sought after explanation.[51] While God patiently tolerates Job's pleas for explanation, nothing—and no one—can demand that he defend himself to man's inquiries.

The Problem of Theodicy

The topic of responses to the problem of evil emerges in Job's experience, as well as almost every consulted resource on suffering, demanding an abbreviated discussion in the context of practical ministry. The reasons that God allows evil and suffering demand academic and apologetic attention. Yet such discussions typically embrace a cognitive, theological approach. By contrast, ministry demands attending to embodied image bearers with our affective faculties employed, not merely our cognitive ones. This section aims to bridge this gap, balancing orthodoxy with orthopraxy and compassion for the afflicted.

Consequently, this article argues that we can utilize theodicy in both incongruous and congruous ways in ministry. Addressing the problem of evil often prompts several motifs, as evidenced by popular works on human suffering. This section will not attempt to discredit the validity of these responses, but to illustrate how they are incongruous in a ministry or counseling setting.

Sin, Responsibility, and Idolatry

One primary theme prioritizes the sufferer's need to recognize sin, assume responsibility for their responses, or understand the idolatrous desires which exacerbate their suffering. This motif emerges as likely the most predominant among the surveyed literature.[52] For example, Tripp explains, "Physical suffering exposes the delusion of personal autonomy and self-sufficiency…. Independence is a delusion that is quickly exposed by suffering."[53] In like fashion, Keller argues, "suffering puts its fingers on good things that have become too important to us."[54] Both of these comments identify a strong proclivity towards addressing personal sin, potentially to the neglect of discussing legitimate grief, sorrow, and lament first.

Within this discussion, Zylla presents a refreshing perspective without

[51] Fyall notes that God comes, "not as plaintiff but as judge; he will ask the questions…. This leads Job to repentance, not for the many sins alleged … but for ignorance and presumptuousness" (*Now My Eyes Have Seen You*, 53).

[52] This survey of literature identified mainline evangelical books on the topic of suffering, pain, and loss, at the popular and academic levels.

[53] Tripp, *Suffering*, 20.

[54] Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, 308.

imposing an idolatry motif: "At the root of sorrow is the human experience of finitude … loss of control, loss of a preferred future, loss of 'normal' expectations, and, at the deepest root, the loss of hope itself."[55] Notice the absence of moralizing these losses and corresponding grief. The loss of control, for example, does not necessitate an ungodly idolatry of control, although that could be the case.

Transformative Justification

Another emerging motif justifies suffering based on a positively transformative outcome. Tripp links the Christian's growth in suffering with the delay of Christ's second coming.[56] Similarly, Elliot articulates that suffering works in ways where "[God] needs to get our attention,"[57] citing an example of a couple whose baby died: "God was using that thing to speak to [them] in a way that He could not have spoken if He had not gotten their attention through the death of that little child."[58] These examples could convey an inadequacy in God's ability to communicate or sanctify apart from assigning suffering, even excessively equating suffering with some level of sanctification or ministerial usefulness. Kapic critiques succinctly, "A tragedy is still a tragedy; pain is still pain, even if some insight is gained in the process."[59] To predominately focus on themes of "beauty from ashes," especially for those whose fires continue to burn, often negates pain and can further isolate the afflicted in their moment of deepest need.[60]

Stewarding Suffering

Popular literature frequently describes suffering as a gift or opportunity to be stewarded. Brian Morley argues, "Suffering is only an opportunity, and like all opportunities, they are only what you make of them."[61] Elliot echoes this idea, "If God has given us a gift, it's never only for

[55] Zylla, *The Roots of Sorrow*, 60.

[56] "God leaves us in this broken world because what it produces in us is way better than the comfortable life we all want" (Tripp, *Suffering*, 179).

[57] Elliot, *Suffering Is Never for Nothing*, 19.

[58] Elliot, *Suffering Is Never for Nothing*, 31.

[59] Kapic, *Embodied Hope*, 23.

[60] Zylla comments, "Explanations often impose a greater suffering on the afflicted by alienating them from the community of hope. Such alienation leads to the suffering in suffering, namely, loneliness, as was the case in the Old Testament experience of Job, which stands as the biblical epitome of suffering" (*The Roots of Sorrow*, 48).

[61] Brian K. Morley, *God in the Shadows: Evil in God's World*, rev. ed. (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2006), 180.

ourselves. It's always to be offered back to Him and very often it has repercussions for the life of the world."[62] This argument also defies the notion that suffering is not part of God's original creation. Keller articulates, "Taken all together, the various theodicies can account for a great deal of human suffering … but they always fall short, in the end, of explaining all suffering."[63] Again, this underscores how various theodicies can be ineffective in the context of practical theology and ministering to suffering people.

Overrealized Eschatology

The consummation of Christ provides present hope of a future reality, an already-not-yet perspective. Peterman and Schmutzer describe this concept, when wrongly applied to suffering, as an overrealized eschatology: "As if all the blessings of the new heaven and new earth—no more death, mourning, crying, or pain (Rev. 21:4)—will come to us now if we just really believe God. But they will not come; we will have glimpses of them, indeed; yet they will not be fully realized in this life."[64] This overrealized eschatology can promote a form of spiritual bypassing, a cognitive denial of grief based on theological doctrines of sovereignty, providence, and eschatological hope.[65] Morgan and Peterson correct this: "This side of heaven, suffering will remain mysterious. Pat answers do not suffice, and indeed they often only add to the hurt."[66] Eschatological hope, properly applied, anchors the believer to truth, rather than being weaponized to minimize pain.

Conclusion

This discussion inherently raises the question: Are there any appropriate uses of theodicy in ministry to the afflicted? As a counselor or pastor, what reason do you give when someone asks, "Why did God let this happen?" One potential answer is a tearful, "I am so sorry. I don't know," a response indicative of "weeping with those who weep" (Rom 12:15 ESV). It is not that we have no doctrinal understanding of the problem of evil, but that we cannot know why God allotted this suffering to this person

[62] Elliot, *Suffering Is Never for Nothing*, 75.

[63] Keller, *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, 95.

[64] Peterman and Schmutzer, *Between Pain and Grace*, 166.

[65] I am indebted to Dr. Evan Marbury for introducing me to the idea of "spiritual bypassing" during casual conversations on multiple occasions. Also see Krispin Mayfield, *Attached to God: A Practical Guide to Deeper Spiritual Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 73–76.

[66] Morgan and Peterson, *Suffering and the Goodness of God*, 21.

at this precise moment in time. In this way, we exhibit humility and recognize that explanations cannot reverse circumstances or how we feel about them.[67] Conversely, explanations may be helpful, primarily after the fact, where someone seeks to integrate their suffering with God's sovereignty. Explanations may also provide a sense of closure or encourage themes of redemption, given time. Here, the overarching goal is that they would be able to integrate their felt experience with their embedded theology.

This article merely scratches the surface in the realm of human suffering, some of its origins, and how we respond to the problem of evil. Human affliction inherently raises questions of God's sovereignty, justice, and benevolence. As a result, the problem of suffering can be a barrier to salvation and spiritual growth for some. Rather than deepening or rehearsing answers to the problem of evil, we can recognize suffering for what it is, where it ultimately comes from, and how we can compassionately protest it as we care for the afflicted. The momentum to move toward, sit with, and, at times, embrace silence will not come from techniques or personal experiences. Rather, we do well to anchor our hope in God's redemptive promises, leading us to protest the brokenness we experience in the already-not-yet.

[67] Zylla, *The Roots of Sorrow*, 43.

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Generational Dysfunction and Fulfillment in Christ (Matt 1:1)

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Abstract: *Matthew 1:1, "Jesus, son of Abraham, son of David" reminds us not only of the lineage of Jesus, but also the influence of past generations. Abraham and David both faced difficulties that had a lasting impact on their children, grandchildren, and others to come. Generational sin and dysfunction are a reality even today, most clearly as generational trauma and struggles with addiction. Clear connections can be made between the lineage of Abraham and David to contemporary family struggles. But just as Jesus was the new Abraham and the new David, he also provides healing and new birth to families today. Through Christ, and only through Christ, generational sin and struggles can be resolved.*

Key Words: *addiction, generational sin, Jesus, Matthew 1:1, trauma*

This article is situated around a single verse in Scripture, Matthew 1:1, and aims to do three things. First, the article will exegete the verse and highlight several assertions that connect the nation of Israel and the modern church, namely dysfunctional families within the church. Second, space will be given to understanding generational dysfunction, primarily as it presents in the home today. Finally, this article will argue that not only is Christ the culmination of the nation of Israel and the contemporary home, but he is also the only one through whom either one finds redemption. Put another way, without Christ, generational dysfunction would continue throughout the history of mankind. We are no exception to this reality. Proper counseling, then, particularly for generational dysfunction must point towards Christ for redemption.

The Bible and Generational Dysfunction

Jesus and Generational Dysfunction

Matthew 1:1 is a fairly simple verse. It reads, "An account of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" (CSB). In the Greek, it is only eight words, and quite literally reads, "a book of the *genesis* of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham." Read in a literal

translation, the reader's mind should automatically go back to Gen 1:1, "in the beginning."[1] Like John 1:1, Matthew is properly situating his reader and making substantial claims from the opening words of his gospel.[2] The reader should not be mistaken: Jesus Christ *is* the genesis, he is the beginning, and he is the focus of the entire text. As the subject of the verse, he is subsequently the subject of the book.[3] In referencing the book of Genesis, we might even say that Matthew is arguing that Jesus is the focus of the entire Old Testament, the culmination of the nation of Israel. The focus is displayed when he calls Jesus the "son of Abraham, son of David." Matthew is summarizing the entire Old Testament canon. He is pointing the reader not only to the historical figures, but the "holders" of the covenants that God has made with his people.[4] With Jesus being the "*son* of Abraham" and "*son* of David," he is the recipient of the covenants. And by claiming that this is the book of the *genesis*, Jesus is also the origin of and the means through which the covenants, for the entire history of God's people, have their meaning. He is the fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham and the new and better king David.[5]

It is interesting as well that Matthew assigns the word "Christ." This word was indicative of his assertion that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah for God's people, the deliverer whom God had promised throughout Israel's history.[6] By the fourth word of Matthew's book, written to Jewish readers, he is asserting the kingship of Jesus and that he fulfills the prophecy that they've waited so long for.[7] In some sense, it is as if Matthew is saying: "He's here! The one you've been waiting for is here. Let me tell you about how He's come to save us!"

The remainder of the book of Matthew draws on this message. Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience—no doubt familiar with the OT canon—demonstrating that Jesus is, in fact, the Messiah. Not only that, but Matthew seeks to demonstrate that Jesus is the Son of God, the fulfillment of OT prophesies. Jesus is the rightful heir of the messianic promises (more to come on this), was born of a virgin in Bethlehem and fulfills OT events such as Israel's wandering in the wilderness. Furthermore, Matthew often quotes OT prophecies and draws connections, such as Jesus as the suffering servant and messianic king. He also bestows on

[1] Charles Quarles, *Matthew,* Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022), 106.
[2] Quarles, *Matthew*, 106.
[3] Quarles, *Matthew*, 106.
[4] Quarles, *Matthew*, 56.
[5] Quarles, *Matthew*, 56.
[6] Quarles, *Matthew*, 107.
[7] Quarles, *Matthew*, 107.

Jesus a multitude of messianic titles, such as "Son of David" and "Immanuel." It should be clear to any reader that Matthew is asserting Jesus is the Messianic King.[8]

Though this article has already drawn out the connection between Abraham and David and the covenants that Jesus came to fulfill, this is not the primary focus. Instead, the focus is on generational dysfunction. Both Abraham and David were men of faith, men who believed in the Lord and trusted in his provision for their lives. But when we progress through the biblical text, it is quite evident that neither one had his house in order.

Abraham and Generational Dysfunction

Consider Abraham. At the end of Genesis 11, Abram shows up in the genealogies, a passage not unlike the rest of Matthew chapter 1. In Genesis 12, God calls Abram, 75 years old at the time, to go to Canaan. The Scriptures say that Abram obeys, taking his household with him. In v. 8, Abram builds an altar to the Lord, but only a few short verses later, Abram and Sarai find themselves in Egypt where Abram tells his wife to lie about who she is so that he will not be killed (Gen 12:11–13). She was "taken to Pharoah's household," and Abram tended Pharoah's flocks. It was not until plagues came that Pharoah realized what was going on (Gen 12:17). This was no short time, though it is only a few verses in the text. After some time and a few other difficulties, Abram and all of his household, leave along with his relative, Lot. Within a few short chapters, Abram entered into a covenant with the Lord, was told that he will have a son to fulfill that covenant, and took his wife's handmaid to try to force the Lord's hand. This handmaid conceives, then Abraham is complicit with forcing her into the wilderness. Isaac is born, in fulfillment of what the Lord said would come to pass, but Isaac is not Abraham's first born. Interspersed is another lie that Sarah is his sister, with some substantial implications on the household they are residing in (Gen 20:2).

Isaac grows up, marries Rebekah, and they conceive Jacob and Esau (Gen 24). Genesis 25:22 tells us that the twins "struggled with one another" in her womb. When she asks the Lord why this is happening, God tells her that two nations are at war within her and that her two sons will separate and that the older will serve the younger. Things will not be as they should. This plays out when Esau sells his birthright to Jacob who receives the greater blessing (Gen 25:29–34). Jacob then goes on to take both Leah and Rachel as his wives, and there is conflict in his home. He

[8] Quarles, *Matthew,* 57.

favors Rachel, particularly Rachel's sons, which in turn causes conflict between them. So much so that the sons of Leah sell Joseph as a slave (Gen 25; 29; 37). Though there is not sufficient space to walk through the rest of their story, there is an evident theme arising: Abraham's story, and the story of his descendants, is one of conflict. And that conflict arises in no small part because Abraham and members of his family want to fulfill the covenant to ensure their own succession. Abraham and those who follow also fall into repeated patterns of fear, dysfunction, and a lack of trust in God's promises.

David and Generational Dysfunction

David follows a similar path. In many ways, the demonstration of his generational dysfunction is even clearer, and it happens even more quickly. David, a man after God's own heart, is established as king over Israel. Certainly, there is conflict that happens around this event, but that is not entirely surprising. Throughout David's time as king, he took another man's wife as his own, had that man killed, and the son that is conceived died (1 Sam 11–12). Later, another one of David's sons raped his half-sister, David's daughter, with little to no consequence, then another son killed that one and comes after David to overthrow him (1 Samuel 13; 15). David, however, escapes. That son, Absalom, is then killed for trying to overthrow his father (1 Samuel 18). David fathered at least nineteen sons from no fewer than seven women—the biblical account is not shy in sharing the dysfunction that happened within his family. David had his fair share of loss and pain, but overwhelmingly it was tied to David's own sinful choices.

Like Abraham, though, God upholds his covenant with David. David fathered Solomon, son of Bathsheba, who became the wisest king in the land. Solomon took the throne at a young age and exercised substantial political power to purge those who would threaten him, which no doubt caused some further conflict (1 Kgs 2). But he was known for his great wisdom that he received from the Lord at his request (1 Kgs 3:5–15). He would go on to author multiple books in the OT canon. He also spent considerable effort building the temple and other key buildings in Jerusalem during his time as king.

Following after his father's example, Solomon's family was extensive. First Kings 11 tells us that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. This practice allowed the import of other deities, permitting these wives to worship other gods. But this has disastrous consequences. First Kings tells us the Lord's response:

> And the Lord was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared

> to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the Lord commanded. Therefore, the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this has been your practice and you have not kept my covenant and my statutes that I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you and will give it to your servant. Yet for the sake of David your father I will not do it in your days, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son, for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem that I have chosen." (1 Kgs 11:11–13 CSB)

God upholds his covenant with David, by the time Solomon's son Rehoboam takes power, the nation of Israel begins to crumble. This happens two generations from when the original covenant was made, explicitly because of sin in the line of David, and is limited to only the second generation because of God's mercy (1 Kgs 12).

Like Abraham, several themes emerge. David's house and his lineage are characterized by rebellion and discord. Amidst all of the conflict, David is unable to keep his house in order. He shows favoritism and a lack of discipline in more than one instance, and he is often seen fleeing for his life, even from his own sons. There seems to be little accountability even for things like rape and murder. It is clear to any reader that David's house was lacking peace.

Readers might be tempted to think the accounts of Abraham and David are entirely different today. We certainly do not take 700 wives and 300 concubines. We do not try to pass off wives as sisters (hopefully!). But notice the underlying themes: conflict, discord, rebellion, fear, poor communication, parental failure, and a lack of trust in God's promises and provision. Within the house of Abraham, there is perpetual conflict to the point of selling one's own brother into slavery. This escalates in David's household where Absalom kills Amnon and then comes after his father. Both men fail to trust God fully and try to take control of a situation that is God's to handle. And in each case, there are disastrous consequences. It's only because of the grace of God and the upholding of his own word that either family continues. God preserves their households rather than either of these men doing it.

Generational Dysfunction Today

Undoubtedly, there are modern-day parallels. Conflict and sexual sin abound, poor communication is almost universal, and parental failure is commonplace. Although there are many generational dysfunctions that we could explore, this article will narrow its focus now to explore two

primary arenas in which generational dysfunction is perhaps most clearly seen in the modern day: addiction and trauma (the second of which is not foreign to the families of Abraham and David). Unfortunately, both impact a significant part of the population in the United States.

Currently in the United States, over 16 percent of the population over twelve years of age struggles with a substance use disorder (and not merely someone who uses a substance regularly).[9] Over ten percent have alcohol use disorder.[10] Twenty-two percent of the population used illicit drugs last year alone.[11] It is not an understatement to say there is an addiction problem in our country. Furthermore, research demonstrates that rates of addiction are higher in children who were brought up in the care of parents or caregivers who struggle with addiction.[12] Theories abound as to why this is, whether it be genetics, their environment, or behavioral factors.[13] Regardless of whether or not there is an underlying genetic or physiological predisposition, the fact remains that children learn maladaptive coping behaviors based on what they are exposed to. When a parent engages in problematic behavior like substance use, children are exposed to it and are more likely to mimic that behavior.

The second generational dysfunction of focus in this essay is trauma. Research on adverse childhood experiences (also known as childhood trauma) shows that almost two-thirds of adults in the US have experienced at least one childhood traumatic event.[14] One in six has experienced four or more.[15] Most of these children then grow up to be parents, bringing with them the trauma experienced as a child. These numbers are astounding, and the implications for long-term physical and mental health

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[9] 2021 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), https://www.samhsa.gov/data/release/2021-national-survey-drug-use-and-health-nsduh-releases (accessed 12/21/2023).

[10] 2021 NSDUH.

[11] 2021 NSDUH.

[12] L. Chassin, S. C. Pitts, C. DeLucia, and M. Todd, "A Longitudinal Study of Children of Alcoholics: Predicting Young Adult Substance Use Disorders, Anxiety, and Depression," *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 108.1 (1999): 106–19 (https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.108.1.106).

[13] D. Hawkins, R. Catalano, J. Miller, "Risk and Protective Factors for Alcohol and Other Drug Problems in Adolescence and Early Childhood: Implications for Substance Abuse Prevention," *Psychological Bulletin* 112.1 (1992): 64–105.

[14] M. M. Islam, M. Rashid, and M. Rashid, "Adverse Childhood Experiences and Association with Poorer Health and Health-harming Behaviours in Adulthood among the Americans," *Child: Care, Health and Development* 49.6 (2023): 943–54 (doi: 10.1111/cch.13104. Epub 2023 Feb 23. PMID: 36772922).

[15] Islam et al., "Adverse Childhood Experiences," 943.

are staggering. Adverse childhood experiences truly are a public health crisis. To narrow into generational trauma, a recent study on these sorts of adverse childhood experiences linked this type of trauma directly with the trauma experienced by their parents. Researchers with the National Institute of Health write, "Parents who experience trauma have diminished capabilities to empathize with their child's emotions due to an altered perception of the world and the individuals they interact with. Diminished parenting skills may result in decreased trust and feelings of safety for their children from a lack of emotional stability. In turn, children mirror their parents' instability, and the process of intergenerational transmission of trauma continues."[16] The study demonstrated that parental experience of trauma, particularly that of the mother, influenced the child's adverse experiences. Fathers were more likely to parent as they had been parented, including in unhealthy ways, but both mother and father contributed substantially to overall family health.

Other studies show that children or grandchildren of individuals who have experienced trauma may exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, or other mental health disorders, even if they did not directly experience the traumatic event themselves.[17] Furthermore, research has shown that trauma can have lasting effects on the brain and nervous system by altering stress response systems, influencing emotional regulation, and changing cognitive processing.[18] These changes can be passed down through generations, potentially increasing the risk of mental health disorders in subsequent generations. For example, if a parent or grandparent experienced a traumatic event such as war, violence, abuse, or a natural disaster, the impact of that trauma may be transmitted to their children or grandchildren through epigenetic changes, modifications to gene expression without altering the underlying DNA sequence. These changes can affect how genes related to stress response, emotional regulation, and mental health are expressed, potentially increasing the risk of mental health disorders in the offspring or descendants of

[16] Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma: The Mediating Effects of Family Health - PMC, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/ PMC9141097/ (accessed 12/21/2023).

[17] Andrew Curry, "Parents' Emotional Trauma May Change Their Children's Biology: Studies in Mice Show How Suffering Triggers Changes in Gene Expression That Last for Generations," https://www.science.org /content/article/parents-emotional-trauma-may-change-their-children-s-biology-studies-mice-show-how; doi: 10.1126/science.aay7690 (accessed 12/21/23).

[18] Bessel Van Der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: The Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 42–46, 54.

trauma survivors.[19] In sum, whether the influences are physiological, relational, or emotional, healthier families lead to healthier children; unhealthy families lead to unhealthy children.

Generational Dysfunction and My Personal Experience

In light of this research, and as a counselor and counseling professor, let address this issue anecdotally. I have the privilege of sitting with families as they walk through sometimes unspeakable hardship. I often work with teenagers and children, and I can attest that the actions, attitudes, and experiences of parents directly influence their children. My own children not only look like me; they *act* like me. I frame their experiences for them and am a model for how they are to perceive and process reality around them. We cannot escape that fact.

Furthermore, I am in many ways a product of my parents. Their mannerisms, speech patterns, habits, and values all manifest themselves in my life in one way or another. I am my mother's child. And even though I am an adult now, with the ability to rationalize, formulate and develop my own values, and assess the world around me, my parents thumbprints are all over me as a person. Children, in many ways, do not have the cognitive ability or discernment to think through positive versus negative influences. They simply respond and react to what is given to them.

But why does that happen? Why, beyond simple modeling, does parental behavior get passed down from parents to children? There are many reasons. Many mental health struggles do have an underlying hereditary component, so while those genetics may not be *causative*, they very well may be highly influential, as we have explored already. Environmental factors are also at play; the family of origin is a child's primary environment, such that the family provides the schema or framework for how a child understands everything around them. Families determine what is "normal" and "acceptable," and children oftentimes have few others to counter those norms. Dysfunctional patterns of behavior and problematic coping behaviors are shared from parent to child, along with things like understanding one's emotions, how to speak to others, or how to deal with conflict. Lastly, certain societal or cultural norms (like having multiple wives in the OT) influence family dynamics and normalize potentially problematic behaviors. Culture influences family values, stigmas around mental health, or the roles of men and women. Though children may not

[19] R. Yehuda and A. Lehrner, "Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma Effects: Putative Role of Epigenetic Mechanisms," *World Psychiatry* 17.3 (2018): 243–57 (doi: 10.1002/wps.20568. PMID: 30192087; PMCID: PMC6127768).

be able to articulate their framework for understanding the world, children are incredibly observant.

Given these realities, it should be no surprise that dysfunction carries from generation to generation. The connections between generational trauma or increased rates of substance abuse noted above should not shock us. Our own experiences (at least mine) affirm these connections. When a parent demonstrates that alcohol is the only effective coping mechanism for stress, children will follow suit. Alternatively, when outbursts of anger, or even physical abuse, are the norm in a home, a child has little opportunity to discover or understand any alternative. It is no wonder sin patterns repeat themselves. As Solomon wrote in Eccl 1:9, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun" (CSB) It seems these words were a bit prophetic of his own life.

Conclusion

Let us return to Matt 1:1 and ask how these things connect. Recall that Jesus is the fulfillment of the covenant of Abraham—God's covenant to bring Israel into communion and community, into the family, of God himself—and Jesus is the new and better king David. Here is the point of this essay: Jesus is the only answer for generational dysfunction. He is the only healer, he is the only deliverer, and he is the only hope. Outside of Christ, there is no hope of change. We will continue to be like our father Abraham and father David. We will continue to be like their sons in the book of Matthew who challenged Jesus, who failed to understand him, and who went about their lives in rebellion to him—products of those who had come before them.

But Matthew reminds us clearly that Jesus does something: he brings restoration. And he does it in a myriad of ways. First, through faith, Jesus brings about deliverance in the individual person. When Christ calls men and women to himself, they are loosed from the bondage of sin. They are no longer enslaved, as Paul tells us in Romans 6. They now have the ability to choose the way of escape when temptation comes (1 Cor 10:13). They have the ability, through the power of the Spirit, to choose different, to create a different household, and to reframe the "norms" of the children in their home. This restoration through Christ has tremendous implications for generational dysfunction.

Furthermore, Christ also brings about healing through grace and forgiveness. He brings restoration of conflict—the same types of conflict that plagued the houses of Abraham and David, and I suspect, the same types of conflict that many of us grew up with. Jesus provides the right model for confrontation and reconciliation, and empowers us again

through his Spirit to speak words that build one another up and bring hope. Not only does he give clear teaching on forgiveness, he reminds us that, for those who are in Christ (Col 1:13–14), he has already paid the price for the sins of our fathers. We no longer have to live under the guilt and shame of past sin, either ours or our family's.

Additionally, through the Spirit sent to us, Christ also fosters in us new loves (John 13:34). He brings about the fruit of the Spirit that push back the effects of dysfunction in a family. He enables us to love one another rightly, find joy and true peace, demonstrate patience and goodness, uphold faith, be generous, and exercise self-control (Gal 5:22–23). Certainly no person is perfect, but in Christ we can repent and restore rather than pass down and perpetuate (Col 3:13). Because he enables us to love God wholly and love our neighbor rightly, those new loves become the priorities, and rightly so (Rom 5:5). We can work towards eliminating sinful patterns, particularly those like conflict or poor communication, because we have been shown how to speak lovingly and constructively.

The Spirit is the one who makes our hearts new, who cultivates within us a love for the Lord and the things that honor him (Ezek 36:26–28). The Spirit exposes sin in our hearts and brings about transformation in ways that we cannot in our own power (John 16:8). And the Spirit gives us understanding about the things of God that we are blind to otherwise (1 Cor 2:10–12).

Lastly, though we want to rightly recognize the profound influence of the family of origin, Christ offers believers a new family. He died to make us his brothers and sisters, adopted sons and daughters of our heavenly Father. We are now members of one body (1 Cor 12:12–14), fellow citizens of God's kingdom (Eph 2:19), and a holy priesthood (1 Pet 2:5). This unity transcends physical or biological relationships and is based on the shared faith in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He also established his church in which we can encourage one another, be vulnerable and transparent with one another, hold one another accountable, be mentored and discipled, and cooperate with one another towards God-honoring ends. Now, "generations" are spiritual generations, passed down from spiritual mothers and fathers as Christ conforms all of us more and more into his own image.

We cannot end without also mentioning the eternal hope of glory and freedom that Christ will usher in at his second coming. Both Abraham and David were looking forward to a day of redemption, to the culmination of God's promises given in the covenants. That day has not yet fully come, but it will. We see a beautiful picture in Revelation 5 of Christ the lamb seated on the throne, the only one worthy to open the scroll. He is the deliverer and priestly king. And by the end of the book of Revelation,

his reign is established in full. All of the covenants are fully realized and all generational dysfunction has ceased. The "generations," then, is the entire family of God living free from conflict as they perfectly image the Son.

All of this is the hope of Matt 1:1. Matthew is reminding his Jewish readers where they have come from, dysfunction and all, and how Christ is going to satisfy all the things that they could not. The same message applies today. Christ came and will come again to restore all things, including generational dysfunction. Praise be to God.

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The Place of God's Law in Counseling

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Abstract: *Many have noted that the biblical counseling movement began with an admonitional emphasis on sin. Jay Adams's nouthetic approach to counseling was largely centered on confrontation of sin and calls to obedience. This emphasis implies the importance of the law of God in Christian living. Though such an emphasis has been central to the biblical counseling movement since its inception, little has been done within the movement to tap into historic resources regarding the use of the law of God. This paper argues that the biblical counseling movement would benefit from a retrieval of the historic Reformed understanding and uses of the law of God. Such a retrieval promotes a more nuanced approach to the use of the law and an increased understanding of the practicality and power of the gospel for daily living.*

Key Words: *biblical counseling, counseling, law and gospel, law of God, threefold use of the law*

The writing, teaching, and ministry of Jay Adams (1929–2020) was controversial partly because it was confrontational. His published work from the beginning was intentionally set against non-directive, client-centered, Rogerian methods of counseling.[1] In opposition to such an approach, Adams proposed an authoritative, confrontational, admonitional approach to counseling. This approach centered on identifying sinful patterns in the counselee that needed to change and helping the person through the use of Scripture in dependence upon the Holy Spirit. All of this was with the goal of replacing sinful patterns with righteous patterns of behavior.[2] Several authors have shown that Adams's work was more heavily influenced by secular psychological principles and methods than

[1] See the chapter titled "Nouthetic Counseling and Rogerian Counseling," in Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 78–104.

[2] Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 41–64; Adams, *The Christian Counselor's Manual: The Practice of Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 180–90.

he explicitly acknowledged.[3] However, it is undeniable that the modern biblical counseling movement has, from its inception, set itself against the most popular modern therapeutic models by focusing on the necessity of dealing with sin. Various emphases in biblical counseling such as nouthetic confrontation,[4] "idols of the heart,"[5] and "saints, sufferers, and sinners"[6] all assume sin as being an essential variable of the counseling process.

The acknowledgment of sin as an essential consideration of the counseling process assumes that there is a standard by which we must judge something to be sinful or righteous: a law—indeed, God's law. Though the law of God has been acknowledged and utilized in various ways among biblical counselors, the movement as a whole has largely neglected to tap into the historic understanding of the nature and use of the law of God in the Christian life. Even Jay Adams, who taught at Westminster Theological Seminary, did not avail himself of the abundant resources available to him in his own confessional tradition for understanding and applying the law of God.[7]

Thus, I suggest that there is a rich theological, practical, and experiential heritage in the Christian faith for understanding and applying the law of God that has rarely been resourced by modern Christian counselors. I do not intend to prove *that* the law of God ought to have a place in Christian counseling. All truly Christian counselors agree on that either implicitly or explicitly. My aim, rather, is to propose *how* the law of God ought to function in the task of counseling *in order to rightly understand the gospel*. I will base my proposal on the way that Christians have understood the law of God to function in the Christian life for centuries prior to the modern age. In making this proposal, I will examine first the nature of the law of God, then the use of the law of God, and finally the experience of the law of God. I will conclude with some brief practical assertions. Overall, my goal is to show the importance of rightly understanding the law of God

[3] George M. Schwab, for example, documents this well in his article, "Critique of 'Habituation' as a Biblical Model of Change," *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 21.2 (2003): 67–83.

[4] Adams, *Competent to Counsel*, 41.

[5] David Powlison, "Idols of the Heart and 'Vanity Fair,'" *Journal of Biblical Counseling* 13.2 (1995): 35–50; Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Idols of the Heart: Learning to Long for God Alone* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001).

[6] Michael R. Emlet, *Saints, Sufferers, and Sinners: Loving Others as God Loves Us* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2021).

[7] On the contrary, in his published work he explicitly denied specific portions of the teaching on the law of God in his own Westminster Standards. See, for example, his book *Keeping the Sabbath Today?* (Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts, 2008).

because, as Scottish theologian John Colquhoun (1748–1827) wrote over 200 years ago, if a man "does not have spiritual and just apprehensions of the holy law, he cannot have spiritual and transforming discoveries of the glorious gospel."[8]

The Nature and Identity of the Law of God

I begin with the nature and identity of the law of God. Function follows nature. That is, the nature of a thing determines the way in which it ought to be used. Thus, how we use the law of God must be determined by what it is. What are the attributes of its essence, and what is its identity? I will first discuss three clusters of attributes of God's law and then move on to its identity.

Holy, Just, and Good

First, the law is holy, just, and good, which is asserted by Paul in Romans 7:12. It is holy, just, and good because it proceeds from the very nature of God who is himself holy, just, and good. It is holy because it is perfect as God is perfect. It is just because it is impartial as God is impartial. It is good because, as God is good, nothing that he commands in his law can be anything but good. Thus, as counselors, when we call our counselees to do something that is in accordance with God's law, we can be assured that what we are asking of them is accurately described by each of these three attributes. We can commend the commandments of God to them with the full confidence that they display the perfect holiness of God, the impartial justice of God, and the goodness of God and his design for his creation. No commandment of God that we might encourage a counselee to obey is sinful, unfair, or lacking in goodness. As Colquhoun explains, the law, "enjoins everything that is holy, everything which is conformable to those moral attributes and actions of God which are patterns for our imitation."[9] As the law is just, it is "exactly suited to our frame as reasonable creatures, and to our condition in this world."[10] As the commandments of God's law are good, "they enjoin nothing but what is conducive to the happiness of both the souls and bodies of men."[11] We can be confident—and we can help our counselees to be confident—with the psalmist that the commandments of the Lord rejoice the heart and enlighten the eyes (Ps 19:8).

[8] John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, ed. Don Kistler (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), xxvi.

[9] Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 79.

[10] Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 80.

[11] Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 81.

Eternally and Universally Binding

Second, the law of God is also eternally and universally binding upon all humans. God has put his law within our hearts. Paul explains in Rom 2:15–16 that, though Gentiles did not have the written law as the Jews did, they had the law of God written on their hearts, and the work of their conscience is a testimony to this. This text teaches that God has written the basic content of his moral law on the hearts of all people.[12] Thus, as those who have this law written upon our hearts, we are eternally and universally bound by virtue of our natural constitution to keep it. As Colquhoun writes, the law "retains, and will continue throughout eternity to retain, its whole authority and obligation over every sinner of mankind who lives and dies under it."[13]

Personal, Entire, Exact, and Perpetual Obedience

Third, the law of God also demands personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience. As the law of God written on our hearts is part of our natural constitution, we are personally required to keep it. This law demands entire and exact obedience because, as James writes, "whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it" (Jas 2:10). Additionally, it demands entire and exact obedience not only with regard to our actions, but also with regard to every thought, intention, and affection of our hearts.[14] Christ himself makes this clear in Matthew 5 when he corrects the teaching of the Pharisees with regard to the law. This means that a proper understanding of the law of God is important for the counselor because it directs us with regard to how we ought to instruct our counselees in both their heart and actions.

The perpetual obligation of the law is also taught by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. He states in Matt 5:17–20,

> Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the

[12] J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland: Mentor, 2021), 162–63.

[13] Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 83.

[14] See Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 76; Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), 45.

> kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.[15]

Paul similarly says in Rom 3:31, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law." Commenting on these two texts James Durham (1622–1658) wrote, "Christ was so far from destroying this law in its authority, and Paul so far from making it void by the doctrine of faith, that our Lord tells [us], He came to fulfill it (Matt 5:17), and Paul shows that his preaching of faith was to establish it (Rom 3:31). Which truth being confirmed by them both in their practice and doctrine shows that the breach of the holy Law of God is no less sinful to us now than it was to them before us."[16] Thus, every counselee that sits before us has a moral obligation to keep God's law in its entirety with the entirety of their person for the entirety of their lives.

The Identity of the Law of God

In discussing the law of God, the only thing that remains before moving on to its use is to assert its identity. To which laws do all of the abovementioned attributes belong? Certainly they do not all describe the ceremonial laws or judicial laws of the Mosaic Covenant, which are positive laws that are not binding and perpetual upon those who do not belong to that covenant.[17] Rather, the "law of God" as I have discussed it thus far refers to the eternal moral law of God, which is inscribed on the heart of every human and is set down in written form in the Ten Commandments. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism succinctly states, "The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments."[18] Proving this is beyond the scope of this article. The reader can consult numerous Reformed works, confessions, and catechisms from the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries to find plentiful proofs that

[15] All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

[16] James Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*, ed. Chris Coldwell (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 3.

[17] Positive law here is distinguished from natural law. As Samuel D. Renihan explains, "Natural law refers to the universal moral law of God impressed on the mind of man. Positive law refers to indifferent things prescribed for a particular period, place, and people" (*The Mystery of Christ: His Covenant and His Kingdom* [Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2019], 15).

[18] Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession: The Confession of Faith, The Larger and Shorter Catechisms, The Directory for the Public Worship of God, with Associated Historical Documents* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 2018), 440.

this is both a widely-received belief in the church and can be well-established from the Scriptures.[19] Suffice it to say that it *must be* believed by all Christians that there is an eternal moral law of God to which all people are bound and that it *has been* believed by most Christians throughout history that this eternal moral law is set down in written form in the Ten Commandments.

The Use of the Law of God

Having established the nature and identity of the law of God, I now turn to its use. After Adam's fall into sin the law took on an entirely different use for humanity. Prior to the fall, Adam and Eve, who had been created upright (Eccl 7:29), had the ability to keep the law. They had the promise of life set before them in the form of the Tree of Life and the

[19] For sixteenth-century catechisms, see Martin Luther's *Small Catechism* and *The Heidelberg Catechism*. For theological and practical works see John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960); Henry Bullinger, *The Decades of Henry Bullinger*, ed. Thomas Harding, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021); William Perkins, *A Golden Chain*, ed. Joel R. Beeke and Greg A. Salazar, *The Works of William Perkins, Volume 6* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018).

For seventeenth-century confessions and catechisms, see Westminster Assembly, *The Westminster Confession*; James M. Renihan, ed., *The Baptist Confession of Faith and the Baptist Catechism* (Port St. Lucie, FL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2010). For theological and practical works, see Durham, *A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments*; Watson, *The Ten Commandments*; Godefridus Udemans, *The Practice of Faith, Hope, and Love*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Annemie Godbehere, Classics of Reformed Spirituality (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012); Thomas Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism of the Westminster Assembly Explained and Proved from Scripture*, Puritan Paperbacks (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1980); Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology: Volume Two: Eleventh through Seventeenth Topics*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1992); Wilhemus à Brakel, *Christian's Reasonable Service, Volume 3: The Law, Christian Graces, and the Lord's Prayer*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1994).

For nineteenth-century works, see John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or a System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures* (Paris, AK: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2007); Theodorus Vandergroe, *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Bartel Elshout, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books; Dutch Translation Society, 2016).

For twentieth-century works, see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 6th printing (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013); Robert Lewis Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1996).

threat of death held before them in the form of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.[20] After the fall, the law of God can no longer be used by fallen humans as a means of attaining the promise of life. Rather than promising life, it offers the condemnation of death (Rom 7:9). But that does not mean that it is not useful for both the regenerate and unregenerate. Historically, theologians have thought of the moral law as having a threefold use. In each of these uses, the law must be understood with relation to the gospel, which is the only hope of redeeming sinners from the curse of the law.

The First Use

The first use—or civil use—is the wielding of the law for the restraint of the sins of men in general.[21] Colquhoun explains, "It is of use, by its terrible denunciations, to curb those who, destitute of every good principle, would rush forward to all manner of sin, and to deter them, through fear of punishment, from many gross enormities."[22] This use is equivalent to Paul's description in Rom 13:1–7 of the use of the law by the civil magistrate. According to this use, the law restrains sinners from being as bad as they could be and paves the way for the proclamation of the gospel. It does this by preventing the further darkening of lost minds and providing roadblocks to keep them from being more and more handed over to their sin as were the sinners in Romans 1. The counselor may avail himself of this use whether or not a counselee is regenerate. We must provide warnings to our counselees when they choose sin. Sin offers a false hope of life, but we must remind people that the breaking of the law promises only death.

The Second Use

The second use—or evangelical use—is the use of the law to drive the sinner to Christ. Joel Beeke explains, "the Holy Spirit uses the law as a mirror to show us our impotence and our guilt, to shut us up to hope in mercy alone, and to induce repentance, creating and sustaining the sense of spiritual need out of which faith in Christ is born."[23] This use is not limited merely to the bringing about of conversion. Rather, it also serves us in our ongoing sanctification by chastening us in our sin and driving

[20] Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works*, 334–35.

[21] Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality: A Practical Theological Study from Our Reformed and Puritan Heritage* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2006), 102–3.

[22] Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 125.

[23] Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 103.

us back to Christ day in and day out as we seek to put our sin to death.[24] The law continually reminds us of what Christ did which we could not do.[25] Much of contemporary gospel-centeredness focuses only on the passive obedience of Christ whereby he took upon himself the deserved penalty of the law for sinners. But more is needed by us than for Christ to simply take our penalty. We needed him to fulfill all of the righteous requirements of the law on our behalf.[26] When we look at the law rightly, we see what Christ accomplished on our behalf. And if we are in him, we see what was imputed to us through no merit of our own. The law used rightly leads us to cling to Christ not only as our atoning sacrifice but also as our righteousness (Jer 23:6; Rom 10:4; 1 Cor 1:30). Such a glorious truth is why the great twentieth century theologian J. Gresham Machan (1881–1937) as he was dying sent a telegram to his friend John Murray (1898–1975) saying, "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it."[27] Our counselees need the law to help them to see their complete inadequacy in and of themselves and their utter need in every moment to rest in the righteousness of Christ. Their hope depends on this, and they will not see it rightly without a right use of the law.

The Third Use

The third use of the law—the didactic use—is the law's usefulness as a rule of life for the Christian.[28] Upon regeneration, the Christian is infused by the Holy Spirit with a principle of life which now enables him to keep the law, though imperfectly. It has been noted by many that the structure of the *Heidelberg Catechism* is (1) guilt, (2) grace, (3) gratitude. Question two of the catechism asks, "How many things are necessary for thee to know, that thou, enjoying this comfort [that you are not your own but belong to God], mayest live and die happily?" It answers, "Three; the first, how great my sins and miseries are; the second, how I may be deliv-

[24] Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 104.

[25] Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, 130.

[26] As John Owen (1616–1683) wrote, "we have need of more than the mere sufferings of Christ, whereby we may be justified before God" (*The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1967], 5:254).

[27] J. Gresham Machen, *Things Unseen: A Systematic Introduction to the Christian Faith and Reformed Theology* (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2020), xxvii.

[28] Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality*, 104.

ered from all my sins and miseries; the third, how I shall express my gratitude to God for such deliverance."[29] These three points serve as the overall structure of the catechism, which, it can be argued is both the summary of Scripture and of the Christian life.[30] The third section on gratitude is where the exposition of the Ten Commandments is located within the catechism. Thus, the Ten Commandments—which reveal the eternal moral law of God—are presented as a means of showing our gratitude to God for what he has done for us in redeeming us from our sin in Christ. The Dutch pastor Theodorus Vandergroe (1705–1784), stated in his sermon on the second question of the catechism,

> This gratitude is nothing less than the life of sanctification—a spiritual living unto God—by the Lord's redeemed, whereby they, in Christ, are inwardly transformed into His image and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, they surrender themselves with soul and body to the Lord, offering themselves as a holy sacrifice of praise to Him in order to live entirely and exclusively to and for the Lord. To know and to enjoy this thoroughly, spiritually, and experientially is the third matter that is requisite for acquiring this true spiritual comfort.[31]

For the Christian, the law of God rightly applied is not legalistic drudgery. Rather, it puts before us a life of obedient service fueled by Spirit-wrought gratitude to God for the glorious work of redemption which he has accomplished on our behalf in Christ. Contemplating our utter inability to keep the law and to justify ourselves, we are led to rest in the glorious promises of God's gospel which have been fulfilled for us by Christ and applied to us by his Spirit. The only right response to being deeply affected by such truths is obedient sacrifice to our Savior in the form of keeping his laws out of love for him.

We must teach our counselees to love the God who first loved them if they are in Christ (1 John 4:19). We must teach them that loving him involves contemplating the depth of their sinfulness and the glorious comfort of the gospel. And we must teach them that if they love this Christ who has redeemed them, then they will obey him by keeping his law (John 14:15). Indeed, we will teach them that his commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3), and we will teach them that they are not

[29] Vandergroe, *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death*, 1:1.

[30] Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Theology: Historical, Experiential, and Practical Studies for the Whole of Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 574–75.

[31] Vandergroe, *The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death*, 1:12–13.

only to love the Savior but also his commandments such that his commandments become their meditation all the day (Ps 119:97).

The Experience of the Law of God

Having discussed the nature and identity of the law of God as well as its use, I now briefly discuss the experience of the law of God. It is not enough to have a mere intellectual knowledge of the nature and use of the law of God. We must also be experientially acquainted with its application to our own souls. John Owen explained this well when he described what he called the twofold sense of sin. On the one hand a man can and must have a general and notional sense of his own sinfulness.[32] According to this sense, he knows what sin is and that he himself is sinful, but not to the degree that his heart has been affected by it. All true Christians must have this sense of their own sinfulness. Indeed, no true conversion has occurred where this sense of one's sinfulness is not present. However, such a general recognition of one's sinfulness can also be present in an unbeliever without that person ever coming to a true saving knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In order for true conversion and sanctification to occur, one must have a sense of his own sinfulness that is active and efficacious.[33] Most unregenerate sinners have had an experience of the first sense of their own sinfulness at some point, but only true believers have experienced the second. And even true believers can fail to experience the second at times, as David did prior to being confronted by Nathan.[34]

The second sense of one's sinfulness gives one a true experiential knowledge of the Spirit's work in applying the law to our hearts. Owen described it as

> a deep and practical apprehension, wrought in the mind and heart of a believing sinner by the Holy Ghost, of sin and its evils, in reference unto the law and love of God, the cross and blood of Christ, the communion and consolation of the Spirit, and all the fruits of love, mercy, or grace that it hath been made partaker of, or on gospel ground hoped for.[35]

Owen explained that this ongoing, experiential knowledge of one's sinfulness according to the law is the only avenue to experiencing in an ongoing manner the glorious rest of forgiveness in Christ. Explaining the

[32] Owen, *Works*, 6:368.

[33] Owen, *Works*, 6:368–69.

[34] Owen, *Works*, 6:369.

[35] Owen, *Works*, 6:369.

importance of weighing our sinfulness according to the law, Owen wrote,

> As ever you desire to come to rest … attend unto what the law speaks of your sin and its desert, or you will never make a due application to God for forgiveness. As ever you would have your souls *justified* by grace, take care to have your sins *judged* by the law.[36]

John Flavel (1627–1691) wrote, "The law wounds, the gospel cures."[37] We seek to have the law applied to the depth of our souls so that we will come to a deep, experiential knowledge of our ever-present need for the gospel. Without an experiential knowledge of our sinfulness according to the law, we will not be able to have an experience of the glorious comfort and cure of the gospel.

In his extended exposition of Ps 51:17, titled *The Acceptable Sacrifice*, John Bunyan (1628–1688) explained that a spirit broken by the law of God is the only sacrifice acceptable by God and is the necessary fuel of all truly holy outward duties to God. Without a heart broken by sin, all our sacrifices are nothing.[38] In our attempts to help our counselees, we must show them that the only avenue to true rest and true obedience is humility in accordance with the law: true brokenness over our sin and an experience of our ongoing need for Christ the perfect Lawkeeper to cover our sin.

Practical Conclusions

As counselors we must be like skillful surgeons who wield the law with precision. It should be used more like a surgical scalpel than like a club. We must apply the law to our counselees if we wish to see them experience the glory of the gospel, but we must be discerning with regard to how we use it. There is a danger in being quick to apply the law without having an adequate understanding of the person. When we do this, we are like "one who gives an answer before he hears," thus bringing about our own "folly and shame" (Prov 18:13). Furthermore, we may cause great harm to our counselees when we apply the law without understanding, potentially leading them into legalism or false condemnation. In our use of the law, we must strive to be counselors who heed the instructions of

[36] Owen, *Works*, 6:370.

[37] John Flavel, *The Works of John Flavel* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1968), 2:297.

[38] John Bunyan, *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 1:689. See also Bunyan's beautiful illustration of the relationship between the law and the gospel in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, ed. W. R. Owens, Oxford World's Classics (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 30–31.

Proverbs and the example of Christ:

> A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver. Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise reprover to a listening ear. (Prov 25:11–12)
>
> To make an apt answer is a joy to a man, and a word in season, how good it is!" (Prov 15:23)
>
> The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with a word him who is weary. (Isa 50:4).

Moreover, counselors must always recognize that, as we use the law in the lives of others, we ourselves also remain lawbreakers. We must always have a sense of our shared humanity with our counselees, and we must be careful to never let them think that we have somehow come to a place in which we have the authority to stand above them in our relationship to the law. Christ is the only human who has ever ministered to others from a place of perfect sinlessness, and he himself displayed a disposition of compassion and care toward even the most egregious offenders. Having made these qualifications, I offer the following brief suggestions for using the law with different types of counselees.

For those whom we counsel that have been egregiously sinned against, we must help them to see that forgiving their offender can only come through the avenue of experiencing a sense of their own sinfulness according to the law and the depth of the forgiveness that they themselves have received in Christ. Christ himself said so in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matt 18:21–35. Though we must do this with patience and great care, we must do it nonetheless.[39]

For those who themselves are offenders, we must help them to look their sin in the face and see it for what it truly is: an egregious offense against a holy God. And we must help them to see that whatever offense they have committed against their fellow man is ultimately a trespass

[39] To nuance this paragraph a bit, those who have been egregiously sinned against often need a great deal of compassion, care, and tenderness. The counselor must demonstrate to them the truth that God is still good despite the trials that they have undergone. My point in focusing on the use of the law for those who have been egregiously sinned against is simply to say that when the time comes to help the counselee move toward forgiving their offender, a recognition of how good God has been to them in redeeming them from their own sin will be an important motivating factor for experiencing the freedom of forgiving those who have sinned against them.

against the eternal moral law of God. In doing so, we must lead them on the path of humility toward the glorious experience of rest in the forgiveness of Christ and obedient gratitude to him for what he has done for them.

In addition to the above categories, some will experience suffering that has not come immediately as a result of their own sin or from the hand of any particular person but is, rather, an effect of the hard providence of God. We must not blame these counselees for their present suffering, but we must also help them to see that their present suffering is much less than what they deserve for their sin. Only through contemplating our sinfulness in accordance with the law can we find rest in the gospel that fuels our ability to remain steadfast amidst trials. Being humbled by the law is the only avenue for gospel rest and gospel obedience.

Conclusion

Much more could be written regarding a methodology for how a counselor uncovers false deception and confusion regarding the law and the gospel in the heart of different counselees with various particular struggles. Additionally, much can and should be written regarding how to skillfully bring gospel hope through rightly utilizing the law. However, the point of this article has simply been to assert that if we would be counselors who are Christian, biblically grounded, gospel-centered, and Christ-exalting, then we must have a right understanding and use of the law of God. For where there is no right understanding of the law of God, there can be no right understanding of the gospel, which is the only place where hope can be found, both for ourselves and for our counselees.

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SEBTS Counseling Professors Roundtable: As It Is and As It Could Be

This essay is an informal conversation among the counseling faculty at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS). The tone of the conversation is casual, but the content seeks to accomplish two things: (1) address some of the leading questions currently being debated in evangelical counseling circles, and (2) provide the reader with an opportunity to gain an understanding of the unique flavor of SEBTS's counseling programs.

Sam Williams serves as the emcee for this conversation. Kristin Kellen, Nate Brooks, and Brad Hambrick dialogue with one another around his questions. We hope you enjoy eavesdropping as we explore leading questions in the field of evangelical counseling together and gain an appreciation for why we enjoy serving together in the counseling program at SEBTS.

Sam Williams: *In a kind and perfect world, how would you briefly label and define the truest, most loving, and effective approach to counseling?*

Nate Brooks: You certainly start off with a softball question there, Sam. I think that counseling that's true, effective, and loving will always be counseling that's consistent with God's heart and God's revelation to his creatures. That approach to counseling will have special revelation, general revelation, and common grace woven together throughout, as that is how God has shown himself to us for our flourishing. This kind of counseling will engage the fullness of what it means to be human—we are covenantal, relational creatures with rational, affective, and volitional powers, ruined by the fall, and restored through redemption.

I go back and forth about what to label such an approach. It is biblical counseling to be certain, as it is an approach that emerges out of the Scriptures. But there are approaches to counseling labeled "biblical counseling" that I would understand as falling far short of this ideal. It's also not Integrationism, as special revelation is not just the foundation of counseling but woven all throughout the DNA of everything done in counseling. I've found myself referring to this approach as "redemptive counseling," as we seek to be part of God's work as he redeems us and his creation, making all things new.

Kristin Kellen: I'd agree with Nate. The Lord has created us to function within our creation in a particular way such that we would flourish,

and when we do so, that's what happens: we flourish. That necessarily entails the way we view people (our anthropology), how we understand the nature of truth and reality (our epistemology), or our actual methods, and each of these must be grounded in revealed knowledge from our Creator. Critical information is more clearly or explicitly given in the Word, other information can be gleaned from creation, but both contribute to how we care for others well.

I like the label "redemptive counseling," though my heart still wants to hold on to the "biblical counseling" label. And yet, as Nate alludes to, the definition of that term can vary significantly from one counselor to another. Whatever we call it, it's the definition that matters the most: true, loving, and effective counseling is derived from our Creator's revealed truth, his methods, and his end goals.

Brad Hambrick: I'll expand on what Nate and Kristin have said by speaking of how I view my role as the counselor. When I first began counseling, I viewed my role as a counselor primarily through the lens of "teacher." I thought that being a *biblical* counselor meant providing people with a practical theology for understanding their life struggle; that is, that a good theology would necessarily produce functional living.

As I have grown in experience as a counselor, I've found the role of "teacher" too narrow for what is required of an effective counselor. A teacher-only view of counseling portrays the counselee as struggling because they have an information deficit, and that more or better information would resolve their struggle. It also conceives of God as only being concerned with what a counselee thinks, believes, or values.

This realization led me to view my role as counselor more through the lens of "ambassador." I am in the counseling office to represent and embody God's primary concerns for this individual at this point in their life. That often involves teaching, but allows for more room for the relational benefits of counseling—listening, empathy, understanding, etc.

So, to tie these comments back into what Nate and Kristin have shared, when teaching is the mode of care that best represents God's primary concern for this person, I want to be a "biblical counselor." When the relational influences of counseling best represent how God would care for this person, then "redemptive counselor" is a more comprehensive description of what I'm striving to be.

Sam Williams: *Let's go with the label "redemptive counseling." What does or should distinguish redemptive counseling from other approaches, such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing*

(EMDR)? What does a redemptive counselor bring to the table that is distinctive and unique?

Kristin Kellen: For me, if I only had to pick one thing, it'd be the end goal. I wholeheartedly believe that we were created by God for the purpose of becoming more like Christ, for the glory of God, and for our enjoyment and flourishing (sorry, Westminster Catechism, I'm adding a step there). If we employ any of those approaches, some of which can be incredibly helpful, towards any other end, our counseling is insufficient. Ultimately, and I'll borrow a phrase I've heard you say, we're merely air conditioning their train ride to hell.

Now, I wouldn't say that means every session must be evangelistic or that we cannot do anything to alleviate suffering, even for an unbeliever. After all, as Mike Emlet has said, the relief of suffering is a kingdom agenda; it gives us a foretaste of the coming redemption. So, we can use secular methods, within a biblical framework and paired with biblical teaching, in such a way that they lead toward sanctification, and in doing so, they are oriented toward God's glory and the counselee's conformity to Christ. We are helping people move toward their God-given end, rather than simply seeking relief from pain or discomfort.

Nate Brooks: Every approach to counseling combines observation and worldview. We observe how people think, desire, and choose and then explain this by means of our beliefs or worldview. This means that every theoretical approach to counseling is (partially) based upon the observation of God's image bearers. It's really difficult to study God's images, breathe God's air, reason with the intellect God has given and get absolutely nothing right. I think this explains why some of these secular approaches to counseling are so helpful—due to God's common grace they do stumble into his truth, unwittingly. However, each of them is ultimately reductionistic. They're trying to reverse engineer the person without the instruction manual, and because of that they also get things terribly wrong at times.

Redemptive counseling is counseling with the instruction manual in hand. This helps us understand where some of the approaches may be helpful and where they're a dead end. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), for instance, gets right that beliefs and thinking are so important. However, Jas 4:17 insists that we can know what's right and choose not to do it. We can't put all our chips in on cognition, as our affections and the orientation of our hearts often direct our thoughts. At our core we aren't reasonable—otherwise we wouldn't have listened to a snake instead of Yahweh. The same can be said for every approach to counseling. CBT can teach us much about how to practically engage in thought change and

what kinds of practices help new thoughts stick. But acknowledging this is different than accepting the entire anthropology espoused by CBT. This willingness to learn skills, but not accept whole systems, distinguishes redemptive counseling from both traditional Integrationism and traditional biblical counseling.

At its best, redemptive counseling engages us fully as human beings—body and soul, with all the complexity of our individual psychological makeup. That's a tall order, to be certain, but you asked for the ideal world, Sam!

Brad Hambrick: I'll approach your question by exploring the relationship between healthiness and holiness. Modalities of counseling that neglect redemption in Christ focus exclusively on helping the counselee become *healthier*; that is, to reduce emotional distress and improve relationships. We can call that approach to counseling "good but incomplete."

A redemptive counselor is going to help a counselee reinforce their pursuit of healthiness with a pursuit of holiness, which is only available to us in relationship to God. When counseling is focused on an area of suffering this would entail helping the counselee understand God's compassion. More than mere relief, the counselor wants the counselee to understand God, like a good father, wants this relief for them. The counseling techniques utilized represent God's heart towards their suffering.

When counseling focuses on an area of sin, this would entail helping the counselee appreciate God's moral laws as good and embracing the freedom that comes through repentance and forgiveness. Repentance is not God shaming them for their sin, but a gift of freedom and means to restore relationships.

The redemptive counselor should be no less skilled than the non-redemptive counselor. But redemptive counselors should be more overt in their efforts to strengthen a counselee's trust and faith in God's character as they pursue a healthier life. When this is done well, the counselee's Christian faith is deepened, and the resources of the counselee's faith enhances the depth of change experienced in counseling.

Sam Williams: *Nate Brooks's article in this journal is entitled, "Everybody Integrates" in which he contends that integration is practically inevitable, even for the most "biblical" of counselors. In addition, several of us have contended that common grace and special revelation are not competitive but are intended by God to be complementary. And yet, the atheistic worldview and presuppositions of most contemporary psychologists are no secret. Their theories about human functioning and their methods for how to help people change operate as if counseling or psychotherapy is a God-free zone. Because of this, the first generation of biblical counselors (exemplified, certainly not exclusively but*

perhaps most boldly, by Jay Adams in much of his writing) stridently rejected "integrationism." Were they mostly right or mostly wrong in doing so? How should we understand this dilemma?

Brad Hambrick: If we name the experience of trust as an increase in the neurotransmitter oxytocin, are we mostly right or mostly wrong? The answer is, we're completely and incompletely accurate. What we've said is *completely accurate*. Oxytocin is the neurotransmitter most closely associated with the experience of trust. But no one would watch the bond emerging as a mother tenderly rocks her child to sleep and say that moment can be completely explained by neurochemistry. So, to reduce trust to a neurotransmitter is *incompletely accurate*.

Let's use this example of being simultaneously completely and incompletely accurate as a parallel for the Nouthetic critique of including common grace resources for counseling, particularly those from the empirical vein of modern counseling approaches. I would contend that Jay Adams, and current Nouthetic counselors who take his logic further than he did, are completely and incompletely accurate. They are *completely accurate* to say that modern theories and practices of counseling omit God from their view of people, problems, and remedies. They are *completely accurate* to note that this is a problem that should be a primary concern of Christians seeking counseling and those providing counsel.

However, let's consider how this approach is *incompletely accurate*. Someone who reads even in the introductory pages of *Competent to Counsel*—Jay Adams's first book on counseling—realizes Jay Adams was grateful to have learned from O. Hobart Mowrer, a secular psychologist with a very critical and oppositional view of Christianity. Despite this, Adams's introduction to *Competent to Counsel* acknowledges a debt of gratitude for Mowrer's clearly influential role in the development of Nouthetic Counseling:

> I read some of Mowrer's works, including *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion*, and *The New Group Therapy*, which he had just published. These books astounded me. Mowrer had gone far beyond my own thinking.… Reading Mowrer's book, *The Crisis in Psychiatry and Religion*, as I said, was an earth-shattering experience.… I came home deeply indebted to Mowrer for indirectly driving me to a conclusion that I as a Christian minister should have known all along, namely, that many of the 'mentally ill' are people who can be helped by the ministry of God's Word.[1]

That might merely mean that Jay Adams was right in his assessment

[1] Jay E. Adams, *Competent to Counsel: Introduction to Nouthetic Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), xiv–xviii.

of resources like Mowrer's work, but inconsistent in his willingness to practice it. After all, we've all been inconsistent with our ideals. But I believe it is more than that. Jay Adams recognized that a secular psychologist (even one who believed Christianity contributed more to mental illness than it cured) could make accurate and useful observations about people, culture, and paths towards healthiness. Jay Adams was willing to learn from, even study under Mowrer for an extended time, to benefit from his work to such a degree that it merited acknowledgement in his seminal book. Jay Adams was able to "eat the fish" (take what was useful) and "spit out the bones" (reject what contradicted Scripture), which is what faithful Christians do when engaging any field of study, including psychology. Jay Adams redeemed what he learned from Mowrer, and *Competent to Counsel* was a fruit of that lesson.[2]

This leads to the following question, "Why do some biblical counselors trust Jay Adams to do this type of integration, but not trust others who claim to do the same thing?" A question this broad has many answers. I'll explore only one. The trust exists because of the person. In the same way that we might trust Miles Davis or John Coltrane to "play jazz" and riff on a melody, but not Justin Bieber.

The reality is integration is an activity like jazz more than it is like mathematics. Every mathematician, if they are good at their craft, will come up with the same answer when they input the same data into the same formula. This is true whether they work the formula in private or public, in France or Taiwan, or while teaching a prideful student or a timid one. But this is not how integration works.

Integration is more like jazz than sheet music. Jay Adams could hear the "melody" played by Mowrer, repurpose it for a redemptive agenda, and ministered it as a "new song" that sought to promote both healthiness and holiness. Jay Adams did this and the end product was biblically faithful. That is why those who say Adams didn't play the same "song" as Mowrer are *completely accurate*, but to say that Adams did not integrate is *incompletely accurate*.

Like all of us, Jay Adams learned from his context. Like the wise, he sought guidance from those who had extensive experience where he lacked it. He then repurposed what he learned for his context. In that

[2] For a more in-depth assessment of Mowrer's influence on Adams and its implications for the modern biblical counseling movement, see Bob Kellemen's article "Meet the Man Who Influenced the Early Nouthetic Counseling Movement: O. Hobart Mowrer" available at https://rpmministries.org/2023/10/o-hobart-mowrer-the-man-who-influenced-the-early-nouthetic-counseling-movement.

sense, if we work redemptively with what we learn from the social sciences, we are following the example of Jay Adams even though his later writings and those who follow in his footsteps criticize this integrative work. Nonetheless, we integrate for three reasons:

1. *It is wise:* We should seek to learn from those who excel in their work, even when we disagree with their presuppositions and need to redemptively recontextualize their work.
2. *It is good stewardship of common grace:* God grants wisdom and insight to the just and unjust, the redeemed and unredeemed; therefore, we should be willing to learn from both.
3. *It is inevitable: W*e are strongly influenced, for better and worse, by the sources of knowledge around us; therefore, it is better to be intentional about filtering those influences than pretending we are impenetrable.

Nate Brooks: I'm not sure that anything really needs to be added to Brad's answer. It's a good and well-thought one. Maybe I can round it out by exploring another angle.

There's a difference between integration as a noun and as a verb. The verb is an activity, a process. And it's absolutely unavoidable for every Christian, as it's part of how God designed us to operate in the world. This type of integration is taking material from different domains and integrating them together into a coherent, workable whole. Preachers do this when they organize their sermons into points, integrating research in rhetoric and memory with the life-giving Word of God to produce a better sermon. A parent integrates as they combine material from economics, nutrition, and time management to organize meal preparation for the family. Counselors likewise are consistently drawing material from various domains as we seek to care well for the persons we counsel.

This verb form should not be confused with the noun form of the word, which usually gets rendered as "Integrationism." This term refers to a particular school of thought within the discussion of how to do counseling as a Christian, especially regarding the way psychology and theology are understood to relate to one another.

Returning to Brad's answer (and my essay), even the staunchest Nouthetic counselor is persistently integrating. Adams in particular used all kinds of material outside Scripture to develop biblical counseling. Thus, he is integrating (process, verb), but he's not an Integrationist (school of thought, noun). This point becomes particularly critical as later counselors within the Nouthetic tradition will strongly insist that the incorporation of extra-biblical material in counseling is either unnecessary

or unfaithful. Yet, you can't actually *do* counseling without incorporating extra-biblical material in counseling. Even the meta-structure of counseling—an individual you talk with about a particular problem, typically for an hour, etc.—which is present in Nouthetic counseling has no specific biblical precedent to point to. That pattern is derived from contemporary secular counseling. Even though the primary location may shift from the counselor's office to the church, this spatiotemporal structure is not derived from Scripture.

Within biblical counseling, we've historically operated out of a rather idiosyncratic approach to integration. As Brad has said, the fact is that certain individuals function as "gatekeepers" for what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable integration. The truth of the matter is that many practices in biblical counseling can be found in secular theories as well. Biblical counseling and CBT both work to identify errant beliefs and replace them with new ones. Narrative therapy works to help individuals by changing the story they tell themselves about who they are and their life events, as biblical counseling seeks to help people connect their stories with the grand metanarrative of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Homework assignments such as self-reflection, journaling, and bibliotherapy are common throughout secular approaches to psychology as well. Why would we not learn from other schools of thought in the same way that Adams learned from Mowrer?

Kristin Kellen: As Nate said, there's not a whole lot to add here (even less so after both!). I'll add a thought briefly, though, and that is the *necessity* of understanding common grace truths/realities in order to properly understand special revelation truth. Common grace gives richness, clarity, and dimension to what God has revealed in his word. This is not to say that Scripture is insufficient, only that God intended us to have "both books." To ignore one or the other diminishes our understanding of the one remaining.

Let's apply this understanding to the use of secular counseling. Are common grace observations, sometimes articulated in terms of "scientific observations," necessary to understand people and their problems, to which we then apply Scripture? I'd argue "yes," though we must be clear in what we mean by "scientific observations." We all do scientific (i.e., systematic) inquiry in our minds: we observe, categorize, make sense of, and then act in light of what we see and how we think about it. And we're just one person. We cannot separate our understanding of reality from how we respond to that reality. Thus, any "science" used must correspond to reality, to God's reality. Some may argue that it's a leap to then say we need secular psychological science, but as Nate has demonstrated in his article, it's almost foolish to think that we don't already use psychological

science by default. Let's just call it what it is. We can do so while still acknowledging its limitations and asserting the wisdom needed to engage with it.

Perhaps an example would make clear what I'm talking about here. When someone experiences extreme fear and has a physiological response to it (what psychologists call "fight or flight"), we almost instinctively act and speak calmly and help them physically calm down. We give them space for their bodies to return to a normal state. Many years ago, when I was being trained in biblical counseling, we didn't use words like "grounding techniques" or "deep breathing," as secular psychology would now label it. However, I've found it incredibly helpful to follow the "instructions" gleaned from observations and science to help my counselees calm their bodies. I'm not sure it ultimately matters what we call it, but gleaning information from scientific observation can be incredibly helpful.

One last thought: If we already do integration by default, then there's an imperative to do it well, not haphazardly. In our care and love for our neighbor, it is an ethical imperative to care for them with excellence. We must be cognizant of the process that we are *already engaging in*. We must integrate well. To do it well, we must consider how we are integrating, what we are integrating, and toward what end.

Sam Williams: *Adolescent mental health has deteriorated rapidly over the last 12 years, deaths of despair in men (drug overdoses and suicides) skyrocketed over the last decade, and anxiety and/or depression affect 25–35 percent of women during their lifetime. Undeniably, our minds are broken, and we live in a very broken world. What is or should be the role of the Christian church in addressing these matters?*

Kristin Kellen: I counsel a lot of young people, so this question resonates with me. Most counselors at the beginning of COVID could tell you that we'd be here today, and that was even without knowing how long it would take to get through it. Those two years only served to exacerbate what was already a reality.

Now to answer your question: ideally, the church should be the *primary* place of counseling, insofar as they are able to serve adequately and competently. Christians were given numerous "one another" commands under which much of counseling falls. Sometimes, though, others outside of the church are necessary to provide the best care. This isn't a judgment statement; churches are limited and may not have someone within the congregation who can provide adequate care for the members.

For the church to be the primary source of counseling requires attention be given to identifying and training leaders to provide this counseling, and correlative systems and resources must be developed within the

church. And yet, some churches on their own may not be able to care for their people sufficiently, which is where cooperation comes in. We can utilize resources from within the larger body to care for those who need it. Then, if needs still remain, or deeper expertise is required, then we can refer to a believer who has been trained to do clinical care.

Brad Hambrick: Kristin did an excellent job of describing the impact of isolation that has occurred during and after COVID. That impact is real. Major events like COVID usually do not *create* new cultural trends. Instead, they tend to *accelerate* existing trends. I believe that is true in this case.

For well over a decade, relationships in our culture have become more superficial. The average American moves eleven times in their lifetime.[3] That is eleven times when that individual has to start over at cultivating a meaningful community. That doesn't include major transitions like changing schools or changing jobs in the same city.

Add to this the "polish" we are perpetually tempted to put on our lives via social media, and the number of important subjects that are so polarized it feels unsafe to ask honest questions about them, and you have a powerful recipe for isolation, or at least, highly superficial socialization.

Hearing this, Gen 2:18 should be ringing in our mind, "It is not good that the man should be alone." If this is true before the Genesis 3 fall, how much more true is it when sin has permeated our hearts and suffering infected our world. Being alone—unknown and without connection to other people—magnifies every other struggle in our life, not least of all mental health struggles.

In light of this, we realize how vital the church is, or could be. The church is meant to be a place of deep and redemptive connection (Acts 2:42–27; 4:32–37), where it should be common to be honest about our sin (1 Tim 1:15–17; Jas 5:16) and our suffering (2 Cor 1:8–11).

With this in mind, I think a big part of the answer to Sam's question occurs not when we're seated in rows listening to a pastor preach (as important as that is), but when we're sitting in circles deciding how honest, vulnerable, and transparent we will be with one another. This is enough of a burden for me that my next book, *Transformative Friendships: Seven Questions to Deepen Any Relationship* (New Growth Press, coming April 2024), is devoted to helping churches cultivate these kinds of relationships in their congregations.

The greatest untapped resource for sanctification and mental health

[3] "Calculating Migration Expectancy Using ACS Data," United States Census Bureau, updated December 3, 2021, https://www.census.gov/topics /population/migration/guidance/calculating-migration-expectancy.html.

may be simple honesty and authenticity. Honesty is the difference between being alone with our challenges and having the support God wants all of us to have through the church. When we fail to be authentic, we unplug ourselves from the care God intends for us to have and the hopelessness that undergirds the statistics that Sam referenced begins to feel suffocating.

Nate Brooks: The church is in a unique place to address this mental health breakdown because it is the custodian of humanity's hope. Brad and Kristin have helpfully laid out many of the troubles that result in statistics like those you've cited, Sam. It really isn't all that surprising we are where we are, given these factors. The major question is what we do about it. People aren't likely to move fewer times and we can't count on cultural fractures being stitched back together. Where's hope in the midst of this?

We are lost, cast about, without hope. God isn't caught off guard by these realities. In fact, it's the natural result of the curse being woven throughout the fabric of human existence after Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. While God isn't caught off guard, I think we often can be, and especially so for those who do not know God and his description of ourselves and our world. As Christians, ultimately, we find hope in the message of the gospel. The church is the proclaimer of this gospel that faces human despair head-on.

I don't mean to be reductionistic, but the cornerstone of hope is the present faithfulness of God in the midst of whatever awful circumstances befall us. My favorite passage in Scripture is a ray of hope in the middle of some of the darkest Scripture written. Having just witnessed the manifold atrocities of a conquering, pillaging army intent on destroying the Jewish people, the author of Lamentations reminds us that:

> Because of the Lord's faithful love
> we do not perish,
> for his mercies never end.
> They are new every morning;
> great is your faithfulness!
> I say, "The Lord is my portion,
> therefore I will put my hope in him."
>
> The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
> to the person who seeks him.
> It is good to wait quietly
> for salvation from the Lord. (Lam 3:22–26 CSB)

Through its ministry of preaching, evangelism, discipleship, feeding the needy, caring for single mothers, etc. the church offers this hope-full

message to those who are feeling the dark effects of being adrift. How this is played out in the real ministries of the church is certainly more complex. But in the midst of conversations about the church and its care in the realm of mental health, let's not skip the foundation. We do have hope to offer, and that's really hard to come by in this world.

Sam Williams: *To bring our conversation to a conclusion, imagine that you woke up this morning and miraculously the greatest problems and needs in Christian counseling were resolved. What would be different? So that we're not just dreaming, what next step(s) would need to be taken for this ideal world to become more of a reality?*

Brad Hambrick: As I think about this question, two passages come to mind. The first is 1 Tim 6:6, "But godliness with contentment is great gain." In context, Paul is talking about our finances and temptation toward greed. But I believe the passage applies well to any situation where comparative thinking tempts us towards pride.

Pride is very competitive. Too much of the conversation in the Christian and biblical counseling worlds is about who does counseling better. I think the evangelical counseling world will be better when we all are content to be excellent in our role. Whether we are licensed, or ministry based, in a parachurch or local church setting, let's focus on being an excellent ambassador of Christ in that setting.

The second passage is 1 Corinthians 8 where Paul is mediating the debate about whether believers should eat food sacrificed to idols. In their day, this was no small question, although it may seem that way to us. If you read the passage, you'll find that Paul had a clear conviction on the matter. But this conviction did not usurp his desire for other-minded unity among believers.

Our inability to hold strong views that vary from one another on matters we deem important is tearing our world apart. It makes social media toxic. In an ideal world, those who lead the Christian and biblical counseling movements—where navigating conflict is common—would model for the church how this is done well.

In order for the ideals of these two passages to become a reality, I believe one step would be foundational: namely, listening with charity. We know we are listening with charity when we interpret what the other says with integrity (i.e., not reading the worst possible meaning into their words). We know we are listening with charity when we value the work of another even when it's in a different setting than our own. This is not easy or natural for us as fallen, sinful people. But we can pray that by God's grace it becomes an increasing feature of debates in the evangelical counseling community and, thereby, begins to permeate the church-at-large.

Nate Brooks: The modern biblical counseling movement has been around for over 50 years in America. It's gone from being a fringe view in the world of Christian counseling to multiple seminaries offering PhDs in the subject specifically. There's been a shift where, to a significant extent, Christ has been restored to counseling and counseling to the local church. Certainly, there is need for more growth, but the biblical counseling movement has largely been successful in its aims. But now what?

John Frame wrote a helpful article some years back titled "Machen's Warrior Children" in which he documents the creation of the new Presbyterian Church in America denomination in the face of growing theological liberalism. Frame's contention is that the combative origin story of the PCA became a persistent mood wherein the participants battled with each other over increasingly more minor points of doctrine, even though the major conflict had come to a close. Frame's words are prescient for the biblical counseling movement. Galatians 5:15 warns believers that "If you bite and devour one another, watch out, or you will be consumed by one another" (CSB).

I'm a seminary professor, and a large amount of my time is spent reading. One thing I've always appreciated about many other disciplines is their ability to have discussions about ideas without turning those discussions into a disputation of someone's character. The conflict over narrower points of doctrine doesn't devolve into questions about someone's salvation. There's an emphasis upon accurately quoting others and engaging at the level of thoughts and ideas. Minor points of difference aren't treated as a point of dire peril for the church at large.

I would love to see biblical counseling mature this way, away from the faithful/unfaithful binary that sows suspicion, promotes tribalism, and leads to unnecessary conflict. Doing this requires careful scholarship and stepping away from fear. Not everyone will agree with one another and that's okay. I'm sure if you pressed the four of us in this discussion, you'd find ways that we view things differently. But I know the hearts and the practices of my colleagues here and their ability to offer good, redemptive-centered care is not a question. An ethos of epistemic humility forces us to recognize our own limitations, to acknowledge the fact that we could be in error, and to trust the Spirit's work in someone else's life. My lane doesn't have to overlap entirely with someone else's lane in order for them to be part of God's good work in someone's life. I'm grateful for those who embody this spirit within biblical counseling and pray that it continues to grow.

Kristin Kellen: Rather than reiterate what I'd give a hearty "amen!" to above, let me offer an additional gap that needs to be addressed: the lack of resources. Almost weekly, I get a question along the lines of "Do

you know of any good resources for XYZ from a Christian perspective?" Sometimes, there's an easy answer, a clear and obvious (sufficient, or at least thorough) resource to share. But more often than not, I have to write back something like "Well, that's a great question… there's a *minibook* or an *article* on that, but we really need more." We have done a great job articulating (and debating) the underlying theory or approach to biblical counseling, even though we haven't reached a consensus, hence the two answers above. But I think the most acute gap is a lack of written resources on specific topics that people are struggling with.

Let me give an example: In the last few months alone, I've received emails or had conversations with ladies in churches or students asking about resources for ADHD, defiant children (oppositional defiant disorder), infertility, and eating disorders. I can think of one, maybe two, resources for the four of these topics combined. These disorders are fairly commonplace, including within the church, and yet we either have no resources at all or those that are somewhat outdated.

To answer the question you asked, if I were to wake up in the morning and our greatest problem was miraculously solved, I'd walk into my office and find a bookshelf full of resources on every specific counseling topic imaginable, from a distinctly Christian perspective. I'd see a handful of books on self-harm, addiction (substances and behavior), eating disorders, particular kinds of trauma, and a host of others. But right now, we have very little *specifics*. The next step, then, is for people to get trained, practice counseling, and share the wisdom God has given them through writing *deeply* about particular struggles in the Christian life, not from an existential or conceptual perspective, but from a practical, "here's how you walk with someone with X" perspective. *That* would advance Christian counseling and serve the kingdom.

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Book Reviews

Rolf A. Jacobson and Michael J. Chan. *Introducing the Old Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023. xxvii + 653 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0801049255. $38.49.

Rolf Jacobson and Michael Chan's *Introducing the Old Testament* is the companion volume to Mark Allen Powell's *Introducing the New Testament*. The authors state that they followed Powell's pattern to help the reader have an "interesting, enjoyable, and intellectually rewarding experience" (p. xiii). It is certainly a versatile resource since it can be used for academic purposes and for study in other environments. It is also attractive—and suitable for personal reading by a broader audience. It is clearly written, and classic and modern artistic representations enrich the text.

The work is structured in five parts. The first focuses on contextualization as it analyzes the ancient context in which OT literature was generated. The remaining four comprise 39 chapters, introducing the traditional divisions of the OT in the Protestant tradition. These parts focus on each of the books, with some treated together, such as 1–2 Samuel, 1–2 Kings, 1–2 Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. The authors provide concise information here. However, their effective and attractive introductions (to each OT book) avoid compromising the academic demands that should characterize a work of this nature. The brief introductions are followed by contextual details (where composition and development history are generally given) and genre, then sections on literary, theological, and historical interpretation.

The page layout deviates helpfully from traditional convention: text cells in the margins contain additional information, explaining the meaning of relevant words and terms, while informational "boxes" contain both explanatory graphics and a more in-depth analysis of the topics addressed in specific sections or chapters. This noteworthy stylistic innovation enhances the book's value.

A key strength of the work is its equitable treatment of various literary, theological, and historical approaches, each of which is treated meticulously. Also, while each section is introduced as an artificial unit, it is presented with singularity, clarity, and coherence. The graphics are impeccable and contribute significantly to understanding the content. Visual elements deserving special mention are charts offering a chronological

comparison of the kings of Israel (p. 263), and the "anatomy of a psalm" (p. 349).

Most OT introductions treat Ezra-Nehemiah together but as separate works. In this volume the authors innovatively treat them as a unity, to provide a new perspective for readers interested in these two books. Then, the section on biblical poetry is one of the most outstanding parts of the book. Here the authors offer data that provides a solid understanding, both of key elements of the Bible and of the genre of poetic biblical Hebrew.

Some aspects of the work could be better. Chapters such as "Numbers" seem excessively dependent on a single source. Offering a broader range of references to support the arguments would have been beneficial. The authors make an initial commitment to present diverse perspectives, reflecting different academic positions, but do not follow through consistently throughout the book. For example, their examination of certain OT books' composition within the corpus of the so-called Deuteronomistic History essentially excludes other interpretations. Moreover, the Deuteronomistic History itself is sometimes referred to as a collective work but elsewhere as coming from a single editor.

This discrepancy may derive from the authors' decision to present their points of view without interfering in each other's arguments. In fact, they do not indicate which of them is specifically responsible for different paragraphs or chapters. It would have aided clarity and coherence (and reduced confusion) in certain sections of the book if this issue had been dealt with transparently and uniformly throughout. In addition, the authors seem to overlook the cultural aspects of the ancient Near East (ANE) in some places, favoring modern and ideological approaches instead. Addressing cultural realities from antiquity in a more complex way would have been better than forcing a sensitivity to modern audience concerns.

Overall, although there are some points that could be improved, this volume is a valuable contribution to OT teaching. Its richness of content, quality of graphics, and use of language open to different audiences, commend it to anyone interested in studying the Old Testament.

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Esther Eshel and Michael Langlois, eds. *The Scribe in the Biblical World: A Bridge Between Scripts, Languages, and Cultures*. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022. vi + 382 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-3110996685. $99.99

The Scribe in the Biblical World is a collection of papers presented at the University of Strasbourg from June 17–19, 2019 (p. 1). The conference aimed to investigate "the status of the scribe" in the biblical world, covering scribes' training, practices, and work (p. 1). Fifteen essays explore this topic from various angles, focusing on topics from the Late Bronze Age to the turn of the era, and covering locations such as Israel, Ugarit, Byblos, Egypt, and ancient Assyria and Babylon. This balanced collection enhances an understanding of the scribe's status in the biblical world, serving as a useful resource for interested scholars.

The book begins with Emmanuel Tov's treatment of scribal approaches emerging from the Judaean Desert. Before discussing the complexities of this topic, Tov carefully describes the subjectivity of this task since it depends on determining a manuscript's *Vorlage* or source text (pp. 3–21). André Lemaire examines the status and function of the royal scribe from 1250–600 BC while Sara Milstein investigates the role of legal texts in a scribe's education (pp. 54–56). Aaron Demsky suggests "curse formulas" were subject to "literary borrowing" (pp. 69–70). For his part, Jan Dušek tests Holger Gzella's argument that inscriptions of central Syrian Aramaic all derive from the same scribal school (pp. 87–114). Anat Mendel-Geberovich discusses the dating of Judaean seals and bullae from the 8th–6th century BC by focusing on provenanced artifacts and concludes that the paleography does not support a more precise dating (pp. 115–38).

Next, Stefan Jakob Wimmer updates his 2008 work on hieratic numerals on Iron Age tax bullae by discussing thirty-six additional bullae (pp. 139–61). Aren M. Wilson-Wright establishes a timeline for the borrowing of Egyptian scribal terms and concludes that six words were borrowed by Hebrew's linguistic ancestors while three were directly borrowed into Hebrew (pp. 163–82). Tania Notarius discusses the terms for writings in Northwest Semitic (NWS), especially the NWS root *spr*. She investigates the alphabetical texts from Ugarit and concludes that the verbal noun *spr*, "counting, listing," derives from the NWS root for "count" (p. 187). William M. Schniedewind argues that letter writing was a primary school exercise in Israelite scribal training based on "model letters" from Kuntillet ʿAjrud (pp. 203–32).

Esther Eshel then provides a helpful introduction to the Aramaic lapidary script. She investigates two new inscriptions, one of which makes

precise dating difficult since it combines older and newer letter forms (pp. 233–48). Michael Langlois discusses the phenomenon of texts that preserve theonyms in paleo-Hebrew. He concludes that this feature occurred after paleo-Hebrew was abandoned for copying and writing literary texts and was likely used to distinguish the sacredness of theonyms (pp. 248–94). Paul Mandel investigates the terms *sofer*/*safar* and concludes that these terms "do not refer to the writing professional associated with the production and transmission of biblical and associated texts" (p. 296). Guy Stiebel studies the epigraphic remains copied at Masada to investigate how stress affected scribal production (pp. 321–42). Jeffrey Stackert discusses the phenomenon of scribal fatigue and its effect on the task of copying a text (pp. 343–70). Finally, Eshel and Langlois, the editors, provide a helpful summary of each chapter, restating the contributors' main conclusions.

A strength of this unique book is the authors' investigation of the scribe's role from new perspectives. Tov's essay, for example, discusses the concept of two scribal approaches to copying. Most scholars discuss these phenomena, but Tov's treatment helpfully investigates the validity of this basic and widespread belief. Stiebel too takes a new approach to understanding the remains of Masada by asking how stress might have affected the artifacts.

Another strength is the cautious approach of many of the authors. Eshel, for example, argues that precise dating of some Aramaic texts is difficult due to the combination of older and newer forms into a single text. Mendel-Geberovich arrives at a similar conclusion concerning the Judaean Glyptic objects, based on a "wide variation in letter forms" (p. 125). Stackert's paper on scribal fatigue is also helpful, but at times, speculative. Although he introduced me to a new and important topic, his basic premise depends on knowing the text's *Vorlage*, something Tov is rightly cautious of.

Overall, this work assembles papers covering diverse geographic regions and chronological times to present the status of the scribe in the biblical world. The work is well-rounded and introduces readers to new questions that are sure to help those interested in this important topic.

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Kyle R. Greenwood and David B. Schreiner. *Ahab's House of Horrors: A Historiographic Study of the Military Campaigns of the House of Omri*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2023. xx + 268 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1683596486. $22.99.

This volume is the second installment in Studies in Biblical Archaeology, Geography, & History, Barry J. Beitzel, editor. It joins another peer-reviewed monograph, Barry Beitzel's *Where Was the Biblical Red Sea?* (2020).

Ahab's House of Horrors focuses on the biblical martial contexts during the reign of the Omrides, attested by relevant ancient Near East (ANE) witnesses, particularly the Tel Dan, Kurkh, and Mesha inscriptions, along with relevant Assyrian archives. Kyle Greenwood and David Schreiner discuss the impasse created by an either-or approach to these records. First and 2 Kings present a negative view of the Omrides, especially Ahab, leaving the impression that they were ineffective leaders. The ANE records show them as sometime major players attempting to blunt successive waves of Assyrian advance into the eastern Mediterranean littoral. The authors detail events of the 9th century BC. valuing, but also nuancing, the ancient witnesses. What emerges is a balanced presentation of the era, surveying the various scholarly approaches and building toward a unified understanding.

The authors begin with a discussion of the later years of the house of Omri featured in 2 Kings 9 and the Tel Dan inscription. This brings the issue of differing accounts into high relief. The Tel Dan inscription appears to credit Hazael of Damascus with the killings of Israel's king Joram (or Jehoram) and Judah's king Ahaziah. 2 Kings 9 credits these to Jehu. To address the impasse, Greenwood and Schreiner survey various solutions offered in the secondary literature. Such explanations involve technical lexical and orthographic observations. The authors give some solutions more probability than others. Without providing a firm conclusion to the discussion, they demonstrate a key overall point: the biblical and secular ANE accounts are complementary. Both should be considered in any conversation.

Chapter 3 takes up the account of the siege of Samaria (1 Kings 20–22). Some question its historicity because of its use of royal titles rather than specific names—an anonymizing of the major players, e.g., Ben-Hadad ("son of Hadad" [a national deity]) or "king of Israel" instead of personal names. Tracing the narrative and other OT historical accounts, the authors conclude that this tendency is characteristic of such texts. Non-biblical material illuminating the Aram/Israelite history is limited, chiefly focusing on the Tel Dan inscription and the Kurkh Monolith

(styled as Shalmaneser's account of westward expansion, including Qarqar [853 BC], with Ahab as a player). Greenwood and Schreiner survey the Aram/Israel interaction from the patriarchal age almost through the end of the monarchical period. The passages show a predominant use of anonymity. The authors also briefly note the use of royal anonymity in the Assyrian and Babylonian sources. In this there is nothing to disqualify the account of 1 Kings 20–22. That it differs from contemporary ANE accounts would be expected since its controlling foci—the rule of Yahweh and obedience to the Law/prophetic word—make this material substantially different from the secular.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 consider the battles at Aphek, Ramoth-Gilead, and the revolt of Moab. The Aphek discussion includes an alternative interpretation for "like two little flocks of goats" (1 Kgs 20:27) suggesting a meager force (the Kurkh inscription suggests Ahab was a sometime major player) and considers the meaning of *ḥerem* (what is "devoted"). The expression translated "little flocks" might suggest something like scrappy or ready for a fight, while "devoted" fits well with a military context implying complete annihilation.

The battle of Ramoth-Gilead ends a period of relative peace between Aram and Israel (1 Kgs 22:1). During this time, Assyria was prevented by internal difficulties from exerting much control over the region and the significant players were the more local kingdoms. Greenwood and Schreiner detail the difficulties of this material (the location of Ramoth-Gilead, the number of encounters there, two Ahaziahs and J(eh)orams vs. one each, and the differing arrangement of chapters between the MT and LXX). The authors present the various options without declaring a winner.

The revolt of Moab (2 Kings 3 and the Moabite Stone [or Mesha Stele]) raises again the either-or question regarding historicity. The ancient accounts vary in some details, but the authors rely on Joe Sprinkle's excellent treatment (*BBR* 9 [1999]: 247–70, incorrectly typed "History of Historical Fiction" instead of "History or…"), showing several specific points of agreement to argue that the accounts complement each other. Neither should be excluded from the discussion.

This is an excellent example of careful scholarship and should serve as a model for future studies both in this series and more broadly.

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Brent A. Strawn, edited by Collin Cornell and M. Justin Walker. *The Incomparable God: Readings in Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. xxvii + 480 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0802879493. $59.99.

Brent A. Strawn's *The Incomparable God* is comprised of 18 essays and sermons edited by Strawn's former students Collin Cornell and M. Justin Walker. The volume consists of three sections: "Readings" (i.e., exegesis), "Biblical Theology," and "Practice" (i.e., sermons). As his editors note, Strawn's work in this volume is indeed "rangy" (p. xiii): He has published on each testament, Bonhoeffer, the Dead Sea Scrolls, Gangsta Rap, Herodotus, Ugaritic, and more. Due to space constraints, this review summarizes the book's six previously unpublished essays/sermons (chapters 5, 6, 11, 14, 16, and 18).

In Chapters 5 and 6, Strawn encourages readers to resist ethical discomfort by reading putatively cruel texts afresh. He finds room to question long-held assumptions and uses these challenging texts as sites of contemplation. While Chapter 6 could have been shorter, both chapters effectively illustrate how to read brutal texts profitably. Thus, in Chapter 5, Strawn reconsiders Psalm 137's desire for Babylon's babies to be smashed against rocks. In a plea for "poetic justice," the psalmist prays that Babylon receives its just deserts for slaughtering Jerusalem's children (p. 116). Whereas other psalms (e.g., Ps 110:5–7) call for God's immediate vengeance, this one only hints that God will be the agent of retribution (Ps 137:8–9).

In the sixth chapter, Strawn revisits "Elisha and the Bears," one of Scripture's most puzzling texts. Providing a "spiritual reading" (p. 133), he argues the church can read 2 Kgs 2:23–25 profitably. He emphasizes how the content of Elisha's curse and a link between the curse and the mauling are absent, inviting interpretive possibilities. Then he explores the "ecclesiological connection" between the church which suffers after Jesus' ascension and Elisha who suffered after Elijah's (p. 157). As Elisha stopped to offer a perfunctory curse, so too the church may become sidetracked from its divine mission. However, in each case, God's ultimate purposes are not hindered. Finally, Strawn surprisingly envisions himself as one of the youths: "Maybe I, like those youths, too frequently pose hindrance to … God's divine work" (p. 160).

In Chapter 11, Strawn compares Tolkien's orcs with the Canaanites (pp. 313–16). He counters those who separate Jesus from the Old Testament God by observing that Canaanites "serve as models of faith" (p. 320) and that some Canaanite-centered texts criticize Israel (p. 317). Unlike the orcs, Canaanites can be good or bad (p. 323). Moreover, helpfully, he encourages readers that "after critique," one should always look to the

grander narrative of Scripture (p. 326). The Canaanites were orcish "for a moment" (cf. Isa 54:7–8), deserving of wrath, but—perhaps like Tolkien's orcs—the narrative arc intimates the Canaanites' redemption (pp. 327–28). Strawn's sensitivity, erudition, and range supply fresh insight into an old problem (cf. p. xiii).

Similarly, in Chapter 14, Strawn problematizes Pharaoh's stereotypical status as the "bad guy" (p. 360). The stereotype works in Exodus, but Genesis 12, Isaiah 19, and Ezekiel 32 complicate it. In Genesis, Pharaoh innocently takes Sarah only to give her back upon realizing her identity, and he cares for Joseph. Here, Pharaoh is "a decent guy" (p. 361). By contrast, the Pharaoh in Exodus is an "egotistical tyrant," deserving of rebuke (p. 362). Finally (and unexpectedly!) in Ezekiel 32 and Isaiah 19, Pharaoh is repentant (Ezek 32:31) and becomes one of God's people alongside the Egyptians (Isa 19:25). Pharaoh's complexity demonstrates how the gospel can incorporate God's archetypal enemies—even us. Appropriately placed in this book's "Practice" section, Strawn pressures Christians to reassess their models of insider/outsider, urging them to liken themselves to Pharaoh's mixed portrait.

Strawn offers a biblical theology of "priesting" in Chapter 16's sermon on Leviticus. In Exodus 19, all Israelites are priests; in Leviticus, only certain people can "priest"; and in 1 Peter 2, every Jesus follower becomes a priest. Next, he draws an analogy between the priest's duties and the modern believer's role (pp. 378–81). Priests and believers each examine, perceive, and judge: priests with "boils, scabies, burns, raw flesh, and fungus" and believers with interpretations and actions (p. 381). This sermon exemplifies Strawn's plea to preach the Old Testament well (as does Chapter 17).

In the volume's 18th and final chapter, he urges early career scholars to integrate faith and vocation (p. 392). They should work for the academy and the church, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes discretely (pp. 393–95). Helping Strawn integrate faith and vocation are Simone Weil's observations that education's emphasis on "attention and humility" can aid "spiritual life" (p. 397); Brother Lawrence's admonition to live wholly for God; and Deut 17:14–20's kingly Torah reader. (Chapter 15 explores this text further, pp. 396–400). Though aimed at academics, Strawn's advice to "integrate!" faith and vocation also applies broadly to the church (p. 395).

In sum, *The Incomparable God* demonstrates Strawn's "ranginess." Its first two sections ("Readings" and "Biblical Theology") display his skill as an exegete and a biblical theologian. However, the third section ("Practice") dazzlingly combines exegesis and biblical theology with edifying ap-

plications relevant to all believers. Using a Strawn*esque* pun, the third section reads less like "Practice" and more like expertise.

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Matthew V. Novenson and R. Barry Matlock, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Pauline Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. 753 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0199600489. $145.00.

This recent addition to the Oxford Handbook series offers readers an up-to-date guide to a wide range of subjects that relate to the Apostle Paul's life, ministry, and writings. As explained by Matthew Novenson, the volume is designed to "take the field of Pauline Studies as it is, in all its bewildering variety, and to orient the reader to it" (p. 2). The editors have certainly succeeded in this endeavor. The collection of essays contained in the volume provides readers with accessible treatments of an impressive range of subjects, some of which have been debated and studied for several years, while others have only recently become the subject of scholarly attention.

The volume includes a total of 38 essays that are organized around five broad categories. Part One explores "Paul the Person" and includes essays that address various portrayals of Paul. Part Two, "Paul in Context," provides an eclectic assortment of essays that relate in one way or another to the background, legacy, or historical study of Paul. Part Three, "Pauline Literature," includes essays that pertain to the production, composition, circulation, and transmission of the Pauline Epistles. Part Four, "Pauline Theology," assesses several subjects that are addressed in Paul's writings. Finally, Part Five, "Approaches to Paul," concludes the volume with a treatment of a few interpretive strategies that have been applied to the study of the Pauline writings. Some of these approaches have an established history, while others have come to the forefront of the study of Pauline literature only recently.

Although many of the essays address subjects that are notoriously challenging and technical in nature, they tend to be well organized and written in a clear and accessible style. None contain footnotes or endnotes. Instead, in-text citations appear sparingly throughout the work. Extensive bibliographies helpfully appear at the end of each essay, prefaced with a short "Suggested Reading" section that briefly identifies the seminal works in the field. The bibliographies are specific to the subject addressed in the essay and serve as a valuable resource for those looking to continue their investigation of specific subjects.

Those familiar with the general landscape of Pauline studies will undoubtedly be familiar with several of the contributors, many of whom are recognized for their previous scholarship on the topics they address in this volume. However, in addition to more widely known Pauline scholars, a few younger and lesser-known scholars from diverse backgrounds contribute to the work, some of whom deal with recent developments and trends in the world of Pauline scholarship.

Like any major compendium of this type, there will naturally be essays that readers find more useful and convincing than others, and some subjects that could have been treated more thoroughly. It is certainly unrealistic for a single volume to include a thorough treatment of everything related to the study of Paul and his writings. Consequently, the editors should not be criticized too harshly for their decision to include or exclude certain subjects from the handbook. Having said that, a possible shortcoming of the work is the scope of its treatment of the disputed writings and other historical issues. Treatment of the disputed Paulines is limited to a single essay, less than half of which addresses theories and arguments related to the subject of authorship. Given the widespread debate that has ensued during the last few centuries over the authenticity of several of the Pauline writings and the ancient practice of pseudepigraphy, further treatment of the subject of authorship and the historical background of the individual letters might have been expected. In addition, the volume could have provided a fuller treatment of Paul's upbringing and early Christian years, the style and structure of his writings, the relationship of Hebrews to the Pauline letter collection, and the dating and provenance of the epistles. For a volume of this length, the treatment of foundational historical matters could have arguably been more robust. It seems though that several important historical issues were given only minimal attention to accommodate the treatment of several subjects that are of more contemporary interest.

Despite these minor shortcomings, the volume promises to serve as a valuable resource to students, scholars, and lay readers who wish to expand their knowledge of specific subjects relating to the study of Paul or simply to remain current on recent developments in the field. In sum, the handbook provides a helpful complement to other recently published resources on Paul such as the *T&T Clark Handbook to the Historical Paul* (2022) and the second edition of the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (InterVarsity Press, 2023).

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Michael F. Bird and Scot McKnight, eds. *God's Israel and the Israel of God: Paul and Supersessionism*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023. xii + 188 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1683596080. $28.99.

Supersessionism is a loaded word. Evoking strong responses in contexts where the gospel and the Jews are discussed, it is the topic of Michael Bird and Scot McKnight's edited volume, *God's Israel and the Israel of God*. The book emerged from the editors' lament over scholarship on supersessionism and the apostle Paul (p. 1), which led to a collection of essays by seven authors.

To begin, there is no definitive agreement on what supersessionism is. As Bird points out in his introduction, understandings of the term range from "the Jews have been replaced by Christian gentiles" to finding "anything deficient in the Jewish religion that is supplemented by faith in Paul's Christ" (p. 1). Such views stem in part from the contrasting Pauline assertions in Gal 2:21 and Rom 11:29: "if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" and "the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (ESV). Bird highlights the difficulty of unifying these biblical claims in the present, although the book does not resolve the issue: "Paul himself was trying to affirm God's faithfulness to Israel—and God sending his Son Jesus to Israel for the sake of the world as the definitive instance of his faithfulness" (p. 8). The challenge though, as McKnight affirms in his conclusion, is Christians should "simultaneously affirm the *solus Christus* (Christ alone is Savior) of their confession and the proposition that … outside of Israel there is no salvation … without denigrating those who share in the flesh and family of the Jewish Messiah" (p. 176).

So, how do the editors rise to this task? In two parts, they present three essays by McKnight, Bird, and Ben Witherington III showing the inevitability of supersessionism (of some kind) when salvation in Christ is paramount, followed by four responses by Lynn Cohick, David Rudolph, Janelle Peters, and Ronald Charles. The first three pieces (with McKnight's conclusion) are persuasive: "How can one say Jesus is Messiah and not, at some level, be supersessionist in one's faith, in comparison to those who think Jesus is not Messiah?" (p. 16). However, despite the cogency of the first essays, one cannot miss the towering figure of N. T. Wright, and especially his magisterial (1,696 page!) *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* behind the scenes. In fact, Wright's influence is such that one might wish the editors had brought his name into the book's subtitle in some way. Alternatively, the book could have been far better had it considered supersessionism in the New Testament as whole, drawing on the expertise of many more authors.

In any event, it may be useful to consider the views of the responding authors briefly, not least to contrast them with the editors' assertion that Paul was supersessionist to some extent. Cohick, the first, helpfully affirms gospel-focused supersessionism but warns against a "broad definition of Christian supersessionism [which] carries with it centuries of wicked deeds done [against Jews] in Christ's name" (p. 84). She recommends emphasizing "identity in Christ, and within this identity celebrating the distinct tribe, language, tongue, and nation of each believer" (p. 102). This is laudable, but celebration should be accompanied by lament. Every people group (including Jews) has distinctive sins. These must not be smothered by celebration as we prioritize our identity in the one who died and rose for us.

Rudolph, a Messianic Jew, objects to McKnight, Bird, and Witherington's lack of clarity on "whether they believe the Jewish people continue to be in a unique covenant relationship with God" (p. 105). McKnight affirms Jews' distinct covenantal calling in his conclusion but argues that this is "to call people to an eschatological faith that comes to expression in Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah." He then goes on to critique Rudolph's silence on whether "all Jews need to believe in Jesus to be saved" (p. 169). The answer must be yes. Theologically speaking, God's ultimate focus is salvation in Jesus. At the same time, Rudolph rightly warns against the belief "that Jews are no longer needed in the world and ideally should be phased out" (p. 110). Such an idea has chilling real-world implications and must be roundly condemned. He also highlights the danger of "assimilation and the loss of Jewish presence" in our churches (p. 114). Quite frankly, the Old Testament—and believers who embody it—should carry far more weight in evangelical ecclesiology than they typically do.

Peters wrestles with supersessionism as a Roman Catholic, but concludes her discussion with some alarming assertions: "Although Paul, a former Pharisee, couldn't resist engaging in dialogue with his former Jewish colleagues, the Roman Catholic Church must definitely not pressure Jews into following Christ. Jews have salvation on their own terms" (p. 145). Really? While pressuring anyone is a questionable tactic, Paul's confidence in the gospel for salvation, starting with the Jews (Rom 1:16), must not be abandoned.

Finally, Charles provides a "very critical response" (his words, p. 147) to the first three essays. Unfortunately, the dismissive thrust of his critique (which is steeped in postmodernism, repeatedly demands qualifications of readily understood terminology, and condemns evangelical Christianity), makes it difficult to discern any constructive contribution to the discussion. Moreover, it is probably no coincidence that his chapter is characterized by a paucity of footnotes when compared to the others.

In sum, I would recommend this book for McKnight's conclusion that expansionism is a better word to use than supersessionism: "That is, the people of God expands to include gentiles on the basis of faith in Jesus as Messiah. Israel is not replaced but expanded—but that … occurs in Christ and through Christ" alone (p. 170). At the same time, another work, based on this theme, but turning to the entire New Testament—with many more scholarly contributions—would be very welcome indeed.

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Dean Flemming. *Foretaste of the Future: Reading Revelation in Light of God's Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022. 232 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-15140015601. $28.00

Reading a lot of academic books, rarely am I as excited as I was to encounter Dean Flemming's *Foretaste of the Future*. Flemming is a unique scholar. He has a PhD in New Testament Exegesis from the University of Aberdeen (1988) and teaches NT at MidAmerica Nazarene University. However, along with this formal training, he also writes and teaches in the field of missiology. I have used his book, *Contextualization in the New Testament* (IVP, 2005) for years and students have benefited greatly. While I do not follow some of his interpretive and missiological decisions, his latest book did not disappoint. I believe it makes a worthy contribution to the fields of both NT studies and missiology.

The book opens with an acknowledgement that the book of Revelation holds a special place in the NT canon. It is loved, hated, and feared by casual readers and exegetes. For this reason, it may be the most neglected book in the NT. In *Foretaste of the Future,* the author suggests that, rather than avoiding the last book in our Bible, Christians should study it as a "culmination of God's entire loving purpose for the world" (p. 3). Flemming follows the order of John's vision but does not write a verse by verse (or even chapter by chapter) exposition. Instead, he interprets the book thematically, "exploring the various dimensions of a missional reading" (p. 10). Each of his ten chapters develops important missiological ideas taught in Revelation.

Flemming begins his work with an overview of God's mission exercised through the slaughtered lamb and practiced by God's people. In these chapters, he supplies the reader with a vision for God's mission of redemption and restoration. The following chapters, "Mission as Witness," "Mission and Judgement," "Missional Worship," "Missional Politics," and "A New Jerusalem Mission," work through key portions of Revelation to show practical implications and challenges for those who

would seek to live missionally in a fallen world.

Nevertheless, NT scholar Grant Osborne is correct when he suggests that "our understanding of the meaning of Revelation depends on the hermeneutical perspective we bring to bear on it" (Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation,* BECNT [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002], 18). Traditionally interpreters have fallen into one of four schools (or a combination of these):

- *Historicist*—the symbols and plotline of John's vision chart Western history.
- *Preterist*—the setting and meaning of the book refer to John's time rather than a future apocalypse.
- *Idealist*—the symbols of the book contain universal, spiritual significance, but are not anchored in a specific historical period.
- *Futurist*—the plot and symbolism found especially in chapters 4 to 22 point to a moment in the future.

Readers looking to place Flemming's book within these traditional categories will be frustrated as he engages in an entirely different exercise. Rather, his work is an attempt to:

> show that Revelation … reveals God's great purpose to redeem and restore the whole creation, including people, through the mission of the slain lamb. At the same time, Revelation seeks to shape and equip Christian communities to participate in God's saving purpose by living as a foretaste of God's coming new creation now, through their lips and through their lives. (p. 3)

It is this missional interpretation of the text as well as the missional application for the church that makes the book a valuable tool for biblical scholars, theologians, and missiologists.

Another beneficial feature of this work is the inclusion of quotes (or pictures) that give voice to a range of scholars and churchmen. These sidebars are presented without comment but serve as a window into how Christians living in a variety of global contexts understand and seek to live out the truths of Revelation. It may take the reader a few pages to appreciate this structure. Sidebars are usually designed to highlight an author's significant ideas. They can serve as guides for the reader. Here, however, the sidebars are not part of Flemming's work but simply serve as additional illustrative voices.

An aspect of Flemming's work that I found frustrating was his emphasis on creation care as an important element of *Missio Dei.* While he falls well within the Cape Town Commitment developed by the Lausanne Movement in 2010, I have a different understanding of this topic. My

concern is not with his commitment to evangelical orthodoxy. Instead, I wish he had placed as much emphasis on the evangelization of the lost; especially on those lacking adequate access to the Christian gospel. To be fair, he stresses that evangelism is necessary, and rejects any form of pluralism. However, the passion for creation care seems a bit out of balance.

In sum, the value of this book is not that it affirms everything I believe. Its contribution is drawing together two academic disciplines in a way that challenges each to take notice. *Foretaste of the Future* is a perfect complement to John's vision in the book of Revelation. It is comforting, challenging, disturbing, and convicting. It is certainly worth reading.

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Stanley E. Porter and Benjamin P. Laird, eds. *Five Views on the New Testament Canon*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2022. 287 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-0825447273. $24.99

Interest in the New Testament canon has surged recently. Unfortunately, for those uninitiated in the complex debates surrounding this subject, the explosion in canon research has not guaranteed greater clarity. In this context, Stanley Porter and Benjamin Laird avoid adding to the quagmire of secondary canonical research with another comprehensive history or technical study. Rather, they aim to "provide readers with a unique opportunity to evaluate a variety of perspectives on the more foundational questions relating to the study of the canon" (p. 36). To accomplish this objective, they feature scholars representing diverse viewpoints—conservative evangelical (Darian Lockett), progressive evangelical (David Nienhuis), liberal protestant (Jason BeDuhn), Roman Catholic (Ian Boxall), and Greek Orthodox (George Parsenios)—to address three critical aspects of the NT canon. These are (1) the historical factors that led to the formation and recognition of an authoritative collection of Christian writings, (2) the canon's basis of authority, and (3) the canon's "hermeneutical implications" (p. 37).

The book consists of three parts. In Part 1, the editors introduce the study of the NT canon. They overview the history of the discussion from the 16th century to the present day, then forecast the essays which follow by highlighting the most critical issues at stake.

In Part 2 the contributors outline their perspectives. Lockett emphasizes the church's early and natural reception of the NT canon in response to the apostolic writings' divine inspiration. Nienhuis critiques the prioritization of historical questions in canon studies and highlights the canon's theological nature. BeDuhn lauds the historical-critical study of Scripture

and outlines the historical processes behind the canon's formation and its status as a creation of the church's leaders (p. 111). Boxall affirms the Council of Trent in 1546 as the "decisive date" for the NT canon's formation (p. 131). However, he traces its development from the early apostolic witness to a growing consensus about core writings to Athanasius's list in 367 CE. The canon is not a "straightforward consequence of ecclesiastical politics" (p. 143), yet the church's role was to discern the canon (p. 144). Finally, Parsenios attributes the Orthodox Church's late official statement on the canon's limits in 1672 to the church's reactive canon law (p. 172), and the role of tradition. Tradition—defined as the church's "practice over time" in response to the leading of the Spirit—"established and solidified" the extent of the canon (pp. 174–76). Significantly, Orthodox theology affirms the inseparability of Scripture and tradition; the former being the "historical record of what God has done to guide his creation" (p. 177) and the latter the "lived experience of Christ in the present" (p. 178).

In Part 3 each presenter briefly summarizes his own position and responds to the other views. Then the editors conclude by highlighting points of agreement and contention between the views and overview primary sources for studying the NT canon.

Porter and Laird skillfully accomplish their stated objective, primarily through three key strengths. First, they select an adequate yet not overwhelming number of viewpoints, introducing the reader to the representative breadth of mainstream positions on the NT canon. By including Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox perspectives, the volume stands apart from the typically tribal (and mostly Protestant) conversations on the canon. Second, the format of the response essays promotes clarity and highlights the most critical issues of the debate. Since each respondent summarizes his own position and the opposing views as he critiques them, the reader is reminded of the key areas of agreement and disagreement. In contrast, books comparing positions often disorient readers by offering responses before each contributor clearly presents his or her viewpoint. Third, the editors were wise to insist that each contributor discuss both the canon's historical and hermeneutical aspects. Often the two are separated with disturbing effects. Including both promotes reflection upon the canon's theological nature and one's approach to its history, which shapes our understanding of what the canon is and how we should read it. At the same time, readers would perhaps be better prepared to understand the different viewpoints if the survey of primary sources on the canon was included in the introduction. Nevertheless, that choice does not detract from the volume's success.

Porter and Laird's affordable book boasts a treasure of historical data

and theological reflection. It should be a valuable resource for the study of the NT canon for years to come. It would also be an excellent supplemental textbook for undergraduate or seminary courses in NT or theology. In this reviewer's opinion, the introductory essay and Lockett's contribution alone justify its price.

Levi Baker
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R. B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman. *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. xxvi + 289 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1540964670. $24.49.

R. B. Jamieson and Tyler Wittman, the authors of *Biblical Reasoning*, are dissatisfied with much theological work on two fronts: biblical scholars do not do enough theology and theologians do not do enough exegesis. They attempt to right the ship by arguing that Nicene and Chalcedonian doctrines exist in the text of Scripture already. The Scriptures do not merely give raw material to develop into orthodoxy, and they certainly do not teach contrary to Nicaea and Chalcedon. In fact, the best exegete learns proper doctrine of Trinity and Christ from Scripture and then carries those insights back into future exegesis. In this way theology and exegesis are mutually related and only separated at the expense of each discipline's quality.

The book features ten chapters plus an introduction and conclusion. The introduction explains the goal of the work, the organization of the material, and the primary resources it draws on. However, there is a stark difference in style between the sections written by each author. Some readers may prefer Wittman's scholasticisms (chapters 1–6 and conclusion), while others may favor Jamieson's pastoral tone (introduction and chapters 7–10).

Chapters 1 through 9 articulate seven theological principles, discerned from Scripture, as well as ten exegetical rules that follow from the theological principles. These principles and rules are displayed in a convenient chart in the book's appendix and set out at the beginning of each chapter in which they are discussed.

Chapter 1 argues that the Bible presupposes readers who seek Christ's glory, and so the goal of exegesis is not observation of the text, but contemplation of its subject matter. Chapter 2 situates Scripture within a wider scheme of divine pedagogy. As such, it leads its students to the vision of Christ's glory adaptively, gradually, and formatively, in the manner of a master teacher. Chapter 3 may be the central chapter of the book

in that it seeks to show the "reciprocal, though asymmetrical, relation between exegesis and theology" (p. 42). This argument stems from the third theological principle, that Scripture is God's own voice. From this principle the authors argue that the Bible must be read as a unity, and each part should be read in relation to a larger theological vision.

Chapter 4 articulates God's holy otherness and then asks readers to read depictions of God in the Bible in a way that is fitting for his unique divine character. Chapter 5 explains the unity of the Trinity insofar as substance is concerned, but distinctiveness insofar as the three persons relate to each other. Three rules follow from this. First, "redoublement" is the idea that Scripture must be read with an eye toward whether something is held in common among the Trinitarian persons or is particular to one person. Second, chapter 6 sets out "inseparable operations," wherein Scripture may refer to one member of the Trinity, but all three are present and active, implicating each other. Third, Scripture's appropriation holds that sometimes one member of the Trinity is assigned a common trait as if it were proper. In these cases, the unity of the Trinity should be upheld.

Chapter 7 moves on to Christological issues, arguing from the hypostatic union that we should never attribute some actions to the divinity of Christ and some to his humanity. Also, we should preserve the paradoxes of Scripture that attribute divine acts to the man Jesus, and human acts to the divine Son. Chapter 8 builds on the hypostatic union to argue for partitive exegesis. This rule holds that Scripture sometimes discusses Christ in a human register, and sometimes in a divine register, therefore good exegesis will notice which register is operative and respond accordingly. Chapter 9 endorses Trinitarian eternal relations of origin, and correspondingly recommends that exegesis upholds these relations. Chapter 10 then applies the ten rules discerned to a reading of John 5:17–30.

This book offers a convincing explanation of the relationship between doctrine and exegesis. As a biblical scholar, I found the theological aspects challenging, enlightening, and enjoyable, and I suspect theologians will have similar feelings about the substantive exegesis. However, I was disappointed by the authors' lack of interest in engaging with alternative views, especially Eternal Functional Subordination and the paper-thin theological methods that produce this error of Trinitarian theology. I also wish the authors had explicitly stated that this work is a corrective to the popular theology of Baptist theologians of recent generations, which it surely must be. In any event, the positive case the authors offer is strong, so I will recommend and cite this book in the future.

Luke Beavers
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Jordan Daniel Wood. *The Whole Mystery of Christ: Creation as Incarnation in Maximus Confessor*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022. 384 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0268203474. $70.00.

The mothers and fathers of the church experienced Christ not only in liturgical rites and the pages of Scripture, but also in the whole of creation. Few, however, gave such precise expression to this experience as St. Maximus the Confessor. Patristic scholars are still realizing the depth of his cosmic awareness. Insight continues to flow from the saint's oeuvre, exemplified by the recent work of Jordan Daniel Wood, *The Whole Mystery of Christ*. Here, the author draws another bright stone from the Maximian mine with his "literal reading" of the Confessor's celebrated statement: "The Word of God, very God, wills that the mystery of his Incarnation be actualized always and in all things." This impressive statement, according to Wood, means just what it says. The book endeavors to prove this thesis and unfold its provocative implications.

Perhaps the foremost of these daring suggestions involves the "identity" of Christ and creation. In Wood's reading, Maximus teaches a *hypostatic* identity between God and the world in Christ's person, in his hypostasis. Wood writes, "In Christ, the divine Son is no more divine than he is human, no more God than man, no more uncreated than created" (p. 38). This hypostatic identity is qualified, though, by an equally strong statement of *natural* non-identity. Indeed, an "absolute natural difference" pertains between divine and human nature (p. 43). For Wood, creation and Incarnation both employ the same "Christo-logic" and even encompass the same act: despite their infinite natural difference, God and the world enjoy perfect hypostatic union in the person of Christ. Briefly put, "God and the world are identical because the one Word is both" (p. xiv). Christ's hypostasis is neither purely divine nor purely human but equally both.

Wood aptly forestalls pantheism by the natural difference between created and divine nature. One could ask, however: why assert an *absolute* difference, even to the point of natural opposition (p. 43)? This quality of complete incompatibility seems to make the God-world union in Christ's person haphazard, and even illogical. Is it true that God and the world have no natural commonality? No living semblance between beings and their source in Being? No ontological interlude to which analogical speech applies? In sum, is grace utterly discontinuous with nature such that the hypostatic union pertains despite a sheer natural inconsistency? These questions enjoin a more holistic Christian ontology that upholds creation's *inherent* image and likeness to God (Gen 1:26)—an image and likeness superlatively revealed in the man Christ Jesus. After all, the gospel

reveals the astonishing reality that the more fully human a person is (i.e., Jesus), the more divine he is.

Speaking of *theosis*, one of the most profound Maximian concepts Wood presents is the idea that, in the deification of creation, man becomes God to the same extent that God became man. This so-called *tantum-quantum* principle of Maximus posits not only that "God became man so that man might become God," an earlier and universally accepted tenet. This axiom goes further to suggest a "mutually proportional" relation between the historical Incarnation and the deification of creation (p. 101). In the self-emptying of the Word, there is a symmetrical exchange of equivalent degree, actualizing a reciprocal communication of idioms: God is born, thirsts, suffers and dies; man can likewise be deemed uncreated. This principle radically (and rightly) restates the biblical notion of creation's participation in the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4), accomplished in the Incarnation.

In one sense, Wood's thesis that creation is Incarnation in Maximus is not new. Many have recognized the Confessor's teaching that the Word is both one and many—both singularly incarnated as Jesus Christ and present in all individual things. God's Word (the *Logos*) is discernable in creation because he has endowed something of himself (the *logoi*) to each creature. The *logoi* are the rational principles of existing entities, the divine meanings for all things, proceeding from and returning to the One. As Wood sums up Maximus, "The Logos is the *logoi* and the *logoi* the Logos" (p. 69). Commentators regularly notice this identity, but unlike most, Wood denies these *logoi* are the same as Platonic ideas. Instead of "separately subsistent, participated [Platonic] forms," the *logoi* are "the personal Logos crafting all things within himself, within them" (p. 71). Again, Wood places special emphasis on the *hypostatic* quality of the God-world identity.

The Whole Mystery of Christ is no light read. Wood revised his PhD dissertation into book form, complete with scholarly detail. To be fair, this often chimes with Maximus' own form of discourse. Both authors prove difficult to decode. Thus, Wood's contribution is a historical, exegetical, analytically rigorous philosophical theology which will mainly appeal to experts in the field. The text is demanding in terms of scholastic jargon and conceptual sophistication. But the payoffs are generally worth the work. I recommend Wood's book to patristic scholars, academic philosophers and the most interested—the most dedicated—lay readers of speculative Christian theology.

Owen Kelly
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Oliver Crisp. *Participation and Atonement: An Analytic and Constructive Account*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. 272 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0801049965. $29.99.

Oliver Crisp is a well-respected theologian in the philosophical theology tradition. He serves as the Head of the School of Divinity at Saint Andrews as well as the Director of the Logos Institute and has authored numerous works on theology. Here, Crisp seeks to answer the question, "*What is the mechanism by means of which Christ's work reconciles human beings to God?*" (p. 3). Pursuing an answer, he breaks his book into three sections: methodological, historical, and synthetic.

The methodological section is arguably Crisp's strongest. In it, he offers definitions for terms that are commonly used interchangeably but with various meanings in atonement literature: motifs, metaphors, doctrines, and models. Even with his clarification, he suggests a "*chastened realism*" for theologians due to their natural limitations. In constructing his full account, it is important to understand that "motifs and metaphors of the atonement are elements that may compose aspects of a doctrine or model" (p. 30). Thus, a full-orbed account of the atonement will use elements of all four.

In the historical section, Crisp looks at four major historical views of atonement: Moral Exemplarism, Ransom, Satisfaction, and Penal Substitution. In his treatment of these views, he argues for a version of the satisfaction theory. His critiques fall along standard lines, but the added precision of his terminology allows him to reclassify deficient views of the atonement into motifs or metaphors. However, the razor-thin nature of philosophical terminology leads to what is the most difficult differentiation—between Christ suffering the punishment for sin and Christ suffering the penal consequences for sin. Crisp finds this distinction of critical importance arguing that "the claim that Christ is punished in the place of fallen humanity is much more difficult to defend than the claim that Christ suffers the penal consequences of human sin" (p. 121). Here he follows Richard Swinburne in claiming that punishment is involuntary, but atonement is voluntary (p. 130). Due to this distinction and other "problematic aspects," he decides it is better to fall back to a robust satisfaction theory of the atonement (pp. 144–45).

With the methodological and historical sections complete, Crisp turns to the third and final part of his book where he offers his own view of the atonement. Here his dogmatic minimalism takes center stage, as he attempts to remove the need for a historic Adam from Reformed thought and create a "moderate Reformed" doctrine of the atonement (p. 155).

His understanding of original sin revolves around a corruption-only approach, separating guilt and sin, so that we receive a corrupted human nature but not the guilt for Adamic sin (p. 161). With this shift in the understanding of sin, he can reposition the mechanism of the atonement to a "vicarious, representative, and penitent act of soteriological representation" (p. 189). Thus, instead of Christ paying the legal cost of sin by taking our punishment on himself, he performs an act of vicarious apology (p. 200). Crisp is clear that, while being dogmatically minimalist, "penal substitution is excluded" (p. 202).

Having cleared up his doctrine of the atonement, the author turns to believers' union with Christ, arguing for a realist union account through the work of the Holy Spirit (p. 228). Here he uses new insights from social ontology to address how it is that Christ is our head as the new Adam. Finally, he ends by offering a very helpful synthesis by way of clarification, offering numerous definitions and bulleted recaps of his thoughts throughout the book.

Overall, Crisp's work stands firmly in the tradition of analytic theology. His classification of differing thoughts on the atonement into motifs, metaphors, models, and theories is most helpful and, if standardized, will bring greater ease of access to the field of atonement theology. He is also quite charitable with the four views he interacts with in the historical section. My main concern with his work is that his "dogmatic minimalism" forces him to be overly accepting at times. This is most notable in his conversation on a historic Adam and Eve, since it is not clear how Christ could act as our representative head and the second Adam in the same way that an aboriginal group of 10,000 could (pp. 196–97). Despite such weaknesses, Crisp's book is helpful for scholars attempting to understand the modern landscape of atonement thought.

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Michael Berra. *Towards a Theology of Relationship: Emil Brunner's* Truth as Encounter *in Light of Relationship Science*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022. xvii + 248 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1666737653. $ 36.00

Emil Brunner's theology has recently received much-needed scholarly attention. Michael Berra's study, *Towards a Theology of Relationship*, highlights the lodestar of Brunner's theology, the I-You relationship.

Berra's work is broken into four parts. In Part 1 he demonstrates how the I-You relationship serves as the focal point in Brunner's theology and clarifies why Brunner is the focus of an examination of relationship science. The I-You encounter (in Brunner's theology) underlines that

> the categories of objective and subjective concerning truth are meaningless since God is not an object one believes [in], but a subject person, who gives himself, and the human response of trust is something entirely different than subjectivism since it involves the whole person. In short: it is not an I-it relationship but an I-You relationship. (p. 31)

In Part 2 of the book, Berra provides interpretive tools to understand Brunner's use of different terminology and helpfully engages different interpretations of Brunner's theology. He capably shows how Brunner's conception of the I-You encounter should not be understood in abstract terms or in an overtly subjective manner. Berra's description of the reciprocal yet fundamentally asymmetric relationship between God and the human being is most helpful in this section. Capturing much of Brunner's thought, he writes,

> As such, God acts and calls in absolute freedom, yet binds himself to humans by giving them relative freedom so that they can freely answer. Moreover, God's ongoing self-disclosure and responsiveness … is intended to elicit an equally self-disclosing and responsive human reaction, leading to an ongoing intimate relationship. (pp. 125–26)

Part 3 then attempts to show how the relationship between God and the human creature is akin to human relationships. Finally, Part 4 emphasizes the need for a relational understanding of God, which has implications for the way theologians and churches approach him.

The Epilogue provides Berra's account of how this relational understanding of God has shaped his life and ministry, while the Appendix provides a summary and introduction of the major frameworks utilized in relationship science.

The book is at its strongest when the author carefully takes the reader through Brunner's theological framework. He shows how Brunner's I-You framework transcends both the objective and subjective poles in theology. He also demonstrates that the I-You relationship between God and the human being is always asymmetrical yet characterized by responsiveness. Additionally, Berra utilizes relationship science to explain how Brunner's framework could incorporate the scriptural language of union:

> congruent with IOS [Including Other in the Self], the more intimate the relationship that is perceived, the more the partner is included in the self, and the more the circles overlap voluntarily. Importantly and objectively, even the highest degree of intimacy does not lead to total oneness, a fusion with the loss of the individual self (total overlap in the IOS scale), but to a voluntarily increasing interdependence of "both partners' distinct, individual selves." (pp. 168–69)

Consequently, Brunner's emphasis upon the I-You encounter can incorporate Jesus's scriptural language of "Whoever abides in me, and I in him" (John 15:5 ESV) without diluting the distinction in the relationship between God and the human creature.

Berra's work shows how the God-human relationship is characterized by asymmetry but also how asymmetric human relationships may be analogous (and open to analogous reasoning) to the God-human relationship. However, he is quick to note that "God is not a human; he is perfectly secure, loving, committed, self-giving, and responsive and as such the perfect partner. Human relationships, and therefore also relationship science, can only theoretically point to this kind of ideal partner" (pp. 171–72). Thus, the unique God-human relationship informs human-to-human relationships. As Berra comments, "Jesus, for example, while constantly referring to God as Father, corrected the common image and perception of human fathers by explaining that God is a different, better father" (p. 172). Here, the God-human relationship informs human conceptions of fatherhood. What is less clear though, is whether asymmetric human relationships also shed light on the God-human relationship. This question is worth asking because Berra appears to leave some theoretical room for asymmetric human relationships to provide some insight on the God-human relationship.

Berra's book raises fundamental questions about how to think about God and provides compelling answers. I highly recommend it as a study of Brunner and as a resource for theologians engaging the question of the relationality of God.

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John Piper. *Come, Lord Jesus: Meditations on the Second Coming of Christ.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2023. 303 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1433584954. $29.99.

Many discussions, debates, and theological differences on eschatology are occasioned by the apparent delay between Christ's incarnation and his return (cf. 2 Pet 3:9). In this regard, John Piper's *Come, Lord Jesus* serves as a helpful resource on Jesus's second advent. He utilizes a three-part methodology to accomplish the book's purpose, captured in his stated thesis of helping "people love the second coming of Christ" (p. 15).

Part 1, which takes up most of the work's contents, explains how a

believer's affections are formed by the reality of Christ's return (pp. 21–22). Piper defines the "affections" as a "heart feeling of astonishment or amazement or awe" (p. 53). He articulates that these feelings are not anthropocentric but rather Christocentric (p. 61). It is God's grace that regenerates a person to an accurate longing and love for the second coming. Piper states that Christ's return does not bring fear to a believer because at the final resurrection, all of Christ's followers will joyfully and rightly worship and praise him (p. 103).

He goes on to explain that a believer's joy will be complete even though non-believers will succumb to Christ's wrath. He rationalizes, "We do not delight in the pain of the punished for itself. We delight in the justice of God and the righteousness of Christ" (p. 115). Christians will be able to experience full joy because both justice for evil and imputed righteousness will magnify the glory of Christ's return. Piper concludes that the second coming puts suffering in its proper perspective, causes believers to remain vigilant, encourages the pursuit of holiness, recognizes eternal rewards, and leads to personal joy (pp. 102, 131, 152, 156, 167).

Part 2 of this work addresses how Christ will return. Piper's intent is to illustrate why postmillennialism helps "us love the Lord's return" and "live our lives with the kind of vigilance and expectancy commended by Scripture" (p. 180). He utilizes the "prophetic perspective" of George Eldon Ladd to interpret various passages of Scripture. Piper argues that texts like Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21 refer to distant events foreshadowed in the near (i.e., "the devastation of Jerusalem in AD 70") emphasizing how these circumstances exist as a preview of faraway ones (p. 186). He concludes that Jesus's return is potentially, holistically, and divinely near (pp. 194–202). He denies the reality of a pretribulation rapture and the tenets of such eschatology, and explains that fulfilling the Great Commission, increasing rebellion, and the arrival of the man of lawlessness will usher in Christ's return (pp. 233–45).

Part 3 could be described as the ethics associated with postmillennialism. Piper asserts, "We pursue with moral earnestness our full salvation in the future, because salvation has already been secured for us in the past" (p. 250). The gospel saves, but the second coming provides the "soil" to "take root and bear the fruit of obedience" in the present while awaiting complete sanctification in the future (p. 252). He thus concludes that the imminent return of Christ ought to cause God's people to stay awake, to avoid deception, to pursue holiness, to adopt a Protestant work ethic, to prioritize gathering with other believers, to devote themselves to prayer, and to fulfill the Great Commission (pp. 249–84).

Piper's argument for the affections associated with Christ's return is one of the book's greatest strengths. Unlike others, it helps Christians

long for and love the return of Christ. In fact, this work could be seen as *Desiring God* meeting eschatology. It makes the book not only unique in its explanations, but also a profound contribution to end-times discussions.

However, it does contain two shortcomings. First, Piper does not treat all eschatological views equally. In Part 2, he focuses primarily on refuting the premillennial position, and in a content footnote, provides his disagreement with the amillennial interpretation of Matthew 24:4–31 (pp. 187–88). Unfortunately, he does not clarify why he has chosen to focus primarily on the premillennial view and neglect amillennialism.

Second, Piper does not defend his postmillennial position (p. 206). Although he references the works of Ladd and Stanley Gundry, they do not clarify his view. His lack of an exegetical argument to elucidate his eschatology could be considered a hindrance to his thesis (pp. 11, 206). If the return of Christ contains a normative ethic, it would be enhanced by a robust defense of Piper's eschatological views.

The shortcomings of the book, however, do not detract from its value and contribution to discussions surrounding Jesus's return. No matter one's eschatology, believers will fall in love with the second coming as Piper effectively shows the glory of Christ in that blessed event. I highly recommend *Come, Lord Jesus* as a valued resource for any Christian, scholar, or pastor.

Jeremy Kyle Bell
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Chloe Starr (ed. and trans.). *A Reader in Chinese Theology*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022. 524 pp. Paperback. ISBN: 978-1481312103. $39.95.

Since at least 2016, with the publication of her *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*, Chloe Starr has publicly championed Chinese theology for English readers. Her three-part series, *Modern Chinese Theologies,* continues this endeavor by providing selected essays discussing the history of twentieth-century Chinese theology. Since "Chinese theology has rarely exported its fruit" she has aimed to change this (*Modern Chinese Theologies: Volume 1: Heritage and Prospect* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2023], ix). In both *Modern Chinese Theologies* and her most recent *A Reader in Chinese Theology*, she is attentive to the full scope of Chinese theology. The latter work is significant not only because it is the first such reader to be published in English (p. ix), but also because it provides an excellent, though inevitably incomplete, survey of historical and contemporary Chinese theology. The book translates and adapts the first of a two-volume Chinese reader: *Sino-*

Christian Theology Reader edited by He Guanghu and Daniel H.N. Yeung. A second volume provides further readings from 20th and 21st century theologians in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Chinese diaspora, and one can only hope that Starr will edit and adapt it as well.

A Reader in Chinese Theology is divided into three major sections comprising a total of 35 excerpts from significant Chinese theologians. The first section covers the theology of traditional China, but includes Matteo Ricci, the one Western author in the book. The second section covers the theology of revolutionary and nationalist China, and the third section is devoted to contemporary theologians and academics. Selections from some authors, such as Watchman Nee, John C. H. Wu, or K. H. Ting, may already be familiar to readers from their English language writing or previously translated works. However, most of the volume's excerpts have never appeared in English, coming from authors unknown to an English-speaking audience.

A short review cannot provide critical interaction with every selection in the book. Alternatively, critically discussing just one or two pieces seems pointless, given the work's wide-ranging nature. Consequently, this review simply commends the excellent choice of articles and authors. The volume begins with a translation of the Nestorian stele and puts a significant emphasis on highlighting the full range of traditions and beliefs present in Chinese Christianity. Nestorian Christians, Roman Catholics, Confucian-Christians, Missionary churches, Three-Self Protestants, Evangelical Fundamentalists, Holiness Movement contributors, and non-Christian academics writing on Christian theology are all represented.

Two important points of contention within the Chinese church have been its fraught relationship with Western Christianity and its desire to be authentically Chinese. The latter impulse can lead to it simply becoming one more syncretistic influence in Chinese popular religion, an arm of the Communist party, or being subsumed by the *sanjiao* ("three teachings") of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism. The two-fold tension is often referred to in contemporary Chinese theology as the problem of indigenization, and both its importance and various attempts to resolve it come through very well in the selected readings.

While the book's wide-ranging selections are an overall strength, they can leave the reader somewhat consternated at times. For instance, moving from Wu Leichuan's "The Renewal of Christianity and the Revival of the Christian Nation," through Wu Yaozong's "Christianity and Materialism: Confessions of a Christian," to Wu Jingxiong's "'Mortification' from The Interior Carmel: The Threefold Way of Love," presents three very different perspectives not only on issues in Chinese theology, but on what Chinese theology is even about. The inattentive reader may be left

confused, especially so a student confronting these ideas for the first time.

In any event, the publication of the first English language reader in historical and contemporary Chinese theology is an exciting moment for anyone interested in the field. It gives English-speakers access to and insight into the development of one of the fastest growing Christian traditions. The selections in the book are well considered and give the reader a sense of the full range of thought in Chinese theology. In addition to benefiting seasoned practitioners, this book will be especially helpful to new scholars encountering Chinese theology for the first time or as a supplement to undergraduate or graduate level classes covering Chinese theology.

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Douglas Sean O'Donnell and Leland Ryken. *The Beauty and Power of Biblical Exposition: Preaching the Literary Artistry and Genres of the Bible*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2022. 302 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1433570445. $23.99.

The Beauty and Power of Biblical Exposition is a tandem effort by Douglas Sean O'Donnell and Leland Ryken. O'Donnell, a former student of Ryken's, provides the "voice" of the book by crafting its contents largely from material his mentor provided over the years in his publications and class instruction.

Core convictions about faithful hermeneutics and fruitful homiletics motivate this work. Both authors believe that because the Bible is literature, approaching it *as literature* will foster more accurate interpretation and thus, better preaching. By observing and honoring the various literary compositions and textures of Scripture, preachers will deliver less reductionistic, more diverse, and more lively sermons. Therefore, a church to whom the Bible is preached with rich literary appreciation will grow to enjoy more the divinely inspired artistic essence of the entire canon. Put simply, they will better appreciate, admire, and apply the Bible in their lives.

At the outset, O'Donnell identifies two main goals for the book. First, he seeks to "inform and inspire" preachers with a literary appreciation of the Bible that is imperative for faithful preaching. In other words, one must see the beauty in the Bible to increase the power of one's expositional ministry. Second, O'Donnell strives to help preachers preach less dull, propositionally cumbersome homilies and preach more vibrant sermons. In other words, he wants preachers to add power to their messages by enhancing their beauty.

Toward these ends, O'Donnell covers six specific genres: narratives (Chapter 1), parables (Chapter 2), epistles (Chapter 3), poetry (Chapter 4), proverbs (Chapter 5), and visionary writings (Chapter 6). Each chapter contains two main parts (the lone exception is Chapter 2, which includes an expanded introduction on the literary attributes of parables). In each chapter's first part, O'Donnell discusses how to *read* a particular genre of Scripture. In other words, he presents interpretive principles specific to that genre. In the second, he considers how to *preach* that genre. In these sections he makes numerous practical suggestions for preparing and preaching sermons from each genre. The chapters end with a helpful list of suggested resources to encourage building the preacher's library within that genre.

The authors have accomplished their stated goals with this work. They demonstrate that effective exposition demands skilled literary interpretation. They convince the reader that the different genres of Scripture must not only be approached and interpreted differently; they should also be preached in ways that recognize, indeed utilize, their differences. The writers also encourage preachers to pursue a more living and active pulpit ministry through the appreciation of genre artistry. O'Donnell's style reflects the combination of beauty and power in the title of the book. He writes with a heavy dose of clever humor (beauty) while serving a meaty discussion on the nature of Scripture's various genres (power).

At the same time, the eager reader will likely wonder if chapters assigned to prophecy and perhaps to the legal sections would have improved the book. Also, one cannot help asking how the authors would suggest reading and preaching the sub-genre of genealogy. Nevertheless, *The Beauty and Power of Biblical Exposition* is an exceptional introduction to reading and preaching the various genres of the Bible. It is a work that honors the Bible as God's word and exhorts preachers to feed their people well by identifying authorial intent through authorial design. This volume will greatly benefit all preachers, whether veteran pastors or pastors-in-training. It is highly recommended for study and application at seminaries, at both masters and doctoral levels.

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