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Identity**

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Carl F. H. Henry and Evangelical Identity

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Abstract: Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003) was among the most important evangelical scholars of the twentieth century. His work spanned multiple disciplines, especially theology, philosophy, ethics, and apologetics. Henry's most influential writings included the short manifesto *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947) and his six-volume magnum opus *God, Revelation, and Authority* (1976–1983). Henry was also instrumental in establishing several strategic evangelical institutions. In all this, Henry played a key role in shaping evangelical identity during the half-century between 1945 and 1995. This essay offers a selective biographical narrative organized around the overlapping themes of conversion, convictions, and connections. It also advances a brief interpretation of Henry's vision for evangelical identity, which interacts with the idea of integration. The essay commends Henry as a compelling role model for evangelical identity to a new generation that has come of age since his passing.

Key Words: apologetics, biblical inerrancy, Billy Graham, Christianity Today, ethics, evangelical, evangelicalism, philosophy, theology

Carl F. H. Henry (1913–2003) was arguably the most consequential American evangelical scholar during the second half of the twentieth century. He has often been called the dean of American evangelical theologians.¹ Albert Mohler argues Henry's influence, "extended through his voluminous writings and public exposure, has shaped the evangelical movement to a degree unmatched by any other evangelical theologian of

the period."² Peter Heltzel has called Henry "the visionary public theologian of the evangelical movement."³ Timothy George claims that "it was Henry more than anyone else who argued the case and set forth a compelling intellectual apologetic for ... the New Evangelicalism."⁴ When Henry died in 2003, his obituary in the *New York Times* claimed he was "a theologian who helped move evangelical Christianity from the sidelines to a central place in American religion."⁵

Though Henry is normally thought of as a theologian, he was really a theologically minded polymath with wide-ranging academic interests. He earned research doctorates in both theology and philosophy. He was a journalist, scholar, and public intellectual, sometimes wearing all three hats simultaneously. He published widely in the fields of philosophy, apologetics, ethics, and systematic theology, and he dabbled in evangelism, missiology, and New Testament studies. Never limited to one audience, Henry wrote for his fellow scholars, for thoughtful pastors, and for engaged laity, and he applied his ideas to the academy, the church, American culture, and even global affairs.

Henry has been called the "architect" of the postwar evangelical movement, and he has been identified as the key shaper of what has been called the "classic" or "essential" evangelical theological consensus that developed in the mid-twentieth century.⁶ During the interwar years, "evangelical" and "fundamentalist" had been roughly synonymous terms used to describe theologically conservative low-church Protestants who resisted modernist theology in mainline denominations and rejected moral downgrade within the wider American culture. But from about 1942 and 1957, postwar evangelicalism distanced itself strategically from

² R. Albert Mohler Jr., "Carl F. H. Henry," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (B&H Academic, 2001), 291.

³ Peter G. Heltzel, *Jesus and Justice: Evangelicals, Race, and American Politics* (Yale University Press, 2009), xix.

⁴ Timothy George, "The Man Who Birthed Evangelicalism," *Christianity Today* (April 2013), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2013/01/man-who-birthed-evangelicalism/>.

⁵ Laurie Goodstein, "Rev. Dr. Carl F. H. Henry, 90, Brain of Evangelical Movement," *New York Times* (December 13, 2003), <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/12/13/us/rev-dr-carl-f-h-henry-90-brain-of-evangelical-movement.html>.

⁶ See Carl F. H. Henry, *Architect of Evangelicalism: Essential Essays of Carl F. H. Henry* (Lexham, 2019); Gregory Alan Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry* (Crossway, 2013); Matthew J. Hall and Owen Strachan, *Essential Evangelicalism: The Enduring Influence of Carl F. H. Henry* (Crossway, 2015).

* This essay was originally delivered as the 2025 Faculty Excellence in Scholarship Lecture at North Greenville University, Tigerville, South Carolina. An earlier version of the essay was read at the 2025 Southeast Regional Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina.

¹ Roger E. Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Westminster-John Knox, 2004), 41; David S. Dockery and Timothy George, *The Great Tradition of Christian Thinking: A Student's Guide* (Crossway, 2012), 20.

the increasingly insular and at times legalistic fundamentalist movement.⁷ The so-called “new evangelicals” or “neo-evangelicals” remained committed to conservative doctrine, and they continued to reject progressive theological and ethical trends embraced by mainline Protestant denominations. But they no longer identified themselves as fundamentalists.

For five decades beginning in the mid-1940s, Henry labored at defining, defending, and commending the evangelical movement. According to Mohler, “More than any other evangelical, [Henry] has given serious and sustained attention to the issue of evangelical identity and definition.”⁸ Paul House argues that, beginning with Henry’s earliest major writings, he demonstrated “a consistent, sustained, comprehensive vision for evangelical theology and its place in the world.”⁹ Henry’s wide-ranging interests, as well as his unique abilities, allowed him to play a seminal role in the development of modern evangelical identity, even if he was never as visible as his far more famous contemporary and frequent collaborator, Billy Graham. More than two decades after his death, Henry remains a symbol of evangelical faithfulness to many, especially within what Mohler calls “confessional evangelicalism,” which emphasizes doctrines such as biblical inerrancy, penal substitutionary atonement, complementarian gender roles, and the exclusivity of Christ.¹⁰

Interest in Henry peaked around 2013, which was the centennial of his birth and a decade after his death. That year witnessed the publication of Greg Thornbury’s *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism: Applying the Wisdom and Vision of Carl F. H. Henry*, as well as major conferences about Henry at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Most of the papers from those two conferences were subsequently published in a themed issue of *Trinity Journal* that was dedicated to Henry or were included in the collection of essays *Essential Evangelicalism: The Enduring Influence of Carl F. H. Henry*, edited by Matthew Hall and

⁷ For more on the developments between 1920 and 1960, see Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 1997); Jon R. Stone, *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism: The Postwar Evangelical Coalition* (St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 73–116; Nathan A. Finn, “The Development of Baptist Fundamentalism in the South, 1940–1980,” PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007), 21–72.

⁸ Mohler, “Carl F. H. Henry,” 283.

⁹ Paul R. House, “Remaking the Modern Mind: Carl Henry’s Theological Vision,” *SBJT* 8 (2004): 4.

¹⁰ R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Confessional Evangelicalism,” in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. Andrew David Naselli and Collin Hansen (Zondervan, 2011), 68–96.

Owen Strachan.¹¹ Since then, there has been a steady trickle of dissertations, articles, and monographs about Henry, though it is unclear how much the rising generation of evangelical ministers know about him. (Or, for that matter, his key contemporaries such as Billy Graham, Harold John Ockenga, Edward John Carnell, and Harold Lindsell.)

This essay aims to introduce one of the founding fathers of modern evangelicalism to evangelicals who have come of age since Henry’s death in 2003. Most of the essay consists of a selective biographical narrative organized around three overlapping themes: Henry’s *conversion*, his *convictions*, and his *connections*. The emphasis is on Henry’s role in shaping evangelical identity during the years between 1945 and 1995. The essay concludes by offering a brief interpretation of Henry’s vision for evangelical identity, which interacts with the idea of *integration*. As younger millennials and members of Generation Z increasingly join the ranks of evangelical ministers and scholars, they may find Henry to be a compelling role model for evangelical identity that values intellectual discipleship, urgent evangelism, and cultural engagement.

Conversion

Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry was born on Long Island in 1913.¹² His parents were German immigrants, and the family surname was originally Heinrich. They changed the name to Henry during World War I because of anti-German sensibilities in the US. The Henrys were not a particularly religious family. Young Carl attended Sunday School at an Episcopal Church, and was even confirmed, but he was not a professed believer. Upon finishing high school, Henry became a journalist, and by age twenty he was editor of a weekly newspaper on Long Island, in addition to freelance work for larger papers such as the *New York Times*.

Henry was introduced to the gospel through relationships with various evangelicals. His conversion experience occurred while he sat in his car on Long Island, waiting out a thunderstorm, Henry recounts:

[A] fiery bolt of lightning, like a giant flaming arrow, seemed to pin

¹¹ See *TrinJ* 35.1 (Spring 2014): 9–117.

¹² Unless otherwise noted, the biographical details in this essay are drawn from Henry’s own autobiographical recollections in Carl F. H. Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian* (Word, 1986), and supplemented by John D. Woodbridge, “Carl F. H. Henry: Spokesperson for American Evangelicalism,” in *God and Culture: Essays in Honor of Carl F. H. Henry*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Eerdmans, 1993), 378–93; and G. Wright Doyle, *Carl F. H. Henry: Theologian for All Seasons: An Introduction and Guide to Carl Henry’s God, Revelation and Authority* (Pickwick, 2010), 1–12.

me to the driver's seat, and a mighty roll of thunder unnerved me. When the fire fell, I knew instinctively the Great Archer had nailed me to my own footsteps. Looking back, it was as if the transcendent Tetragrammaton wished me to know that I could not save myself and that heaven's intervention was my only hope.¹³

Henry's conversion proved transformative. He remarked almost a half-century later, "Christ has been real to me in a vital way ever since June 1933. It was a blinding experience. I knew he is real. He's alive. He's the Risen One. I've never, even in the most serious crises of life, doubted that."¹⁴ Henry believed he was a new creation in Christ, and for the rest of his life the eternal importance of personal regeneration remained an animating principle in his ministry.

For Henry, the centrality of the *evangel* was always the heartbeat of evangelicalism. He engaged in personal evangelism from the time of his conversion until the end of his life, leading John Woodbridge to call Henry a "theologian-evangelist."¹⁵ For example, while serving on the faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary from 1947 to 1956, Henry frequently spent evenings sharing the gospel with the homeless who lived on the streets of Southern California. Although this may not seem surprising for a seminary professor, Henry did not teach evangelism or missions, but rather theology and philosophy. Henry also supported mass outreach initiatives, including the evangelistic crusades of his friend Billy Graham, the most famous evangelist in the world, and those of his former Fuller Seminary student Bill Bright, the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ.¹⁶ While at Fuller, Henry helped organize and co-chair the annual Easter Sunrise Service in the Rose Bowl from 1948 to 1956. Tens of thousands of people attended the annual service, where they heard an evangelistic message that focused on the resurrection of Christ. After retiring to Wauwatertown, Wisconsin in his later years, Henry once again helped to plan evangelistic community Easter services.

Henry also cared deeply about global missions. He frequently said, "the gospel is only good news if it gets there in time."¹⁷ In 1966, he chaired

¹³ Henry, *Confessions of a Theologian*, 45–46.

¹⁴ Quoted in Woodbridge, "Carl F. H. Henry: Spokesperson for American Evangelicalism," 380.

¹⁵ John Woodbridge, "A Biblically Faithful Theologian Evangelist," in *Essential Evangelicalism*, 81–91.

¹⁶ See Grant Wacker, *One Soul at a Time: The Story of Billy Graham* (Eerdmans, 2019); and John G. Turner, *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

¹⁷ Quoted in Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism*, 175.

the Berlin Congress on World Evangelism, which was sponsored by *Christianity Today*. He delivered the opening address at the gathering and then edited the conference proceedings alongside Stanley Mooneyham, a vice president of the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. In his address, Henry suggested, "It is tragic when men who profess to serve Christ, in effect forsake the duty of evangelism."¹⁸ Henry then followed up on the Congress with a short book reflecting on the theological, evangelistic, social, and ecumenical implications of the gathering.¹⁹ The Berlin Congress anticipated the more famous International Congress on World Evangelization that met in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974. At Lausanne, Henry spoke on how Christian personal and social ethics ought to be integrated with evangelistic proclamation for a consistent gospel witness. He closed with the following admonition:

The Gospel transforms believers for life in a new society ruled by love and, as such, anticipative of the Kingdom of Heaven. But it does not remove men from the world and the struggle for justice. In the Church, love of God and man is the only adequate norm of human conduct, for it mirrors God's own love. The Church knows the value of human life as a creation of God and as an object of Christ's redemption, and it can and ought fervently to plead the cause of peace and the merit of universal disarmament.²⁰

Henry promoted evangelism and missions in many of his writings. One of his earliest books was a history of the Pacific Garden Mission in Chicago, published in 1942.²¹ He frequently discussed evangelism and missions in the pages of *Christianity Today*, both during his years as editor and afterwards as a featured columnist.²² He also periodically published

¹⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, "Facing a New Day in Evangelism," in *One Race, One Gospel, One Task: World Congress on Evangelism, Berlin 1966, Official Reference Volumes*, vol. 1, ed. Carl F. H. Henry and W. Stanley Mooneyham (World Wide Publications, 1967), 18.

¹⁹ Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis* (World Wide Publications, 1967).

²⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, "Christian Personal and Social Ethics in Relation to Racism Poverty, War, and Other Problems," Lausanne Movement (July 21, 1974), <https://lausanne.org/content/christian-personal-and-social-ethics-in-relation-to-racism-poverty-war-and-other-problems>.

²¹ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Pacific Garden Mission: A Doorway to Heaven* (Zondervan, 1942).

²² For example, *Architect of Evangelicalism* is a published selection of Henry's essays for *Christianity Today*. The index lists almost two dozen references to evangelism or evangelization across three decades of essays.

scholarly essays about evangelism.²³ Henry often mentioned evangelism in his books on other topics, leading Jerry Ireland to argue Henry was a theologian of evangelism who regularly applied his theological reflections to gospel proclamation to non-believers.²⁴ By the end of his life, Henry was longing for national revival and cultural renewal as the antidote to secularism and neo-paganism in the United States. His lectures and essays on this theme were published in four volumes between 1984 and 1994.²⁵ Even when he wrote about Christian cultural engagement, Henry maintained that lasting renewal would ultimately only come about through lives transformed by the power of the gospel.

Historians rarely focus on evangelism or missions when they write about modern evangelical history or identity. In part, this is understandable, since it is impossible for historians to divorce the questions they are asking about the past from the concerns that are being raised in the present. It is also true that what a historical actor *claimed* he cared about might not be the only thing, nor the most important thing, his actions actually *evidenced*. But even acknowledging these caveats, it is clear that evangelicals cared far more about gospel proclamation than is often acknowledged by historians, especially scholars who are primarily interested in evangelical social views or political activism.²⁶ Henry exemplified the postwar evangelical commitment to evangelism, missions, and spiritual awakening, and

²³ For example, Henry's 1971 book *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* included two published lectures titled "The Theology of Evangelism" and "Personal Evangelism and Social Justice." See Carl F. H. Henry, *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration* (Baker, 1971), 55–72, 107–24. The aforementioned *Evangelicals at the Brink of Crisis* included a chapter titled "Evangelicals and the Evangelistic Crisis" (pp. 33–52).

²⁴ Jerry M. Ireland, *Evangelism and Social Concern in the Theology of Carl F. H. Henry* (Pickwick, 2015), 101–52.

²⁵ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society: Promoting Evangelical Renewal and National Righteousness* (Multnomah, 1984); Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Countermoves in a Decadent Culture* (Multnomah, 1986); Carl F. H. Henry, *Twilight of a Great Civilization: The Drift Toward Neo-Paganism* (Crossway, 1988); Carl F. H. Henry, *Gods of This Age or the God of the Ages?*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Broadman & Holman, 1994).

²⁶ It is often the case that insider scholars focus on topics like evangelism, theology, and worship, while outsider scholars focus on social and cultural factors. Both are necessary for understanding the Christian past. For more on this topic, with special application to Southern Baptist history, see Nathan A. Finn, "On Observing Southern Baptists: Literature since 1993," in *Southern Baptists Re-Observed: Perspectives on Race, Gender, and Politics*, America's Baptists, ed. Keith Harper (University of Tennessee Press, 2022), 3–17.

he used his unique platform as a public intellectual to promote the importance of spreading the gospel to non-believers.

Convictions

A second major theme in Henry's life was his convictions. He was the author or editor of over forty books, in addition to hundreds of editorials, shorter articles, scholarly essays, and book reviews. In summarizing Henry's literary agenda, Paul House argues that "Henry's vision for theology was that it be epistemologically viable, methodologically coherent, biblically accurate, socially responsible, evangelistically oriented, and universally applied."²⁷ For the sake of space, this essay will highlight some of Henry's most influential books, which together illustrate House's argument.

Henry's first two serious academic books include *Remaking the Modern Mind*, which was published in 1946, and *The Protestant Dilemma*, which was published two years later. *Remaking the Modern Mind* was actually Henry's third book but his first scholarly work.²⁸ Henry critiqued the different philosophies that had shaped modern Western thought; he argued that the two World Wars had undermined theological liberalism and exposed cracks in philosophical naturalism, and he offered a robust defense of Christian theism. *Remaking the Modern Mind* was an example of what we might today call cultural apologetics, which is challenging cultural narratives so that the gospel seems more plausible to contemporary unbelievers. Henry's work differs from more recent examples of cultural apologetics because he wrote in a context that was still deeply informed by the Judeo-Christian tradition and Protestant sensibilities, whereas today cultural apologetics address a more post-Christian context.²⁹

In *The Protestant Dilemma*, Henry advanced a more extended critique of mid-century Protestant theology.³⁰ Henry believed modernism had steadily lost influence in the generation since World War I, and he was heartened. He also acknowledged that neo-orthodoxy, which seemed ascendant at the time in the theological academy, represented an improvement

²⁷ House, "Remaking the Modern Mind," 5

²⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, *Remaking the Modern Mind* (Eerdmans, 1946).

²⁹ For more on the contemporary discussion of cultural apologetics, see Collin Hansen, Skyler Flowers, and Ivan Mesa, eds., *The Gospel After Christendom: An Introduction to Cultural Apologetics* (Zondervan Reflective, 2025); and Paul M. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Zondervan Academic, 2019).

³⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Protestant Dilemma: An Analysis of the Current Impasse in Theology* (Eerdmans, 1948).

over modernism. However, Henry was not satisfied with what he often criticized as the “neo-supernaturalism” of dialectical theology, which he believed still fell short of biblical understandings of revelation and human sin. He was somewhat less critical of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner’s respective views of Christology, though he warned that Reinhold Niebuhr was closer to modernism. Henry argued the only faithful path forward was a recovery of traditional Protestant orthodoxy. If *Remaking the Modern Mind* was a work of cultural apologetics, *The Protestant Dilemma* was an example of polemical theology that addressed the key doctrinal debates of Henry’s early career. He would return regularly to the themes in both of these early books in many of his writings in the coming years.³¹

Henry’s most widely known book is *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, which was published in 1947, the year between *Remaking the Modern Mind* and *The Protestant Dilemma*.³² *Uneasy Conscience* began as a series of articles serialized in *United Evangelical Action*, a magazine published by the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). Henry was the book review editor.³³ The final version of *Uneasy Conscience* was an 89-page manifesto that called for evangelicals to embrace a holistic public witness that includes both personal evangelism and cultural engagement.

In *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry positioned the new evangelicalism as a faithful middle between sectarian fundamentalists and accommodationist liberals. He believed an engaged evangelicalism offered the key to overcoming what has been called the “great reversal,” the severing of evangelism and social action among turn-of-the-century evangelicals in response to the Social Gospel.³⁴ Madison Trammel argues that Henry mischaracterized recent fundamentalist social action, since prewar fundamentalists were committed to curtailing alcohol sales and consumption as well as combatting the teaching of Darwinism in public schools.³⁵ But Henry was

³¹ For example, Henry offered a more accessible polemic against both modernism and Neo-Orthodoxy in *Evangelical Responsibility in Contemporary Theology* (Eerdmans, 1957), and his critiques of modern philosophy and revisionist theology loomed large through all six volumes of *God, Revelation and Authority*, to be discussed below.

³² Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Eerdmans, 1947).

³³ For background on the book’s publication, see Ben Peays, “The Modern Mind and the Uneasy Conscience: Carl F. H. Henry and Postwar Evangelical Social Ethic,” in *Essential Evangelicalism*, 149–73.

³⁴ See David O. Moberg, *The Great Reversal: Evangelism versus Social Concern* (Lippincott, 1972).

³⁵ Madison Trammel, *Fundamentalists in the Public Square: Evolution, Alcohol, and Culture Wars after the Scopes Trial*, Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology (Lexham, 2023).

more interested in articulating a more comprehensive social agenda for evangelicalism than he was in offering a nuanced scholarly assessment of fundamentalist cultural engagement.

The legacy of *Uneasy Conscience* looms large in both Henry’s thought and in the wider evangelical imagination. Russell Moore argues that inaugurated eschatology is the key to understanding *Uneasy Conscience* as well as Henry’s overall approach to social ethics. Henry’s view of the kingdom as both present and future and the implications of this understanding of the kingdom for cultural witness rejected both the modernist Social Gospel and fundamentalist isolationism.³⁶ Henry continued to speak and write about the importance of evangelical cultural engagement until the end of his career. For example, he revisited the topic in his shorter writings for *Christianity Today*, in a collection of essays titled *A Plea for Evangelical Demonstration*, in the aforementioned address at Lausanne, in the final volume of *God, Revelation and Authority*, and in nearly all his shorter writings in the 1980s and 1990s.³⁷ *Uneasy Conscience* has been reprinted twice: in 2003, with a new foreword by Richard Mouw, and in 2022, with a new foreword by Russell Moore.³⁸ The latter year was the seventy-fifth anniversary of the book’s publication, leading to numerous reflections on the enduring influence of *Uneasy Conscience*.³⁹

One of Henry’s most widely read early books was *Christian Personal Ethics*, a textbook for use in seminary courses.⁴⁰ The first third or so of the book focuses on the history of non-Christian philosophical ethics from the pagan philosophers to modern naturalists. The latter two-thirds

³⁶ Russell D. Moore, “The Kingdom of God in the Social Ethics of Carl F. H. Henry: A Twenty-First Century Evangelical Reappraisal,” *JETS* 55.2 (2012): 377–97.

³⁷ See previous notes for these works. Additionally, see Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority, Volume VI: God Who Stands and Stays, Part Two*, 2nd ed. (Crossway, 1999), 402–54.

³⁸ See Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Eerdmans, 2003); and Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Crossway, 2022).

³⁹ For example, the Institute for Religion and Democracy (IRD), a thinktank in Washington, DC, held a conference in November 2022 to consider Henry’s legacy in light of the milestone anniversary of *Uneasy Conscience*. Videos of the proceedings, as well as transcripts, are available on the IRD website, <https://juicyecumenism.com/tag/carl-henry-conference/>. For the author’s reflections, see Nathan A. Finn, “Revisiting Carl Henry’s *Uneasy Conscience* for a New Generation,” The Land Center for Cultural Engagement (July 11, 2022), <https://landcenter.org/revisiting-carl-henrys-uneasy-conscience-for-a-new-generation/>.

⁴⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Eerdmans, 1957).

develops a Christian ethics rooted in biblical revelation. Richard Mouw argues Henry's approach was broadly in the Reformed tradition, with an emphasis on the ecclesial nature of Christian ethics, perhaps reflecting Henry's Baptist convictions.⁴¹ Henry later edited the *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, bringing together ethicists from across the landscape of evangelicalism.⁴²

Henry also intended to write a follow-up textbook focused on Christian social ethics, though he never got around to it. Henry transitioned out of the academy in 1956 to become the founding editor of *Christianity Today*, which led to a two-decade pause to his more substantive academic writing. Most of his scholarly output in these years was limited to lectures, essays, and edited collections. However, he continued to lecture widely on social ethics for the remainder of his career, and he published shorter works on the topic, including a collection of his own essays titled *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*.⁴³

Scholars agree that Henry's most important work is *God, Revelation and Authority*, published in six volumes between 1976 and 1983. Carl Trueman calls Henry's magnum opus the "Sistine Chapel" of American postwar theological reflection.⁴⁴ Space precludes an extended discussion of *God, Revelation and Authority*, though several scholars have offered extended evaluations of the work.⁴⁵ As House notes,

These volumes argued for the necessity of careful epistemological work as a prolegomena to theological writing. They were deeply

⁴¹ Richard Mouw, "Toward a Full-Orbed Evangelical Ethics," in *Essential Evangelicalism*, 51–53.

⁴² Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics* (Baker, 1973). The same year the dictionary appeared, Henry participated in a workshop in Chicago among mostly younger evangelicals committed to social ethics. The participants drafted a statement titled "A Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern," to which Henry was one of the original signatories. Henry was more theologically conservative than most of the other participants, and by the mid-1970s socially engaged evangelicals were dividing into two camps: the Religious Right, which is better known, and the far smaller Religious Left, which was represented by groups like Evangelicals for Social Actions (est. 1974). For more on these developments, including Henry's role as an elder statesman among the young activists, see David Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

⁴³ Carl F. H. Henry, *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics* (Eerdmans, 1964).

⁴⁴ Carl Trueman, "Admiring the Sistine Chapel: Reflections on Carl F. H. Henry's *God, Revelation and Authority*," *Themelios* 25.2 (2000): 48–58.

⁴⁵ See Bob E. Patterson, Carl F. H. Henry, *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind* (Word, 1983); Doyle, *Carl F. H. Henry: Theologian for All Seasons*; Trueman, "Admiring the Sistine Chapel."

committed to stating propositions that can be understood and explored through human reason. They insisted on the inerrancy and full authority of the scriptures as the surest ground for theology and as a logical conclusion drawn from the nature of God. They elaborated the inherent perfection of God, and stressed the uniqueness, finality, and necessity of Jesus Christ. They argued that this theology conveys God's goodness and saving grace to lost men and women, who though competent to reason, are lost without specific divine revelation.⁴⁶

All the major themes of Henry's other writings are revisited and often expanded in *God, Revelation and Authority*. However, his most enduring contribution in the work is his fifteen theses, which provide the structure for volumes 2–4.

1. Revelation is a divinely initiated activity; God's free communication by which he alone turns his personal privacy into a deliberate disclosure of his reality.
2. Divine revelation is given for human benefit, offering us privileged communion with our Creator in the kingdom of God.
3. Divine revelation does not completely erase God's transcendent mystery, inasmuch as God the Revealer transcends his own revelation.
4. The very fact of disclosure by the one living God assures the comprehensive unity of divine revelation.
5. Not only the occurrence of divine revelation, but also its very nature, content, and variety are exclusively God's determination.
6. God's revelation is uniquely personal both in content and form.
7. God reveals himself not only universally in the history of the cosmos and of the nations, but also redemptively within this external history in unique saving acts.
8. The climax of God's special revelation is Jesus of Nazareth, the personal incarnation of God in the flesh; in Jesus Christ the source and content of revelation converge and coincide.
9. The mediating agent in all divine revelation is the Eternal Logos—preexistent, incarnate, and now glorified.

⁴⁶ House, "Remaking the Modern Mind," 19.

10. God's revelation is rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form.
11. The Bible is the reservoir and conduit of divine truth.
12. The Holy Spirit superintends the communication of divine revelation, first, by inspiring the prophetic-apostolic writings, and second, by illuminating and interpreting the scripturally given Word of God.
13. As the bestower of spiritual life, the Holy Spirit enables individuals to appropriate God's revelation savingly and thereby attests the redemptive power of the revealed truth of God in the personal experience of reborn sinners.
14. The church approximates the kingdom of God in miniature; as such, she is to mirror to each successive generation the power and joy of the appropriated realities of divine revelation.
15. The self-manifesting God will unveil his glory in a crowning revelation of power and judgment; in this disclosure at the consummation of the ages, God will vindicate righteousness and justice, finally subdue and subordinate evil, and bring into being a new heaven and earth.

Biblical inerrancy is one of the key evangelical doctrines Henry addresses in *God, Revelation and Authority*. By the 1970s, inerrancy was becoming a topic of considerable debate among evangelicals. In 1971, Fuller Seminary, where Henry taught from 1947 to 1956, revised its confessional statement to downplay its earlier commitment to inerrancy. In response, Harold Lindsell wrote *The Battle for the Bible* (1976), which documented the alleged drift from traditional evangelicals views of Scripture. Jack Rogers responded with *Biblical Authority* (1977), which countered that the Bible is infallible in matters of faith and practice, but includes errors related to history, geography, and science.⁴⁷ In response to these debates, a group of evangelical scholars drafted the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy in 1978.⁴⁸ The inerrancy debate continues to this day, flaring up periodically, especially when a prominent evangelical scholar redefines or

⁴⁷ Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan, 1976); Jack Rogers, ed., *Biblical Authority* (Word, 1977).

⁴⁸ The papers from the Chicago gathering are available in Norman L. Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Zondervan, 1980). The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is widely available online. For example, Dallas Theological Seminary provides a scanned copy of the original printed document on their Library's website, https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf.

rejects the doctrine.⁴⁹

In volume 4 of *God, Revelation and Authority*, Henry made a compelling case for biblical inerrancy. He affirmed the Chicago Statement, including the full text of the document as a supplemental note. He rejected the more moderate belief that infallibility was preferable to a traditional view of inerrancy.⁵⁰ He thus sided with traditionalists rather than revisionists in the debate. However, Henry also argued that one could be an evangelical and prefer infallibility to inerrancy. Unlike Lindsell, for whom inerrancy was a matter of orthodoxy, Henry suggested biblical inerrancy is a test of evangelical consistency rather than evangelical authenticity.⁵¹

God, Revelation and Authority proved to be Henry's last major work, though through the mid-1990s he continued to publish edited volumes of his shorter writings, mostly about evangelical engagement with secularism and neo-paganism in American culture.⁵² He also authored two other books of note: *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief*, which summarized and updated some of the key arguments in *God, Revelation and Authority*, and *The Identity of Jesus of Nazareth*, which offered a brief semi-scholarly response to the Jesus Seminar, which was promoting its skeptical views to the wider public.⁵³

For Henry, evangelical identity was necessarily theological. In his own convictions, Henry was a biblical inerrantist, a presuppositional apologist, a gender complementarian, a Calvinistic Baptist, and a champion of penal substitutionary atonement, justification by grace alone through faith alone, and soteriological exclusivism. From within this theological framework, Henry's writings evidence a number of core commitments that characterized his thinking and, to varying degrees, shaped the intellectual contours of postwar evangelical identity.

- Epistemology matters, truth must cohere with reality, and God is the source of reality and the fount of truth.

⁴⁹ For example, see G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Baker Academic, 2008).

⁵⁰ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority, Volume IV: God Who Speaks and Shows, Fifteen Theses, Part Three*, 2nd ed. (Crossway, 1999), 129–271.

⁵¹ For more on Henry's view of inerrancy and its role in evangelical identity, compared to Lindsell on Henry's right and Bernard Ramm on Henry's left, see Ryan Reed, "The House Divided: An Assessment of the American Neo-Evangelicals' Doctrine of Scripture," *Themelios* 49.1 (2024): 146–58.

⁵² See footnote 25 above.

⁵³ Carl F. H. Henry, *Toward a Recovery of Christian Belief: The Rutherford Lectures* (Crossway, 1990), and Carl F. H. Henry, *The Identity of Jesus of Nazareth* (Broadman, 1992).

- The Triune God created all things, desires to be known relationally by his human creatures, and discloses himself to us through general revelation and especially special revelation.
- God's most enduring special revelation is the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, which are his inspired written words and are fully authoritative and trustworthy because they reflect his perfect character.
- A Christian worldview that is rooted in Scripture, committed to objective truth, and rationally coherent should shape the way the believer thinks about the world and his or her place in it.
- Cultivating a Christian worldview is at the heart of Christian education, including both theological education and university education.
- A Christian worldview ought to shape the believer's personal ethics as well as Christian social ethics.
- Christianity is a global movement, the kingdom of God transcends our respective ecclesial traditions, and all believers are called to do their part to fulfill the Great Commission.
- The gospel is the good news of Jesus's saving actions on behalf of sinful humanity, and this news should be shared with unbelievers everywhere.
- Christian witness is holistic: the proclamation of the gospel should be accompanied by acts of mercy and the pursuit of biblical justice, including social justice—as Henry often said, God is the God of both justification and justice.⁵⁴
- Believers are to engage culture from the perspective of a Christian worldview, including, but not limited, to political involvement.
- Christian public witness includes contending for the truth of the faith, countering both false doctrine and rival worldviews, and commending biblical values in the public square.

Connections

Henry's connections mark the final subject in this thematic biographical introduction. Henry interacted with many of the leading figures in the

⁵⁴ For example, see Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 6:402–17.

postwar evangelical movement, including scholars, pastors, and evangelists. Through those personal connections, Henry was further associated with many influential evangelical institutions during the latter half of the twentieth century. His vision for postwar evangelical identity was not only about fidelity to the gospel and adherence to sound doctrine and its implications, but also about the relationships, initiatives, and institutions that were rooted in those commitments and committed to advancing them. Space will not allow for a full accounting of all Henry's connections, so this section will offer a broad overview.

Henry attended Wheaton College at the recommendation of Frank Gaebelin, who later served as general editor of the New International Version of the Bible and the *Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Henry earned both his bachelor's (1938) and master's degrees (1941) from Wheaton College. During these years Henry was mentored by philosopher Gordon Clark, who reinforced in Henry a commitment to both Reformed soteriology and presuppositional apologetics. Among the students at Wheaton Henry met his future wife, Helga, knew an aspiring evangelist named Billy Graham, and met his longtime friend and sometimes colleague, Harold Lindsell. Wheaton proved formative for Henry because it connected him to the emerging ecosystem of interdenominational evangelicalism, which was developing more around likeminded individuals and parachurch ministries than traditional denominational structures.⁵⁵

Henry earned the Bachelor of Divinity (1941) and Doctor of Theology (1942) from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. He also taught on the faculty of Northern Seminary from 1942 to 1947, where Lindsell was a colleague. During summers in the mid-to-late 1940s, Henry worked on a second doctoral degree, a PhD in Philosophy, which he received from Boston University in 1949. During his second doctoral studies, Henry befriended other evangelicals who were studying at either Boston University or Harvard. Owen Strachan calls them the "Cambridge evangelicals," a group that included Henry, Edward John Carnell, Kenneth Kantzer, George Eldon Ladd, Roger Nicole, John Gerstner, Merrill Tenney, Paul Jewett, and Gleason Archer, among others.⁵⁶ Many of these Cambridge evangelicals were influenced by the ministry of Ockenga, the educated

⁵⁵ Joel A. Carpenter, "A Shelter in the Time of Storm: Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929–1942," *Church History* 49 (1980): 62–75.

⁵⁶ Owen Strachan, *Awakening the Evangelical Mind: An Intellectual History of the Neo-Evangelical Movement* (Zondervan Academic, 2015), 71–107.

and erudite pastor of Park Street Church, located near Boston Common.⁵⁷

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) was formed in 1942 with Ockenga as the first president. Henry participated in the NAE from the beginning, handling publicity for the annual convention and, as referenced earlier, serving as book review editor for *United Evangelical Action*. In 1947, Henry left Northern Seminary to become a founding faculty member of Fuller Seminary, alongside Lindsell, Everett Harrison, and Wilbur Smith. Ockenga was the founding president, though he served *in absentia*. Later faculty additions during Henry's years at Fuller included Edward John Carnell and George Eldon Ladd. Fuller Seminary became the flagship seminary of neo-evangelicalism, a position it occupied for two decades until the aforementioned inerrancy controversy led to competition from more conservative institutions such as Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.⁵⁸

In 1949, Henry helped found the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS), and he participated in that organization for the rest of his life. Henry regularly presented papers at national and regional ETS meetings, wrote a number of articles and book reviews for the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, and served as ETS president in 1970. In 1956, Billy Graham tapped Henry as the founding editor of *Christianity Today*, a position he held until 1968. Henry then taught at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary from 1969 to 1974. From 1974 to 1987, he served as lecturer-at-large for World Vision. During the final two decades of his life, Henry was also connected in various ways to institutions such as the Institute for Religion and Democracy, the Ethics and Public Policy Center, Hillsdale College, Prison Fellowship, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. One is hard-pressed to find a major evangelical institution that Henry did not have some meaningful connection with, whether through employment, key relationships, invited speaking engagements, or collaborative writing projects.

For much of his life, Henry identified primarily with the Northern Baptist Convention, now the American Baptist Churches USA, as well as conservative movements adjacent to that denomination. However, when he moved to Washington to edit *Christianity Today*, Henry joined Capitol Hill Baptist Church, where he remained a member for nearly 50 years and

⁵⁷ For more on Ockenga's role in the evangelical movement, see Garth M. Rosell, *The Surprising Work of God: Harold John Ockenga, Billy Graham, and the Rebirth of Evangelicalism* (Baker Academic, 2008).

⁵⁸ For more on the role of Fuller Theological Seminary in neo-evangelicalism, see George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 1995).

periodically taught Sunday School.⁵⁹ Capitol Hill was originally dually aligned with both Northern Baptists and Southern Baptists, but the church dropped the Northern Baptist affiliation in the 1940s.⁶⁰ Though technically a Southern Baptist based upon his church membership, Henry only became more closely identified with Southern Baptists during the final two decades of his life. During those years, he influenced many of the conservative scholars who participated in the Inerrancy Controversy that began in the SBC in 1979. Barry Hankins has suggested, "It would not be going too far to say that Henry has been a mentor for nearly the whole SBC conservative movement."⁶¹

For Henry, postwar evangelicalism was a movement just as much as it was an emphasis on gospel proclamation or a theological program. Movements require relationships and are normally tied to institutions. Along with his allies, most notably Graham and Ockenga, Henry was one of the great evangelical institution-builders of the mid-twentieth century. Their work guaranteed that evangelicalism was never some abstract idea, but was embodied in various schools, parachurch ministries, networks, and denominations, which provided the institutional context in which evangelical identity developed.

Interpretation

In matters of religious assumptions, twentieth-century America was neither pre-Christian, nor post-Christian, but what historian Mark Noll has characterized as "late Christian."⁶² This late-Christian world was formative, not only for Henry's generation of evangelicals who came of

⁵⁹ For more on Henry as a Sunday School teacher, see Caleb Morell, "Carl F. H. Henry's Anti-Communist Worldview: Insights from Unpublished Notes, 1962–1964," *JETS* 66.2 (2023): 301–13.

⁶⁰ All the churches in the District of Columbia Baptist Convention were at one time dually aligned with the NBC and the SBC. Beginning in 1947, Metropolitan Baptist Church designated its giving so that all of its funds went to the SBC and none were forwarded to the NBC. See Caleb Morell, *A Light on the Hill: The Surprising Story of How a Local Church in the Nation's Capital Influenced Evangelicalism* (Crossway, 2025), 144–45.

⁶¹ Barry Hankins, "The Evangelical Accommodation of Southern Baptist Conservatives," *Baptist History and Heritage* 33 (Winter 1998): 59. Hankins later argued that Henry and Francis Schaeffer in particular were the two key shapers of conservative Southern Baptist views of cultural engagement. See Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (University of Alabama Press, 2002), 23–30, 105.

⁶² Mark A. Noll, *C. S. Lewis in America: Readings and Reception, 1935–1947* (IVP Academic, 2023), 84.

age in the mid-twentieth century, but also for evangelicals who are Baby Boomers (born 1946–1964) or part of Generation X (born 1965–1979).⁶³ However, many evangelical millennials (born 1980–1994) and all of Generation Z (born 1995–2012) have reached adulthood in an American culture that is in some ways vastly different from Henry's context. Aaron Renn contends that American culture shifted considerably in its posture toward Christianity between 1964 and 2024. The period from 1964 to 1994 represented a "Positive World" wherein society in general was positively disposed toward Christianity and Judeo-Christian moral norms for the most part shaped society. The two decades between 1994 and 2014 were a transitional "Neutral World" for Christianity in America. Christianity was neither privileged nor disfavored in a pluralistic, multicultural public square, and Judeo-Christian moral norms still had some purchase in the public imagination. Since 2014, American society has been a "Negative World" for a growing number of Christians, especially in spaces most influenced by cultural elites. Secularism is the status quo, and Judeo-Christian morality is considered backwards and repugnant.⁶⁴

Nearly all of Henry's career took place in the Positive World, which overlaps with the waning years of Noll's late Christianity. Indeed, one of Henry's ongoing concerns was that various intellectual movements were eroding the Judeo-Christian foundations of Western Culture and creating an atmosphere wherein nominal Christianity would be a halfway house to outright secularism. In the 1970s and 1980s, Henry was contending with the very trends that would ultimately contribute to the move from the Positive World to the Neutral World.⁶⁵ Much of Henry's thought remains evergreen, and many of his concerns proved prescient. Thus, this final section offers an interpretation of how the three recurring themes of *conversion*, *convictions*, and *connections* came together in Henry's agenda for evangelical identity. It interacts with the idea of *integration*, a topic Henry wrote about periodically, especially when addressing the application of the

⁶³ This dating of the various generations is taken from Jean M. Twenge, *Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America's Future* (Atria, 2023).

⁶⁴ Aaron M. Renn, *Life in the Negative World: Confronting Challenges in an Anti-Christian Culture* (Zondervan, 2024), 6–7.

⁶⁵ One suspects that Henry would claim the pluralism of the Neutral World was already winning the day by the 1980s. His essays in the 1980s and 1990s demonstrate that he was concerned that, absent spiritual awakening and cultural renewal, America was well on its way to the anti-Christian culture that Renn laments. See note 25 above.

Christian worldview to education.⁶⁶ Though a man of his time, Henry's integrated understanding of evangelical identity has much to offer the emerging generation of evangelical ministers and academics.

First, Henry championed the integration of theological thoughtfulness, missionary fervor, and cultural engagement. Although Henry believed that different Christians were called to various primary vocations, he never understood that vocational diversity to provide any excuse for a partial approach to discipleship.⁶⁷ Henry reminds us that the most famous Great Commission passage, Matthew 28:18–20, is not only for missionaries. The text includes a declaration of Jesus's Lordship over all creation, his charge to make disciples, and his command to teach those disciples to observe all his teachings. Henry's agenda for evangelical faithfulness was *robust, not thin*.

Second, Henry championed the integration of personal evangelism and social action. He believed that Christian public witness should be holistic, directed to both the salvation of sinners and the promotion of authentic human flourishing. As evidenced across the decades, long after writing *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* Henry remained critical of separatist fundamentalism (which he believed too-often neglected social action), mainline modernism (which he believed had abandoned the gospel), and neo-orthodoxy (which he believed downplayed both biblical authority and evangelistic urgency). Henry's agenda for evangelical witness was *holistic, not fragmented*.

Third, Henry modeled the integration of theology, philosophy, ethics, and apologetics. The latter was arguably the throughline because a decidedly apologetic bent characterized nearly all Henry's scholarly and semi-scholarly writings. Henry believed Christian truth was always under threat, especially the belief that the one true God has revealed himself authoritatively to humanity through both general and special revelation. Without

⁶⁶ For more on Henry's vision for education, including the integration of faith and learning, see Paul R. House, "Making Christian Minds: Carl Henry and Christian Higher Education," *Renewing Minds: A Journal of Christian Thought* 1 (Spring 2012): 67–79. For most of his career, Henry championed the idea of a Christian research university, ideally located in New York City. This dream never came to pass, though Henry did found the Institute for Advanced Christian Studies in 1967, which was a foundation to support interdisciplinary evangelical scholarship from the perspective of a Christian worldview. See Owen Strachan, "Carl F. H. Henry's University Crusade: The Spectacular Promise and Ultimate Failure of Crusade University," in *Essential Evangelicalism*, 59–80.

⁶⁷ Henry developed his understanding of vocation in a lecture titled "The Christian View of Work," which was included in *Aspects of Christian Social Ethics*, 31–71.

acknowledging and submitting to this revelation, individuals, churches, institutions, and even entire societies drift headlong into spiritual and moral shipwreck. Henry was committed to both defining and defending the faith and its implications, both for individuals and in the public square. His agenda for evangelical thought was *activist, not merely intellectual*.⁶⁸

Finally, Henry modeled the integration of evangelical unity and doctrinal clarity. Near the end of his life, in 1989, one of Henry's final initiatives was to partner with his longtime friend Kenneth Kantzer, president of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, to host the Evangelical Affirmations Conference. The National Association of Evangelicals sponsored the gathering. The participants, who were drawn from across North American evangelicalism, produced a statement of beliefs and contributed to a collection of essays, which Henry and Kantzer co-edited.⁶⁹ Henry deeply desired evangelical unity, and he believed evangelicals should unite first and foremost around the good news. However, he also understood that while the gospel must be the center of evangelical unity, doctrinal boundaries matter—including how best to articulate the gospel itself. Henry never stopped calling evangelicals to greater faithfulness, even as he sought to unite evangelicals from across the ecclesial spectrum. Henry's agenda for evangelical unity was *convictional, not merely pragmatic*.

Carl Henry made a significant and multi-layered contribution to post-war evangelical identity. That identity would not remain static. By the 1960s, Henry and his generation found themselves defending their vision against a younger cohort of evangelicals who were often more socially progressive and at times less theologically precise. By the late-1980s, even evangelical scholars who remained theologically conservative were moving on to new questions and engaging with fresh intellectual trends, sometimes distancing themselves from aspects of Henry's thought.⁷⁰ Perhaps

⁶⁸ Kenneth S. Kantzer wrote of Henry in a *festschrift* for the latter, "His primary calling has been to scholarship, broadly interpreted, but he has never been a pedantic scholar or a monk in a cell. Carl Henry is preeminently a man of God out in the bustling, wicked, confused world, seeking to build the edifice of a Christian world and life view and trading blows with all who would attack it, seeking to weaken or destroy it. This has been his passion" ("Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry: An Appreciation," in *God and Culture*, 377).

⁶⁹ Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, *Evangelical Affirmations* (Academic, 1990). Henry wrote the Foreword (pp. 13–15) and contributed a larger chapter titled "Who Are the Evangelicals?" (pp. 69–94).

⁷⁰ Space precludes substantive engagement with Henry's evangelical critics, but many scholars have addressed this topic. For example, see Patterson, *Carl F.*

in part because of these criticisms, as well as a sort of "theological recency bias," Henry's many and varied contributions remain largely unknown among his evangelical heirs who have entered ministry since he passed off the scene.

A generation ago, John Woodbridge argued that Carl Henry was the spokesperson for American evangelicals.⁷¹ Although that is no longer the case, for many today—especially many theologically conservative Baptists and evangelicals in the Reformed tradition—Henry still offers a mostly compelling vision of evangelical identity, even if aspects of his thought and priorities sometimes need updating. Younger evangelicals should embrace and, when necessary, adapt Henry's classical evangelical identity for our own post-Christian age. Reclaiming Henry's example and emphases, as well as those of many of his postwar evangelical colleagues, can contribute to the flourishing of contemporary evangelicalism.

H. Henry, 160–69; Doyle, *Carl F. H. Henry: Theologian for All Seasons*, 92–129; Thornbury, *Recovering Classic Evangelicalism*, 97–115; Chad Owen Brand, "Is Carl Henry a Modernist? Rationalism and Foundationalism in Post-War Evangelical Theology," *SBJT* 8 (2004): 44–60.

⁷¹ Woodbridge, "Carl F. H. Henry: Spokesperson for American Evangelicalism."

Easing the *Uneasy Conscience*: A Comparison of the Social Engagement of Carl F. H. Henry and Olin T. Binkley

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Abstract: *This essay compares the social engagement of Carl F. H. Henry and Olin T. Binkley, primarily using Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* and Binkley's *Victory Unto Victory* and *The Churches and the Social Conscience*. Henry's conscience was uneasy regarding fundamentalism's lack of social engagement in the post-war era; however, this essay argues that Olin Binkley's conscience was at ease because the post-war era provided Southern Baptists with a missionary opportunity to rebuild society through the application of the mind of Christ, interpreted by the integration of Scripture with modern scientific insights. This comparison of Binkley and Henry's short post-war books demonstrates Henry and Binkley's different approaches to social engagement. Binkley blended sociological insights with a scientific interpretation of Scripture to address social sins, whereas Henry appealed to propositional truths in the Bible's divine revelation as the source of ethics and social engagement.*

Key Words: *Carl F. H. Henry, evangelicalism, fundamentalism, Olin T. Binkley, post-war evangelicalism, progressive Southern Baptists, propositional theology, Southern Baptist social engagement, the mind of Christ*

The comparison of Carl F. H. Henry and Olin T. Binkley presents a unique case study in Baptist social engagement. They held much in common. Both were pious Christians who took their faith seriously. Both men lived long lives, stretching through most of the twentieth century. Both deeply valued their faith's social implications. They received prestigious northern educations and were instrumental in establishing two seminaries founded to engage contemporary society with the gospel—Henry joined the founding faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary, and Olin Binkley joined the early faculty of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Their differences are just as notable. Henry (a Northern Baptist conservative) and Binkley (a Southern Baptist progressive) approached Christian social engagement differently. At his core, Henry was a philosopher whereas Binkley was an ethicist. Henry wrote much whereas Binkley

wrote little.

Although, Henry and Binkley were undoubtedly familiar with one another, there are no extant records of them having corresponded. Nevertheless, this essay seeks to place them in conversation with one another, comparing their distinct views of social engagement. When comparing these leading ethical thinkers, one wonders why Olin Binkley did not share Carl Henry's uneasy conscience. Olin Binkley's conscience was at ease because the post-war era provided Southern Baptists with a missionary opportunity to rebuild society through the application of the mind of Christ, interpreted by the integration of Scripture with modern scientific insights.

This comparison accomplishes two goals. First, it highlights Olin Binkley's overlooked contributions to the development of Baptist social engagement. Casual observers may view the comparison of Binkley to Henry as that of apples to oranges. Although Carl F. H. Henry is the better-known figure today, Binkley's name carried much weight as a leading Christian ethicist in the mid-twentieth century. For example, his 1948 *The Churches and the Social Conscience* was part of a series that included scholars from the University of California at Los Angeles, Yale University, the University of Chicago, Oberlin College, Union Theological Seminary. Binkley's inclusion in this lineup compiled of esteemed sacred and secular institutions speaks to his credibility as a leading Christian ethicist. Further, this essay highlights the progressive Southern Baptist tradition that Olin Binkley represented and is often neglected in modern scholarship, seeking to call attention to and fill that lacuna.¹

Second, this comparison focuses primarily on Henry's *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (1947) and Binkley's *Victory Unto Victory* (1945) and *The Churches and Their Social Conscience* (1948). Comparing these small books explores the differences between two contemporary theologians writing on the same topic at the same time from different perspectives. Carl Henry represents the fundamentalist-evangelical movement, and Olin Binkley represents the progressive Southern Baptist tradition. The comparison of their books, supplemented with their later writings and lecture notes, demonstrates Henry and Binkley's different approaches

¹ For more on progressive Southern Baptist social engagement, see John Lee Eighmy, *Churches in Cultural Captivity: A History of the Social Attitudes of Southern Baptists* (University of Tennessee Press, 1987); David Stricklin, *A Genealogy of Dis-sent: Southern Baptist Protest in the Twentieth Century* (The University of Press of Kentucky, 1999). See also Larry McSwain and William Lloyd Allen, *Twentieth Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics* (Mercer University Press, 2008). Interestingly, McSwain and Allen include neither Henry nor Binkley, though Binkley is mentioned in the chapter on Henlee H. Barnett.

to social engagement. Binkley blended sociological insights with a scientific interpretation of Scripture to address social sins, whereas Henry appealed to propositional truths in the Bible's divine revelation as the source of ethics and social engagement.

Introducing the Context and Characters

The Post-War Cultural Context

On August 6 and 9, 1945, the United States of America unleashed the destructive forces of atomic bombs on Japan. The preceding horrors of two world wars, a world-wide economic depression, and the Holocaust, proved the optimism of postmillennialism and theological liberalism shortsighted. These theological traditions failed to solve the world's problems. Significant parts of Europe and Asia required post-war reconstruction. Yet these regions were not alone; American Christianity also underwent reconstruction. Neither fundamentalism's emphasis on separatism nor Protestant liberalism's emphasis on humanity's innate goodness could address the horrors of war, economic depression, and genocide. Fundamentalism and liberalism were forced to reconcile with a new cultural moment.

The need for Christian engagement in the new cultural moment coincided with the renewed rise of fundamentalism. As the fundamentalist movement gained prominence in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it began to experience schism. Although the movement was never truly united, it split into distinct ideological camps in the mid-1950s. One side of the movement wished to separate itself from perceived corrupt and modernistic denominations. The other side retained a commitment to the fundamentals of the Christian faith, but instead of separating from culture, this group sought to influence and transform culture.² This split led to the distinction between the terms "fundamentalist" and "evangelical."³ Fol-

² George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 3rd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2022), 289.

³ "Evangelicalism" is a loaded term. This study relies on David Bebbington's quadrilateral to define evangelicalism. Bebbington understands evangelicals to emphasize (1) Biblicism, (2) crucicentrism, (3) conversionism, and (4) activism. See David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Routledge, 1989), 2–3.

lowing this split, "fundamentalist" referred to the separatists, and "evangelical" referred to those who sought to engage the culture.⁴ As the intellectual leader of this group, Carl Henry helped centralize and unite evangelicals around "a powerful and culturally influential white male elite."⁵ Simultaneously, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) entered a heyday of unprecedented growth and expansion. Between 1942 and 1963, the SBC's membership doubled from 5.4 million to 10.4 million.⁶ Southern Baptist elites who led the Convention's entities were theological progressives. Olin Binkley stood tall among these progressives as a leading thinker, optimistic that Southern Baptist progressives could lead in rebuilding society.

Carl F. H. Henry

Born to German immigrants on January 22, 1913, Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry grew up in Long Island, New York. He graduated from Wheaton College with a BA (1938) and an MA (1941), and from Northern Baptist Theological Seminary with a BD (1941) and ThD (1945), and he later completed a PhD at Boston University.⁷ As a student at Wheaton College, the young academic became frustrated with the assigned textbook for his ethics course. The book, J. S. Mackenzie's *A Manual of Ethics*, "skirted the ethics of revelation," allotting only one page to the discussion of Christian ethics and only referencing Jesus Christ in relation to Buddha and Kant.⁸ His doctoral studies of ethics at Boston University "swung the pendulum in the opposite direction" toward idealism with a "gentlemanly distaste" for ethics rooted in revealed religion.⁹ These experiences led

⁴ Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 290. This split occurred in the mid-1950s. Thus, literature written in the early twentieth century often uses "fundamentalist" and "evangelical" synonymously. The words continued to grow with the complexity of the movement, thus contemporary usage no longer corresponds with the mid-to-late twentieth-century use of the terms.

⁵ Matthew Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 195.

⁶ Anthony Chute, Nathan Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (B&H Academic, 2015), 262.

⁷ James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Theology: A Four Century Study* (Mercer University Press, 2009), 515–16.

⁸ Carl F. H. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Eerdmans, 1957), 16.

⁹ Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 16.

Henry to formulate a system of Christian ethics based on “a comprehensive revealed ethic, full-orbed as Christian Theology.”¹⁰

In 1947, Henry helped establish Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, where he and his colleagues sought to reform the fundamentalist movement.¹¹ Henry taught at Fuller until 1956 when Billy Graham invited him to become the editor of *Christianity Today*. He edited the periodical for eleven years but left the organization over differing visions for the magazine’s direction.¹² The next era of Henry’s life proved very productive. He taught in various institutions, started researching and writing *God, Revelation and Authority*, and advocated for evangelical social action through World Vision.¹³ Through personal contact and his writings, Henry mentored a new generation of evangelical leaders, providing them with a philosophical and theological framework for engaging culture from a theologically conservative perspective. Henry died in his sleep at his home in Watertown, Wisconsin on December 7, 2003, at the age of 90.¹⁴

Olin T. Binkley

Born August 8, 1908, Olin Trivette Binkley grew up in rural Nash County, North Carolina. His parents were farmers, and his father was a bi-vocational Baptist pastor. Binkley enrolled at Wake Forest College at age sixteen and graduated in 1928 with a double major in English and Greek.¹⁵ Wake Forest College President William Louis Poteat taught Binkley biological evolution and its compatibility with Scripture, leaving a

¹⁰ Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics*, 16. See also Richard J. Mouw, “Toward a Full-Orbed Evangelical Ethic: The Pioneering Contribution of Carl F. H. Henry,” in *Essential Evangelicalism*, ed. Matthew J. Hall and Owen Strachan (Crossway, 2015). Mouw’s chapter expands on Henry’s quote in *Christian Personal Ethics*.

¹¹ George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1987), 57.

¹² R. Albert Mohler, Jr., “Carl F. H. Henry,” in *Baptist Theologians*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Broadman, 1990), 521.

¹³ “Carl F. H. Henry,” 521.

¹⁴ Beth Spring, “Carl F. H. Henry, Theologian and First Editor of Christianity Today, Dies at 90,” *Christianity Today*, December 1, 2003. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2003/12/carl-fh-henry-theologian-and-first-editor-of-christianity-today/>. Oddly, the *Christianity Today* website dates the article as December 1, 2003, though Henry did not die until December 7, 2003.

¹⁵ Olin T. Binkley, “Oral History Interview of Olin T. Binkley,” by John F. Loftis, 1978. Archives and Special Collections, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky.

lasting impression on Binkley.¹⁶ He moved to Louisville, Kentucky and completed his Bachelor of Divinity degree at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. At both Wake Forest College and Southern Seminary, Binkley learned a critical interpretation of Scripture and a social application of the gospel. After seminary, he completed a PhD in sociology and ethics at Yale Divinity School in 1933.

Binkley joined the Wake Forest College faculty, teaching until 1944 when he became professor of Christian Ethics and Sociology at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.¹⁷ Upon the establishment of the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS) in Wake Forest, North Carolina in 1950, the SEBTS Board of Trustees asked Binkley to be the seminary’s first president. Binkley declined but joined the SEBTS faculty in 1952 as Professor of Christian Ethics and Sociology.¹⁸

The Southeastern faculty looked to Binkley as the intellectual leader of the seminary. Olin Binkley, not President Sydnor Stealey, delivered the opening lecture of the seminary’s second term in the Fall of 1952. Binkley spoke on “the fundamental emphases in [Southeastern’s] educational program.”¹⁹ He indicated that the seminary existed to teach “a coherent interpretation of the Christian message and mission in a responsible society.” Continuing, Binkley stated the administration and faculty hoped that Southeastern “will help to advance the gospel of Christ and the ethic of righteousness and love which issues out of it.”²⁰ From the beginning, SEBTS was missional, and that mission contained a social application of the gospel.²¹ Binkley’s vision of social engagement marked the seminary’s

¹⁶ Binkley Oral History. Binkley’s dissertation, which was inspired by Poteat, is entitled “The Anti-evolution Movement in Relation to Public Education in the United States.” For a new treatment of Poteat, see Paul A Sanchez, *New Christianity for the New South: William Louis Poteat and Liberal Religion in the Baptist South* (The University of South Carolina Press, 2026).

¹⁷ Binkley Oral History.

¹⁸ Keith Harper, Josh S. Pruitt, and Faith Steele, *Building a Great Commission Seminary: Different by Design: A Brief History of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary* (Southeastern, 2025), 31–34, 50–51.

¹⁹ Olin T. Binkley, “Fundamental Emphases,” *Biblical Recorder*, October 4, 1952.

²⁰ Binkley, “Fundamental Emphases.”

²¹ “Missional” is a contested term. In this essay, “missional” means that Southeastern was founded with Christian missions in mind. However, the school’s understanding of what comprises missions changed over time. At its founding, Southeastern understood Christian missions to contain an element of

understanding of mission.

Southeastern's trustees elected Binkley as the school's first dean in 1958 and its second president in 1964. Theologically, Binkley was neither liberal nor fundamentalist; he held evangelical commitments to gospel proclamation and adhered to neo-orthodox theology with a social gospel ethic.²² Binkley retired as president of Southeastern in 1974, and he retained the title of president emeritus until his death on August 27, 1999, at the age of 91.²³

Whereas Henry's influence is seen as a writer and public theologian, Binkley's influence is seen most clearly in the academic structures he built. Binkley's greatest contribution was shaping Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary into the progressive Southern Baptist educational institution. As seminary professor and administrator, Binkley primarily produced students who took his ethical framework into their pulpits, communities, and classrooms. Leading twentieth-century Southern Baptist ethicist Henlee H. Barnett credited Olin Binkley as the "most influential figure" in his intellectual development.²⁴

Theological Context of the Twentieth Century

Modernism

Olin Binkley existed squarely in the progressive Wake Forest College tradition that sought to reconcile faith and science to appeal to the intellect of modern humanity. Although Binkley held strong evangelical sym-

social Christianity. Southeastern's early faculty understood "mission" to include elements of societal transformation. They affirmed that the gospel redeems humankind and that it speaks to social ills. For more, See Harper, Pruitt, and Steele, *Building a Great Commission Seminary*, 243–45.

²² Josh S. Pruitt, "A Rural Social Gospel: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary's Church-Community Development Program as a Means of Southern Regional Development, 1953–1978" (MA thesis, Adams State University, 2025), 44–52. See also Harper, Pruitt, and Steele, *Building a Great Commission Seminary*, 31.

²³ Lee Weeks, "Southeastern's 2nd President, Olin T. Binkley, dies at age 91," *Baptist Press*, August 27, 1999. <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/southeasterns-2nd-president-olin-t-binkley-dies-at-age-91/>.

²⁴ Ronald D. Sisk, "Henlee Hilux Barnett (1911–2004): Principist in the Southern Seminary Tradition," in *Twentieth Century Shapers of Baptist Social Ethics*, ed. Larry McSwain and William Lloyd Allen (Mercer University Press, 2008), 82. See also Henlee Hilux Barnett, *A Pilgrimage of Faith: My Story* (Mercer University Press, 2004), 49–53. Barnett studied under Binkley at Wake Forest College, and Binkley supervised Barnett's doctoral studies at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

pathies, he had one foot planted in modernism and emphasized a "reasonable and righteous" faith.²⁵ He felt that modernism emphasized human intellect at the cost of personal faith. Binkley valued science and an intelligent interpretation of the Bible, but he also valued the Bible itself. Although not a full-fledged modernist, Binkley was modernistic. For Binkley, modernism was not a threat; it was a tool that could be used effectively.

Binkley epitomized post-war Southern Baptist progressivism. Mid-twentieth-century Southern Baptist progressive theology limited the scope of Scripture's inspiration to the religious sphere. This narrow view of inspiration allowed progressives to present Christianity as credible to the modern scientific mind while maintaining reverence for Jesus and the Bible. Notably, Southern Baptist progressives emphasized the social application of the gospel, especially in civil rights, income inequality, social welfare, and the peace movement.²⁶ This emphasis is seen in Binkley's social ethic.

Although Binkley expressed some comfort with modernism, Henry strongly opposed it. In *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, he stated that fundamentalists proclaimed the gospel but had neglected its social implications. Modernists, however, had dropped the supernatural aspects of the gospel while retaining *only* the gospel's social teachings.²⁷ Although this assessment is overly simplistic, Henry's point is relevant: both fundamentalism and modernism had neglected important aspects of Christianity. According to Henry, both modernism and progressive Baptist theology failed to recognize the authority of the Bible as God's self-revelation.

Resurgent Fundamentalism

The fundamentalist movement retreated from the public eye, losing its momentum after infamous Scopes Trial (1925), but it spent the 1930s and 1940s building interdenominational coalitions to combat modernism within established Protestant denominations. During this interlude between the Scopes Trial and the foundation of the National Association of

²⁵ Olin Binkley, Note, no date, Olin T. Binkley Papers, MS 460 Box 22, Folder 1, Special Collections & Archives, Z. Smith Reynolds Library, Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, N.C., USA (hereafter WFU Archives).

²⁶ Gregory A. Wills, "Progressive Theology and Southern Baptist Controversies of the 1950s and 1960s," *SBJT* 7.1 (Spring 2003): 13.

²⁷ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Eerdmans, 1947), 18.

Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942, many fundamentalists focused their attention on building institutional networks of Bible institutes, radio programming, and parachurch organizations.²⁸ Fundamentalists fought to preserve doctrinal purity in essential Christian doctrines: Jesus's virgin birth, his miracles, his bodily resurrection, his substitutionary atonement, his second coming, and the authority of Scripture—especially the inerrancy of Scripture.²⁹

Olin Binkley expressed concern over resurgent fundamentalism, especially in the US South. Carl Henry's ministry primarily focused in the northern and western United States, but Binkley's concerns likely still applied. Binkley noticed three trends in religious thought impacting the US South: resurgent fundamentalism, defensive liberalism, and the new orthodoxy.³⁰ Binkley held varying degrees of sympathy with aspects of each of these trends. Nevertheless, "mature religious thinkers" needed to respond to those movements by encouraging "an affirmative attitude toward religious faith and a deeper perception of its relation to scientific and intellectual disciplines."³¹ Mature Christian leaders needed "to clarify the role of the church in its community" by bringing "the mind of Christ effectively to bear upon personal, political, and economic decisions," advised Binkley. Going further, he charged intellectual leaders to replace "fear-motivated behavior" and "to confront a radically secularized situation in which a new society is emerging with a Christian interpretation of

²⁸ Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 3. Matthew Sutton has contested this claim. See Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014). Although Sutton seeks to downplay the importance of the Scopes Trial in fundamentalism (p. xiii), he later refers to the trial as having a "central role in facilitating the redefinition of fundamentalism" (p. 176). Further, Sutton writes, "Despite the claims of post-World War II evangelicals such as Carl Henry, fundamentalists never expressed indifference to the world around them ... they never retreated" (p. xiii). Nevertheless, one is hard-pressed to discount Carl Henry's firsthand account of the changing tides of fundamentalism. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience* serves as a primary source document proving fundamentalism's lack of social engagement. Regarding whether fundamentalists had retreated from engaging society, this essay sides with Henry's account of fundamentalism's failure to engage the cultural challenges of post-war America found in *Uneasy Conscience* over Sutton's assertions.

²⁹ George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Eerdmans, 1987), 4.

³⁰ Olin Binkley, "A Subject for Research: Religion in the South," MS 460, Box 45, Folder 2, WFU Archives. Notably, Binkley crossed out "the new orthodoxy" and replaced it with "critical orthodoxy."

³¹ Binkley, "A Subject for Research."

history and a positive, prophetic message."³² Binkley's statement seems targeted toward fundamentalism's escapism and liberalism's comfort with secular society. Both Carl Henry and Olin Binkley offered alternative methods of engaging the post-war culture.

A Comparison of Carl Henry and Olin Binkley's Social Engagement

Henry and Binkley's Books on Social Engagement

Carl Henry was a prolific writer, but his *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* may be his most succinct work, calling for evangelical social engagement. Although his six-volume *God, Revelation, and Authority* details his mature understanding of social engagement, *The Uneasy Conscience* provides an early glimpse at Henry's thinking during the mid-to-late 1940s. During that same period, Olin Binkley wrote two short books outlining his vision of social engagement. In 1945 Binkley wrote *From Victory Unto Victory*, and in 1948 he wrote *The Churches and the Social Conscience*. Although both Henry and Binkley emphasized the church's need for social engagement, comparing their post-war works provides helpful insight into their distinct understandings of social engagement.

The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism

In his 1947 preface to *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, Carl Henry noted that, in the post-war era, "The hour is ripe ... for a rediscovery of the Scriptures and of the meaning of the Incarnation for the human race."³³ Indeed, Henry's conscience was troubled because fundamentalists—people who had established themselves as biblicists—had failed to apply the teachings of the Bible to the problems facing contemporary society. Too often, fundamentalist social engagement had been limited to reactionism and escapism.³⁴

Contrary to perception, Henry argued that fundamentalists did possess a social ethic, though it had been neglected.³⁵ By definition, the fundamentalist (and later the neo-evangelical) movement defined itself by a commitment to the authoritative and inerrant Word of God, but Henry observed that the movement had no social plan to address the evils of the

³² Binkley, "A Subject for Research."

³³ Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Eerdmans, 2003 reprint), xvi.

³⁴ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 3.

³⁵ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 13.

world.³⁶ Liberal Christians had retained an emphasis on social reform but had dropped the supernatural aspects of Scripture. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, maintained an emphasis on the gospel and full biblical authority, but they had stopped emphasizing the gospel's social implications.³⁷ Henry felt that in fundamentalism, the gospel had been divorced from social reform, leaving "the Christian social imperative ... in the hands of those who understand it in sub-Christian terms."³⁸

By the time he wrote *Uneasy Conscience*, Henry had lived through two world wars, a worldwide economic depression, and the use of atomic bombs. Theological liberalism's insistence that the world and humanity were becoming better "had been violently declared false."³⁹ Fundamentalists could no longer simply rail against personal sins; social sins were influencing the world negatively.⁴⁰ The time had come—indeed, it had passed—for fundamentalists to address totalitarianism, racism, and oppressive labor practices among other social ills.⁴¹ "The modern crisis is not basically political, economic or social," wrote Henry, "it is religious."⁴² The solution was not building new social structures, as the liberals had attempted. Rather, the solution was "the proclamation of redeeming grace to sinful humanity."⁴³ Henry affirmed that gospel proclamation provided the solution to society's problems.

Henry believed that if Christians who valued biblical authority "holds itself aloof from the present world predicament, it is doomed to a much reduced role."⁴⁴ Fundamentalists could not simply retreat into their own camps and ignore the world's problems. Separation was not the answer; biblical social engagement rooted in gospel proclamation answered society's questions. They needed to unite with those outside their fundamentalist echo chamber to transform society. Nevertheless, the evangelical gospel "is the most pertinent message" in post-war society.⁴⁵ Henry opposed the separatism common among some fundamentalist, emphasizing the centrality of the gospel in social engagement.

Henry's social engagement is best summarized in his own words:

³⁶ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 2.

³⁷ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 18–19.

³⁸ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 39.

³⁹ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 1.

⁴⁰ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 7.

⁴¹ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 63.

⁴² Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 83.

⁴³ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 84.

⁴⁴ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 63.

⁴⁵ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 85.

Is there political unrest? Seek first, not a Republican victory, or labor victory, but the kingdom of God and his righteousness. Then there will be added ... political rest. Is there economic unrest? Seek first, not an increase of labor wages coupled with shorter hours ... but the divine righteousness; this latter norm will involve fairness for both labor and management.... There is no satisfying rest for modern civilization if it is found in a context of spiritual unrest.... The gospel of redemption is the most pertinent message for our modern weariness, and that many of our other so-called solutions are quite impertinent, to say the least.⁴⁶

Indeed, the undiluted gospel as proclaimed in the authoritative Bible offered the solution to society's problems. Carl Henry believed that the gospel would redeem the sinner, and the sinner could affect Christian social reform within the society.

From Victory Unto Victory and The Churches and the Social Conscience

Olin Binkley did not share Henry's uneasy conscience. Binkley's conscience was at ease because the post-war era provided Southern Baptists with a missionary opportunity to rebuild society through the application of the mind of Christ, interpreted by the integration of Scripture with modern scientific insights. Binkley's post-war set of books presents a progressive Southern Baptist alternative to Carl F. H. Henry's *Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*.

When World War II ended in 1945, Broadman Press published Binkley's second book, *From Victory Unto Victory*. Binkley believed that, in rebuilding post-war society, "the supreme task in this new day is the Christian missionary enterprise," and that American Christians were responsible to expand and express Christianity at home and abroad.⁴⁷ Although military strength helped win the war, Christian social ethics were necessary to rebuild society. Binkley observed that "fundamental changes come, not through surface manipulations and compromises [in politics, economics, and military arrangements], but through the spiritual regeneration of human nature and the renewal of human life by the Spirit of God."⁴⁸ Here, Binkley and Henry agree. They differ, however, in the application of that sentiment.

In a post-war world, Binkley believed Christians had a three-fold mis-

⁴⁶ Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*, 85.

⁴⁷ Olin T. Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory* (Broadman, 1945), Foreword, np.

⁴⁸ Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory*, 24.

sion. First, the Christian's primary objective is "to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to bear in saving power upon the lives of people."⁴⁹ However, Binkley noted elsewhere that "a person is not completely evangelized until he has the Christian attitude toward God, himself, others, and things."⁵⁰ Evangelism was primary in social engagement, but evangelism was not alone.

Second, Christians should educate others "in the mind of Christ."⁵¹ For Binkley, "the mind of Christ" comprised the entirety of Christian ethics and repeatedly used the phrase in reference to his understanding of social engagement. The "mind of Christ" was more than a scriptural reference for Binkley; it was the essence of the gospel. The mind of Christ is the "message of Jesus, the revelation of love and truth."⁵² Pursuing the mind of Christ entailed studying Scripture and through observing the social sciences. Pointing toward his modernistic tendencies, Binkley noted that the mind of Christ "includes the insights and the laws which the saints and the scientists have discovered."⁵³ However the saint and scientist were not alone in discerning the mind of Christ; the Holy Spirit's mission is to guide Christians "into a deeper understanding of the mind of Christ."⁵⁴ Binkley's emphasis on the Holy Spirit in discerning truth is prominent in his writings.

Third, Christians should provide social relief. Christians "cannot disregard the hunger, the suffering, the loneliness, the ignorance, and the bondage of men and women for whom Christ died," wrote Binkley. He emphasized that the gospel included evangelism, education, and social engagement. Through this three-pronged mission, Jesus's moral teachings could be applied to the family, community, and socioeconomic order. With this understanding, American Christians could move from victory in war to victory in social engagement. Binkley's conscience was far from uneasy; it was encouraged at the possibilities coming out of World War II.

Demonstrating his prominence as a leader in ethical thought, Binkley was selected as "a distinguished authority" by the National Foundation

⁴⁹ Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory*, 30.

⁵⁰ Olin Binkley, Handwritten note on "Christian Sociology 91, Third Term, Christian Ethics and the Larger Social Life" Notes, circa 1944–1951, MS 460, Box 28, Folder 6, WFU Archives.

⁵¹ Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory*, 34.

⁵² Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory*, 34.

⁵³ Binkley, *From Victory Unto Victory*, 34.

⁵⁴ Olin Binkley, "Our Helper in World Missions," MS 460, Box 28, Folder 8, WFU Archives.

for Education in American Citizenship to contribute a volume to the Fundamental American Principles Series on Religion in 1948, just one year after the publication of Carl Henry's *Uneasy Conscience*.⁵⁵ Binkley's thesis for the book is that religion—specifically the Christian religion—is a powerful social force.⁵⁶ Christianity functions as a social control through its moral and ethical standards of conduct, and it is a determining factor in social change.

Throughout the book, Binkley offers examples of Christianity influencing society for moral good. He observed that following the American Revolution, crime and immorality increased due to the prominence of Hume and Paine's teachings.⁵⁷ The "Evangelical Awakening" at the dawn of the nineteenth century, however, brought a renewed emphasis on Christian morality through benevolence societies, antislavery efforts, and enterprises focused on temperance, prohibition, and humanitarianism.⁵⁸ Binkley's brief overview of Christian morality's influence on the United States is very brief and very selective. Nevertheless, his point remains: Christianity is a powerful social force.

Continuing further, Binkley considers the social gospel movement in rather friendly terms. Binkley considered it a "minority movement" within the church that sought to recover the "social emphasis [found] in early Christianity."⁵⁹ He understood the social gospel as exemplified by Walter Rauschenbusch to exhibit Jesus's moral insights "in the family, in the community, and in the economic order."⁶⁰ In an era coming out of economic depression and world war, such emphases were needed in American society.

Binkley was a realist; he understood that other Christians disagreed with his progressive view of social engagement. He observed that Christians disagree on the church's role in social engagement. Some believed the church must work for social betterment whereas others believed the church's primary function was to proclaim the gospel.⁶¹ Nevertheless, as

⁵⁵ Samuel R. Harrell, "Preface," in *The Churches and the Social Conscience* (National Foundation Press, 1948), v. Other scholars in the series represented distinguished intuitions such as the University of California at Los Angeles, Columbia University, Yale University, the University of Chicago, Oberlin College, and Union Theological Seminary.

⁵⁶ Olin T. Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience* (National Foundation Press, 1948), 3.

⁵⁷ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 8–9.

⁵⁸ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 8–19.

⁵⁹ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 23.

⁶⁰ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 23.

⁶¹ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 31.

a Southern Baptist leader, he understood the SBC possessed the responsibility to lead its constituency in social thought and behavior. Even though the majority of Southern Baptist church members did not share the progressive social vision, Binkley held that “a minority” could “insist that the chief social task of the churches is the development of a more sensitive social conscience among their own members.”⁶² Progressive SBC leaders believed gospel mission included the social uplift of Southern Baptist churches.

Binkley understood the Christian’s social conscience to be a powerful force in the nation’s life.⁶³ He believed the gospel could “remake human nature and human society.” His conscience was at ease. Binkley and other SBC progressives sought to apply the gospel’s teachings to lost souls and society.

The Basis of Their Social Engagement

Both Henry and Binkley believed Christians should engage culture with the gospel, yet they disagreed methodologically *how* to engage society with the gospel. Carl Henry based his social engagement in God’s self-revelation of himself in Scripture, whereas Binkley based his social engagement in the mind of Christ discerned by Scripture and science. These themes can be seen in their post-war books but is fleshed out more in their later writings and notes.

Carl Henry rooted his social engagement in God’s special revelation of himself in Scripture, which he systematized propositionally. Henry wrote, “Divine revelation is the source of all truth.”⁶⁴ At the core of Henry’s theology of social engagement is the idea that God has revealed himself to humankind in Scripture, and humanity can understand God by the propositional truths revealed therein. He understood social welfare and liberation to be consequences of gospel proclamation. Gospel proclamation can result in “the blessing and liberation of the hungry, the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed,” but the gospel itself does not liberate the hungry, poor, or oppressed.⁶⁵ Henry considered the church to be a “new social entity of regenerate humans participating in the eternal life of the kingdom.”⁶⁶ For Henry, the church addressed social needs corporately as a result of its redemption.

Binkley held that humankind’s knowledge of God comes through his

⁶² Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 34.

⁶³ Binkley, *The Churches and the Social Conscience*, 33–34.

⁶⁴ Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, vol. I, *God Who Speaks and Shows: Preliminary Considerations* (Crossway, 1999), 1:215.

⁶⁵ Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:63.

⁶⁶ Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:69.

self-revelation through history, through Christ, through obedience to God’s will, and through the Bible.⁶⁷ Notably, Binkley uses revelatory language only in association with history and Jesus Christ. “Christ is the perfect revelation of God’s character and purpose,” wrote Binkley.⁶⁸ He understood all revelation to be special revelation. He taught that revelation “does not require the Christian mind to interpret God’s truth as identical with a human statement of it.”⁶⁹ Although Henry affirmed that God has communicated to all humanity through general revelation, only special revelation through Scripture conveys “the propositional content of God’s redemptive revelation.”⁷⁰

Binkley posited that in Jesus, “the mind of God was disclosed.”⁷¹ In his lecture notes, he wrote that “God’s supreme act of self-disclosure is seen in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”⁷² God has spoken to humanity “through his mighty acts in the history of Israel and through his Son,” and the Bible offers a record of those events.⁷³ Elsewhere, Binkley wrote, “The Bible is the book in which the self-disclosure of God ... is recorded.”⁷⁴ Binkley’s view of inspiration is weak compared to Henry’s view. Binkley understood the Bible to be “an inspired and unique body of learning.”⁷⁵ The Holy Spirit enlivens the message and events of the Bible, giving them “meaning for us in our particular life situation.”⁷⁶ Binkley’s understanding of Scripture aligns with the experiential understanding of Scripture common among theological liberals.

Pursuing the mind of Christ provided Binkley with the standard by which Christians should engage the culture. The Bible, for Binkley, was secondary to the mind of Christ. The Bible served as a valuable tool in discerning the mind of Christ, but it was not primary. Scripture supplemented with knowledge of modern science and sociology provided the basis of Binkley’s social engagement.

⁶⁷ Olin T. Binkley, *How to Study the Bible* (Convention Press, 1969), 4–6.

⁶⁸ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 5.

⁶⁹ Olin T. Binkley, “Revelation and the Christian Faith,” in *Approaches to the Understanding of God* (Wake Forest University Press, 1977), 36.

⁷⁰ Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 3:460.

⁷¹ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 5.

⁷² Olin T. Binkley, “A Word Concerning Christ,” MS 460, Box 28, Folder 6, WFU Archives.

⁷³ Binkley, “A Word Concerning Christ”; Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 6.

⁷⁴ Olin T. Binkley, “Revelation and the Christian Faith,” in *Approaches to the Understanding of God* (Wake Forest University Press, 1977), 35–36 (emphasis added).

⁷⁵ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 9.

⁷⁶ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 26.

Though Binkley did not have a strong view of inspiration, he valued the Bible and considered it powerful. He felt that Scripture spoke to society's spiritual and social needs. Binkley believed that careful study of Scripture resulted in steadfast reverence for God, loyalty to Jesus, and devotion to the church and vocation. He understood the Bible to be a source of encouragement, comfort, and hope for the Christian.⁷⁷ However, he reduced Scripture from God's special revelation to "moral and religious insight" that can be understood "with disciplined minds in the Christian fellowship under the guidance of the Holy Spirit."⁷⁸

Binkley emphasized faith, not reason, in knowing the will of God, insisting that "The God of the Bible is not an abstraction or an idea to be known solely through an intellectual process of observation and contemplation."⁷⁹ Nevertheless, he emphasized that biblical interpreters must exercise intelligence in seeking to understand Scripture. Besmirching fundamentalism's overly emotional faith and practice, Binkley stated that intelligent biblical interpretation is necessary because intelligence exerts control over "powerful emotions," delivering readers from arrogance and helping them to understand the purpose of God.⁸⁰ An intelligent interpretation of Scripture stems from a critical, "scientific study of biblical documents *and* of human society."⁸¹

Although both Carl Henry and Olin Binkley agreed that the Christian faith speaks to social ills, they disagreed on *how* the church should speak to those issues. Binkley adapted the insights of sociology with a scientific interpretation of Scripture to address social sins. Henry appealed to the Bible's divine inspiration and propositional truth to provide humankind with truth claims by which to live.

Conclusion

Post-war reconstruction was not limited to war-ravaged countries in Europe and Asia. American Christianity also experienced something of a reconstruction following the world wars and the Great Depression. Fundamentalism's penchant for separatism and theological liberalism's optimistic hope in human goodness proved insufficient to address the needs of the atomic era. The theological traditions represented by Carl F. H. Henry—neo-evangelicalism—and Olin T. Binkley—Southern Baptist progressivism—both sought to reform the errors of fundamentalism and

⁷⁷ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 10–11.

⁷⁸ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 27.

⁷⁹ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 5.

⁸⁰ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 25.

⁸¹ Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 25 (emphasis added).

liberalism and to address the social and spiritual needs of contemporary society.

Coming out of World War II, Carl Henry's conscience was uneasy. Christians who claimed to value the authority of Scripture had, in his view, failed to apply the Bible's social teachings. Simultaneously, emboldened by growth and expansion of the Southern Baptist Convention, Olin Binkley's conscience was untroubled. Post-war SBC leaders believed the time was ripe to enact a progressive, Baptist social vision. Men like Binkley recognized that the average Southern Baptist was conservative in both theology and social issues. Nevertheless, they believed the contemporary cultural moment required progressive leaders to move conservative, if not backward, churches toward "a more sensitive social conscience."⁸² The social application of the gospel required progressive Baptist leaders to enlighten fundamentalists and conservatives to the mind of Christ, which Binkley interpreted through the integration of Scripture with modern scientific insights.

⁸² Binkley, *How to Study the Bible*, 34.

John Gill on the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: Retrieving a Baptist Nicene Ecclesiology

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Abstract: *The task of this essay is to focus on John Gill (1697–1771) to determine whether his ecclesiology is catholic (i.e., universal). The measure of a catholic ecclesiology will be the four marks of the church found in the Nicene Creed (one, holy, catholic, and apostolic). This essay will examine Gill's writings, specifically his Complete Body of Divinity and selections from his Exposition of the New Testament and his Exposition of the Book of Solomon's Song. I will then argue that Gill's ecclesiology is in harmony with the Nicene Creed and emphasizes the unity and catholicity of the church. Though his comments on the holiness and apostolicity of the church are less frequent, he does affirm these marks of the church as well. This focus on the four marks from the Nicene Creed distinguishes this essay from previous articles on Gill's catholicity.*

Key Words: *apostolic, catholic, ecclesiology, holy, marks of the church, Nicene Creed, one, unity*

The case for Baptist catholicity may appear oxymoronic to some, but increasingly Baptist theologians are making the case that on all major Christian doctrines Baptists are planted firmly within the bounds of the small “c” catholic faith. Nowhere are Baptists more distinctive from other Christian traditions, though, than in their ecclesiology. Therefore, in making the case for Baptist catholicity, ecclesiology must be addressed. If Baptists prove themselves to be catholic in their theology proper, Christology, and so forth but are found to be decidedly un-catholic in their ecclesiology, then Baptist catholicity will only ever be a partial affair applying to certain doctrines. If instead Baptists are demonstrably catholic even in their approach to ecclesiology, then this will go a long way toward demonstrating the catholicity of Baptist theology without removing or denying Baptist distinctives.¹

¹ Christopher Green makes the same point with admirable concision when he says, “Baptist ecclesiology must be catholic if Baptist theology as such is to be catholic in any meaningful sense” (“Baptist Catholicity in the Ecclesiology of John Gill [1697–1771],” *Themelios* 49.3 [2024: 654].

To demonstrate Baptist catholicity in ecclesiology across Baptist history and theology would require a lengthy volume examining the theology and practice of various theologians and churches. The goal of this essay, however, is much more modest: to determine whether and to what extent the ecclesiology of John Gill (1697–1771) is catholic.² For the purposes of this essay, the measure of catholicity in ecclesiology will be the four marks of the church found in the Nicene Creed: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Therefore, this essay will examine the writings of John Gill, specifically his *Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity* as well as selections from his *Exposition of the New Testament* and his *Exposition of the Book of Solomon's Song* with particular relevance to these four marks. I will then argue that Gill shows no signs of dismissing any of the four marks of the church found in the Nicene Creed, neither does he dismiss any of the four marks as incompatible with a Baptist ecclesiology. On the contrary, in agreement with the Nicene Creed, Gill puts great emphasis upon the unity and catholicity of the church and though his comments on the holiness and apostolicity of the church are considerably less frequent, he does affirm these marks of the church as well.

The focus on the four marks of the church found in the Nicene Creed distinguishes this essay from previous articles on Gill's catholicity by David Rathel and Christopher Green. Rathel argues that “Gill's works exhibit a spirit of catholicity” by which he means “they reveal an attempt to employ the resources of the broader Christian tradition in his overall theological project.”³ Rathel points to “two examples of Gill's use of the tradition” to make his case, namely, “his remarks on the value of the rule of faith and his reliance on the grammar provided by the patristic period in his discussions on the Trinity.”⁴ This essay will build on Rathel's insights on Gill and the rule of faith in order to argue that Gill esteemed the Nicene Creed and found its extrabiblical language not only permissible but necessary. Green, like Rathel, also argues Gill's “writings exhibit a spirit of Baptist catholicity that takes seriously a broader Christian tradition of

² David Rathel suggests that “[Gill's] inclusion could only serve to further the credibility of any project that wishes to highlight the presence of a spirit of catholicity among earlier Baptists.... [Gill] offers one of the most sophisticated considerations of the tradition from any Baptist of his era.... Contemporary scholars interested in historic examples of Baptist catholicity should give his writings more attention” (“A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity: The Scriptures and the Tradition in the Theology of John Gill,” *Baptist Quarterly* 49.3 [2018]: 115–16). Christopher Green's work cited above is already following this counsel and this essay aims to make some contribution in this direction as well.

³ Rathel, “A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity,” 109.

⁴ Rathel, “A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity,” 109.

Christian theological reflection,” and that “Gill steadfastly maintained a positive engagement with the catholic tradition.”⁵ Green, who also acknowledges building on Rathel’s work, focuses his claim of catholicity for Gill on his “use of sources in his ecclesiological writings,” specifically his “use of patristic and Reformed paedobaptist sources instead of credobaptist sources in the presentation of his ecclesiology.”⁶ Unlike Green’s work, this essay will not focus on Gill’s use of sources and their origin (whether credobaptist or paedobaptist) but will instead argue for Gill’s catholicity based on his agreement with a singular catholic source, the Nicene Creed, in its articulation of the nature of the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

It is not the aim of this essay to address the catholicity of Gill’s ecclesiological practice. Affirming the four marks of the church does not mean Gill regards each visible church as equally valid or faithful to Scripture, nor does it require that Gill interpret or understand each of the four marks in the same way a Roman Catholic or Anglican theologian might.⁷ Affirming the four marks, along with others who recognize the Nicene Creed, does provide a common ground for recognizing and articulating the fundamental characteristics of the church. If this common ground can be established, then from this commonality agreements and disagreements can be debated and discussed. Consequently, this essay will not address Gill’s views on who may participate in the Lord’s Supper in a particular church, whether baptisms performed in other churches or other denominations would be accepted as valid in his church, the extent to which various forms of church government may be justified by Scripture, or what Gill thought about sharing the pulpit with a minister of another church. Instead, this essay aims to demonstrate that John Gill affirmed in accord with the Nicene Creed that the church is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic.

In order to appreciate Gill’s ecclesiology as catholic in the sense of being in harmony with the Nicene Creed, it is necessary to begin with Gill’s stance on the rule of faith and creeds more generally from his particular position as a Baptist theologian. From there, his remarks on the unity and catholicity of the church must be observed. Finally, though they appear less frequently, his work must be plumbed for any remarks related

⁵ Green, “Baptist Catholicity in the Ecclesiology of John Gill,” 644.

⁶ Green, “Baptist Catholicity in the Ecclesiology of John Gill,” 644.

⁷ For Gill’s view of a well-ordered particular church, see the section “Of the nature of a gospel-church” especially what he says about “the *form* of it” in John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: Or A System of Evangelical Truths, Deduced from the Sacred Scriptures*, new ed., 2 vols. (Tegg & Company, 1839), 2:559 (emphasis original).

to the holiness and apostolicity of the church. With all these pieces in place, it will be evident that Gill’s ecclesiology is Nicene while remaining Baptist. Therefore, Baptists may benefit from retrieving Gill’s Nicene ecclesiology for the purpose of ecclesiological renewal without fear of compromising the distinctives of Baptist ecclesiology.⁸

John Gill on the Rule of Faith and the Creeds

Gill does not make frequent mention of the Nicene Creed. Part of the reason for this may be an accommodation to his audience since he acknowledges early in his *Body of Divinity* that “Formulas and articles of faith, creeds, confessions, catechisms, and summaries of divine truths, are greatly decried in our age.”⁹ Gill pushes back on this spirit of the age in various ways and in Muller’s words “adopts an apologetic stance” in order to defend their use.¹⁰ For example, Gill cites several passages of Scripture, including the *locus classicus* of the analogy of faith, Rom 6:17, when he argues, “Mention is made in the New Testament of a form of doctrine delivered, and a form of sound words that had been heard and was to be held fast, and of a proportion or analogy of faith.”¹¹ He also argues for the reliability of the Apostles’ Creed and the existence of a rule of faith when he says, “The apostles’ creed might not be composed by [the apostles themselves], nor so early as their time; yet the substance of it was agreeable to their doctrine, and therefore called theirs; and there was a *regula fidei*, a rule of faith, very near it in words, received, embraced, and professed very early in the Christian church.”¹² Gill does not see this early

⁸ Green makes a similar point while arguing for Gill’s ecclesiological catholicity from a different angle than the one pursued in this essay. He says, “Gill steadfastly maintained a positive engagement with the catholic tradition in light of his Baptist distinctives, a methodological approach in which we may discern a certain depth of commitment to catholicity. Gill thus provides a helpful model for contemporary Baptist theologians, charting a path that, I will argue, is worthy of emulation” (“Baptist Catholicity in the Ecclesiology of John Gill,” 644).

⁹ John Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 1:viii.

¹⁰ Richard A. Muller, “John Gill and the Reformed Tradition: A Study in the Reception of Protestant Orthodoxy in the Eighteenth Century,” in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Brill, 1997), 57. For a more detailed look at Gill’s response to the shifts in theology he faced in his day see the context of this quote where Muller says that Gill’s is “a theology written in the wake of the Pietist critique of orthodoxy and, closer to home for Gill, of the latitudinarian spirit and increasingly eclectic philosophizing of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century” (p. 57).

¹¹ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 1:x.

¹² Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 1:xi.

development of doctrinal summaries as problematic but as a positive good.

David Rathel notes that the “digression on the rule of faith at the beginning of Gill’s systematic theology is rather unusual for a work by an eighteenth-century Baptist minister,” which highlights its significance for our purposes.¹³ Indeed, Rathel goes on to say that “the significance Gill places on the tradition becomes apparent when one considers the frequency with which the terms analogy or rule of faith appear in his works.”¹⁴ Evidently this was of some importance to Gill.

Gill also addresses something that Rathel says “appears to be a crude form of Biblicism” that opposes the use of words not explicitly found in Scripture.¹⁵ Since the Nicene Creed uses extrabiblical terminology, this criticism would certainly apply to any affirmation of this creed. Gill notes this criticism when he says, “It is strongly pleaded that articles and confessions of faith, in which men are to agree, should be expressed in the bare words of the sacred Scriptures, and that nothing should be considered as a fundamental article that is matter of controversy.”¹⁶ Gill responds by producing a list of reasons why this position is untenable. First, though, he asserts both the unique position accorded to Scripture and the impossibility of explaining the meaning of Scripture without using words not found in Scripture itself. Here is how Gill puts it: “Though we ought to entertain the highest esteem of the words of Scripture ... yet our sense of them cannot be expressed but in words literally varying from them.”¹⁷ In other words, Gill sees the practice of using extrabiblical vocabulary as not only permissible but necessary.

The reason for this insistence on the necessity of using words other than those in Scripture in order to explain Scripture is made clear through one simple example Gill provided, which has undoubted connections to the Nicene Creed. Gill argues that if only the words of Scripture are allowed to be used, then “an Arian cannot be known from an Athanasian; both will say in the words of the Scripture that Christ is the *great God*, the *true God*, and *over all God blessed for ever*; but without expressing themselves

¹³ Rathel, “A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity,” 111.

¹⁴ Rathel, “A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity,” 112. In a footnote he provides his count: “According to my counting, Gill uses the phrase analogy of faith in the content I describe here a total of 31 times in all of his published writings. References to it often appear in his biblical commentaries, particularly his commentaries on the New Testament” (“A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity,” 112n16).

¹⁵ Rathel, “A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity,” 113.

¹⁶ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 1:xii.

¹⁷ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 1:xii.

in their own words, their different sentiments will not be discerned.”¹⁸ The connection to the Nicene Creed is clear since that creed was written specifically for this purpose: to differentiate between Arianism and orthodox Christology. Without naming the Nicene Creed for his potentially creed-resistant audience, he affirms the rightness of the Nicene formulation being made in words outside of Scripture in order to defend the true meaning of Scripture from the distortion of the Arians who quoted the same Scriptures but interpreted them in a radically different manner.¹⁹

Furthermore, Gill suggests the desire to hide unorthodox views may be exactly why some argue for the use of Scripture words only: “Indeed this seems to be the grand reason why it is urged with so much vehemence, by some, that only Scripture words and phrases should be made use of, that their erroneous tenets may not be detected and exposed.”²⁰ Gill even notes the particular word used in the Nicene Creed that was at the root of the difference between these two groups when he says, “The Athanasians had as good a right to use the word *ὁμοουσιος* as the Arians *ὁμοιουσιος*, and thereby explain their sense and defend their doctrine concerning the person of Christ, and his equality with God, against the latter, who introduced a phrase subversive of it.”²¹ If Gill were trying to distance himself from the reliability of the Nicene Creed, he is certainly doing a poor job of it.²² On the contrary, it is clear to those familiar with that creed that Gill is talking about it without naming it.²³ Therefore,

¹⁸ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 1:xiv.

¹⁹ David Rathel notes Gill’s use of “significant fourth century theologians” (p. 70) and that he “drew from the broader Christian tradition, particularly the rich period of the fourth century” (p. 66) but does not seem to see this as a nod to the Nicene Creed itself which was formulated and defended in that same century (“John Gill and the Rule of Faith: A Case Study in the Baptist Retrieval of Tradition,” *STR* 14.2 [Fall 2023]: 66, 70).

²⁰ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 1:xiv.

²¹ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 1:xv.

²² Muller notes that “Gill’s reliance on ... older theologies for doctrinal models was far more profound than his sometimes scanty references indicate, given the strong and clear echoes of the older Reformed theology in his prolegomena and in his Christology, even in places where no references appear.” If that is true it supports the contention here that Gill is alluding to the Nicene Creed even if he does not name or reference it directly here (“John Gill and the Reformed Tradition,” 67).

²³ Gill does mention the council of Nicaea by name four times in *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*. For these three references see pages 1:xv (in

Rathel does not go too far when he says that according to Gill, “When interpreting Scripture and constructing one’s theology, one gains assistance from the manner in which the church universal has expressed the teaching of Scripture, especially in such documents as the creeds.”²⁴ One could even suggest that Rathel’s analysis could go further in making explicit what Gill leaves implicit, namely, his support for the Nicene Creed with its extrabiblical language.

On John Gill’s Interpretive Method

Before turning to Gill’s exegetical and theological comments on particular texts and truths of Scripture, it is worth noting some particular features of his method of interpreting Scripture as it relates to theology and the rule of faith. Thomas Ascol is one of the few to write directly about Gill’s method of interpretation and notes that “perhaps the distinguishing characteristic of Gill’s New Testament exegesis is its overtly theological orientation.”²⁵ This is not only because Gill wrote both a systematic theology and a commentary covering the whole Bible. Rather, Ascol goes on to say that “Gill’s theological understanding always informed his exegesis by operating as the framework for biblical interpretation.”²⁶ This “framework” should be kept in mind when reading Gill’s comments on the text of Scripture. More specifically, Ascol argues that “the analogy of faith plays a crucial role in Gill’s exegetical method.”²⁷

a footnote), 1:229, 2:581, and 2:685. He also mentions the Nicene Creed by name once but only to argue that the descent into hell was “foisted into [the creed] in later times” (*Body of Divinity*, 577). This passage is also referenced by Colton Strother, “Reconsidering John Gill as a Baptist Heir of Reformed Orthodoxy: A Historical and Theological Account,” (PhD diss., Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023), 202. David Rathel suggests that a reference to the Nicene Creed occurs in a passage from Paraeus quoted by Gill, but he offers no indication where this reference to the “Nicene Symbol” occurs in the quotation and it is not immediately obvious (“A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity,” 111). Caleb Hawkins, covering some of the same ground in his article that is being covered here (as any who evaluate Gill on the creeds must), also acknowledges, “Though Gill does not identify the Nicene Creed by name here, the ‘articles of faith’ he describes are clearly a reference to the Nicene Creed” (“Defining the Faith: Contrasting Philip Doddridge and John Gill’s Approaches to the Creedal Tradition,” *The Hanover Review* 2.1 [March 2024]: 58).

²⁴ Rathel, “A Case Study in Baptist Catholicity,” 112.

²⁵ Thomas K. Ascol, “John Gill’s Approach to New Testament Exposition,” in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697–1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Brill, 1997), 124.

²⁶ Ascol, “John Gill’s Approach to New Testament Exposition,” 124.

²⁷ Ascol, “John Gill’s Approach to New Testament Exposition,” 125.

John Gill on the Unity of the Church

One of Gill’s favorite texts for describing the church is Heb 12:23 which speaks of “the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven.”²⁸ This passage, which he understands to refer to the universal church, appears over and over in his writings. He distinguishes between a local church (which he calls “particular”) and the universal church when he says, “This church is but one, though particular churches are many: to this may be applied the words of Christ; *My dove, my undefiled, is but one*, Cant. 6:9; and this is what sometimes is called by divines, the invisible church.”²⁹ The invisible church is the universal church and this universal church is not only united but “one” just as the Nicene Creed declares.

Given the significance of the theme of the unity of the church in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, it is no surprise that Gill has much to say about the unity or oneness of the church in his commentary on that epistle. Commenting on Eph 1:23 which says, “[the church] is his body,” Gill notes that “as an human body is but one, consisting of various members, united to each other, ... so the church of Christ is but one general assembly.”³⁰ By “general assembly” he indicates that Paul is speaking of the universal church which Gill notes is “one.”

Regarding the statement in Eph 2:21 that “the whole structure [which] grows into a holy temple in the Lord,” Gill argues that Paul’s image of a growing temple “is to be understood of all the saints, and people of God; of the whole universal church, which is God’s building; and is a building of a spiritual nature, and will abide for ever.”³¹ The reality of the church’s oneness or unity is present in the words “all” and “whole” as well as the image of a single “building.”

Commenting on Eph 4:3, which says, “Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” Gill notes that, “There is an union between God and his people, and between Christ and his members, and between saints and saints, and the bond of each union is love; and that it is which knits and cements them together; and it is the last of these which is here intended: the saints are united under one head, and are members

²⁸ Unless found in a quote from a work of John Gill, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) (Crossway, 2016).

²⁹ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:560. “Cant.” is an abbreviation for “Canticles,” another term for the Song of Solomon.

³⁰ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3 vols., The Baptist Commentary Series (Mathews and Leigh, 1809), 3:68.

³¹ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3:77.

of one and the same body.”³² In other words, Gill sees in this text a reference to the unity of the church, “between saints and saints” and again uses the word “one” to describe this unity.

Perhaps Gill’s lengthiest comments on the oneness of the church come just one verse later as he comments on the phrase in Eph 4:4, “there is one body,” noting,

It is called *one* with relation to Jews and Gentiles, who are of the same body, and are reconciled in one body by Christ, and are baptized into it by the spirit; and with respect to saints above and saints below, who make up one general assembly; and with regard to separate societies; for though there are several particular congregations, yet there is but one church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven; and saints of different ages, places, states, and conditions, are all one in Christ Jesus, who is the one, and only head of this body: and this is an argument to excite the saints to unity of spirit; since they are, as one natural body is, members one of another, and therefore should not bite and devour one another; they are one political body, one kingdom, over which Christ is sole King and lawgiver, and a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand; they are one economical body, one family.³³

Again and again in this passage, Gill notes the oneness of the church. He repeatedly uses the word “one” to emphasize the unity of the whole church under the headship of Christ her king.

John Gill on the Catholicity of the Church

Closely related to the unity of the church is the catholicity of the church. Though some later Baptists denied (and some today still deny) the reality of the universal church, Gill had no hesitation in affirming that the church is catholic. He is quite clear about what he means by the small “c” catholic church when he says, “the church catholic, or universal, . . . consists only of God’s elect, and of all of them, in all times and places; and reaches even to the saints in heaven: this church is invisible at present, and will never fail.”³⁴ So the catholic church is the universal church, the invisible church which consists of all God’s elect in heaven and on earth. Gill believes this is the church Christ is speaking of in Matthew 16 when he says, “I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt 16:18). Gill comments that this church is not “a particular congregated church, but the elect of God, the general assembly and

church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven; and especially such of them as were to be gathered in, and built on Christ, from among the Jews and Gentiles.”³⁵ This is the church not only “built on Christ” but that Christ himself promises to build.

In addition to affirming that Scripture itself affirms the reality of the universal church, Gill also notes that this truth is affirmed by Polycarp, Irenaeus, and Origen. Before mentioning these luminaries of the early church Gill says, “The church may be said to be catholic, or general, as it may consist of such in any age, and in the several parts of the world, who have true faith in Christ, and hold to him the head, and are baptized by one Spirit into one body; have one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of all.”³⁶ Christopher Green argues that based on this passage and what follows, “We can safely note that Gill explicitly defines catholicity as a category in his dogmatic system, that this catholicity describes the church in every age, and that it includes a oneness of faith.”³⁷ Gill goes on to say, “And this is the church which Polycarp called, the whole catholic church throughout the world: and Irenæus, The church scattered throughout the whole world to the ends of the earth: and Origen, The church of God under heaven: and this is the church built on Christ the rock, against which the gates of hell shall never prevail.”³⁸ These great thinkers and theologians confessed the universal or catholic church just as Gill is doing. He goes on to add, “Such a church Christ has always had and will have; and which may be, when there is no visible particular congregated church, or a particular church gathered according to gospel-order; and of this the apostle seems to speak, when he says, *Unto him be glory in the church, by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end*, Eph. 3:21.”³⁹ Gill affirms that the church against which the gates of hell shall not prevail is the catholic or universal church. Then Gill indicates that Paul’s statement in Eph 3:21 about Christ receiving glory in the church also refers to the church as a whole, the catholic church. Notice that Gill himself does not shy away from using the term “catholic” to describe the universal church just as the Nicene Creed does.

Gill’s comments on the catholicity of the church are not limited to his exposition of Ephesians. In his comments on 2 Cor 11:2, which says, “I betrothed you to one husband,” Gill notes that “Christ stands in the relation of an husband to the church catholic and universal; to the whole

³² Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3:86.

³³ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3:86–87 (emphasis original).

³⁴ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3:480.

³⁵ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 1:184.

³⁶ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:561.

³⁷ Green, “Baptist Catholicity in the Ecclesiology of John Gill,” 647.

³⁸ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:561.

³⁹ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:561.

general assembly and church of the first-born, whose names are written in heaven; even to all the elect of God, that ever were, are, or shall be.”⁴⁰ Though Paul is addressing a particular local church in Corinth, Gill notes that Christ is husband not to this one particular church but to the one “whole” catholic church.

If someone were to ask Gill, “Where does this universal church assemble since the very word ‘church’ means ‘assembly?’” we do not have to wonder how Gill might respond. In his comments on Heb 12:23 he addresses the assembly of the catholic church this way: “They met together, in the infinite mind of God, from all eternity; and in Christ, their head and representative, both then and in time; and at the last day, when they are all gathered in, they’ll meet together personally; and a joyful meeting it will be.”⁴¹ The universal church has assembled already in the mind of God and will assemble in person at the return of Christ. The fact that it does not and cannot assemble in the present does not negate its reality or make it inappropriate to call it the church.

Although Gill expounded on all of the Bible, he published a distinct work on the Song of Solomon where in accord with a long history of interpretation he recognizes a picture of the relationship between Christ and the church. It is not surprising that much of what Gill believes about the church is articulated in this commentary. For example, on Song of Solomon 6:9, “My dove, my perfect one, is the only one, the only one of her mother,” Gill notes that this refers in part to “the church’s unity in herself,” and goes on to list seven aspects of the church’s unity.⁴² Again in his comments on verse twelve of the following chapter he says, “There are several separate, distinct, and congregated churches; though these all make up but one catholic church, one ‘general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.’”⁴³ Once again he references Heb 12:23 and asserts the catholicity and unity of the church.

John Gill on the Holiness and Apostolicity of the Church

While describing the church, Gill also highlights the holiness of the church, though he does not dwell on this at great length like he does the unity and catholicity of the church. For example, in his comments on the

⁴⁰ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 2:826.

⁴¹ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3:480.

⁴² John Gill, *An Exposition of the Book of Solomon’s Song: Commonly Called Canticles* (William Hill Collingridge, 1854), 245–46. The seven aspects of unity he mentions are: “She is but one body ... she has but one Spirit ... she has but one Head and Husband ... they enjoy the same privileges ... they make a profession of one and the same faith ... they are one in worship ... [and] they are one in affections.”

⁴³ Gill, *An Exposition of the Book of Solomon’s Song*, 317.

husband calling his bride “my perfect one” in Song of Solomon 5:2, Gill notes that “it may then seem strange, that Christ should call his church, and that in her present circumstances, his undefiled one: and so she is not in herself, but as considered in him.”⁴⁴ Gill acknowledges that the church may not appear holy or “undefiled” since “believers themselves are not free from pollution; but complain of the uncleanness of their hearts and lips.”⁴⁵ At the same time, Gill affirms that by virtue of her position in Christ she is pure and “undefiled,” and therefore holy. When describing the nature of the church, Gill argues that “such who are proper materials of a gospel church, are such who are called out of a state of bondage to sin, Satan, and the law, into the liberty of the gospel; and out of darkness into marvellous light; and are called with a holy calling, and called to be saints.”⁴⁶ Churches are to be made of holy people. Why? Gill goes on to say,

Such are not only called to be saints, but in and by effectual vocation become really saints, at least are judged to be so, by a charitable discretion of them; so the members of the churches at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse, are described as saints, and sanctified persons, and as holy temples, built for habitations of a holy God; hence they are called churches of the saints, because they consist of such; and Christ, who is King and head of the church, is called King of saints.⁴⁷

The members of churches should be holy because the church is the dwelling place of God and God is holy. Gill also urges that members of particular churches should be holy. He says, “The materials of a gospel church should be men of holy lives and conversations; holiness both of heart and life becomes the house of God, and those who are of it; none should have a place in it but such.”⁴⁸

As with the holiness of the church, in comparison with his frequent and lengthy comments on the unity and catholicity of the church, Gill’s comments on the apostolic nature of the church are less conspicuous. Gill is given a clear opportunity to address the apostolic nature of the church in his comments on Eph 2:19–20, which speaks of “the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone.” Yet Gill rushes to say that “not the persons of the apostles and prophets, nor their doctrines merely, are here

⁴⁴ Gill, *An Exposition of the Book of Solomon’s Song*, 185.

⁴⁵ Gill, *An Exposition of the Book of Solomon’s Song*, 185.

⁴⁶ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:563.

⁴⁷ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:563.

⁴⁸ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:564.

meant; but Christ who is contained in them, and who is the foundation on which the church, and all true believers are built.”⁴⁹ Gill does not seem eager to expound on the church’s connection to the apostles. He is more eager to connect the church to Christ than his apostles, which of course represents the emphasis Paul places on Christ as the “cornerstone.”

The same impulse is evident in his comments on Acts 2:42 where Luke says that the believers in Jerusalem “devoted themselves to the apostle’s teaching.” Gill says that the teaching of the apostles “is the same with the doctrine of Christ, of which he is the author, preacher, and subject.”⁵⁰ The same emphasis is found again commenting on Rev 21:14 where the new Jerusalem is described as having twelve foundations on which are written the names of the twelve apostles. Gill says, “Christ is the one and only foundation of his church and people ... but because he has been ministerially laid as the foundation, by the twelve apostles, for men to build their present and future happiness upon, therefore the foundations of the wall of salvation are said to be twelve.”⁵¹ His use of the word “ministerially” here may help to explain why he so frequently moves quickly from the role of the apostles to Christ himself. It is not that the role of the apostles in the establishment of the church is unimportant, but that it is ministerial and therefore secondary to Christ’s.

In this same spirit, Gill affirms the importance of the office of apostle in the church. He says of the apostles,

These had the first and chief place in the church.... They had their call and mission from Christ, and were not of men, nor by men, but by Jesus Christ; and as they had their mission and commission immediately from Christ, so their doctrine; they neither received it from men, nor were taught it, but had it by the revelation of Christ.⁵²

Once again Gill is quick to connect the apostles and their doctrine directly to Christ. Then he goes on to say about the office of apostle and any potential successors, “This office is now ceased; the apostles have no successors in it: not such who are called lord bishops; for as the apostles had not their pompous titles, nor their grandeur, nor their wealth, so neither have these lordly bishops their gifts, power, and authority; they have neither mission nor commission, nor work similar to theirs.”⁵³ Gill not only denies that the later bishops were the successors of the apostles but makes

⁴⁹ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3:77.

⁵⁰ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 2:162.

⁵¹ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 3:861.

⁵² Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:574.

⁵³ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:574.

an incisive comparison between the apostles and these later bishops.⁵⁴

The reason for this reticence to connect the church to the apostles appears to be his rejection of apostolic succession and the primacy of Peter. Not only does Gill contrast the apostles with later bishops, but he also denies that Peter is the rock Christ builds his church upon in Matt 16:18. Gill says, “By the *rock* on which Christ builds his church, is meant, not the person of Peter; for Christ does not say, upon thee Peter, but upon *this* rock, referring to something distinct from him.”⁵⁵ Why then call Peter a rock at all? “He is so called because of his trust and confidence in the Lord, on whom he was built; but not because he was the foundation on which any others, and especially the whole church, were built.”⁵⁶ Gill’s point then is that Peter alone does not make up the foundation of the church. Gill affirms that the apostles *together* are called the foundation. He says,

Tis true, he may be called the foundation, as the rest of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are, Eph. 2:20; Rev. 21:14 without any distinction from them, and preference to them; they and he agreeing in laying doctrinally and ministerially Christ Jesus as the foundation of faith and hope, but not in such sense as he is; neither he, nor they, are the foundation on which the church is built, which is Christ, and him only.⁵⁷

But when Gill inevitably addresses the association of Christ’s words to Peter and the claim of the Pope, Gill does not mince words. “After all, what is this to the pope of Rome, who is no successor of Peter’s? Peter, as an apostle, had no successor in his office; nor was he bishop of Rome.”⁵⁸ So Gill affirms the apostolic nature of the church but is careful to distinguish his understanding of apostolicity from those who include apostolic succession or the primacy of Peter as elements of what it means for the church to be apostolic.

At one point, Gill seems to indicate that some form of congregationalism, which is common among Baptists, where the congregation plays a role in selecting or electing church leaders can be traced back to the apostles. He notes, “Clemens Romanus, who lived at the latter end of the apostolic age, says, the apostles appointed proper persons to the office of

⁵⁴ It is not clear whether Gill has the bishops of the past or of his own day in mind, but the present “are” may be an indication that he intends a reference to those of his own day.

⁵⁵ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 1:184.

⁵⁶ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 1:184.

⁵⁷ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 1:184.

⁵⁸ Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 1:184.

the ministry, *with the consent or choice of the whole church*; and this practice continued to the third century.”⁵⁹ Gill then notes this practice took place with Cyprian, Cornelius, and Fabianus before bringing in the council of Nicaea: “The council of Nice, in the beginning of the fourth century, in their synodical epistle, to the churches in Egypt, ordered, that when any were removed by death, their places should be filled up by others, provided they were worthy, and such as the people chose; the bishop of Alexandria agreeing to and confirming the choice.”⁶⁰ Gill is thus connecting a distinctive emphasis of Baptist ecclesiology, congregationalism, to apostolic practice while denying that apostolicity means affirming the claim of apostolic succession and the primacy of Peter.⁶¹ Gill is not rejecting the apostolic nature of the church, but he does appear to reject certain ways of explaining what it means for the church to be apostolic. He affirms the doctrinal connection between the church and the apostles since the apostles are the ambassadors of Christ, but he denies that the church’s connection to the apostles is maintained through any form of apostolic succession. In a more positive sense, Gill seems to hint at apostolic precedent being observed rather than added to when he mentions “the ordinances of Christ, which every true Christian should be zealous for, that they be kept as they were first delivered, without any innovation or corruption.”⁶² Gill affirms an apostolic church free of later “innovation” or additions.

Conclusion

Gill defended the suitability of and even the importance of the creeds. More than that, he repeatedly emphasized the oneness or unity of the church and argued strongly for the catholicity of the church. These are deep wells that those who are engaged in expounding and encouraging Baptist catholicity would do well to draw from with greater frequency. One could wish Gill had said more about the holiness and apostolicity of the church, but he said enough to show he affirmed the confession of the church’s holiness and its apostolic nature provided these were properly understood. In these areas too, Gill may prove a helpful guide for carefully articulating a Nicene ecclesiology without forfeiting Baptist distinctives.

⁵⁹ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:581 (emphasis original).

⁶⁰ Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:581.

⁶¹ Though it does not have a direct bearing on the argument made in this essay, Christopher Green’s observation that “John Gill’s ecclesiological writings . . . lack a single citation to a Baptist source,” is also significant (“Baptist Catholicity in the Ecclesiology of John Gill,” 652).

⁶² Gill, *A Complete Body of Divinity*, 2:524.

Resourcing Free Church Ecclesiology: Pilgram Marpeck's Chalcedonian Doctrine of the Church¹

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Abstract: *This essay argues that Pilgram Marpeck's ecclesiology is properly understood only when it is placed within its Chalcedonian frame. Far from rejecting orthodox Christology, Marpeck's entire theology is built upon and flows from the narrative substructure of Chalcedonian Christology. It is not just Marpeck's Christology that is Chalcedonian, though. His entire theology, particularly his ecclesiology, is shaped by his conception of Christ. Marpeck conceives of the life of the individual Christian—a combination of flesh and Spirit—as constituting a new wesen ("reality") on analogy with the Chalcedonian two-fold (human and divine) Christ. In the same way, the church itself is a new wesen in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Marpeck's Chalcedonian ecclesiology has important implications for the practice of church discipline and for the church's relationship with the world broadly and the state in particular.*

Key Words: *Anabaptism, Chalcedon, Christology, ecclesiology, Free Church, Pilgram Marpeck*

Within earliest Anabaptism, there were variant understandings of the nature of the church. Although they bore a strong resemblance to one another, their differences were real. At least in the case of the Swiss, Dutch/North German, and the South German Anabaptist movements, their different ecclesiologies grew out of their differing Christological emphases.

For example, Pilgram Marpeck (c. 1495–1556), a leader in the South German Anabaptist movement, wrote at least four letters to the Swiss Brethren that amount to a critique of their ecclesiology. Specifically,

¹ The author wishes to thank Neal Blough, Joel Lawrence, and the two anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and editorial suggestions. Thanks are also due to Heath Waidehch for his editorial assistance and to West Clinton Church for the time afforded me as their Lead Pastor to do the research and writing that led to this article.

Marpeck's letters critiqued their view of the incarnation, influenced by Melchior Hoffman and Caspar Schwenckfeld, which shaped their understanding church discipline. Although they had officially rejected the "Celestial Christology" of Hoffman and Schwenckfeld, both men were present in Strasbourg during the formative years of the Anabaptist movement and interacted with other followers there. Additionally, their ecclesiology bears resemblance to Hoffman's. This similarity shows that though they officially rejected his unorthodox Christology, its effects on their Christology held on. As I will show later, Marpeck combats this Christology in his letters to his Swiss counterparts.

Hoffman also influenced Menno Simons's Christology. Simons inherited Hoffman's celestial flesh Christology mostly intact, and it had a profound impact on his ecclesiology. In contrast, Pilgram Marpeck articulated an alternative Anabaptist ecclesiology built upon a completely orthodox, Chalcedonian Christology.

Contemporary Treatments of Marpeck's Christology

Marpeck was well-educated and from a wealthy family. He was involved in local politics through his vocation as an engineer (architect) and his debates with Reformed leaders in Strasbourg. He was also determined to articulate an Anabaptism in concert with classical theology.² Because of his wider involvement with city politics and his push for a more catholic Anabaptism, Marpeck has been treated as less extreme than his contemporaries. It is argued that whereas Marpeck's contemporaries and most of subsequent Anabaptism practiced a strict "separatism," Marpeck represents a non-separatist voice for many today.³

Since Marpeck was a chief engineer for the city of Strasbourg, some have argued that Marpeck was a "tame" Anabaptist who offered "a more

² This is not to say that other Anabaptist leaders did not care about their theology being in accord with the best of the Christian tradition. For example, Simons's writings engage with Augustine and other Fathers quite often. However, Marpeck was more successful at articulating Anabaptism in concert with the Great Tradition than were his contemporary Anabaptist leaders.

³ This turn toward Marpeck as a non-separatist option is evident outside of the Anabaptist tradition as well, for both theological liberals and conservatives. In fact, some within the Baptist stream have embraced Marpeck. See Malcolm Yarnell III, *The Formation of Christian Doctrine* (B&H Academic, 2007), 73–106.

moderate type of apoliticism” that was tolerated by the authorities because it was not a threat.⁴ Others have looked to Marpeck as “an Anabaptist for our times,” to whom many contemporary (progressive) Anabaptists have turned out of “frustration for the isolationist tendencies of their predecessors” and because “they are drawn to his engaged stance with the government.”⁵ Still others paint Marpeck as a sixteenth-century representative of contemporary activist Anabaptism, and in doing so they attempt to paint Marpeck’s Christology as less than orthodox, emphasizing his ethics over his theology.⁶

There are much better readings of Marpeck available. Interpreters like Neal Blough read Marpeck’s ecclesiology as focusing more on being “sent” than on being “separate.” This is a welcome point of focus, though the distinction is exaggerated.⁷ Gerald Mast points out that Marpeck did not reject church discipline; rather, he wanted it practiced with patience and love. As he argues, in a contemporary ecclesial context in which tolerance is the supreme virtue, “Marpeck’s critique of legalism by itself is easily misunderstood as a defense of tolerance, rather than as an expression of his concern for the church’s visible witness.”⁸ Similarly, both William Klassen and C. Arnold Snyder identify the influence on Marpeck of the Spiritualist tradition of Caspar Schwenckfeld and Hans Denck with the centrality of love reigning supreme.⁹ Klassen and Snyder have been

⁴ See, e.g., James Stayer, *Anabaptists and the Sword* (Coronado, 1972), 186–87. These interpreters forget, though, that Marpeck had to resign his governmental positions twice because his convictions did not allow him to continue.

⁵ Andrea M. Dalton, *United with Christ: The Mystical Ecclesiology of Pilgram Marpeck* (MATS thesis, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, 2008), 1, 4.

⁶ See J. Denny Weaver, *Becoming Anabaptist: The Origin and Significance of Sixteenth-Century Anabaptism*, 2nd ed. (Herald, 2005), 88. The most recent example of this attempt to portray Marpeck as out of step with historic orthodoxy is the volume edited by J. Denny Weaver, Gerald J. Mast, and Trevor Bechtel, *Anabaptist Political Theology After Marpeck* (Cascade, 2022).

⁷ See Neal Blough, “The Relevance of Pilgram Marpeck for the Contemporary Church,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85 (January 2011): 37–58. See also Stephen B. Boyd, *Pilgram Marpeck: His Life and Social Theology* (Duke University Press, 1992), 162–63.

⁸ Gerald J. Mast, “Patient Separation in Marpeck’s Theology,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85 (January 2011): 79.

⁹ See C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Pandora, 2002), ch. 13; William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life and Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Eerdmans, 1968), 176–77. Klassen is more hesitant than is

helpful in pointing out that Marpeck was in genuine dialogue, showing both agreement and disagreement with Schwenckfeld, rather than in simple antagonism. Each of these readings is correct, but we can and must dig deeper to fully understand Marpeck’s theology.

Though these readings are commendable and have furthered Marpeck studies, his ecclesiology, discipline included, is more complicated than these readings suggest and requires more nuance. If we stick to the surface of Marpeck’s theology, we miss the deep substructure of his thought. In what follows, I approach Marpeck’s ecclesiology guided by these questions: What is the theological account of Jesus’s identity that shapes Marpeck’s thinking and that leads him to push for a more patient and loving form of discipline? Was his thinking about discipline just because he was more tolerant, or was his view grounded in something more substantive?

I am following those interpreters who understand Marpeck’s theology as orthodox, particularly his Christology.¹⁰ I agree with those interpreters, John Rempel and Neal Blough especially, who argue that Christology is the center of Marpeck’s theology. But I place the emphasis on the Chalcedonian character of Marpeck’s Christology more than Rempel and

Snyder in placing Marpeck in the Denckian stream: “Even in Marpeck’s Strasbourg period there is no evidence of the depreciation of ceremonies seen in Denck, and they part ways decisively in their views of the Word of God. Even if it cannot be shown that Marpeck was dependent upon Denck in his view of the covenant or order, there does appear dependence on him at the point of asserting a great freedom in the ethical sphere, particularly such matters as the oath and participation in the state.” As I will argue below, there is no such “great freedom in the ethical sphere” in Marpeck, as Klassen would have us see.

¹⁰ On the classical nature of Marpeck’s theology, see Thomas Finger, “How ‘Classical’ Was Pilgram Marpeck’s Theology?,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85 (January 2011): 115–31. See also Walter Klaassen and William Klassen who claim that Marpeck “was thoroughly committed to the church’s creedal traditions” (*Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity* [Herald, 2008], 25, 344). John Rempel, “Critically Appropriating Tradition: Pilgram Marpeck’s Experiments in Corrective Theologizing,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85.1 (January 2011): 74; see also Rempel’s Introduction and his introduction to Marpeck’s “Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld,” in Pilgram Marpeck, *Later Writings by Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle*, vol. 1: The Exposé, A Dialogue, and Marpeck’s Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld, trans. Walter Klaassen, Werner Packull, and John Rempel (Pandora, 1999), 17, 72; Neal Blough, *Christ in Our Midst: Incarnation, Church, and Discipleship in the Theology of Pilgram Marpeck* (Pandora, 2007); Thomas N. Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology: Biblical, Historical, Constructive* (InterVarsity Press, 2004), 376, 381, 433, 434.

Blough.¹¹ Specifically, I see Chalcedonian Christology as the narrative substructure that undergirds Marpeck's Christology.¹² That narrative substructure shaped everything about Marpeck's theology, especially his ecclesiology. Furthermore, that narrative substructure was shared by Marpeck's Lutheran and Reformed counterparts, as Blough helpfully shows: "The Christological heritage that Marpeck embraced was common to medieval theology, and to the Reformation in general, including most of its Anabaptist wing."¹³

The Concept of "Narrative Substructure"

By "narrative substructure," I mean that which is assumed and so unstated as the narrative background or foundation of a text or worldview. In applying the idea to Paul's theology, Richard Hays elucidates what he means by "narrative substructure": "a story about Jesus Christ is presupposed by Paul's argument in Galatians, and his theological reflection attempts to articulate the meaning of that story."¹⁴ For Hays's reading of Paul as well as my reading of Marpeck, the word "presupposed" is key.¹⁵

To take another example from Scripture, 1 John does not mention, quote from, or allude to the Old Testament text. It does, however, allude

¹¹ This is not to say that Rempel and Blough do not hold Marpeck as Chalcedonian, although both qualify that label. See the sources cited above in footnote 10. By "Chalcedonian," I refer to the Christological consensus reached by the church in the fourth century regarding the full divinity and full humanity of Jesus. This is a consensus that the early church fathers believed was based on the Trinitarian logic of Scripture, was established in the Nicene Creed, and was upheld and explained further at the Council of Chalcedon in 451. For more on this history, see Frances M. Young and Andrew Teal, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background*, 2nd ed. (Baker Academic, 2010).

¹² My framing of the question in this way is indebted to Richard Hays's investigation of the "narrative substructure" of Paul's thought in *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed. (Eerdmans, 2002).

¹³ Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 196.

¹⁴ See Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, xxiv.

¹⁵ Hays is not the only scholar to make such a claim about Paul. In his book *Pauline Christology*, Gordon Fee claims that "we are seldom reading Paul's argued Christology, but rather his assumed Christology" (*Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* [Hendrickson, 2007], 4). And the same can be said about the doctrine of the Trinity broadly. In fact, Sanders makes exactly that claim: the Trinity is assumed (i.e., presupposed) in the New Testament. One does not see Paul saying, "And now, about the Three-in-One God . . ." because, Sanders argues, what we came to call the Trinity was a shared assumption between Paul and the churches to which he wrote (Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* [Zondervan, 2016], 205).

to the Gospel of John. And the Gospel of John is saturated with quotations and allusions to the Old Testament story. As evidenced by its intertextual relationship with the Fourth Gospel, 1 John assumes but does not make explicit its reliance on the Old Testament story. It is unstated, but completely dependent on that story. Thus, the Old Testament story serves as the presupposed "narrative substructure" of 1 John.

Consider the contemporary analogy of baseball metaphors used by middle-class Americans. If after preaching a sermon, a pastor tells his family around the lunch table that he "really whiffed on that," or that he "hit that one out of the park," or that he "struck out with that one," he does not need to explain the source of those metaphors. They know without explanation what those metaphors mean because we share a common narrative substructure that includes a basic understanding of baseball. Marpeck's orthodox, Chalcedonian Christology is like that.

Critics will be quick to point out that Marpeck never uses the word "Chalcedonian" to describe his Christology, but he does not need to. That is precisely the point of a narrative substructure: one does not feel the need, or even realize the need, to make it explicit. It is assumed. When his writings are read closely, it becomes clear that Marpeck held to orthodox, Chalcedonian Christology and that it shaped everything else.¹⁶ It is the deep well of orthodox, Chalcedonian Christology out of which Marpeck's theology flows and that serves as the grounding for his particular Anabaptist ecclesiology.

The Chalcedonian Substructure of Marpeck's Theology: Hermeneutics, Pneumatology, and Ecclesiology

Marpeck worked out his Christology in correspondence with three sparring partners. In his lengthy correspondence with the Swiss Brethren, Marpeck vigorously defended the role of the Holy Spirit (the "inner") and its implications for church discipline. In his Christological battles with

¹⁶ Although my reading of his theology should make this clear, one piece of evidence that can be quickly seen is the presence of the Athanasian Creed (one of the three historic creeds that expressed Chalcedonian Christology in the *Kunstbuch*, a collection of writings published after Marpeck's death that were important to his ecclesial circle). See John D. Rempel, ed. *Jörg Maler's Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgrim Marpeck Circle* (Pandora, 2010).

Caspar Schwenckfeld, Marpeck emphasized the humanity of Jesus, “defending the external,”¹⁷ especially baptism and the Lord’s Supper. In interacting with these first two, Marpeck works out the implications of his Chalcedonian Christology for the questions of his context. For Marpeck, the inner and outer, spiritual and physical, divine and human are distinct, but they cannot be separated. Just as this is true in the life of Jesus, so also is it true in the life of the church.¹⁸ Marpeck’s third sparring partner was his Reformed colleagues in Strasbourg. Marpeck engaged in a lengthy correspondence with Martin Bucer over the questions of infant baptism and the nature of the church in relation to the world/state.¹⁹ Marpeck’s contributions to each of these three conversations work only because they grow from the Chalcedonian substructure of his thought.

Chalcedonian Christology is the doctrinal center around which everything else revolves. It shaped and was shaped by how he read the Bible (with Schwenckfeld) typologically as a progressive document, with the Old Testament a “promise” with “figures” that are fulfilled in Christ. It shaped how he viewed the relationship between the church and the world, with the Body of Christ as the “prolongation” of the incarnation and thus to be distinct from the world outside of Christ. It shaped how he viewed the radical change brought about by the new birth of redemption and filling with the Holy Spirit. It also animated Marpeck’s debates around the proper use of church discipline.

Marpeck’s Christology, hermeneutics, and pneumatology shape Marpeck’s ecclesiology. But Christology is chief among them—the glue that holds everything else together. And out of his ecclesiology, informed by the other doctrines, grows the way he treats church discipline. In other words, Marpeck only thinks the way that he does about church discipline

¹⁷ Walter Klaassen, “Church Discipline and the Spirit in Pilgram Marpeck,” in *De Geest in Het Geding: Opstellen Aangeboden Aan J.A. Oosterbaan*, ed. I. B. Horst, A. F. de Jong and D. Visser (H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1978), 171.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Marpeck’s letter “To Helena von Streicher,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, ed. and trans. William Klassen and Walter Klassen (Herald, 1978), 389: “I also admit that the inner and the outer have to be kept distinct, but to divide one from the other, to use one and not the other, cannot be substantiated by any Scripture.”

¹⁹ See William Klassen, *Covenant and Community: The Life and Writings of Pilgram Marpeck* (Eerdmans, 1968). See also Walter Klaassen and William Klassen, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity* (Herald, 2008) and their introduction to *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 23–36. Among Marpeck’s extant writings, those directed to Bucer and the Strasbourg City Council are: “A Clear Refutation” (pp. 43–68), his “Confession of 1542” (pp. 107–58), and his letter “To the Strasbourg Council” (pp. 306–8). Each of these can be found in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*.

because of his (orthodox) view of the incarnation and its implications for ecclesiology. I will now unpack each of these doctrinal points in the rest of this section. Doing so will allow us to look closely at Marpeck’s treatment of discipline from the proper vantage point.

Marpeck’s Christology

In reaction to Caspar Schwenckfeld’s spiritualist Christology’s influence by the South German Anabaptist movement, Marpeck focused relentlessly on the materiality of the incarnation,²⁰ *die menscheit Christi* (“humanity of Christ”), insisting on the unity of the physical with the spiritual. In doing so, Marpeck was critical of those who, like Schwenckfeld and Hans Bänderlin, do not “esteem the humanity of Christ,” a mistake which leads “us into the spiritual pride of the devil, for we then assume to be already what we shall only become in the future.”²¹

This focus on the humanity of Christ has led some interpreters to miss or deny the fact that Marpeck’s Christology was Chalcedonian.²² They argue that the “center” of Marpeck’s thought was the human Christ, not the fuller picture of orthodoxy.²³ Although true to some extent, Marpeck only emphasizes the humanity of Christ when his “opponent”—typically Schwenckfeld—emphasizes the divinity of Christ and minimizes Jesus’s humanity. Or as Marpeck says, when Jesus was “divided.” On the undivided Christ (i.e., the Chalcedonian Christ), Marpeck is worth quoting at length:

²⁰ This emphasis can be found throughout Marpeck’s writings on Christology. See especially his various correspondences with Schwenckfeld and his “Concerning the Humanity of Christ,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 507–15. For more on this relationship, see Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism: A Study in the Christology of Balthasar Hubmaier, Pilgram Marpeck, and Dirk Philips* (Herald, 1993), 108–18.

²¹ Marpeck, “A Clear and Useful Instruction,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 86.

²² For example, see J. Denny Weaver, “Making Theology Specific to Jesus: Pilgram Marpeck as Anabaptist Theologian,” in *Anabaptist Political Theology after Marpeck*, 31–52. Weaver has made a career as a self-avowed anti-creedal, anti-orthodox, anti-tradition theologian who has attempted to redefine Anabaptism as such. He attempts to do the same thing with Marpeck in “Making Theology Specific to Jesus.”

²³ For example, Walter Klaassen incorrectly calls the humanity of Christ the “key concept in Marpeck’s theology.” See Walter Klaassen, “Church Discipline and the Spirit in Pilgram Marpeck,” 169. See also William Klassen, *Covenant Community: The Life and Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 57–66. See again Weaver, “Making Theology Specific to Jesus,” in *Anabaptist Political Theology after Marpeck*, 31–52.

He was without beginning and from eternity the everlasting God and Spirit; but within time, he was made flesh (Jn. 1). Please understand, he was not newly-created, but was born of the already-created (*vorgeschoepften*) flesh of human generation in the body of Mary. And, as the first, figurate Adam had no father in his birth other than God alone and lifeless earth as his mother, from which God made him according to the flesh, so also the human Christ as the essential Adam had no other father than God alone and the earth of the living, that is, human, creaturely generation in his birth and incarnation. He came to the tribe of Judah and to the body of Mary, his mother. From her, God carved out Jesus' flesh, prepared through his holy and divine activity (Heb. 3:10).... In this and no other way did the origin and advent of the human being Christ happen. He was born out of God and the Holy Spirit and out of a remarkable act of God the Father, from his nature and essence, and from the Virgin Mary, full of grace and blessing under the sway of the Holy Spirit.²⁴

In his treatment of Marpeck's Christology, Rempel rightly identifies one of the influences on Marpeck's thought as Luther's repudiation of the Spiritualist influence on the church, namely that the "corrective spiritualism had brought to the church was being used to eliminate the material world as a medium of divine communication. Everything signified by the incarnation was under threat."²⁵ In taking up Luther's critique, Marpeck articulated for the early Anabaptists (and tried to unite the various Anabaptist movements under) an answer to the Spiritualist-influenced, celestial flesh Christology by repeatedly emphasizing the humanity of Christ. As stated already, that emphasis is an expression of the substructure of Marpeck's Chalcedonian thinking demanded by his context.

By contrast, Marpeck often emphasized the spiritual aspect—the divinity of Jesus and the importance of the Holy Spirit—in his interactions with the Swiss Brethren. And comparatively, he did not need to emphasize either in his interactions with Bucer and the Strasbourg Council. His emphases there were his points of disagreement with them: infant baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the nature of the church's relation with the state. But Marpeck's views in each case grew out of his understanding of Jesus. Marpeck's emphasis within the Chalcedonian frame varies—whether on the humanity or the divinity of Jesus—depending on which

²⁴ Marpeck, "Marpeck's Response," 126 (cf. p. 86). See also Marpeck, "Concerning the Humanity of Christ," in *The Writings of Pilgrim Marpeck*, 509.

²⁵ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper in Anabaptism*, 96.

theological battleground he is fighting. In each case, though, Chalcedonian Christology (and its implications) is the tool that he wields:

Some wanted only a man from the seed of David (Mt. 24:41–45), and not a Lord such as the Son of God (Mt. 26:63–67; Jn. 8:53–59; 10:31–39), who was Lord over Moses, David, the prophets, and the Law, and who could forgive sins upon earth (Mt. 9:2; Lk. 5:20–24). The reason of man, and of those who presume to be Christians, works even today in dividing the Messiah.²⁶

Marpeck's Hermeneutic

Chalcedonian Christology shaped Marpeck's reading of Scripture. Though he later disagreed with Schwenckfeld about Christology, Marpeck inherited intact Schwenckfeld's early understanding of the relation between the Old and New Testaments.²⁷ But that is where their agreement ended.

Schwenckfeld articulated a narrative, progressive, figural hermeneutic that saw the Old Testament as the type, figure, and promise²⁸ fulfilled by the work of God in Jesus.²⁹ Neither Schwenckfeld nor Marpeck rejected the Old Testament by any means. Rather, they sought to read the Bible as a unified story that consisted of two covenants—those of Moses and

²⁶ Marpeck, "A Clear and Useful Instruction," in *The Writings of Pilgrim Marpeck*, 80–81.

²⁷ On Schwenckfeld's hermeneutic, see Schwenckfeld's "Unterscheid deß Alten und Newen Testaments: Der Figur und Maarhait" ("Difference between the Old and New Testaments, the Symbol and the Truth") (ca. 1531), found in *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*, 4:414–443; and "Vom underschaid deß Alten und Newen Testaments" ("On the Understanding of the Old and New Testaments"), 4:470–79 (accessible online at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015069633926&seq=10>); see also Maier, *Caspar Schwenckfeld*, 26–32; and Gottfried Seebass, "Caspar Schwenckfeld's Understanding of the Old Testament," in *Schwenckfeld and Early Schwenckfeldianism*, ed. Peter C. Erb (Schwenckfelder Library, 1986), 87–102.

²⁸ See Marpeck, "Admonition," in *The Writings of Pilgrim Marpeck*, 225.

²⁹ Although I've not seen him acknowledge it anywhere, Baptist theologian Stephen Wellum's "progressive covenantalism" is strikingly similar to Marpeck's hermeneutic. See Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Crossway, 2018); Stephen Wellum, *Systematic Theology: From Canon to Concept*, vol. 1 (B&H Academic, 2024), 393–485.

of Christ—not one. The two testaments are distinguished from one another, but they are not opposed.³⁰ The New fulfills the Old, which points forward figuratively to the New.³¹ Schwenckfeld's (along with Marpeck's) emphasis on the progressive fulfillment of the Old by the New was opposed to the Reformed one covenant hermeneutic that Schwenckfeld saw as legitimizing the fusion of state and church. As Snyder argues,

In clearly delineating two covenants—sharply distinguishing between the physical and spiritual covenants (“Moses” and “Christ”)—Schwenckfeld's hermeneutical template provided a clear counter to the unitary hermeneutics of “one covenant” and “one people” that lay at the heart of Reformed theology and which supported the founding of theocratic states.³²

But with that hermeneutic, Marpeck understood that it was precisely and only the Chalcedonian Christ—fully God and fully man—who could fulfill the promise of the Old Testament. The one who fulfilled the promise had to be fully flesh and fully God in order to bring the “spiritual” fulfillment of the “physical” covenant of Moses.³³ Christ could not be divided—as he saw Schwenckfeld doing with his focus exclusively on the “inward” Christ—and still fulfill the promise.³⁴

In other words, Marpeck read Scripture in a Chalcedonian frame, whereas Schwenckfeld did not. Marpeck engaged in the same kind of “partitive exegesis” that John Behr identifies in the Nicene theologians:

For the Nicenes ... Scripture speaks throughout of Christ, but the Christ of the Kerygma, the crucified and exalted Lord, and speaks

³⁰ Schwenckfeld, “Unterscheid deß Alten und Newen Testaments,” *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*, 4:436. I owe this reference originally to Snyder, “Caspar Schwenckfeld, Pilgram Marpeck, and Their Followers,” 476.

³¹ See Marpeck, “Admonition,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 225.

³² Snyder, “Caspar Schwenckfeld, Pilgram Marpeck, and Their Followers,” 478.

³³ See again Schwenckfeld's “Unterscheid deß Alten und Newen Testaments: Der Figur und Maerhait,” *Corpus Schwenckfeldianorum*, 4:414–43. As Snyder notes, Schwenckfeld's two covenant hermeneutic was also formulated in contrast to Luther's “Law” and “Gospel” schema. See Snyder, “Caspar Schwenckfeld, Pilgram Marpeck, and Their Followers,” 478n37.

³⁴ Rempel captures the issue for Marpeck well: “Already in his Strasbourg years Marpeck had written that such inwardness doomed the very nature of the Gospel. Not only a visible church and sacraments but the Bible itself was at risk. Without a robust theology of sacred history and of the incarnation, which issued from it, what objective basis was there for revelation and the church?” See Rempel's “Introduction” to Marpeck, “Pilgram Marpeck's Response to Caspar Schwenckfeld's Judgment,” in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck's and His Circle*, 69.

of him in a twofold fashion, demanding in turn a “partitive” exegesis: some things are said of him as divine and other things are said of him as human—yet referring to same Christ throughout.³⁵

As Behr argues, this “partitive” exegesis of the orthodox Nicenes contrasts with the “univocal” exegesis, similar to Schwenckfeld's, of their opponents:

The non-Nicenes, however, insisted on an absolutely univocal exegesis, which applied all scriptural affirmations in a unitary fashion to one subject, who thus turns out to be a demi-god, neither fully divine nor fully human—created but not as one of the creatures. And, at least in the modern reading of this, this demi-god is a temporal being, with his own history—the “preincarnate Logos” who eventually, as one phase in his existence, animates a body, becoming the man Jesus Christ.³⁶

Marpeck and Schwenckfeld too could agree on the general shape of the canonical story, but Schwenckfeld's focus on the “inward” Christ led him to “divide Christ” (as Marpeck says), finding only a divine or inner Christ in Scripture. Marpeck, on the other hand, understood that “Scripture speaks of Christ in a twofold manner.”³⁷ For Schwenckfeld, the interpretive key is a truncated Christ who is merely inner or divine. For Marpeck, the interpretive key to Scripture is the twofold, undivided Christ—fully God and fully human.

As Jamieson and Wittman rightly point out, “some things are said of him as divine, and other things are said of him as human. Biblical reasoning discerns that Scripture speaks of the one Christ in two registers in order to contemplate the whole Christ.”³⁸ Jamieson and Wittman then encourage readers to read their Bibles exactly as Marpeck did: “read Scripture in such a way that you discern the different registers in which Scripture speaks of Christ, yet without dividing him.”³⁹ Marpeck was no systematic theologian, so it has been argued that he sometimes gets categories mixed up (and he may have) but he remains remarkably consistent in his treatment of the “twofold” Christ. That consistency is sometimes not spelled out, but substructures do not need to be and usually are not. For Schwenckfeld, the interpretive key is a truncated Christ who is

³⁵ John Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, vol. 2 of *Formation of Christian Theology* (St. Vladimir, 2004), 14.

³⁶ Behr, *The Nicene Faith*, 14.

³⁷ R. B. Jamieson and Tyler R. Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning: Christological and Trinitarian Rules for Exegesis* (Baker Academic, 2022), 153.

³⁸ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 153.

³⁹ Jamieson and Wittman, *Biblical Reasoning*, 153.

merely inner or divine. For Marpeck, the interpretive key to Scripture is the twofold Christ. This difference is subtle and can go unnoticed in Marpeck's writings, but it makes all the difference.

The New Chalcedonian-Like *Wesen*: The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Believer

Closely related to and pivotal for his Christologically and hermeneutically-shaped ecclesiology was his theology of redemption—the reality (*wesen*) of new birth experienced by those baptized into Christ's death and filled with the Holy Spirit. Reception of the Holy Spirit is the decisive reality in the life of the church and of the individuals who make up the church. This reception is the major difference between life under the old covenant and the new, the spiritual covenant:

The old covenant brought forth [men] into slavery through the fear of God, but without the future love of Christ. Their understanding of the testament of promise was quite childish, and, thus, as young children, they had to wait under the tutelage of the eternal ordinances. Good and bad together, they need compulsion, for the freedom in Christ had not yet been achieved.... However, in the New Testament, by virtue of the Holy Spirit received through Christ, there is a different reality.... The Spirit of Christ, which is the true sanctification, was given to no one before the suffering and death of Christ, who Himself bought, acquired, and won that Spirit and comfort.⁴⁰

Marpeck forged his theology of the Holy Spirit in debate primarily with Schwenckfeld, Entfelder, Hoffman, and others including the Swiss Brethren. For Schwenckfeld, Christ came not to redeem fallen human flesh but to rescue us from his "creativity."⁴¹ In answer, Marpeck articulated a theology of the Holy Spirit on analogy with orthodox Christology: when we believe in Jesus Christ, our fallen fleshly bodies are filled with the Holy Spirit and so we become "similar to Christ" in that we become one new *wesen* out of what was previously separated: flesh and Spirit.⁴² The redeemed Christian is therefore a combination of flesh and spirit. Marpeck is worth quoting at length:

Although it is lived according to the Spirit derived only from God,

⁴⁰ Marpeck, "Pilgram Marpeck's Confession of 1532," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 119.

⁴¹ Maier, *Caspar Schwenckfeld*, 41. By "creativity," Schwenckfeld meant our human existence with fallen human flesh. For Schwenckfeld, we inherit Christ's heavenly flesh.

⁴² Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 129.

childhood is nonetheless received in flesh and blood so that, through baptism, flesh and blood is born, under the Spirit, into obedience, never again to live according to its lust. Thus, here and there, the children of God and of men are spirit, flesh, and blood, and they are also eternal after the resurrection. Just as Christ is the Word, Spirit, and God, so, too, is He a man born from the seed of woman, but without the seed of man, born of a generation of human flesh and blood, and raised again according to the flesh of the seed of David. So, too, we are spiritual and physical children of God and of men; we are included in the Spirit and Word derived from God, but we are also flesh and blood, derived from man, and we remain such with Christ eternally.⁴³

Our flesh is therefore redeemed, not abandoned.⁴⁴ It is no longer our "willing and running" that matters; rather, "He gives the will."⁴⁵ Though he disagreed with Schwenckfeld about the purpose of the Spirit, Marpeck took seriously the reality of the Holy Spirit in the church and the implications for the presence and power of the Spirit in the life of God's people. The Holy Spirit, who brings a "new birth from God,"⁴⁶ was, in fact, the entire and only reason that a Christian, with a "heritage of flesh and blood," could be expected to practice obedience in the life of faith.⁴⁷ The Swiss Brethren, by contrast, seemed to have simply emphasized obedience without the spiritual reality that undergirds the Christian ability to obey. In other words, they were legalists. As Snyder explains: "The continuing inner power of the Holy Spirit would enable a life of righteousness that actively resisted sin. The Swiss Brethren, by contrast, emphasize the obedience of the elect, with little reference to the spiritual underpinnings

⁴³ Marpeck, "Admonition of 1542," in *Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 212. As Blough notes (*Christ in Our Midst*, 101–32), Marpeck's "Admonition" represents Marpeck's Christology at its maturest. Thus, the Chalcedonian substructure of his thought is most explicit in that document. But as the above quote from his 1532 "Confession" makes clear, the Chalcedonian substructure was still there ten years earlier.

⁴⁴ On this, see Marpeck, "Pilgram Marpeck's Response," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle*, 68–144.

⁴⁵ Marpeck, "Concerning the Humanity of Christ," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 510.

⁴⁶ Marpeck, "An Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 29.

⁴⁷ Marpeck, "An Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 29.

of that obedience.”⁴⁸

Though Marpeck emphasized the obedience of faith that is made possible by the “fusion” of flesh and Spirit, he “sought to take seriously the ethical life of the believer without falling prey to . . . legalism.”⁴⁹ The way that he did this was by his refusal to treat justification and sanctification as either Simons’s or his Lutheran conversation partners. For Marpeck, the two are not conflated, but neither can they be separated. We are not only declared righteous in Christ (Luther’s forensic view); we are also made righteous (Simons’s view).

In other words, justification is efficacious; it changes the believer. Marpeck writes, “To become a child of God means more than simply a spiritual change in the believer. It is a complete transformation of the human being. For Marpeck, the work of Christ transforms the very flesh of the believer, so that sinful flesh becomes conformed to Jesus’ holy flesh.”⁵⁰ But it does not do so instantaneously, as Simons often argued, and as later Anabaptist tradition has implied. Justification, becoming a “child of God,” is “the beginning of God’s work in the believer.”⁵¹

But such an experience is, of course, only partial in this life. The sanctification half of the justification/sanctification pairing is a process, and it is a process that continues throughout the life of the believer. The disciple is already transformed, filled with the Spirit, having taken on Jesus’ holy flesh, a child of God, but we will only fully experience that reality upon our own resurrection. Peter Orr, in his monograph on the ascension of Jesus, captures this reality well: “Our experience . . . mirrors Christ’s—who was fully God’s son before this resurrection but entered into the full experience of his sonship following his resurrection from the dead.”⁵²

The new *wesen* created by the Chalcedonian-like fusion of flesh and Spirit combined with Marpeck’s refusal to view justification as purely forensic is the seedbed from which his ecclesiology grew.

The Chalcedonian Analogy Applied to the Church

The substructure of Chalcedonian Christology is evident in Marpeck’s ecclesiology. Just as the eternal Christ “lived and worked on earth” in the incarnation before his glorification, Jesus works today through the

church, his “unglorified body on earth”⁵³ that has been filled with the Holy Spirit and redeemed in baptism. This is what Marpeck means by the church as the “prolongation” of Christ’s incarnation, of the human part of the Chalcedonian fusion. Marpeck continues: “Even today he works through his unglorified body (which is the church). It is the very temple of God—at work outwardly because Christ is at work in it inwardly.”⁵⁴ So, without mentioning it outright, Marpeck makes an important distinction here: the church is not identified with Christ; rather, Christ remains separate from the church, though in some way indistinct from it, operating as its head and working through it. The church is the literal continuation of Jesus’s earthly life, but the church is such analogically and unequally—just as Jesus was fully human and fully divine, by analogy the church is fully human and divine (by its filling with the Spirit). The church is the earthly, human body of Christ—emphasis on human—that has been filled with the Holy Spirit.

Like the rest of his theology, Marpeck forged his ecclesiology in conversation with both the Spiritualists (who elevated the inner or spiritual above the outer or material in the life of the church) and Reformed acquaintances in Strasbourg, whom he saw as elevating the outer over the inner and “establish a church on the dead letter.”⁵⁵ Marpeck’s Christology shaped his progressive hermeneutic. Together, they shaped how he understood the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church. And those three together were the soil for his ecclesiology shaping his view on the relation between the Kingdom of Christ and secular authority. Marpeck’s theology of church and world is the clearest, most orthodox representative of early Anabaptist two-kingdom theology.⁵⁶ This is partly so because he is careful to clarify that God is sovereign over both kingdoms, a reality

⁵³ Marpeck, “Response,” 84.

⁵⁴ Marpeck, “Response,” 84. Marpeck formulated this distinction between the “glorified Christ” and the “unglorified Christ” in response to Caspar Schwenckfeld’s emphasis on the “glorified Christ” at the complete loss of any notion of the human Christ, or “unglorified Christ.” For Marpeck, the ceremonies are actions precisely of the “unglorified Christ” in the church. Blough is right when he claims that “Christ glorified, in heaven, always acts on earth by means of his unglorified body, the church” (*Christ in Our Midst*, 150).

⁵⁵ Marpeck, “The Churches of Christ and Hagar,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 397. Marpeck has that criticism to level against his Catholic and Reformed opponents, but on the same page, he criticizes his opponents on the Spiritualist side by accusing them of trying to be children of God “without a legitimate mother” (i.e., the church).

⁵⁶ Found in Marpeck, “Exposé of the Babylonian Whore,” in *The Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle*, 24–44.

⁴⁸ Snyder, “Caspar Schwenckfeld, Pilgram Marpeck, and Their Followers,” 485.

⁴⁹ Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 152.

⁵⁰ Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 165.

⁵¹ Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 217.

⁵² Peter C. Orr, *Exalted Above the Heavens: The Risen and Ascended Christ*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 47 (IVP Academic, 2019), 35.

that historic Anabaptists have not always made sufficiently clear:

Even as God has offered peace to everyone, but not all have accepted it, likewise he has in his mercy also established and ordained divine Authority on earth to preserve temporal peace wherever the true peace of God, which is incompatible with self-seeking, is not accepted, in order that they don't destroy each other over their property.⁵⁷

Although God is sovereign over both, the church's place is only in God's Kingdom.⁵⁸ And when carnal authority (the state) demands obedience that is contrary to the will of God revealed in Scripture, the church is obligated to "act against the Authority, remain faithful to God, and surrender bodily life in patience and love to the government as the Authority over the flesh but not over the Word and the Spirit."⁵⁹

The fusion of flesh and Spirit in the church and individual believers necessitates obedience, even when it means acting "against the Authority."⁶⁰ This especially applies when the state calls us to take up arms.⁶¹ Marpeck's Schwenckfeldian hermeneutic led him to agree with Schwenckfeld's belief that the Reformed doctrine of justification by faith is incomplete. He argued that it lacked sufficient emphasis on the obedience of faith that is part of the reason for the cross and resurrection in the first place: "What is missing in their teaching is the cross of Christ; they resist it and teach others to resist it."⁶²

⁵⁷ Marpeck, "Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *The Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle*, 31.

⁵⁸ Marpeck, "Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 39.

⁵⁹ Marpeck, "An Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 31.

⁶⁰ Marpeck, "An Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 20.

⁶¹ This is made plain through Marpeck's "Exposé," but he is especially clear on pp. 30–31.

⁶² Marpeck, "An Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 28. Snyder summarizes this well: "For Marpeck, as for Schwenckfeld, to be 'baptized within' by Christ's fire and Spirit was to experience a spiritual rebirth. Believers were 'justified' by Christ's sacrifice, of course. That is, their sins were forgiven, for Christ's sake. However, echoing Schwenckfeld exactly on this point, Marpeck would clarify that Christ's intent was not simply to justify, or to 'consider sinners righteous,' but rather to consider them righteous and to *sanctify* them—that is, to make sinners holy by the spiritual power of rebirth." See Snyder, "Caspar Schwenckfeld, Pilgram Marpeck, and Their Followers," 484.

Marpeck's two-kingdom theology grew out of his Christological analogy of Jesus's Chalcedonian identity with the Body of Christ. As the "prolongation" of the Body of Christ on earth, Marpeck is making an analogy between the incarnation and the nature of the church. The incarnate Lord was both human and divine, both flesh and Spirit. Analogically, the church is both human and divine. The church is the prolongation of the human Christ, and the church is filled with and animated by the Spirit.⁶³ But the accent here must fall on the human side of the equation. As Marpeck says, this necessitates a spiritual battle on the part of every member of the Body of Christ:

While the unbeliever is nothing more than flesh and death (Rom. 8:6; Jn. 3), the true believer will not be able to slacken the struggle between Spirit and flesh. His flesh cannot bear the rule of the Spirit until it submits itself to the discipline of the Spirit. Then the struggle between flesh and Spirit begins (Gal. 5:17).⁶⁴

This elevation of the material—the flesh as the locus of the Spirit's struggle within us—impacted Marpeck's ecclesiology. It is the physical that mediates the spiritual; therefore, "the visible and material realms of our existence ... cannot be dismissed, despised, relativized as means for knowing God or for making God known."⁶⁵ This is important because it means that the concrete practices, including discipline, of the church are important for its integrity and witness.⁶⁶ These concrete practices, or "ceremonies" as Marpeck and his spiritualist opponents called them, were "anything out of Jesus' ministry which passes on his teaching and identity."⁶⁷

⁶³ Interestingly, this is remarkably parallel with Karl Barth's treatment of the church as the "earthly-historical" existence of Jesus. Though he rejects talk of the church as "prolongation," for Barth, the "horizontal" (human) dimension of the church is met by the "vertical" (divine) dimension, forever changing the reality of the "horizontal." See Kimlyn Bender, *Karl Barth's Christological Ecclesiology* (Cascade, 2013).

⁶⁴ Marpeck, "A Clear and Useful Instruction," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 103.

⁶⁵ Blough, *Christ in Our Midst*, 225.

⁶⁶ In opposing the Spiritualist treatment of the "ceremonies," Marpeck often refuses to distinguish between the different "ceremonies," saying instead that "If one is invalid, all are invalid; if one remains valid, all remain valid" (*WPM*, 52). By "all," Marpeck here lists "baptism and the Lord's Supper ... all Scriptures, external teaching, separation from the world, ban, rebuke, exhortation, prayer, kneeling, the example of the believers, and all ceremonies for improvement and corporate benefit."

⁶⁷ Rempel, *The Lord's Supper*, 98.

For Marpeck, observance of the “ceremonies of the New Testament” is important for two reasons.⁶⁸ First, doing so is a matter of obedience. The apostolic church was the historical norm for Marpeck, so the ceremonies practiced by those of the apostolic era were therefore crucial to the existence of the Church. Second, the ceremonies serve to connect the spiritual, or “inner,” to the physical, or “outer.”⁶⁹ They are the point at which the spiritual life of the Christian connected with the outer, physical world. As markers of God’s grace, the ceremonies show the truth that, for Marpeck, the physical mediates the spiritual. It was in these ceremonies that the work of the Holy Spirit was made visible in the world: “the external service of the church in the proclamation of the Gospel, in water, bread and wine, *and in mutual discipline* is fused with the internal spiritual service of Christ into one living, dynamic reality.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, it is in reflecting upon the “physical words, works, deeds, and life” of Christ that the Holy Spirit is received by the church.⁷¹ Moreover, an individual only receives the Spirit as a member of the church, Christ’s body: “God the Father is not completely in any one member of Christ’s body ... or in the single member alone; rather, He is in all when the members are knit together under the Head and united through His Spirit.”⁷²

The church is fundamental to Marpeck’s Christology because the church itself is one of the “external” realities that points to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Thus, the church, as the body of Christ in the world, represents physically and spiritually the presence of Christ, especially in its adherence to the ceremonies of the apostolic age. The church, as the continuation of the revelation of Christ, makes known God’s revelation precisely by its enactment of these ceremonies. The enactment of the ceremonies by the church was the enactment by Christ himself, the “unglorified Christ.”

This revelation of the “inward testimony of the Spirit” in the “outward testimonies” is best illustrated in baptism. Marpeck saw baptism as the entry point into the church. Baptism without discipline makes no sense,

⁶⁸ Marpeck, “A Clear Refutation,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 44.

⁶⁹ Marpeck, “A Clear Refutation,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 74. For more on the meeting between the “inner” and the “outer,” or the flesh and the Spirit, in the ceremonies, see also “A Clear Refutation,” 83. For more on this dual purpose, see Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper*, 99.

⁷⁰ Walter Klaassen, “Church Discipline and the Spirit in Pilgram Marpeck,” *De Geest in Het Geding: Opstellen Aangeboden Aan J.A. Oosterbaan*, ed. I. B. Horst, A. F. de Jong and D. Visser (H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1978), 170–71 (emphasis added).

⁷¹ Marpeck, “A Clear Refutation,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 63.

⁷² Marpeck, “A Clear and Useful Instruction,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 87.

though. Baptism, as an outward testimony, pointed toward the inward reality of the receipt of God’s grace *and* one’s submission to the community in the battle against the flesh.

Granted, this focus on the “ceremonies of the New Testament” is an important aspect of traditional Anabaptism’s ecclesiology as well, but where Marpeck’s thinking on this is different and important for the purposes of this essay is in the fact that Marpeck, more than perhaps any of the other early Anabaptists, understood what we would now call “formation”: “The fundamental reality leading to a life of love and peace was not a series of external New Testament ‘commands’ that were to be obeyed to the letter, but rather a life of spiritual growth informed by the living reality of Christ’s presence.”⁷³ Of course, for Marpeck “the life of spiritual growth informed by the living reality of Christ’s presence” necessarily includes the practice of discipline and the other “ceremonies” which mediate the spiritual in the world of the physical. This mediation is, for Marpeck, what leads to “spiritual growth,” or the process of ending “fleshly control,” in the church.⁷⁴

The Chalcedonian Analogy and Church Discipline

As stated at the beginning of this essay, Marpeck’s view of church discipline has enjoyed scholarly focus in the past generation. But because Marpeck’s treatment of church discipline, like all his theology, grows out of the Chalcedonian substructure of his thought, it is not simply pragmatic. Neither is it guided chiefly by some abstract concept like “patience” or “love,” though both concepts are important for Marpeck in the practice of discipline. The nuance of Marpeck’s thinking about discipline is at the intersection of that Chalcedonian Christology, its ecclesiological application, and his agreement with the rest of the Anabaptists that the church is to be characterized by radical faithfulness in the obedience of discipleship.

As the prolongation of the humanity of Jesus, the church must practice obedience to Jesus. From that lens, Marpeck saw the Swiss Brethren’s “hasty” practice of discipline to be more like the world than Christ.⁷⁵ The church is supposed to be different from the state and world, especially in the world’s use of the “carnal sword.”

Contrary to the contemporary tendency to turn to Marpeck as a less-

⁷³ Rempel, *The Lord’s Supper in Anabaptism*, 100.

⁷⁴ Marpeck, “Exposé of the Babylonian Whore,” in *Later Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 29–30.

⁷⁵ Marpeck, “Judgment and Decision,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 313.

sectarian “Anabaptist for our times,” Marpeck insisted on a firm separation of the faithful from the world, but he did so in a different way than those of either the Swiss Brethren or the Dutch/North German Anabaptists. This is clear throughout his writings where he addresses the nature of the church’s relationship with the world, but one such quotation will suffice to support my claim.

The body of Christ is ... built inwardly through the Holy Spirit, and externally through the co-witness of works. His church or communion is His bride, internally in the Spirit and truth, externally with praise to God, and to be a light before the world. But this church is separated from the world, for it is a witness over it. Similarly, through word and work, the gospel must be preached before the coming of the Son of Man.⁷⁶

The problem arises when we start from the strict, legalistic separatism of what became historic Anabaptism. From that view, Marpeck’s view seems like a compromise. But to understand Marpeck’s approach to church discipline, one needs to see it as an outworking of Marpeck’s Chalcedonian ecclesiology. His focus on the church as the prolongation of the humanity of Christ, based on analogy to Chalcedonian Christology, means that members of the church really are new *wesen*, filled with the Holy Spirit. Christians really are new creations, transformed by the Holy Spirit. But unlike Christ, Christians are not sinless. We are new *wesen*, spirit and flesh, similar to Christ, but only similar to. This is where “on analogy” is an important qualifier. Like his stricter dialogue partners, Marpeck expects real change in the Christian life, but that change is the fruit of a process of sanctifying transformation. Marpeck is clear that this understanding *calls for* discipline within the Church *and* for separation. Marpeck says it well when he writes, “the church is separated from the world, for it is a witness over it.”⁷⁷ Discipline becomes a tool for the purpose of spiritual formation and the witness of the church.

There is no evidence that Marpeck disagreed with the Swiss Brethren’s Schleithem Confession and its insistence on the use of “the ban” to preserve the church.⁷⁸ Marpeck shared their conviction that separation from

⁷⁶ Marpeck, “On the Inner Church,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 423.

⁷⁷ Marpeck, “On the Inner Church,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 423.

⁷⁸ Although the truth of this claim is evident from a close reading of Marpeck’s writings, Klassen argued as such in his 1959 article in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia IV*: “There is no evidence that the Marpeck brotherhood was critical of Schleithem at any time, even though there were some tensions between the

the world’s evil was of utmost importance for the life of the church.⁷⁹ He desired, however, to ground it more firmly in the Bible, particularly Christologically. Marpeck was chiefly concerned to unify the various Anabaptists movements under one theological umbrella, but in order for that to happen, he needed to see the Swiss Brethren reframe and reform their hasty and coercive use of judgment.

In “Judgment and Decision,” Marpeck addresses and critiques two opposite and equally misguided approaches to discipline. First, he critiques the rejection of discipline by those who proof-text Scriptures like Matthew 7:1:

But everywhere the devil selectively uses his weapons against us through the dead letter. Some do not want to judge at all, and take refuge behind Matthew 7[1]: “Judge not that you be not judged. Do not condemn so that you will not be condemned.” They do not see the contrary to this statement, Matthew 18[15]: “If your brother sins, punish him.”⁸⁰

Rather than entertaining that misuse of Scripture, Marpeck seeks to ground the practice of discipline in the character of Christ. Just as God dealt with us patiently and mercifully, so also we are to practice discipline in “patience, humility, meekness, and love.”⁸¹

Secondly, Marpeck critiques the opposite error that is “worse than the one referred to above, to lead men astray with hasty and uncertain judgments.”⁸² This criticism is aimed right at the Swiss Brethren. Marpeck views this approach to discipline as working against the Holy Spirit. By practicing discipline the way they do,

they are judging and condemning themselves, making sin where there is no sin, setting up laws, commandments, and prohibitions

Marpeck brotherhood and some Swiss Brethren.” I owe this reference to Gerald J. Mast, “Patient Separation in Marpeck’s Theology,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 85.1 (January 2011): 79. Mast makes the same argument as Klassen and myself.

⁷⁹ Marpeck wrote four letters to the Swiss Brethren to correct their practice of church discipline, not their practice of it as such. These were “Judgment and Decision” (undated); “Another Letter to the Swiss Brethren” (1543); “Concerning Hasty Judgments and Verdicts” (1542); and “The Cause of the Conflict” (1543). The first two can be found in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, and the latter two can be found in *Jörg Maler’s Kunstbuch: Writings of the Pilgram Marpeck Circle*.

⁸⁰ Marpeck, “Judgment and Decision,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 327.

⁸¹ Marpeck, “Judgment and Decision,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 326.

⁸² Marpeck, “Judgment and Decision,” in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 327.

against the authority and sovereignty of the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave His own no law except the law of love.... They seek to establish laws, and would become the masters of Scripture, but they do not know what they establish. Because of this ignorance, the enemy takes hearts and consciences captive.⁸³

It is precisely because the church is the prolongation of Christ's physical presence on earth and thus subject to the desires of the flesh that discipline is to be undertaken with humility and love. We need discipline and "the ban" because we are imperfect. We also need to tread lightly and with love when we practice discipline, *because we are imperfect*.

On the other hand, though imperfect and fleshly, we need discipline because we have the invisible Spirit within us. Because the church is the prolongation of Christ's physical presence on earth, the church must work toward obedience; thus, we need discipline. There is obviously a tension here that is not to be solved. Rather, like Marpeck, we must live in the tension by practicing discipline patiently and faithfully, not running "ahead of Christ Jesus."⁸⁴ In other words, we *are* already the Body of Christ, and that reality necessitates an ongoing war against the flesh by means of the Spirit. As Minear writes regarding the identity of the church, "the church is always under constraint to become what it is."⁸⁵ Marpeck would agree. The church is the Body of Christ, mysteriously continuing his physical presence on earth, and so must learn to become that by means of the slow, patient sanctifying work of discipline. We can thus affirm Snyder's claim when he maintains that "Marpeck insisted that the function of the ban was not primarily for the maintenance of purity in the Body, but rather the ban, properly understood, was an instrument for the building up of the Body of Christ in love."⁸⁶

This alternative approach to discipline is best summarized by Marpeck's distinction between fruit and blossoms or leaves in a believer's life: "Christ commands us to judge by the fruit, and not by the blossoms or the leaves which precede the fruit, for blossom and leaf may become good or evil. Evil fruit, when it appears, can never become good. Then the faithful are obligated to exercise judgment."⁸⁷

⁸³ Marpeck, "Judgment and Decision," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 327.

⁸⁴ Marpeck, "Judgment and Decision," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 324.

⁸⁵ Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament*, 127.

⁸⁶ Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology*, 331.

⁸⁷ Marpeck, "Judgment and Decision," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 344.

Conclusion: Marpeck as Resource for a Renewed Anabaptism

Marpeck's Chalcedonian ecclesiology is a fascinating mix of convictions that are difficult to hold together. Marpeck focused resolutely on both the humanity, the materiality of Christ, *and* on the divinity of Christ. It is the Spirit of Christ dwelling in us, not a legal adherence, which forms people.⁸⁸ But like Paul, Marpeck was misunderstood as a libertine. It is this conviction concerning the law that typically led other early Anabaptists down the path to Spiritualism. Marpeck's theology is in tune with the unfolding story of Scripture, with the Chalcedonian definition of Christ, with the reality of the church's vocation in the world, and with the ways that the Holy Spirit actually works in the life of a believer.

Marpeck refused to take the path that many have taken in Anabaptist history: separating theology from ethics. Modern Anabaptists fall into this trap often: so-called progressive Anabaptists do so, focusing on behavior without doctrine, and end up legalists. And so-called conservative Anabaptists often end up in the same place in their emphasis on a different set of accepted behaviors. Either way, a truncated ecclesiology centered around legalistic behavior policing is created. In their own ways, both are heirs of the Swiss Brethren's legalistic ecclesiology. Marpeck shows us another path—discipleship that begins with and grows from a proper Chalcedonian substructure. Theology and ethics cannot be separated. Proper, faithful Christian ethics grows from proper, faithful Christian theology, the center of which is Christology. The same has always and must remain the case for Anabaptism.

Anabaptism and the Free Church broadly have something important to offer the contemporary church, especially the Evangelical church as it grapples with its place in a rapidly changing culture. We do not help ourselves to gain a hearing with the wider church by denying the fact that Anabaptism is and must be orthodox at its core. Indeed, Marpeck shows us that Anabaptism is one among many possible representations of historic, orthodox Christianity. Historic Anabaptism has too often avoided the "Great Conversation" by imagining that it is entirely other than its Protestant brothers and sisters. Anabaptist theology and ecclesial practice is certainly distinct, but it has much more in common with rest of the

⁸⁸ Among many Marpeck passages that could illustrate this aspect of his thought, see Marpeck, "Judgment and Decision," in *The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck*, 331: "whoever presumed to preserve, rule, and lead the kingdom of Christ through law, commandment, and prohibition, yes, through the law of God, not to mention human inventions, no matter how pious it appears, it, too, thrusts the voluntary Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, the proper Ruler of hearts, out of His place and puts himself in the place where he ought not to be."

(Protestant) church than has been historically acknowledged. If the Anabaptist voice is to be heard among the contemporary church's struggle to find its place in our secularizing western culture, it must acknowledge and build upon the orthodox core that Marpeck exemplifies. In navigating his rapidly changing and contested theological environment of the Reformation, Marpeck provides the way forward to navigate a rapidly changing and contested theological environment.

The Application Model of Jim Shaddix in Expository Preaching

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Abstract: Most homileticsians agree that application is a fundamental component of expository preaching. However, there exists a debate as to whether application in an expository sermon should be specific or general. Well respected scholars on both sides of the debate have contributed greatly to their respective convictions on the matter. Nevertheless, this essay seeks to uncover some of the potential dangers that befall overly specific and general application. Furthermore, this essay argues that the application model as proposed by Jim Shaddix serves as a *via media* between the dangers of specific and general application, thereby offering a viable approach to aid preachers in applying the biblical text without drifting into either extreme.

Key Words: application, expository, general, Holy Spirit, particular, preaching, principle, specific

John Broadus once penned the words, “The application in a sermon is not merely an appendage to the discussion or a subordinate part of it, but is the main thing to be done.”¹ Over a century later, he is joined by many who share the same conviction. Grant Osborne writes, “The static study of the original meaning of a text dare never be an end in itself but must at all times have as its goal the dynamic application of the text to one’s current needs and the sharing of that text with others via expository teaching and preaching.”² Likewise, Dennis Johnson maintains, “Exegesis itself is impoverished when specialization and professional pressures in the academy inculcate into faculty and students a model of biblical interpretation that aborts the process short of *application*, depriving it of its

sweetest fruit.”³ Others have used more vivid language, arguing that exposition without application leads to “spiritual constipation”⁴ and “abortion.”⁵ When the expository sermon lacks application, preaching is deprived of its purpose of “bringing home to God’s people God’s message from God’s Word.”⁶

At one point in time, the debate over the necessity of application was pertinent. In fact, many of the aforementioned works were written amid an age when not only expository preaching in general, but application in particular, fell on hard times.⁷ Fortunately, as evidenced above, several scholarly works have contributed to a reclaiming of application in expository preaching in recent decades.⁸ Therefore, this essay will not seek to contribute further to the necessity of application but rather to explore the extent to which a preacher should apply the biblical text. In other words, this essay is not focused on the broader question, “Should preachers apply the biblical text?” but rather, “To what degree of specificity should the text be applied?”

This question has also created a debate among likeminded expository

³ Dennis E. Johnson, *Him We Proclaim: Preaching Christ from All the Scriptures* (P&R, 2007), 13 (emphasis original).

⁴ Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Baker, 2001), 113.

⁵ Howard G. Hendricks and William Hendricks, *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*, rev. and updated ed. (Moody, 2007), 171. Hendricks and Hendricks articulate that Scripture is not intended to be studied merely to satisfy curiosity but to transform lives. Therefore, when a preacher neglects to apply the text to the audience, he deprives Scripture of its transformative purpose.

⁶ Jay E. Adams, *Truth Applied: Application in Preaching* (Ministry Resources Library, 1990), 32. Jay Adams explains that the nature of preaching is to herald, meaning that it involves declaring both the good and bad news of the Bible in an authoritative manner.

⁷ Hershael York and Scott Blue write, “Though some disagreement exists about the precise definition of expository preaching, no dissension stands sharper nor has greater consequences than the current discussion regarding the necessity or even the appropriateness of the role of application in an expository sermon” (Hershael York and Scott Blue, “Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?” *SB/T* 3.2 [Summer 1999]: 70).

⁸ For further examples, see Scott A. Blue, “Application in the Expository Sermon: A Case for Its Necessary Inclusion” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001); and R. Scott Pace, “Hermeneutics and Homiletics: A Case for the Necessity and Nature of Contextual-Theological Application in the Expository Sermon” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2007).

¹ John Albert Broadus and Vernon L. Stanfield, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 4th ed. (Harper & Row, 1898), 165.

² Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. and exp. ed. (InterVarsity Press, 2006), 410.

homileticians in recent years. Jeramie Rinne explains that because “application deals with how God’s timeless message speaks now, and now is always changing,” the task of application remains fluid.⁹ Furthermore, this essay claims that the debate over the level of specificity has not only resulted in the task of application remaining unclear, but it has also left the guardrails against overly specific and general application unclear as well. Therefore, the question this essay seeks to answer is, “What are the potential dangers of specific and general application, and is there a model of application that currently exists that helps guard against these potential dangers?” This essay argues that the application model as outlined by Jim Shaddix warrants a viable approach to help guard against several hazards presented by specific and general applications.

Research Methodology and Defining of Key Terms

In order to validate the thesis, this essay will incorporate a qualitative content analysis.¹⁰ First, the arguments made by proponents of specific and general application will be analyzed, and some of the potential dangers that befall each respective approach will be extracted. After establishing a working knowledge of each approach and the dangers they might pose to expository preaching, this essay will then analyze Jim Shaddix’s model of application. At the end of the essay, Shaddix’s model will be evaluated as a *via media* between the potential dangers of specific and general application.

Before conducting the analysis, I will provide a working definition of specific and general application. As a functional element of expository preaching, application is helpfully understood as “the process whereby the expositor takes a biblical truth of the text and applies it to the lives of his audience, proclaiming why it is relevant for their lives, and passionately encouraging them to make necessary changes in their lives in a manner congruent with the original intent of the author.”¹¹ Expositors on both sides of the application spectrum agree with the underlying premise of this definition. The disagreement, however, lies in how one understands the term “relevant.” Those who fall into the specific application camp, such as Bryan Chapell, argue that relevancy is achieved when the focus of

the message is “on real concerns of specific people.”¹² Charles Dennison, however, argues that the Word of God is already relevant and thus does not need to be “pull[ed] into our world as if [it] were deficient in itself and in need of our applicatory skills.”¹³ John MacArthur, similarly, maintains that the preacher is tasked only with expounding on the principles of the text and entrusting the Holy Spirit to apply those principles in a relevant way to each individual.¹⁴ Therefore, one could define specific and general application in the following way:

Specific application deals with the immediate context of the sermon and intends to address specific challenges or concerns of a particular group of people at a particular time in a particular place. General application, on the other hand, focuses on the broader context and intends to address deeper and more varied principles that are derived from the biblical text, entrusting the Holy Spirit to reveal the significance of those principles directly to individual listeners.¹⁵

With a working definition now in place, one can begin to glean a proper understanding of specific and general application as well as the potential dangers each approach might present to expository preaching.

Understanding Specific Application

Specific application accentuates the particulars of a given congregation over the broader implications a biblical text might have on God’s people in all times and at all places. Chapell elevates the particulars of a congregation when he writes, “The old preaching adage rings true: if you try to speak to everyone, you really speak to no one. In preaching, *the particular is the universal*; the more we focus our messages on real concerns of specific people, the more everyone is compelled to listen.”¹⁶ Although Chapell

¹² Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 3rd ed. (Baker Academic, 2018), 32. Chapell’s understanding of relevance and specificity leads him to argue for every text having a Fallen Condition Focus (FCF), which offers the audience more incentive to listen to the message.

¹³ Charles G. Dennison, “Some Thoughts on Preaching,” *Kerux* 11.3 (December 1996): 8.

¹⁴ John MacArthur, *Preaching: How to Preach Biblically* (Thomas Nelson, 2005), 246.

¹⁵ The researcher was unable to find any sources that offer a precise definition for specific and general application. Therefore, the following definition belongs to the author and is based on research in the field of application in expository preaching.

¹⁶ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 32 (emphasis added).

⁹ Jeramie Rinne, “Learning the Art of Sermon Application,” *The Gospel Coalition* (July 2013).

¹⁰ Paul D. Leedy, Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, and Laura Ruth Johnson, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 12th ed. (Pearson, 2019), 235–37.

¹¹ York and Blue, “Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?” 73–74.

does not align himself fully with the theology of Norman Neaves, he is sympathetic to the pastoral tone Neaves portrays when he writes,

I'm tired of sermons that do not live where people live, that don't connect with the real stories and struggles by which their lives are shaped, that never touch the earth or breathe the air that the congregation breathes. Maybe there are those who enjoy developing the universal sermon, the one that can be preached everywhere and anywhere, that has a quality of being timeless. But as far as I am concerned, everywhere and anywhere really means nowhere; and those who strive to be timeless, are usually, simply not very timely.... The particular is higher than the universal.¹⁷

Although Chapell cautions that such an elevated view of the particulars of the congregation does not permit preachers to call people out by name, he nevertheless calls for preachers to "speak with tactful specificity to the burdens and struggles our people face—just as the Scriptures do."¹⁸

Murray Capill, another proponent of specific application, adds that preachers should target their application towards the real spiritual experiences their people face.¹⁹ In order to accomplish this goal, he suggests that preachers ask themselves questions about individual people in their congregation. These questions include, "Where is *this* person at? What does *she* need? How can I get inside *him*? How can I help *her* advance spiritually?"²⁰ By asking questions about the spiritual needs of individual people, the preacher enables himself to make application that is both varied and useful to his congregation.²¹

In a similar vein, John Stott has contributed significantly to the discussion of application in expository preaching with his analogy of "bridge-

building."²² Although Stott may not classify himself as a proponent of specific application in the same way Chapell and Capill do,²³ he nevertheless values the task of the preacher "to ask people questions and get them talking."²⁴ He explains,

We ought to know more about the Bible than they do, but they are likely to know more about the real world than we do. So we should encourage them to tell us about their home and family life, their job, their expertise and their spare-time interests. We also need to penetrate beyond their doing to their thinking. What makes them tick? How does their Christian faith motivate them? What problems do they have which impede their believing or inhibit them from applying their faith to their life? The more diverse people's backgrounds, the more we have to learn. It is important for us to listen to representatives of different generations as well as of different cultures, especially of the younger generation.²⁵

Although Stott's questions include individual needs and concerns, they are not limited to individual people. In fact, they are designed ultimately to acquire a working knowledge of different generations and cultures, which is necessary for effectively connecting the world of the Bible to the world of contemporary people.²⁶

Some adherents of a general approach to application, such as MacArthur, rely heavily on the influence of the Holy Spirit in applying the text to the congregation. That does not imply, however, that adherents of specific application ignore the Holy Spirit's role in this task. In fact, Chapell contends, "Ultimately, the Spirit alone can apply the truths of his Word; therefore, sermon application succeeds only when preachers preach for his purposes and in dependence on his work."²⁷ Likewise, Capill argues,

²² John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Eerdmans, 1982), 99–135.

²³ For the sake of clarification, I do not claim that the names mentioned in the specific and general application approaches agree with one another in all matters involved in the discipline of preaching. Although there is certainly a connection between all of these individuals regarding their theology, this is not always indicative that there is a lack of nuance between their methodology.

²⁴ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 146.

²⁵ Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 146.

²⁶ A critical element of bridging the cultural gap between the biblical text and contemporary audience is what Stott refers to as double listening. He defines this concept as "listening to the word of God and listening to the voices of the modern world, its cries of anger, pain, and despair" (John R. W. Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor* [InterVarsity Press, 2007], 100).

²⁷ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 214.

¹⁷ Norman Neaves, "Preaching in Pastoral Perspective," in *Preaching the Story*, ed. Edmund A. Steimle, Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles Rice (Fortress, 1980), 108. Quoted in Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 205–6.

¹⁸ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 35.

¹⁹ Murray Capill, *The Heart Is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text* (P&R, 2014), 135.

²⁰ Capill, *The Heart is the Target*, 135 (emphases added).

²¹ In chapter five of his book, entitled "One Size Doesn't Fit All," Capill illustrates a fascinating analogy to support the need for specific application. He writes, "I don't want to go to a doctor who automatically prescribes penicillin for every patient. I want to go to one who diagnoses before she prescribes. Careful diagnoses will then ideally lead to a range of holistic remedies. They won't be just about what medicine to take, but about exercise, sleep, diet, mental well-being, relaxation, and so on. Preachers must do the same" (*The Heart Is the Target*, 135–36).

“Belief in the power of God’s Word when applied to the heart directly by the Holy Spirit is absolutely right.”²⁸ However, he adds, “Settling for explanation of the Word but not application of it to life fails to do justice to the fact that the Spirit uses means, and his means include the preacher’s proclamation of the Word to his people in his day.”²⁹ Essentially, failing to apply the biblical text specifically to a particular congregation is not permitted by a high pneumatology. Such an idea, according to York and Blue, is “disingenuous” for there is no “biblical or moral principle [making] exegesis the work of the preacher and application the exclusive province of the Spirit.”³⁰ On the contrary, a high pneumatology necessitates that the preacher make specific application for, as Chapell argues, “Sound explanation requires good scholarship. Solid application requires deep spirituality.”³¹

The Dangers of Specific Application

In dealing with specific application, several potential dangers arise out of the models presented by the likes of Chapell, Capill, and Stott. First, when the preacher attempts to grasp the felt needs and concerns of the congregation, the natural temptation that follows is the potential for those needs and concerns to drive the message more than the biblical text. Granted, neither Chapell, Capill, nor Stott argues for preaching that is less Word-driven and more audience-driven.³² Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize this potential hazard that awaits expository preachers seeking to relevantly apply the biblical text. Daniel Doriani cautions against naïveté at this point, beckoning preachers to consider the questions, “What books are [the people] reading? What societal ills have they noticed? What

²⁸ Capill, *The Heart Is the Target*, 12.

²⁹ Capill, *The Heart Is the Target*, 12.

³⁰ York and Blue, “Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?,” 72.

³¹ Chapell adds, “A pastor who is keenly aware of the soul’s struggles and who is intimately acquainted with scriptural remedies has what it takes to produce sound applications” (*Christ-Centered Preaching*, 207). Capill, similarly, articulates in his application model that powerful preaching and penetrating application flow through the spiritually nourished reservoir of the preacher’s own life (*The Heart Is the Target*, 81–94).

³² For example, Stott clarifies, “We listen to the Word with humble reverence, anxious to understand it, and resolved to believe and obey what we come to understand. We listen to the world with critical alertness, anxious to understand it too, and resolve not necessarily to believe and obey it, but to sympathize with it and to seek grace to discover how the gospel relates to it” (John R. W. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* [InterVarsity Press, 1992], 28).

troubled persons have stepped into their offices? What songs have they been singing? And what if these recent experiences have little to do with the text?”³³ Doriani even cautions against the corrupted heart of the preacher himself:

Further, we dare not neglect the role of the corrupted human heart in the process of application. What are the teacher’s frustrated desires and dreams? Who has offended him and in what way? What would he like his hearers to do for him? Some leaders can find, in many a text, evidence that their goals and their programs are precisely God’s will for themselves or their church. In short, free meditation has few safeguards against the infections of a deceitful heart.³⁴

Essentially, when felt needs and concerns become too suggestive for the sermon, the preacher might find himself making application that has little to no grounding in the Scriptures. Hence, Haddon Robinson claims, “More heresy is preached in application than in Bible exegesis.”³⁵

The second potential danger that befalls specific application is what Doriani refers to as the “personal spirituality view.”³⁶ There is no way to know for sure if Doriani has Chapell in mind when he states, “Solid application requires deep spirituality,”³⁷ but it stands to reason that Doriani may be questioning the logic that Chapell uses.³⁸ Doriani elaborates, “Taken to its extreme conclusion, the ‘personal spirituality’ view regards theoretical reflection on application as superfluous. If the speaker faithfully hears the text, he will know what to say.... On this view, application is better caught than taught.”³⁹ If powerful application is determined less by methods and more by one’s spirituality, then it raises the question, “How well can a model of specific application be taught and replicated at all?” In essence, the potential problem with claiming that application is contingent upon the preacher’s spirituality is that it may insinuate that

³³ Daniel M. Doriani, *Getting the Message: A Plan for Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (P&R, 1996), 125.

³⁴ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 125.

³⁵ Haddon Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching: A Comprehensive Resource for Today’s Communicators*, ed. Haddon W. Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Zondervan, 2005), 306.

³⁶ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 124.

³⁷ Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 207.

³⁸ Chapell’s *Christ-Centered Preaching* was originally published in 1994, whereas Doriani’s book was published in 1996. So, although Doriani may not have Chapell in mind at the point of writing his book, Chapell’s work was circulating at that time.

³⁹ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 124.

specific application is only possible when the preacher is filled with the Spirit, regardless of how well he understands the particular needs and concerns of his congregation.

The third and final potential danger of specific application is the issue of over-individualization. Rinne helpfully calls attention to this likelihood in expository preaching, writing, "We suffer from an individualistic, self-focused orientation (at least here in the United States). As a result, we instinctively think of relevance in personal terms. We ask, 'What does this text mean for *me*?' but fail to ponder what it means for *us*. And yet so much of the Bible is written to God's gathered people, whether Israel or local churches."⁴⁰ In other words, when application is tied too closely to individual people and their felt needs, what is lost is the potential for the Scriptures to address and form the body and bride of Christ as a whole.

Understanding General Application

As mentioned above, the general application approach views the Bible as a naturally relevant book that does not require the preacher to display its relevance through multiple, specific points of application. On the contrary, rather than focusing on the particulars of the congregation, proponents of general application focus on the broader principles of the biblical text. MacArthur helpfully explains this point, writing, "If a listener cannot grasp the principles taught by the text of the sermon, he will fail to understand their application to his own life. If he does understand them, he will be unable to escape their specific application made by the Spirit to his own life."⁴¹ According to MacArthur, if the congregation cannot understand the basic underlying principles of the biblical text first, it is unthinkable to presume that they will rightly understand the implications the text has for their lives.

Although York and Blue claim that MacArthur "downplays the need for sermon application,"⁴² it appears that his convictions on the matter are a bit more nuanced than they suggest. MacArthur is clear that preachers should seek to apply the biblical text in some measure. He writes,

True expository preaching is actually the most effective kind of applicational preaching. When Scripture is accurately interpreted and powerfully preached, the Spirit takes the message and applies it to the peculiar needs of each listener. Apart from explicit general application in principilizing the main parts of the exposition, the

⁴⁰ Rinne, "Learning the Art of Sermon Application" (emphases original).

⁴¹ John MacArthur, *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Word, 1992), 356.

⁴² York and Blue, "Is Application Necessary in the Expository Sermon?" 71.

expositor is not compelled to give a set number of points of specific application before a sermon can have an applicational impact. *That's not to say he should not make some illustrative applications*, but if the text is allowed to speak fully, applications will multiply far beyond what he can anticipate as the Spirit of God takes His Word and applies it to each listener.⁴³

As is evidenced by the italicized sentence above, MacArthur believes preachers should strive to apply the biblical text. His only caveat is that the sermon's impact is not contingent upon the number of applications offered by the preacher. Rather, MacArthur argues, it is the task of the preacher to explain and apply the general principles of the text and trust that the Spirit will further apply those principles in specific ways to individual people. By doing so, "This grants the Holy Spirit, who is most capable in applying the Word to every heart, His rightful place in speaking to individual lives."⁴⁴

Although application is the process of connecting scriptural truth to the contemporary world, a general approach to application recognizes the lack of a one-to-one relationship between these two factors. Walter Kaiser writes, "[The Bible's] words are most frequently . . . directed to a *specific* people in a *specific* situation in a *specific* time and in a *specific* culture."⁴⁵ Therefore, Robinson concludes, "The Bible is specific, but my audience is general."⁴⁶ He explains, "For example, a man listening to a sermon can identify with David committing adultery with Bathsheba, but he's not a king, and he doesn't command armies. We have to take this text that is historically specific and determine how the living God speaks from it today."⁴⁷ In the example that Robinson provides, a general approach to application will focus only on the principles that contemporary people share with David, which, in this case, is the principle of committing adultery. By doing so, the preacher is safeguarded from "saying what God doesn't say."⁴⁸

⁴³ MacArthur, *Preaching*, 246 (emphases added).

⁴⁴ MacArthur, *Preaching*, 246.

⁴⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Baker, 1998), 37 (emphases original).

⁴⁶ Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," 307.

⁴⁷ Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," 307.

⁴⁸ Robinson, "The Heresy of Application," 307. Robinson uses very vivid language to describe the act of applying the text in ways that the biblical writer would not permit. He considers it "a rape of the Bible" (p. 306).

The Dangers of General Application

There are a couple of different dangers that arise out of a general approach to application. First, although MacArthur's theology of preaching is thoroughly conservative, his reliance on the Holy Spirit to make specific application can lead preachers into the tragic waters of liberal ideology. Jay Adams argues, "Abhorrence of direct application leads ... into common ground with many liberals who believe that the use of the indicative alone, to the exclusion of the imperative, is adequate. At best, such preaching is applied (if at all) by implication; at worst, only by inference. Application becomes the task of the listener rather than the preacher."⁴⁹ Daniel Akin asserts that this "weakness is one of the deadliest ones of the so-called 'New Homiletic.'"⁵⁰ Indeed, one can trace the similarities between what MacArthur believes about application and what New Homiletic practitioner, Fred Craddock, believes as well. In defense of his inductive preaching method, Craddock writes, "If it is done well, one often need not make the applications of the conclusion to the lives of the hearers. If *they* have made the trip, it is *their* conclusion, and the implication for their own situations is not only clear but personally inescapable."⁵¹ The main issue with this potential danger is not the language connection between MacArthur and Craddock, but rather the presumption that the specific applications drawn by the congregation are rightly understood. Akin precisely points out that because we cannot "assume that [our people] will understand on their own ... [w]e cannot hope our people will 'fill in the blanks' of sermon application."⁵² In essence, reliance on the Holy Spirit to apply the message directly to individuals does not always result in rightly understood conclusions from the audience.

The second potential danger of general application is that it might lead preachers to become complacent.⁵³ Even if the preacher views the Bible as an intrinsically relevant book, the problem remains that the common perception of the Bible in modern times is that it is irrelevant.⁵⁴ Doriani

⁴⁹ Adams, *Truth Applied*, 21.

⁵⁰ Daniel L. Akin, Bill Curtis, and Stephen Nelson Rummage, *Engaging Exposition* (B&H Academic, 2011), 178.

⁵¹ Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, rev. and with new sermons (Chalice, 2001), 48–49. Compare this statement with MacArthur's: "If he does understand them, he will be *unable to escape* their specific application made by the Spirit to his own life" (*Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, 356, emphases added).

⁵² Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 178.

⁵³ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 127.

⁵⁴ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 127. Stott shares a conversation he once had

states, "Even Christians fail to see what the Bible has to do with their financial struggles and emotional decay at home, or with the temptations and the pressures to compromise at work. It stands mute, it seems, before the issues of the day—questions raised by constant change, the global economy, medical technology, and chronic poverty."⁵⁵ When preachers fail to recognize this sad reality of the day, and continue to "urge people to pray, trust God, observe the law, read the Bible, evangelize, and 'show their commitment by getting involved,'" the temptation is to stick with the same clichés and ignore real struggles and questions their congregation face day to day.⁵⁶

Understanding Jim Shaddix's View and Model of Application

Having explored some of the potential dangers of specific and general application that faces expository preaching, the question that arises is, "Is there a model of application that currently exists that helps guard against these potential dangers?" In the affirmative, this essay claims that Jim Shaddix's model of application warrants a viable approach to help guard against the potential dangers of specific and general applications. Before analyzing Shaddix's model, it is important to first understand his convictions on the matter.

Shaddix defines application as simply "relating the sermon to your audience, involving them in its subject, and calling them to act on its challenge."⁵⁷ He recognizes that expository preaching has received a bad reputation in the past, often "characterized by an overload of exegetical details with no connection to the real world."⁵⁸ Such a status, according to Shaddix, is not indicative of true expository preaching but "poor expository preaching."⁵⁹ He explains, "The goal of true expository preaching must be to secure some moral action, not simply to communicate doctrine."⁶⁰ In recent years, Shaddix argues that the pendulum has swung too far to the other side of the spectrum. No longer are preachers weighing down their congregations with exegetical facts; now they "are preaching more application at the expense of needed exegetical details of the

with brothers who denounced Christianity because they wanted to know "not whether Christianity is *true*, but whether it's *relevant*" (*Between Two Worlds*, 102, emphasis original).

⁵⁵ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 127.

⁵⁶ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 127.

⁵⁷ Jim Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching* (Rainer, 2019), 87.

⁵⁸ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 87.

⁵⁹ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 88.

⁶⁰ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 88.

text.”⁶¹ Such a shift in focus also misses the mark of true expository preaching “because it undermines and nullifies the possibility of real life change.”⁶² Taken together, Shaddix views exposition and application not in terms of a “greater-lesser” relationship, but as complementary partners in the shared goal of transforming lives.⁶³

Shaddix not only considers exposition and application partners in the preaching task, but he also contends for a symbiotic relationship between the preacher and the Holy Spirit in applying the biblical text. He and Jerry Vines write, “The expository preacher has a powerful ally as he seeks creatively to communicate God’s Word to contemporary listeners. He’s been promised divine assistance in connecting the ancient text to life today.”⁶⁴ According to Shaddix, the Spirit “provides guidance regarding the infinite number of specific situations and problems people face.”⁶⁵ Consequently, while the preacher is commissioned to apply the biblical text to his people, the Spirit’s assistance relieves him of needing expertise in everything under the sun.⁶⁶

Although the Spirit guides the preacher in making application, according to Shaddix, such an asset does not permit the preacher to neglect his responsibility to apply the text rightly. In fact, he and Scott Pace write that one of “the most compelling [reasons] for including application in the sermon is our opportunity to *cooperate with the Holy Spirit*.”⁶⁷ They recognize that the Spirit and the Scriptures alone contain sufficient power to change hearts, but they also acknowledge that preachers are the Spirit’s “delegated spokesmen” who are “charged to communicate on his behalf.”⁶⁸ Contrary to proponents of general application, Shaddix is hesitant to hastily distinguish between the preacher’s and the Spirit’s responsibility in applying the text.

Although Shaddix does not entirely accord with those on the general application side of the debate, he is concerned with the extent to which

⁶¹ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 88.

⁶² Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 88.

⁶³ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 90. This is a slightly different perspective than Chapell who contends that application justifies and provides a target towards which exposition aims (*Christ-Centered Preaching*, 189–92).

⁶⁴ Jerry Vines and Jim L. Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*, rev. ed. (Moody, 2017), 75. See also where Pace and Shaddix state that preachers exercise spiritual leadership through application “in partnership with the Spirit” (R. Scott Pace and Jim Shaddix, *Expositional Leadership: Shepherding God’s People from the Pulpit* [Crossway, 2024], 51).

⁶⁵ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 52.

⁶⁶ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 52, 90.

⁶⁷ Pace and Shaddix, *Expositional Leadership*, 52 (emphasis added).

⁶⁸ Pace and Shaddix, *Expositional Leadership*, 52.

specific application has progressed. Regarding the individualistic tendencies of specific application, Shaddix laments that preachers “get so consumed with making specific application to individuals that they never consider the degree to which their preaching relates to the larger congregation.”⁶⁹ Furthermore, and most importantly for Shaddix, “The more individualized and specific the preacher becomes, ... the less relevant his preaching becomes with regard to the purpose of preaching and the agenda of the Almighty. Additionally, ... he likely will find himself making God say some things He never said!”⁷⁰ When the preacher is more focused on making specific application to individual felt needs, he may effectually give them a lot of *good stuff*, but the tragedy “is not what people are *getting* but what they are *not getting*”—namely, *God’s stuff*.⁷¹ Essentially, Shaddix is concerned about application that places undue confidence in human resources rather than directing attention to divine agency.⁷²

Based upon the brief research above, Shaddix advocates for a *via media* between specific and general approaches to application. Nevertheless, in order to fully substantiate this claim, Shaddix’s own model of application must be considered and evaluated. Therefore, the questions raised now are, “What is Jim Shaddix’s proposed model of application, and how well

⁶⁹ Jim Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen* (B&H, 2003), 111. Shaddix is not against the idea that preachers should be concerned about individual listeners, as will be analyzed in his application model below; he simply argues that individual application must proceed only *after* considering the broader implications the text has on the congregational body. He writes, “None of this is to say that the preacher should not be concerned with specific application to the lives of his individual listeners. Certainly, every preacher must give serious attention to whom he will be speaking and how he might establish relevancy in each heart and mind. John the Baptist, Jesus, Paul, and the other apostles were concerned that the people acted rightly based on specific application of truth (e.g., Matt 7:21–27; Luke 3:10–14; Eph 4:25–32; Jas 2:14–26). But they provided such application only after allowing it to flow naturally from a consideration of broader theological ideas” (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111).

⁷⁰ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111. Shaddix argues that the agenda of the Bible is to set people “on a course to be shaped into the image of [God’s] Son, Jesus Christ” (Jim Shaddix, “Hearing God’s Voice: A Practical Theology for Expository Preaching,” *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 13.2 [Fall 2016]: 10). Shaddix agrees with Robinson on the issue of making God say things He never said (Robinson, “The Heresy of Application,” 306).

⁷¹ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 66. Shaddix defines *God’s stuff* as the very essence of the Bible, whereas *good stuff* is helpful advice in life that is easily gleaned from simple observation and research.

⁷² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 66.

does it help guard against the potential dangers that specific and general application present to expository preaching?" These important questions are addressed by considering Shaddix's "application funnel" and his implementation in two selected sermons.⁷³

Application Funnel

Shaddix views relevancy in preaching as "that which connects the truth of God's Word with the greatest needs of the most number of people."⁷⁴ When the preacher strives to apply God's truth as revealed in Scripture to the greatest needs of his congregation, he is on course to preach a message that is both meaningful to his people and glorifying to God.⁷⁵ Therefore, in order to make application with integrity, Shaddix proposes a series of six considerations for preachers that collectively form what he refers to as the "application funnel."⁷⁶ Just as a "V" shape funnel is intended to direct a downward flow into a specific location, the six considerations of Shaddix's application model are positioned in decreasing order of priority, beginning with the theological application of the text and ending with its application to individual people.⁷⁷

Theological Application

When the preacher sets out to apply the Scriptures to his audience, the first area of significance he should establish is its theological implications. This part of the application funnel helps answer the broader question, "What does this given biblical text teach us about God and his relationship with people?"⁷⁸ By answering this question first, the preacher is able to determine why God put that particular text in the Bible in the first place.⁷⁹ Vines and Shaddix offer a couple of guiding sub-questions to help the preacher in this task: First, "What biblical doctrines and theological

⁷³ The two sermons selected for examination are "Pursuing Christ's Presence" on Haggai 1 and "The Mystery of Marriage" on Eph 5:31–33. See Jim Shaddix, "Pursuing Christ's Presence," *The Website of Jim Shaddix (TWJS)*; Jim Shaddix, "The Mystery of Marriage," *TWJS*.

⁷⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 108.

⁷⁵ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 108.

⁷⁶ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 109.

⁷⁷ When the application funnel is used appropriately, Shaddix claims that "the preacher can establish a logical, significant relationship between biblical truth and the largest number of his listeners without losing substance along the way" (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 109).

⁷⁸ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 109.

⁷⁹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 175.

tenets are informed by this text?"⁸⁰ Second, "Where does this text stand in relation to Christ and the gospel?"⁸¹ In establishing the theological implications of the text, the preacher constructs a strong foundation upon which he can connect "that part of mankind which relates to the Creator."⁸²

Shaddix identifies the theological implications of both Haggai 1 and Eph 5:31–33 by locating the significance of the respective subject matter in relation to Christ and the gospel. In his sermon on Haggai 1, Shaddix relates the Jewish temple to the presence of Christ. He says, "God did not establish that physical building as end game. He established it as a representation of that which is to come, which you and I are the beneficiaries of, and that is the presence of Jesus Christ in our lives."⁸³ Likewise, in dealing with Paul's explication of marriage in Ephesians 5, Shaddix equates the concept of marriage with the portrayal of the gospel. He says, "I think [Paul] shows us ... in this passage of Scripture ... that through the marriage relationship, God has been streaming the gospel ever since he instituted marriage at the beginning of the history of mankind."⁸⁴ In effect, by equating the temple to the presence of Christ and marriage to the demonstration of the gospel, Shaddix forms the theological foundation upon which the remaining applications build.

Universal Application

After establishing the theological implications of a given biblical text, the preacher can then move to establish its universal application. In other words, "This is the timeless truth in any given passage that is applicable

⁸⁰ "Look to see what the text teaches us about foundational doctrinal issues like the character of God, the nature of salvation, and the depravity of man, that element of humanity that rebels against the glimpse of God. Be sure to look for some glimpse of God in every Bible passage, such as Creator or Sustainer" (Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 175).

⁸¹ "As noted earlier, every text stands in relation to Christ in some way. It either points forward to Christ, speaks directly of Christ, or reflects back on Christ. Determine how your passage relates to God's larger story of redemption through the gospel. The expositor can't afford to neglect to determine where his passage intersects with Christ and the gospel. Whatever you do, don't leave the study of your text and move on to sermon preparation without identifying the Christocentric and gospel-driven nature of your passage" (Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 175).

⁸² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 109.

⁸³ Shaddix, "Pursuing Christ's Presence," 6:58.

⁸⁴ Shaddix, "The Mystery of Marriage," 6:44.

to all people of all time.”⁸⁵ Examples of universal, timeless truths include “human identity, the reason for existence, the future, guilt, love, significance, death, eternity, and more.”⁸⁶ These issues were just as relatable to the people in the Bible as much as they are today. Therefore, at this stage of the application funnel, the preacher seeks to locate these timeless truths and state them as principles that apply to all people across multiple generations.⁸⁷

In his sermon on Haggai 1, Shaddix moves from the theological implication that the temple represents Jesus’s presence to the universal significance of that truth for all people. After tracing the language of “temple” throughout the New Testament, Shaddix says, “Jesus is the temple. Jesus gets in you, you’re the temple. You come together as the body of Christ, we’re the temple together. But we are looking for, waiting for, moving toward that time when we will experience the presence of God in Christ Jesus for all eternity.”⁸⁸ Essentially, Shaddix indicates that the lasting significance of the temple as a symbol of Christ’s presence is that when people are indwelt with Christ’s Spirit, they too become the temple. Similarly, Shaddix establishes the universal significance of marriage in his sermon on Ephesians 5. He says, “As the people of God, the Church of Jesus Christ, we’re the bride, he’s the bridegroom. This is God’s purpose in all of eternity.”⁸⁹ In effect, because marriage is a depiction of the gospel, Shaddix asserts that the Church’s relationship with Christ should vividly reflect the gospel in every way.

Before moving forward with the next consideration of the application funnel, Shaddix and Vines address an important issue. They write,

Sometimes the best application of a text will be limited to its theological implications and timeless truths. The preacher will be able to say no more with regard to relevance without stretching the text. Certain truths issuing from the theological implications will serve as the primary application of the passage. And you should never feel guilty about that. *Theological implications and timeless truths are application, even though they may not have immediate and practical expression*

⁸⁵ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110.

⁸⁶ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110; Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 176.

⁸⁷ Vines and Shaddix refer to Kaiser’s process of “principlization,” which involves “[stating] the author’s propositions, arguments, narrations, and illustrations in timeless abiding truths with special focus on the application of those truths to the current needs of the Church” (*Power in the Pulpit*, 176). See also Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, 152.

⁸⁸ Shaddix, “Pursuing Christ’s Presence,” 9:05.

⁸⁹ Shaddix, “The Mystery of Marriage,” 24:46.

*in people’s lives.*⁹⁰

This wise caution deals with the tension many preachers face in trying to make practical application to their audience. There are some biblical passages that are not easily applicable beyond its timeless truths. When the preacher both recognizes and accepts this reality, he guards himself from stretching the text to make it say something it was never intended to say. In essence, this is the very point in the application funnel where, depending on how far one goes, application can either remain biblical or outright heretical.⁹¹ Nevertheless, Shaddix recognizes that in many cases, the preacher “will be able to apply the truth rightly in practical ways.”⁹² Therefore, he encourages preachers to review the gathered material at this point and begin to consider how the text might apply to a particular audience in specific ways.⁹³

Generational Application

Once the preacher understands the text’s theological and universal application, he moves to its generational application. In other words, at this point in the application funnel the preacher “addresses that which is constant for all people living on planet earth at the time the message is preached.”⁹⁴ By using the term “generational,” Shaddix insists that preachers should recognize the different qualities that characterize every *living* generation, and seek to connect the theological, timeless truths of Scripture to each one represented in his respective congregation.⁹⁵ When the preacher strives to apply biblical truth to the generational characteristics of his time, he is more likely to achieve an element of relevance with most of the people.

Shaddix displays generational application most clearly in his sermon on Ephesians 5. Interestingly, Shaddix indicates the relevance of the subject matter to each representative generation during the introduction of his sermon. He says, “So, regardless of how long you’ve been married, if you’ve been married; regardless of if you were married once and are no longer married; regardless [of] if you’re a young person, a student maybe

⁹⁰ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 224 (emphasis original).

⁹¹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 225.

⁹² Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 224.

⁹³ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 224.

⁹⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110.

⁹⁵ Shaddix offers clarification on this point: “By *generation* I mean the group of individuals born and living contemporaneously” (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110, emphasis original).

anticipating marriage somewhere down the line; and every other manifestation [of] relationship, those of us who are part of the Church of Jesus Christ, marriage is crucial for who we are and what we do.”⁹⁶ Essentially, Shaddix presents the concept of marriage as a relevant subject for each generation represented in the congregation, regardless of their marital status.

Cultural Application

The next consideration for the preacher is the cultural dynamics of his current setting. This step in the application funnel is focused on “[connecting] eternal truth with the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize the culture or cultures of [the preacher’s] immediate context.”⁹⁷ Relevant application at this stage presents a challenge for preachers, especially in North America due to the growing plethora of cultural beliefs, traditions, social forms, and material traits from various countries, ethnicities, and people groups.⁹⁸ Consequently, when the preacher considers the shared factors within the culture or cultures represented in his immediate context, he has more potential to establish relevant application with the majority.

In his sermon on Haggai 1, Shaddix briefly makes cultural application by drawing a connection between the realities of the biblical text and the current American climate. After stating that the people of Israel neglected to build the temple because they were distracted by excess, Shaddix says, “Listen to me, American Christians, Western Christians, this is a word for us. We get distracted by our excess, don’t we?”⁹⁹ Although Shaddix’s application is subtle, he essentially asserts that the temptation to quit pursuing Christ’s presence because of various distractions is a pertinent struggle for American Christians living within a culture of abundance. Likewise, Shaddix speaks to the relevance of marriage in Ephesians 5 by drawing a contrast with the current American culture. He says, “Some have come to this passage of Scripture and said that [this] stuff is irrelevant. You know that whole ‘wives submitting to husband’s’ thing ... [saying] it really

⁹⁶ Shaddix, “The Mystery of Marriage,” 1:15.

⁹⁷ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110.

⁹⁸ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110. Matthew D. Kim describes this growing reality in the North American Church when he writes, “Most congregations in North America are not as completely homogenous as they once were with respect to denominational traditions, ethnicity, gender, location, socioeconomic, musical preferences, education, ministry, philosophy, theology, ecclesiology, and so on” (*Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* [Baker Academic, 2017], xii).

⁹⁹ Shaddix, “Pursuing Christ’s Presence,” 20:00.

doesn’t have any bearing on the free culture, the free society, and free love context in which we live today. Well, that’s completely false.”¹⁰⁰ By distinguishing between how the Bible portrays marriage and how American culture views it, Shaddix essentially argues that the theological and timeless truths of marriage are cross-cultural.

Communal Application

The fifth consideration for the preacher to make is that of a particular community. Shaddix explains this step as “the connection of biblical truth with those persons whose lives are bonded together by some type of common relationship. This may be manifested in families, close-knit communities, same occupations, shared life situations, similar struggles, or some other characteristic which groups of individuals have in common.”¹⁰¹ He also considers this step in the process “even more difficult than the previous one ... because not everyone who comes to church will have a common tie to any of the numerous other groups within the congregation.”¹⁰² Consequently, the preacher must acknowledge that at the point of trying to apply the text to a particular community of faith, whether that be a local church or elsewhere, he will find it more difficult to connect biblical truth to the greatest number of people.

In Haggai 1, Shaddix makes communal application several times throughout his sermon. Having preached this sermon in chapel at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, several of Shaddix’s applications are oriented toward students who are currently in or preparing for ministry. Subsequently, after explaining that another reason the people of Israel forsook building the temple was due to their comparison of it to the previous one, Shaddix says,

One of the reasons some of us throw down our tools and quit when it comes to actively pursuing the effects and influences of the Holy Spirit is because we look at our ministries and we look at the size of our ministries and we say it’s not worth it; it’s not as big as the next guy’s; it’s not as big as it used to be; I haven’t had the impact that I would like to have; why keep going? And if you’ve never been there, I promise you, you will be there at some point in your ministry.¹⁰³

In effect, Shaddix takes the issue that arises in the text and draws a connection to the concerns that a community of ministerial students may

¹⁰⁰ Shaddix, “The Mystery of Marriage,” 9:51.

¹⁰¹ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 110–11.

¹⁰² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111.

¹⁰³ Shaddix, “Pursuing Christ’s Presence,” 18:27.

have in common.

Individual Application

Finally, after considering the previous five steps of applying the text to the greatest number of people, the preacher can address the needs of individuals or selected groups.¹⁰⁴ While this final consideration receives most of the attention today, according to Shaddix, it is “inevitably the most limited in the larger scope of things.”¹⁰⁵ In other words, when the preacher reaches this point in the process, it is almost a guarantee that the proceeding application will not pertain to most of the gathered people. Therefore, while this is the final step in Shaddix’s application funnel process, he maintains, “Both preachers and listeners must acknowledge the myth that suggests that preaching is irrelevant if it fails to make specific application to each individual listener. Why? Because a whole lot of application is germane to each individual listener as part of creation and humanity, as well as part of a particular generation, culture, and community.”¹⁰⁶ Essentially, applications that are generationally, culturally, or communally bound are just as relevant as individual application.

Although individual application does not take up a substantial part of Shaddix’s sermons on either Haggai 1 or Ephesians 5, he calls attention to how husbands and wives are to live in relation to what Paul writes about marriage. He says concerning husbands, “Brothers, men of God, what does that say? It says this, listen to me very carefully: God has been streaming the story of the gospel ever since he instituted the marriage relationship. And guess what? Your role is to play Christ. Your role, my role, as men of God ... is to treat our wives in such a way, [to] relate to our wives in such a way that when people look at us, it makes them think of Jesus.”¹⁰⁷ As for wives, Shaddix says later, “When people look at the way you relate to your husband, when they look at the way that you treat him, the way that you respond to him, they think of the bride of Christ in relation to the bridegroom. You get to play the Church.”¹⁰⁸ Here, Shaddix applies the text to individual groups of people. Yet, he gives only brief attention to this point.

The End Goal of the Application Funnel: Incarnation

As the preacher progresses through the application funnel, he holds a more noble task than merely imparting biblical truth. Shaddix explains,

¹⁰⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111.

¹⁰⁵ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111.

¹⁰⁶ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 111.

¹⁰⁷ Shaddix, “The Mystery of Marriage,” 34:10.

¹⁰⁸ Shaddix, “The Mystery of Marriage,” 37:43.

“As the Word of God is applied to the lives of believers through the application funnel, they essentially are being conformed to Christ’s image (see Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:10, 21). To say it another way, He is *formed* inside them.”¹⁰⁹ Therefore, as the preacher works through the application funnel, he must recognize that “[life] change doesn’t take place from the outside-in, but from the inside-out.”¹¹⁰ As such, the applications that are produced as a result of the application funnel process must aim “to foster Christlike character in our people.”¹¹¹ This kind of preaching, according to Shaddix, is what he refers to as “incarnational preaching.”¹¹²

Shaddix views incarnational preaching, that which forms believers into the image of Christ, through the lens of four concentric circles. The inner circle, which is the initial target for the preacher, is the character of Christ within the listener.¹¹³ Before sermon application delves into pragmatic behavioral modification, Shaddix argues that the preacher’s main priority is to nurture the character of Christ within listeners, which “is the primary influence on how the believer thinks, feels, and desires.”¹¹⁴

This initial priority of Shaddix’s incarnational preaching naturally leads to the preacher’s second concern, which “is still not to alter his listener’s conduct but to alter their consciences.”¹¹⁵ As the influence of Christ’s character grows within a person, it will inform Christ’s conscience within them as well. Only then, when “people begin to think Christianly, they will begin to decide for Christ in every aspect of life, for faith is always expressed in the willful obedience to God’s Word.”¹¹⁶ Although the preacher might not sufficiently “scratch the surface of the infinite amount of variables in the application of God’s truth,” Shaddix contends that the Holy Spirit’s help is an essential “resource for acting in keeping with

¹⁰⁹ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 112 (emphasis original).

¹¹⁰ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 89.

¹¹¹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 75.

¹¹² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 112; Jerry Vines and Jim L. Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit: How to Grow in Your Preaching* (Moody, 2017), 76. This is not to be confused with Stephen and David Olford’s “incarnational preaching,” which pertains more to the issue of the Holy Spirit’s anointing (Stephen F. Olford and David Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching* [B&H, 1998], 214). Although Shaddix refers to the anointing elsewhere as “humanity clothed in deity,” the context in which he uses the term “incarnation” here is specific to the area of application (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 41).

¹¹³ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 112.

¹¹⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 113.

¹¹⁵ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 115.

¹¹⁶ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 116.

[Christ's] character and will."¹¹⁷

Shaddix's concentric circles of incarnational preaching do not end with conduct, for once more he maintains that "contemporary preaching desperately needs a larger purpose than mere individual assent and personal application."¹¹⁸ Ultimately, he writes,

Preaching helps in forming the community of faith—not just individual believers—into Christlikeness. Most of the time when we're talking about the journey of transformation into Christlikeness, we're thinking about individual believers. Paul, however, often addresses the corporate community in his writings when referring to their spiritual growth. He intentionally wanted to build a mature community, not just mature individuals. When you stop and think about it, there are lots of things in the Christian life that can only be realized and manifested in community. Love, unity, spiritual giftedness, peace, and patience are just a few of the qualities of the Christian life that imply the experience of body life. They take more than one person to happen!"¹¹⁹

In order to foster Christlikeness within a corporate body, Shaddix offers two practical suggestions for preachers to incorporate in their application.

First, preachers should frequently address the identity and mission of God's people.¹²⁰ In conjunction with the Bible's agenda to "save a people from their sins and set them on a course to be shaped into the image of [God's] Son,"¹²¹ Shaddix advises preachers to lead their people "to ask 'What should *we* do?' instead of 'What should *I* do?'"¹²² Second, Shaddix encourages preachers to use theological terminology.¹²³ He writes, "It is highly unlikely that corporate identity will ever be developed without nurturing the community's own distinctive vocabulary."¹²⁴ In other words, preachers should not hesitate to explain *and* apply theological terms such

¹¹⁷ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 117.

¹¹⁸ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 118.

¹¹⁹ Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 76. For sake of clarification, Shaddix writes elsewhere, "Oh. I'm not speaking of the Christian communism which some have mistakenly drawn from the Acts 2:42–47 passage. Such was not the order of the day, even for the early church. What I am championing for, however, is at least some semblance of accepted community standards among God's people and preaching that seeks to establish them" (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 119).

¹²⁰ Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 78.

¹²¹ Shaddix, "Hearing God's Voice," 10.

¹²² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 119–20 (emphasis original).

¹²³ Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 78.

¹²⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 119.

as "election," "sanctification," "propitiation," and "redemption."¹²⁵ Doing so not only helps form a communal body around scriptural language but challenges the high biblical illiteracy in the current culture as well.¹²⁶ All taken together, when the preacher engages people with the character of Christ in his application, a Christian conscience, conduct, and community, is more likely to result.¹²⁷

Evaluation of Jim Shaddix's Application Model

Having established several potential dangers that await overly specific and general application and analyzed Jim Shaddix's application model, one is now able to evaluate how well his model guards against these dangers. I do not presume that all potential dangers of specific and general approaches to application are reflected in this essay, nor that Shaddix's application model perfectly shields the preacher from error. Nevertheless, the aforementioned perils of overly specific and general application are derived from research that suggests that such potential dangers are worthy of one's consideration. Therefore, the following evaluation of Shaddix's application model is delimited by the potential dangers as outlined above.

Concerning Specific Application

The first major concern that an overly specific application poses to expository preaching is the temptation to allow the needs and concerns of the people to dictate the message more than the biblical text. Shaddix's application funnel presents an approach that avoids this inclination as its design encourages preachers to prioritize the theological implications and timeless truths over immediate practical application. Although Shaddix acknowledges that in many cases, preachers "will be able to apply the truth rightly in practical ways," he insists that the only way to get there with integrity is by considering the theological and universal truths of the text

¹²⁵ Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 78.

¹²⁶ Shaddix claims that the growing biblical illiteracy has wrongly "convinced us that we must translate all of our terminology for the benefit of those who do not know our theological lingo" (*The Passion Driven Sermon*, 118–19).

¹²⁷ In a later article, Shaddix adds one more circle beyond the four concentric circles of Christ in character, conscience, conduct, and community. He states, "We can easily add one more circle beyond these four—culture. When enough communities are true reflections of the body of Christ, then culture is going to be affected positively" (Jim Shaddix, "Preaching as Cultural Engagement," *The Website of Jim Shaddix* [June 2020]).

first.¹²⁸ By doing so, the preacher sets himself upon a firm biblical foundation as he seeks to address the needs of his church in an applicable way.¹²⁹

The second issue with an overly specific approach to application is what Doriani refers to as an overemphasis of “personal spirituality.”¹³⁰ In other words, the “personal spirituality” view suggests that a healthy, vibrant spiritual and private life of the preacher is prerequisite for powerful application. Doriani’s issue with this concept is that application remains superfluous and “is better caught than taught.”¹³¹ In contrast, the simplicity of Shaddix’s application funnel appears replicable, and he never suggests that it is dependent upon the preacher’s spirituality.

Last, the final problem with an overemphasis on specific application is the issue of over-individualization. Essentially, the desire to make practical application to individual people has resulted in a decline in preaching that addresses and informs the gathered church. Shaddix averts this issue with his application funnel as it intends to connect “the truth of God’s Word [to] the greatest needs of the most number of people.”¹³² By working through the application funnel stage-by-stage, the preacher is compelled to consider how the truth of the text relates to generations, cultures, and communities, all of which consist of multiple people. Furthermore, as is clear by the concentric circles of incarnational preaching, Shaddix insists that the purpose of preaching is larger than individual application—it is ultimately to form Christlikeness into a community of faith.¹³³ Shaddix is worth quoting at this point:

The teaching shepherd must preach on a larger plane than merely meeting individual needs and answering individual questions. While there will always be a plethora of topics from which to choose in this realm, that pastor has a loftier goal in his preaching—his congregation’s ultimate welfare at Christ’s coming. Christ’s community must continually be looking for His return.¹³⁴

In essence, while the last consideration of the application funnel is the individual application of the text, the process does not force individual

application at all points of the sermon.¹³⁵ Rather, it simply guides the preacher in considering the extent to which the text applies to the majority of his listeners, effectually forming them into the image of Christ.

Concerning General Application

When application remains too generic, a couple of issues may surface. First, Adams helpfully points out that an over-dependence upon the Holy Spirit to apply the text specifically to individuals can lead into liberal philosophy, which suggests that application is ultimately “the task of the listener rather than the preacher.”¹³⁶ Although Shaddix recognizes that the “Spirit is faithful to make specific application to the listeners at just the right time and just the right way,”¹³⁷ he also acknowledges that “this doesn’t negate the preacher’s responsibility to make good and right application in his sermons.”¹³⁸ Furthermore, given that four of the six considerations of Shaddix’s application funnel are focused on generational, cultural, communal, and individual application, there is no inherent suggestion that implies these are limited to the Spirit’s sphere of responsibility alone.

The second potential danger of overly generic application is the temptation for the preacher to remain complacent and ignore the very real concerns that his people might have, essentially contributing to the all-too-common perception that the Bible is irrelevant. Due to the intentional step-by-step process of Shaddix’s application funnel, there is no inclination that it leaves room for complacency on the part of the preacher. On the contrary, Shaddix writes that “the preacher must *intentionally* pour—or apply—God’s Word into the areas that connect with the most number of people.”¹³⁹ When the preacher is intentional about applying the text rightly to the greatest needs of his people, he will not easily become complacent in this task. Furthermore, although Shaddix warns that relevancy in preaching is not determined by felt needs of people, the ultimate task of the preacher is to show what “God has determined to be relevant in the Word of God.”¹⁴⁰ If the Bible was inspired by God for the purpose of saving “a people from their sins and set them on a course to be shaped into the image of [Christ],”¹⁴¹ as Shaddix believes, the preacher should not

¹²⁸ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 224.

¹²⁹ Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 224.

¹³⁰ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 124.

¹³¹ Doriani, *Getting the Message*, 124.

¹³² Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 108.

¹³³ Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 76; Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 118.

¹³⁴ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 120.

¹³⁵ Shaddix and Vines write, “Like the other functional elements, not every part of your text will need to be applied. Be intentional about picking your spots for practical application” (*Power in the Pulpit*, 223).

¹³⁶ Adams, *Truth Applied*, 21.

¹³⁷ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 52.

¹³⁸ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 52.

¹³⁹ Shaddix, *The Passion Driven Sermon*, 109 (emphasis added).

¹⁴⁰ Shaddix, *Decisional Preaching*, 52.

¹⁴¹ Shaddix, “Hearing God’s Voice,” 10.

“enter the pulpit until [he] can talk about the gospel in a way that portrays it as nothing less than the most incredible news in the universe.”¹⁴²

Conclusion

This essay has attempted to situate Jim Shaddix within the current debate surrounding specific and general application in expository preaching. More precisely, this essay demonstrates that Shaddix advocates for a *via media* between specific and general application, warranting his application model as a viable approach to help guard against potential dangers that both approaches present to expository preaching. The essay does not argue that Shaddix’s model is the best or only viable approach to sermon application. Therefore, a comparative analysis between Shaddix’s application model with those of the names mentioned throughout this essay, such as Chapell, Capill, and MacArthur, is a suggestion for further research.

¹⁴² Vines and Shaddix, *Progress in the Pulpit*, 124. Later in the book, Shaddix writes an entire chapter entitled “Rising Above Foyer Feedback: The Art of Objective Sermon Evaluation” offering practical ways to help the preacher grow in his preaching (*Progress in the Pulpit*, 167–83).

Book Reviews

Joanna G. Kline. *Narrative Analogy in the David Story: Parallels between Genesis 25–50 and 1 Samuel 16–1 Kings 2*. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2, 154. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2024. 308 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-316158252-3. \$124.00.

Joanna Kline is Assistant Professor of Old Testament at Gordon College, having completed her PhD at Harvard University in 2018 under the supervision of Jon D. Levenson. Her *Narrative Analogy in the David Story* serves those who preach and teach by identifying analogies between the David story (1 Sam 16–1 Kings 2) and the Jacob story (Gen 25–50). Her work adds depth to the stories—not new meanings—since her findings are “consistent with the broader messages of the narratives in which they appear” (p. 27). This monograph is the published form of her doctoral dissertation in the Forschungen zum Alten Testament 2 series, which features interdisciplinary works written by scholars at the beginning of their scholarly careers.

Kline’s project has a fourfold objective: (1) to identify the analogies between the two stories; (2) to determine the direction of influence; (3) to suggest how her findings support or challenge theories of composition; and (4) for her work to be a case study for other narrative analogies in the Bible. To accomplish these objectives, Kline employs narrative analogy.

Narrative analogy identifies and explains connections between two passages by relying on a series of parallels rather than shared vocabulary alone (p. 19). Furthermore, the direction of dependence can be determined by ungrammaticality, conflation, and characterization. Ungrammaticality is when the “verbal locutions . . . are awkward,” or details of the plot are “essential” in one narrative but “marginal or unnecessary” in the other (p. 20). Conflation is when traits or actions from two or more characters are combined in a single character (p. 21). Finally, characterization is one character’s action being portrayed in contrast to another, either positively or negatively. If both are positive or negative, the secondary text will likely be more extreme (p. 21).

In Chapter 1, she explores David’s (1 Sam 16–18) and Joseph’s (Gen 37, 39) rise to prominence. Both were shepherds who became rulers. In Chapter 2, she looks at the marriage negotiations of David (1 Sam 18–19, 24) and Jacob (Gen 29, 31–33) with Saul and Laban, respectively. Then in Chapter 3, she explores the analogies between the rapes of Tamar (2

Sam 13) and Dinah (Gen 34). Finally, Chapter 4 has two main parts. First, the story of Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39) has parallels with David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11–12). Second, the rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13) is read alongside both Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39) and the beginning of the Joseph story (Gen 37). Given that each chapter contains numerous parallels—themes, motifs, plot elements, characterization, similar language, structural similarity, etc.—Kline helpfully provides charts to summarize her conclusions. She includes an explanation of her findings, including the direction of influence and how each analogy supports or challenges theories of composition.

While some of Kline’s conclusions on the historical development of the text may be challenged in places by readers of this journal, there is great value in the analogies she identifies and explains for the reader. First, her approach aids interpretation by identifying the analogies in the stories, pointing to the big ideas of the passage. Second, and related to the first, her work establishes helpful guardrails for application. Old Testament texts can become containers of ideas, with application tangential to the passage at times. Kline’s work aids the preacher or teacher apply the text by showing how its features (e.g., plot, theme, characterization, etc.) portray the faith, failures, vices, and virtues of those in the narratives.

However, among all the findings Kline provides, one analogy is left unmentioned and unexplored—the deaths of aged leaders. Within Genesis 25–50 and 1 Samuel 16–1 Kings 2, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, and David all die. The texts not only relate to their deaths, but all provide final words to those remaining after their passing (save for Samuel, whose farewell speech is given in 1 Samuel 12, which is outside Kline’s scope of the David story). Beyond this though, the detail of her work is impressive and gives the preacher and teacher much to appreciate when working through these narratives.

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Alexander T. Kirk. *Agur’s Wisdom and the Coherence of Proverbs 30*. Ancient Israel and Its Literature. Atlanta: SBL Press, 2024. 303 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1628375657. \$50.00.

Agur’s Wisdom and the Coherence of Proverbs 30 (hereafter *AWCP*) is an insightful and exemplary academic monograph, which deserves the careful attention of the scholarly community. The author, Alexander Kirk, utilizes the tools of philology to argue that Proverbs 30 is a coherent literary text that taunts pride and greed and recommends, instead, the way

of humility and contentment. *AWCP* is characterized by cogent summaries of previous scholarship, a useful methodology, close and careful readings of biblical and other ancient texts, and a highly artistic and engaging writing style. This blend of characteristics is unusual in academic monographs. Each feature will be discussed in turn.

Chapter 2 (“Agur and His Interpreters: Wisdom Literature, Form Criticism, and the Hermeneutical Potential of Proverbs 30”) deftly surveys the concept of “wisdom literature” in the Hebrew Bible, form criticism of the Hebrew Bible (especially as it pertains to “wisdom literature”), and varying approaches to interpreting Proverbs 30. Kirk fulfills the intention he sets out at the beginning of the chapter: “I chose my examples because they seemed particularly illustrative of broad trends in reading the chapter, and they help us to get behind the most recent commentaries and examine the assumptions of the guild” (p. 30).

AWCP is one of many recent publications aimed at renewing and utilizing the philological method in biblical studies. Philologists utilize a variety of textual, literary, and linguistic skills to understand ancient texts. Drawing on the work of Alexander Samely (among others), Kirk suggests that scholars ought to pay close attention to “the ways of the text” to uncover the (potential) coherence, themes, and message of (seemingly) disunified texts. He does just this and discerns in Proverbs 30 a unity and coherence that many scholars have failed to see, partly because of their prior methodological commitments. His close, philological reading of Proverbs 30 enables him to uncover a consistent thread throughout: mockery of pride and greed and commendation of humility and contentment.

Examples of the fecundity of philology for interpreting Proverbs 30 abound in *AWCP*. A few examples will be sufficient to support this claim. Kirk shows the value of his philological approach in his reading of the name Agur as a literary persona. He writes,

Treating Agur as a persona means that we take him seriously as the voice animating the text and that we locate him within the world of the text with its language, symbols, and beliefs, without necessarily making historical claims about how the text was authored or redacted. (p. 68)

He pays special attention to how Agur’s voice and tone mock pride/greed and commend humility/contentment.

Kirk shows his philological skill in his assessment of the notoriously difficult term **נֶשֶׁם** in Prov 30:1. Scholars have suggested various meanings of **נֶשֶׁם** in this verse: son of Ishmael, realm of King Lemuel, load/burden/lifting, or utterance/oracle. The author unties the knot by

comparing the use of **נֶשֶׁם** in Prov 30:1 with its use in 2 Kings 9; Isaiah 13–14; Ben Sira; the Dead Sea Scrolls; and the Deir ‘Alla plaster inscriptions. Considering these comparisons, he concludes that **נֶשֶׁם** in Prov 30:1 “seems to connote a warning or a burden, a weight of teaching that must be responded to” (p. 95). Kirk’s close reading of **נֶשֶׁם** here opens new and exciting interpretive possibilities.

Chapter 5 (“Agur’s Beastly Ethics: The Numerical Saying, Animal Imagery, Humor, and Coherence in Proverbs 30:11–33”) repeatedly demonstrates the value of the philological method. Kirk illuminates numerous difficult sayings in this collection and shows they have the united voice already noted: mockery of pride and greed and commendation of humility and contentment. He summarizes his close reading of Prov 30:11–14 as follows,

In sum, the tone of the stanza from 30:11–14 is sardonic, employing elements of humor and disgust to mock such wicked progeny by characterizing them as rapacious animals. Pride that leads to dishonoring parents degrades you, turning you into an animal smeared with your own filth, thoughtlessly devouring the weak. (p. 170)

Perhaps the most disappointing section of the book is Kirk’s discussion of the identity of the son in Prov 30:4 (pp. 127–29). He fails to carefully engage with messianic readings of this passage, simply stating, “While many Christian interpreters have found this line bursting with theological potential, it is somewhat enigmatic from the perspective of the Hebrew Bible” (p. 127). However, his own philological method is used by many interpreters to see the Messiah here. Engagement with this argument (even in a footnote) would have been helpful. (Interestingly enough, he does engage in a messianic reading of Prov 30:4 in his 2021 popular level article in *The Gospel Coalition*: “When Scripture Gets Weird: Understanding Agur in Proverbs 30.”)

In any event, Kirk’s composition deserves mention simply because so much academic phrasing is drab and boring. The smooth flow of the writing, the syntactical variation, and his creative vocabulary are all evidence of skillful formulation. Though a younger practitioner, he provides a model of artistic word crafting benefiting even seasoned scholars. *AWCP* is an original contribution to the study of the book of Proverbs that the guild must not ignore.

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Mitchell L. Chase. *Walking the Way of the Wise: A Biblical Theology of Wisdom*. Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (ESBT). Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2025. xii + 172 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1514010914. \$26.00.

Mitchell Chase is currently Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (where he earned his PhD), and pastor at Kosmosdale Baptist Church. He has written *Good News for All the Earth* (2025), *Short of Glory* (2023), *Resurrection Hope and the Death of Death* (2022), *Hope for All the Earth* (2022), *The Gospel Is for Christians* (2020), *40 Questions About Typology and Allegory* (2020), *Behold Our Sovereign God* (2012), and contributed to the Daniel portion of the *ESV Expository Commentary* (2018). The volume under review is his *Walking the Way of the Wise*.

As the subtitle indicates, this is a biblical theology of wisdom. Significantly though, since the theme of wisdom does not advance the biblical storyline, it suffers neglect (p. 4). In fact, those familiar with the Bible typically limit their thinking about wisdom to Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs (and James in the NT, p. 2). However, Chase does not think the important theme of wisdom is solely confined to these few books. He explains, “We must remember that the biblical authors both show *and* tell. The narratives teach biblical truth in ways different from propositional claims or proverbial statements. A biblical theology of wisdom must notice how the different biblical genres showcase wisdom” (p. 4). Indeed, wisdom is better understood as a concept than a genre (p. 2). Wisdom, then, in the biblical sense is more than street smarts. It is more than cleverness in a particular field. Biblical wisdom is the result of living in glad submission to God’s Word in God’s world. Biblical wisdom is believing what God has revealed and seeking to live in light of it (p. 2).

The author divides his book into 12 chapters, giving an overview of each in the Introduction (pp. 4–5). Chapters 1, 3–4, and 9 trace the theme of wisdom in the narrative books, whereas Chapters 2, and 5–8 explore the theme in the wisdom books. Finally, Chapters 10–12 unpack the development of wisdom in the NT. Jesus Christ supersedes Solomon. The way of wisdom leads to him: He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). The implication of this is enormous. As Chase clarifies, “What we do with Jesus will show whether we are wise or foolish.... His voice is the voice of Wisdom, and we need to respond rightly to him” (p. 139).

Chase’s treatment of wisdom is notable for three reasons. First, his exploration of the narrative books is engaging. He skillfully shows the theme of wisdom in these books without getting bogged down with technical details. He lets readers see enough of the trees while not missing the forest.

Second, his biblical theology of wisdom does not neglect the theme of folly. In fact, Chase’s attention to foolishness illumines his discussion of biblical wisdom. For example, the book of Joshua demonstrates that the Israelites have every reason to trust YHWH, but Judges displays their folly as they do what is evil in YHWH’s sight (pp. 51–56). Quite frankly, “Doing what is right in your own eyes is evil in God’s eyes” (p. 56). Likewise, Saul’s folly serves as a foil to David’s dependence on God (pp. 58–60). Also, the straight talk of Lady Wisdom is appreciated when compared to the crooked talk of Lady Folly (pp. 84–85). And the downfall of Solomon (pp. 117–19) makes one yearn for one greater than he—the Lord Jesus (see Chapter 10).

Third, although studies of biblical wisdom often neglect the narrative books, Chase helpfully corrects that imbalance (see Chapters 1, 3–4, 9–12). He makes a persuasive case that the concept of wisdom is present even when the term is not (cf. p. 3). At the same time, he does not read wisdom into every passage. As he clarifies, “I am not arguing that everything in Scripture is wisdom; if everything is wisdom, then nothing is” (p. 3).

The only quibble I have is the length of treatment allotted to the NT (Chapters 10–12, which is 25 percent of the book). Given the supremacy of Christ and his being the epitome of wisdom (1 Cor 1:24), one would wish for more than just three chapters. It is hard to do justice to all the NT’s wealth of wisdom that succinctly. Indeed, eight NT books are not discussed (2 Thessalonians, Philemon, 1–2 Peter, 1–2–3 John, and Jude).

Nevertheless, *Walking the Way of the Wise* is a welcome contribution to studies on biblical wisdom. The ESBT series aims for a “superb and extremely difficult balance of canon-wide exegesis and a warm, lay-level tone—solid scholarship for the church’s delight” (p. ix). Chase’s volume succeeds admirably here. And since we are called to get wisdom (Prov 4:5, 7), buying this book would be an excellent place to start.

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Hindy Najman. *Scriptural Vitality: Rethinking Philology and Hermeneutics*. The Bible and the Humanities. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025. xvii + 193 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0198865711. \$110.00.

In *Scriptural Vitality*, Hindy Najman challenges “Spätjudentum”—an antiquated idea which sees Second Temple Judaism in a state of religious and cultural decline. Instead, she posits the Hellenistic period as a time of

widespread vitality for Jewish traditions. She offers this fresh understanding of the landscape of Second Temple literature by building on critiques of classical philology and on positions normally taken for granted in textual criticism and hermeneutics. She draws on several thinkers, including Friedrich Nietzsche, Friedrich Schlegel, and Peter Szondi, to develop “a forward-moving approach to philology which is integrated into hermeneutics and the growth of works, collections, and even individual psalms or units of texts” (p. 4). She uses this approach to examine Second Temple Jewish literature for its own sake and to garner an appreciation for the vitality and resilience of writing in the Hellenistic period.

Najman examines this period’s reading practices with a focus on non-canonical literature. She establishes that “the overarching hermeneutic of the texts we consider” inherit and innovate in a forward-looking manner (p. 6). Next, her brief discussion of canon examines Hellenistic Jewish textual traditions “within and beyond the Hebrew Bible,” and ways they interacted with predecessor traditions “in the face of Graeco-Roman philosophy and culture” (p. 11). She then focuses on the familiar “search for the original,” highlighting problems with textual criticism’s traditional perspective. She takes an approach whereby “we will not [necessarily] see textual variation and proliferation as error and corruption,” but “as manifestations of the vitality of the [Hellenistic era’s] traditions” (pp. 27–28).

Next, Najman appraises the impact of the Dead Sea Scrolls on discussions about textual vitality. She also examines the ubiquitous phenomenon of anonymous literature from the period, seeking to locate it alongside pseudepigraphical works. By anonymizing themselves, “these texts place themselves out of time” (p. 43). This challenges the modern interpreter—conditioned to view the author’s function as indispensable. In Chapter 4 she examines ancient texts and the idea of self, the reader, and the “emerging subject, whether as an individual or as an interpretative community” (p. 61). Read in the light of the emerging self, Second Temple literature can be seen as “a vitality which is generative for community” (p. 71), driving its readers toward togetherness and individual improvement. She dubs this trait “ethical reading.”

The middle third of *Scriptural Vitality* examines the book of Jubilees. Najman exemplifies it as paradigmatic for the development of textual tradition, asking, “How were the traditions of Scripture and tradition kept dynamic, and what were the mechanisms” of textual hermeneutics (p. 75)? She presents Jubilees, an interpretive reading of Genesis and parts of Exodus, as an “open book,” one that grows and develops both through time and into different languages. She argues that it “participates in practices of reading earlier biblical traditions as well as incorporating interpretative

materials into the work itself” (p. 85). Jubilees, then, is a text demonstrating her thesis of scriptural vitality through ancient traditions, looking into its present and forward into its future.

The last part of Najman’s work examines the role of Hellenistic Judaism in subject development, cosmological reflection, and personal transformation. Here she drives home her description of poetics bringing the text to life, which then enlivens the self. Her discussion is helpful in rethinking and sharpening our concepts of intertextuality or textual dependence. She nuances the concept of “rewritten bible,” demonstrating the creative ways in which Second Temple Jewish texts used and engaged with their predecessor traditions to reflect on humanity’s relationship with God, the cosmos, and itself. A postscript summarizes her goals of celebrating Hellenistic Judaism’s textual culture and shaking up our assumptions.

Seeing the way textual traditions develop is crucial for examining Second Temple Jewish textual communities and sects. Najman’s study thus has the capacity to shine helpful light on studies of Hellenistic Jewish literature, including the Septuagint and its various traditions. It especially impacts conversations around the pluriformity and transmission of the Greek Old Testament. How much we can benefit from using it in more traditional endeavors, such as reconstructive textual criticism, is difficult to determine though. Nonetheless, this book will be of interest to students or scholars concerned with the literature of Hellenistic Judaism. Its challenges to many positions scholars take for granted will sharpen our thinking. It is also noteworthy that *Scriptural Vitality* is an open access title.

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Esau McCaulley, Janette H. Ok, Osvaldo Padilla, Amy Peeler, eds. *The New Testament in Color: A Multiethnic Bible Commentary*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2024. xiv + 792 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0830814091. \$40.75.

The New Testament in Color is premised upon a key assertion: “It matters that we have diverse representation in the process of biblical interpretation because it is always *ourselves* as persons with our experiences, biases, gifts, and liabilities that we bring to the text” (p. xii). Accordingly, the volume attempts to make the distinctive reading strategies of various American ethnic communities available outside their own sphere. It distinguishes itself by consciously taking a “hermeneutics of trust” position

rather than the “hermeneutics of suspicion” in which “much socially located biblical interpretation has been rooted” (p. xiii). This work constitutes, therefore, an example of—or perhaps even evidence for—the value of multiethnic biblical interpretation in a form acceptable to evangelicals and other theological moderates and conservatives.

The volume begins with an introduction and five essays that describe the distinct reading strategies of the five American ethnic identities represented in the book, namely African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, Turtle Island (Native), and Majority-Culture American (white). Esau McCaulley recommends beginning with these essays before tackling the commentary itself (p. xiii). Chapters of commentary on each book of the New Testament follow (although 1 and 2 Thessalonians, the Pastoral Letters, and the Letters of John are treated together). Additionally, four essays tackle key contemporary issues. They are “Gender in the New Testament,” “Resources for the Mental Health of the Oppressed in the New Testament,” “Multilingualism in the New Testament,” and “Immigrants and the Kingdom of God.” No rationale is evident for the placement of these essays (one before Acts, the others before James) but neither does the placement detract from the reading experience.

The introductory essays offer commonalities and features of diversity within each ethnic community. Alongside the primary goal of commending the hermeneutical perspectives of each group, these essays conveniently introduce the reader to unique social and political realities these communities face in America today.

The commentary chapters take a variety of shapes in their attempt to provide biblical interpretation rooted in the particulars of each author’s experiences and identity. Miguel Echevarría’s commentary on John, for example, employs theological sources from Latin America, such as the work of liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez and *misión integral* scholar Samuel Escobar. Sourcing his reading of the more “spiritual Gospel” (see *Ecl. Hist.* 6.14.7) with these authors allows Echevarría to conclude that the message of John the evangelist is not that “God loves people’s souls but sees fit to leave them in their present squalor and oppression.” Rather, the “marginalized and oppressed can begin to experience equity and justice in the present, through the renewing work of the Spirit” (p. 189). His reading of John, therefore, maintains an appropriately realized eschatology that demonstrates the value of attending to the Latin American theological tradition.

Alternatively, Dennis Edwards focuses more on the relevance of African American Christian culture, practice, and experience throughout his exposition of Colossians. He describes how Paul’s discussion of slavery (Col 1:7; 3:22–4:1; 4:7) falls on the ears of African American Christians

and offers constructive thoughts about how to interpret it effectively. He makes insightful connections to African American culture using several other themes too. For example, he relates Paul’s pastoral perspective in Colossians to African American culture’s “utmost respect for pastors.” He also connects Paul and Timothy’s relationship with the tradition of African American pastors “identifying themselves as sons and daughters of the pastor under whom they received their calling” (pp. 482–83). Edwards thus melds NT scholarship, evangelical theological commitments, prophetic ethical authority, and pastoral sensitivity effectively. His is exactly the sort of voice one wants to consult before preaching a complicated NT text.

Additionally, the commentaries include relevant discussions of the historical and literary matters one might expect from a biblical commentary. Kay Higuera Smith’s work on Mark includes extended discussions of the temple, Torah, Qumran, and other features of ancient Jewish life. The commentaries also engage with contested issues in NT scholarship—e.g. Julie Newberry’s three helpful “framing observations” (p. 366) for interpreting 2 Corinthians 3 post-supersessionism (pp. 366–71). Consequently, the work also serves as a suitable single volume commentary for general interpretive questions, not only those related to the ethnicity and culture of the authors.

The New Testament in Color achieves its goal to demonstrate evangelical interpretations from specific ethnic locations. However, some chapters of commentary focus less on an author’s ethnic background than others. These chapters read as high quality, traditional, biblical commentary—perhaps with extra attention to issues of social justice. Such commentaries merit commendation. However, the stated aim of the work leaves the reader wondering why some biblical books evoke folk stories, traditional proverbs, and widespread cultural experiences, while others do not. Each author must prove, of course, that it does in fact matter “that we have diverse representation in the process of biblical interpretation” (p. xii). Most of the commentaries achieve this goal, but it may prove beneficial in a future edition to improve consistency across the volume.

Notwithstanding a bit of unevenness, *The New Testament in Color* promises to expand interpretive horizons of students and would be well suited for a New Testament introduction or biblical hermeneutics course. It would also be a convenient resource for preachers who seek interpretations that are sensitive to these issues but remain committed to “hermeneutics of trust.”

Benjamin Luke Beavers
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Gary R. Habermas. *On the Resurrection, Volume 2: Refutations*. Brentwood, TN: B&H Academic, 2024. 896 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1087778624. \$69.99.

In Volume 2 of *On the Resurrection*, world renowned scholar Gary Habermas continues his magnum opus on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Having dealt with the minimal historical facts of the resurrection in volume 1, he turns his attention to attempts to refute it in his second volume. Dealing primarily with objections from the time of David Hume to the present, he seeks to give the most comprehensive account of and response to attempted refutations of the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ. Although he does not break his book into sections, by following the historical trends his work develops a porous split between *a priori* and *a posteriori* refutations.

Beginning in the second century, Habermas shows that early Christians (AD 30–140) unanimously believed in the resurrection and did not question the historicity of the four Gospels (p. 49). Since many scholars assert that any date later than this is simply too far from the crucifixion to be of “any real historical value,” he jumps forward to the eighteenth century to deal with objections to the resurrection in their more mature form (p. 51). He begins this survey of modern refutation attempts with David Hume’s essay against miracles. This interaction grounds much of his subsequent work, since he rejects Hume’s *a priori* dismissal of miracles here. Although he presents his own arguments against him, he also shows that Hume was not met with unwavering adoration; rather, several critiques of Hume’s work were published within a few years of his essay against miracles, which Habermas incorporates into his argument against Hume’s general position (pp. 68–70). Thus, if the resurrection cannot be dismissed on the grounds that people do not rise from the dead, one must deal with evidence related to the empty tomb. Habermas then shows how refutations of the resurrection arose in Liberal Christianity, were challenged within their own camp, and were challenged again by the rise of neo-Orthodoxy. This historical survey allows him to show the variety of attacks leveled against belief in a historic, bodily resurrection of Jesus.

Having defended the possibility of miracles, Habermas turns his attention to proposed explanations for the empty tomb. These include everything from the disciples simply going to the wrong sepulcher to unprecedented mass hallucinations. Although there is a consistent rejection of miracles driving these proposed explanations for the empty tomb, the author does more than simply fall back on his proof that miracles can, in fact, occur. Rather, he consistently points to methodological issues behind various approaches and offers critical evaluations of each position. For

example, if Christ’s resurrection was experienced merely as an attested vision, that could remove the need for a bodily resurrection. However, after listing six critiques, he concludes, “None of these objective visionary configurations account for the robust New Testament textual evidence” (pp. 693–701). This approach allows him to build strong, multifaceted arguments against those who seek to refute the bodily resurrection of Jesus, independently of the minimal facts approach established in Volume 1 or the reasonableness of miracles established at the beginning of this work.

As the introduction of volume 2 notes, it is rare for a book to spend more than 100 pages on attempted refutations of the resurrection (pp. 1–2). However, this work far exceeds 800 pages, which some may see as a hindrance. I believe this is its greatest strength. Christian scholars can use it as a comprehensive introduction to literature seeking to disprove the bodily resurrection of Christ, and Christian pastors now have a single volume allowing them to interact with any objection to the resurrection that may arise in their churches.

In sum, Habermas’s interactions with various proposed refutations of Christ’s resurrection demonstrate the careful scholarship that has come to mark his career. That, in turn, gives Christian readers confidence in appropriating these arguments for their own interactions with deniers of Jesus’s bodily resurrection. I would have liked to see more engagement with Islamic objections to the resurrection. Although an appendix addresses this issue, given the rise of Islam in historically Christian lands, a deeper engagement with the ways Islamic scholars seek to refute the bodily resurrection of Christ would have strengthened the work. Nevertheless, Habermas does an excellent job surveying and objecting to scholars’ attempts to refute the historic Christian teaching of the bodily resurrection of Christ. This results in a must-have volume for pastors and scholars alike.

Brian Wagers
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Robert M. Bowman Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski. *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics: A Biblical Defense*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2024. 896 pp. Hardback. 978-0825445798. \$57.99.

The Incarnate Christ and His Critics is an exceptional work offering one of the most comprehensive and systematic defenses of the deity of Christ. The authors’ main argument is that Christ is “the eternal Son, God by nature, come in the flesh as a real human being” (p. 17). It follows *Putting*

Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ (2007) where Robert Bowman and Ed Komoszewski equip lay-level readers to understand and defend the deity of Christ. *The Incarnate Christ* delves deeper into this key doctrine's academic foundations, engaging modern views contrary to biblical Christology. Its detailed and wide-ranging analysis of the incarnation challenges the reader to consider not only the facts about Christ but also the validity of his claims. The riches of each chapter help the reader see the incarnate Christ in all his glory, although this substantial (almost 900-page) tome takes time to digest.

Throughout the book, Bowman and Komoszewski bring evidence from their respective fields, biblical Christology, comparative religion, and biblical studies, to depict the problems Christ presents for skeptics (p. 18). They address Christological objections from many critics, including secular skeptics, Muslims, progressive revisionists, Unitarians, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Oneness Pentecostals. They offer thoughtful responses to modern criticisms and present biblical solutions to understand Christ as God incarnate. They approach their opponents hospitably and seriously, attempting to understand and work through their respective views before responding with their own position.

Bowman and Komoszewski structure their work around the acronym *HANDS* to help readers see that Jesus is God incarnate. Using this acronym, they argue that Christ should be awarded the same *honor* as the Father because he shares the same *attributes* and *names* as the Father. Further, his *deeds* reveal him to be fully God. Finally, his authoritative *seat* in the heavens proclaims his divinity. *The Incarnate Christ* is thus divided into five parts, developing the *HANDS* framework, to provide a comprehensive, thorough, and accessible treatment that defends biblical truths from modern critics' disbelief in Christ's deity. The first part interacts with the divine *honors* due to Christ, worship, devotion, praise, fear, faith, hope, and love. The second examines how the Son shares the Father's *attributes*, pre-existence, creation, and sinlessness. The third investigates the divine *names* Jesus and the Father have in common. The fourth shows how Jesus's *deeds* argue for his divinity. The fifth and final part unveils the divine *seat* Christ shares with his Father.

Bowman and Komoszewski's research, while comprehensive in scope, is accessible and easy to understand. Readers with limited knowledge of the field will walk away with copious amounts of material to defend the deity of Christ. Another strength of this work is its approach. Using the *HANDS* acronym provides an easy learning device to remember the book's core arguments. Further, the chapter structure, building from the honor due to Christ and ending with the seat of authority he holds, reinforces the truth of Christ's deity.

Although not a weakness per se, the length of the book may intimidate lay-level readers from engaging it. Additionally, the title might create the impression that *The Incarnate Christ* covers various heresies through church history. These are touched on, but the bulk of the work deals with modern critics of Christ's deity. How the modern views emerged is not emphasized, but that does not minimize the book's benefits.

To say this volume is a great resource is no understatement. Each chapter is carefully presented, significantly enhancing contemporary discussions of the deity of Christ. Bowman and Komoszewski analyze diverging perspectives charitably, providing brief summaries and counter arguments to help navigate the complexities of each view. Despite its academic nature, this work equips anyone desiring a deeper defense of orthodox Christology to emerge with a greater appreciation of Scripture and its revelation of Christ in all his glory. Church lay people, pastors, academics, seminary students, and professors will all benefit from reading *The Incarnate Christ*.

Nicholas Dawson
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Benjamin L. White. *Counting Paul: Scientificity, Fuzzy Math, and Ideology in Pauline Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2025. xiv + 272 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-0197802243. \$99.00.

It is refreshing to see challenges to assumptions long taken for granted by Pauline interpreters. None are more fundamental than those of the nineteenth century scholar Ferdinand Christian Baur, whose research on the authorship of the Pauline corpus still undergirds assumptions on what "counts" as Paul. In *Counting Paul*, Benjamin White exposes and critiques these assumptions in their various forms through a methodologically rigorous study in the digital humanities. Building upon his argument in *Remembering Paul* (OUP, 2014), White argues that we must begin with Pauline tradition and work backwards, thereby offering a new paradigm to determine Pauline authorship.

White outlines the problems in historical Paul research in the first two chapters. Generally, the issue is twofold. First, the modern study of Paul is deeply rooted in the nineteenth and twentieth century focus on Pauline biography (i.e., the difficult question of what counts as admissible when discussing Paul's life). In the first chapter, "Studying Paul," the author traces this issue from Baur and his predecessors to current research, demonstrating the lack of methodological rigor underlying these studies.

Fascinating indeed is the role of Acts in this biographical chaos: For Edward Evanson, Acts was the standard of Pauline biography, and he argued against the authenticity of Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Titus, and Philemon because of their supposed contradiction with Luke's Paul (p. 48). For Baur, however, Acts was a proto-Catholic *apologia*, not an artifact of historical information, with only Romans, 1–2 Corinthians, and Galatians counting as authentic Pauline epistles (pp. 52–55).

White then concentrates on the supremacy of style in the second chapter, "Counting Paul." The argument here claims that vocabulary and style serve as the powerful, nigh untouchable, undergirding argument for authorship and authenticity of Paul's corpus. The author then demonstrates several difficulties and problems of the "Paul-as-math-problem" approach. He introduces the concept of computational games, showing that research begins under a framework of rules established by the researcher.

Moving to the third chapter ("Computing Paul"), White argues that researchers' games are usually driven by their ideological presuppositions. For example, the computational study of David Mealand (1995) found Ephesians–Colossians to be closer to Romans, Galatians, and 2 Corinthians than 1 Corinthians. However, this study still considered 1 Corinthians and the other primary epistles to have the same author (pp. 136–38). Ultimately, White determines that the problems of the subjective stylometric studies from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries continue to plague researchers in the computational age (pp. 148–49).

White then presents a helpful way of "Gaming Paul" (Chapter 4), by offering a computational study rooted in a clear method. He begins with event determination, "the discernment of those features that are most successful in separating texts by author" (p. 162). He moves to canonization, the body of data considered, and to inference, conclusions to be drawn from playing the game. Running two tests, he demonstrates that variance between the epistles is not a result of Pauline coauthors or collaborators, nor is the manuscript tradition responsible. Rather, the tests themselves are often done in a vacuum, usually undertaken to prove what the tester assumes from the outset, a set of "tradition-laden biases" (p. 201) that directly influence how the game is played.

Following this, the author offers a paradigm of starting in the second century and working backwards. He thereby exposes a nerve underlying much Pauline interpretation: we all see Paul through the lens of tradition. While this is no cardinal sin, we must begin with the first two centuries: *they* tell us about counting Paul, unlike the sixteenth, nineteenth, or twenty-first centuries. We should avoid the implicit (and sometimes explicit) interpretative priority of Galatians and Romans and examine the

figure of Paul through his earliest reception, including Acts, instead. Doing so, White suspects, will uncover a Paul who, in an ironic echo of the great Albert Schweitzer (quoted on pp. 26–27), resembles himself more than his interpreters.

Those asserting Pauline authorship for the 13 epistles may see no need to engage with White's excellent work in *Counting Paul*, since it will simply confirm what they already know. Doing so would be a grave mistake. He challenges many assumptions, both implicit and explicit, throughout the field of Pauline studies. For example, interpreters often extol Galatians as a glimpse of the unfiltered Paul, a tendency whose impetus lies as early as Marcion (!). However, White points out that 1 Corinthians—the most unique stylistically and thematically of the *Hauptbriefe*—boasts the most widespread attestation in early Christian literature, decades before Galatians (p. 228). If 1 Corinthians becomes the standard for authenticity though, how would that shift one's understanding of Paul and his thought?

In conclusion, this book is a superb study of what should be considered Pauline. It will challenge those unengaged in the academic conversation, but only on account of the subject matter (including its expedition into the digital humanities) and the amount of ground covered. White's writing is clear and accessible. Pauline interpreters, especially those interested in a deeper understanding of the historical Paul, need to engage White's work and let it challenge and expand their assumptions and presuppositions.

Davis M. Sutton

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Maurice E. Vellacott. *The Earliest View of New Testament Tongues: Understood as Non-Supernatural, Learned Earthly Languages*. Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2024. xii + 356 pp. Paperback. ISBN 979-8385228423. \$42.00.

Maurice Vellacott's book *The Earliest View of New Testament Tongues* is based on comments from the fourth century Jewish Bishop of Salamis, Epiphanius. In his text, Epiphanius refers to the problem in Corinth stemming from the use of Hebrew and Greek dialects in a prideful manner. Hence the apostle Paul must speak of earthly, known languages, not non-earthly ecstatic utterances. Vellacott's goal is thus to demonstrate the soundness of Epiphanius's interpretation of tongues. He sums up his work as follows:

My aim is to rigorously test this unique Epiphanius proposition

that the *γλώσσαις*-speaking in 1 Corinthians 14, with the terms *γλῶσσα*/*glōssa* (singular) or *γλῶσσαι*/*glōssai* (plural), was a controversy around the use of the Hebrew Older Testament Scripture and classic Greek dialects in the assembly and the need to interpret into a common Greek language so others could be edified. (p. 11)

The author then organizes his point with a linguistic analysis of the term for tongues (Chapter 2), a cultural analysis (Chapter 3), a history of interpretation of tongues (Chapter 4), a biblical analysis of key texts (Chapter 5), and notes on relevant Bible translations (Chapter 6).

Vellacott reviews the uses of relevant Greek terms in both Testaments to show how *γλῶσσα*/*γλῶσσαι* does not normally mean ecstatic or non-ecstatic angelic/heavenly language (p. 21). After showing that Epiphanius's interpretation fits within this linguistic framework, he moves to the historical and cultural context. He discusses how Hebrew would still have been used in the first century, Paul included. He then notes evidence for a synagogue in Corinth that was a "synagogue of (the) Hebrews" (p. 65, citing F. F. Bruce). The author also mentions that the Doric Greek dialect would have been dominant in Corinth. These cultural notes, then, fit with Epiphanius's view.

Regarding the history of interpretation, Vellacott writes, "It is significant that *glossolalia* (a non-earthly, angelic/heavenly language for public or private use) is nowhere alluded to, nor hinted at, nor found in the Apostolic or post-Apostolic Fathers, nor in the major Reformers" (p. 161). He provides a sample of quotations and comments on various figures throughout church history to demonstrate this main point. The last major chapter before his notes on Bible translations includes discussion of tongues in Acts 2, 10, 19, and 1 Corinthians 12–14. Throughout his discussion, he continues to argue for each passage meaning a non-supernatural, earthly language. Even a verse as difficult for his position as 1 Cor 13:1 ("tongues of angels"), he interprets as the Hebrew language (p. 224). He also argues for the clearer passage in Acts 2 to be used for interpreting the more difficult passages in 1 Corinthians 12, 14. His comments on the biblical passages, then, conform to Epiphanius's view. Vellacott's final chapter consists of notes on the translation of *γλῶσσα*/*γλῶσσαι* in the history of English Bible translations, as well as notes on Luther and Calvin. He sees Epiphanius's view as compatible with the "intent of the earliest English translations" (p. 317).

Vellacott's book deserves reflection because he shows that Epiphanius's view is a legitimate interpretative option. However, a few caveats are in order. Although the reader will understand the basics of Epiphanius's view in this book, it would have been beneficial if the author had

provided more discussion of the text and the historical context of Epiphanius himself. Also, interpreters who are not yet convinced may have a difficult time reading Vellacott due to the way he refers to those who disagree. For instance, he somewhat disparagingly uses terms like "from a strict scholarly point of view" (p. 16), "the skeptic" (p. 203), and "a contrarian" (p. 251). He also refers to one scholar's comment as "inexplicable" (p. 247), and another's comments as "presumptuous" (p. 248). He asserts that those who might see two different kinds of tongues in the different passages (which is linguistically possible considering semantic range) have "arrived at this position on the basis of their theological presuppositions rather than from biblical evidence" (p. 255, quoting Thomas Edgar approvingly). Such comments distract from the contributions of scholars seeking to weigh all the options on their own merits without disparaging the work of others. Nonetheless, Vellacott's position remains well worthy of consideration.

Alex Carr

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Stephen O. Presley. *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Early Church: Recovering an Ancient Vision*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. xi + 204 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1540966414. \$24.99.

Biblical Theology in the Life of the Early Church is a simple title hinting at the profundity of its content. Stephen Presley's work provides a wealth of material on how to do biblical theology in the modern context by retrieving the methods of the early church. He rightly finds modern methods of biblical theology, which study texts academically but not as Scripture given to the church by the living God, lacking. As a solution, he proposes an "ecclesial biblical theology" (p. 7), recovering the premodern hermeneutic of the patristics. The modern church needs to recover the "social imaginary," the view of life and the world held by the early church, if we are to come to the theological conclusions of that church.

In the first chapter Presley explains his vision for an "ecclesial biblical theology." This project consists of seeing Scripture as God-given, the rule of faith as a hermeneutical guide, and liturgy as faith-shaping. Next, Chapter 2 addresses hermeneutical assumptions. The Fathers approached the text with a metaphysic. They read Scripture believing the Triune God is the true God who providentially works in the world, including how he gives Scripture.

Chapter 3 explores the biblical theology of the fathers, explaining the "literal sense" (i.e., the words in context). This provides the roadmap for

connecting texts in Scripture under a cohesive narrative. It is the basis for close readings using intertextuality.

Then, in Chapter 4, Presley addresses the spiritual sense, a way of seeing Christ in all the Scriptures. Since the Son is preexistent in the text, we should be able to find him there. To aid us, the author divides the fathers' method into three categories: personal, prophetic, and partitive. The "personal" reading means the Son speaks and is present in the Old Testament. For example, prosopological exegesis teaches us that the persons speaking in a text may be the members of the Godhead (e.g., Psalm 110). As for prophetic, Presley argues for a "two-advent hermeneutic," reading Scripture by looking for prophecies of either the first or second advent of Christ. Finally, partitive exegesis means we distinguish the two natures of Christ. At times, Scripture tells us of his divinity, at others, his humanity. This chapter really shines by showing us how to see Christ in the Scriptures.

Chapter 5 moves to address the reader's role in interpretation. The fathers argued for a cycle of virtue in biblical reading. Virtue is necessary for proper interpretation, and proper interpretation produces more virtuous readers. Presley presents three parts of Scripture which especially help with virtue formation: the life of Christ, the wisdom literature, and other spiritual models (e.g., Joseph, Moses, Job). For the fathers, wisdom literature plays an important role in biblical theology because it teaches the reader to be virtuous.

Finally, Chapter 6 argues for biblical interpretation within the context of the ecclesial community. The liturgy and preaching shape church members into virtuous interpreters. Biblical theology, moreover, is intended for proclamation. It is not to be relegated to academic pursuits. In fact, the church and its rule of faith guard the interpreter from missing the point of Scripture.

For all its merits, the book has a minor weakness. Presley does not qualify the church fathers' practices or interpretations. In other words, they did not get everything right. Contemporary Baptists would have serious trouble with some of Augustine and Origen's views, for example. I grant that our hermeneutic should lead us to Nicaea. This is the author's larger point, and he makes it well. But are there dangers in a hermeneutic's other destinations? Would the fathers' exact hermeneutic also lead us to Wittenberg (Protestant), Geneva (Reformed) and London (Baptist)? Were their errors a result of inconsistency? Simply noting these questions would have improved this work. I'm not claiming the fathers' hermeneutic will lead us astray but wish Presley had explored whether (and if so, how) we should *not* follow them. He does hint at this when he encourages us to "embrace the best of patristic biblical interpretation" (p. 176). However,

this merely implies potential problems with wholesale adoption of the patristics at the book's very end.

In any event, Presley's work is an important one, encouraging Protestants to retrieve a pre-modern hermeneutic. Many Christians today seem to reach Nicaea by hermeneutical bushwacking rather than traveling the fathers' well-trodden path. By recovering their early view of interpretation, we might see the weaknesses of our own presupposed metaphysics and instead treat sacred Scripture as given by the Triune God to testify to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

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J. V. Fesko. *Signed, Sealed, Delivered: An Introduction to Covenant Theology*. Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2024. 139 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1642896183. \$14.00.

J. V. Fesko's *Signed, Sealed, Delivered* usefully defines a covenant and describes the covenants of redemption, works, and grace. Laity looking for an explanation of these theological concepts will find this book useful. However, Christians seeking a biblically sound defense of covenant theology, aimed to win over doubters such as dispensationalists or Arminians, should look elsewhere. The author introduces himself as having had "Baptist convictions" that "shifted to Reformed theology." Unfortunately, this reveals an assumption that Baptists cannot be Reformed.

Baptists will be particularly interested in Fesko's assertion, common in Reformed theology, that baptism replaces circumcision. It is argued that just as infants were circumcised in the Abrahamic covenant, infants should be baptized in the new covenant. Fesko offers a heading, "Circumcision to Baptism," that he claims shows why (but not whether) circumcision gives way to baptism (pp. 95–106). He devotes nearly one-tenth of the book to this assertion but fails to prove it. He passes from Jesus's explicit statement that the Lord's Supper is the new covenant sign (Luke 22:19–20) without comment to the claim that the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20) makes baptism a covenant sign, even though the Commission mentions neither "covenant" nor "sign." Although he uses many Scriptures to prove tangential points, he does not establish his central claim that baptism replaces circumcision. He simply assumes it.

Even though Fesko's animus toward Baptists reveals itself, it is more pronounced in his *Word, Water, and Spirit* (2010). For instance, he assumes that *ἐβαπτίσαντο* (1 Cor 10:2) refers to the Christian rite, ignoring the literal "immersed." He then claims, "Those who received the Red Sea

'believer's baptism' were barred from the promised land because of their idolatry and sin ..., but those who received the Red Sea 'infant baptism' were the ones who entered the promised land" (p. 105). Moreover, he argues that infants are "admitted to the covenant community by the sacrament of baptism" (p. 105) but does not believe they are regenerated by baptism. This implies that unregenerate people are made members of the church—something no family of Christianity held before Reformed paedobaptists. He also asserts (falsely), "Anabaptists ... argued that the Old Testament was irrelevant for New Testament Christians" (p. 63).

Most regrettable though is Fesko's hermeneutic and the theology of Scripture that underpins it. Although he asserts, rightly, that "we may speak only when scripture speaks" (p. 25), his conclusions stretch far beyond Scripture. For example, he claims that circumcision, involving cutting, "reveals the covenant curse" (p. 99). He then argues that Jesus's crucifixion was a "circumcision-crucifixion" (pp. 99, 103), referencing Colossians 2:11, because both involve cutting. He also says Jesus's metaphorical use of "immersion" in Mark 10:38–39 ("the baptism with which I am baptized") means that "baptism is ... a sign of covenant judgment" (p. 100). Additionally, he interprets 1 Cor 10:1–4 to say that Pharaoh's army was baptized, and 1 Pet 3:20–21 to say the entire world was baptized in Noah's flood (pp. 101, 104). This, he asserts, shows that baptism is a covenant curse for the unbelieving. But neither passage suggests that unbelievers are baptized. He reads that into them. Eisegesis pervades his handling of Scripture. All too often, he ties together a string of distorted Scriptures, out of context, with leaps in logic, to land in the predictable, predetermined place the Westminster Confession of Faith would have him.

Fesko also suggests—inadvertently but revealingly—that a close examination of Scripture may not support his findings. He likens Scripture to an impressionistic painting: "when we look more closely at the details, we see blobs of paint and color where features blur and the picture becomes less clear" (p. 3). This implies that careful exegesis does not show Scripture teaching what he claims is the big picture. That denies the perspicuity of Scripture, whether he realizes it or not.

In sum, something as significant as a covenant sign that the church must provide should depend on explicit, divine words, not on inferences, contortions of logic, and filling in the blanks. Fesko even likens the Bible to hearing only half a phone conversation. We must fill in the blanks to make sense of it (p. 37), and that filler is traditional covenant theology. Unfortunately, this otherwise useful *Introduction to Covenant Theology* (to cite the subtitle) handles Scripture slavishly in service of preconceived conclusions. A more careful use of the Bible would have benefited (and possibly

persuaded) those not already convinced.

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Robert S. Smith. *The Body God Gives: A Biblical Response to Transgender Theory*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2025. 446 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1683598121. \$34.99.

What is a man? What is a woman? Transgender theory questions the ontological goodness of the body and affirms gender from a psychosocial perspective. While some contemporaries embrace this ideology, the church grasps for understanding and answers to the transgender assumptions in general and how the Bible addresses this topic in particular.

Robert S. Smith provides *The Body God Gives*, which evaluates transgender theory and responds to it from both a "theo-anthropology and theo-ethic perspective" (p. 3). His thesis is "to evaluate the central ontological claim of transgender theory: that the sexed body *does not* determine the gendered self" (p. 3). His analysis includes a biblical response to this theory. He also leans on Augustinian theology and Kevin Vanhoozer's "Drama-of-Redemption Model" (pp. 48–57).

His work contains three parts. Part 1 explains the complex nature of the term "transgender." Supporters of transgender theory argue that a broad range of individuals might fit into this category (pp. 11–14). Although broad in definition, the underlying assumption of this ideology denies "that the sexed body reveals and determines the gendered self" (p. 15). The first part of the book concludes with various evangelical responses to transgender theory. This brief overview reveals how the author's theological method provides a unique discourse in comparison to other contributors.

Part 2 traces the historical influences transgender theorists utilize to deduce that gender exists as a social and psychological construct (pp. 63–93). This theory contains both philosophical and biological arguments. Theorists claim that intersex conditions provide a gender spectrum between male and female. Smith's statistical analysis shows that 0.015 percent of people are born with this (biological) abnormality. Even then, he argues that intersexuality does not change the male-female binary because this condition creates an epistemological challenge rather than an ontological one.

Historically, the philosophical aspect of "gender" started in the fourteenth century (p. 98). Then, the first and second waves of feminism pro-

vided transgender theorists with the separation of gender from one's biological sex (p. 107). Like these theorists, Smith also distinguishes gender from sex (pp. 151, 161). However, his view explains how the human body "provides the foundation (and so determines the boundaries and direction) for authentic gender cultivation" (p. 210).

Part 3 provides biblical arguments against transgender ideology. The value of this section cannot be overstated. Smith responds to many trans affirming theologians who utilize Scripture to support their position. He presents their arguments and responds with a historical-grammatical hermeneutic. He also explains how doctrines like the *Imago Dei* and the resurrection deny transgender theorists' claims.

This work contains a plethora of strengths. One is Smith's explanation of human beings as "hylomorphic psychosomatic" unities, which precludes the bifurcation of humanity into sex and gender (pp. 225–27). Although ontological holists and substance dualists might disagree with hylomorphism (every physical entity combines matter and form), the holistic dualist argument strengthens the body's ontological grounds for informing one's gender. Throughout this book, he insists the two are not ontologically separate categories nor is gender superior to the body as transgender theorists claim.

Although a technical work, Smith's pastoral tone permeates his writing. The promulgation of transgender theory derives from the "somatic effects of sin" (p. 301). The fall coupled with the doctrine of original sin is why people struggle with gender incongruence, which leads to transgender theory (p. 366). The author provides gospel hope here to those who have undergone gender reassignment surgery or hormonal therapies for transforming their body into their perceived gender. The promise of a believer's bodily resurrection will heal all those who either struggle with gender dysphoria or have altered their bodies.

Despite the book's strengths, there is one minor weakness to Smith's argument. He believes gender and the sexed body ought to remain distinct (pp. 151–59). This position seems inconsistent with the theo-anthropological ethic he posits—i.e., hylomorphism. If the sexed body informs one's gender and its corresponding roles, it seems disadvantageous to separate the two on cultural and psychological grounds. Perhaps the two have differing functions ontologically and epistemologically, but they are not distinct in nature. The psychosomatic unity of the human constitution seems to imply they are inseparable—i.e., the one informs the other. However, this minor weakness does not deflect from the work's significant contribution to transgender theory.

The Body God Gives exists as a welcome resource in a time of gender confusion and transgender theory. Its central contribution is that God's

desire for one's gender is revealed by the design of the body, which is rejected by transgender theory (p. 275). The Bible affirms the ontological goodness of the body. This position informs our understanding of roles and responsibilities as human beings made in God's image. The Bible also affirms the male-female binary. Smith's book is a must read for scholars and pastors.

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Emily Conroy-Krutz. *Missionary Diplomacy: Religion and Nineteenth-Century American Foreign Relations*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2024. 331 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1501773983. \$46.95.

Emily Conroy-Krutz's *Missionary Diplomacy* is a well-researched, well-written, and convincingly argued book on the relationship between the American Protestant mission movement and the U.S. State Department in the nineteenth century. Early on, she points out, "both the State Department and the mission movement were small and weak, with outsized ambitions for eventual influence over the whole world" (p. 11). By the century's end, however, the State Department had undergone significant professionalization, while the missions movement had become one of the most influential forces shaping America's foreign relations. She argues for a narrative of change, connection, and increasing complexity between missionaries and American diplomacy.

The book is divided into three parts. Part 1 examines the role of missionary intelligence. Throughout the century, foreign missionaries often served as the primary link between Americans at home and the wider world. They reported, lectured, and published extensively about their mission fields, thereby educating the American public. In doing so, missionaries enjoyed privileged influence over how the U.S. understood foreign nations. As educated eyewitnesses, they were often regarded as experts on specific regions.

Part 2 introduces the growing complexity of American foreign relations as the century progressed. Traversing Asia, the Pacific, and the Middle East, Conroy-Krutz shows that missionaries served as consuls, workers, and at times, provocateurs who forced State Department intervention. Known among diplomats as "missionary troubles," instances of physical violence or violations of missionaries' rights prompted them to seek U.S. protection and sympathy. Missionary roles including medicine, education, and economic ventures—often considered a field of

evangelism—complicated the lines between religious and national interests. Conroy-Krutz raises important questions: Could missionaries be treated as U.S. citizens abroad? Did their involvement in government functions compromise the separation of church and state?

Missionaries could be seen as victims or instigators. For example, the ABCFM (American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions) missionary John Stephens was assassinated in 1862 by a pro-Roman Catholic mob in Mexico. In contrast, the Ponape crisis of 1887 involved the arrest of ABCFM missionary E. J. Doane and subsequent consular intervention by the United States in the Caroline Islands by 1890. In both cases, Conroy-Krutz argues, the State Department was compelled to act—regardless of whether missionaries were troublemakers or victims.

Part 3 concludes with case studies from the Philippines, China, Congo, and Turkey at the turn of the century. By the 1890s, the State Department had become much larger and more professionalized, and these case studies illustrate that missionaries could either advance or hinder U.S. interests abroad. As the author summarizes, “Across the century, missionaries forced the government to articulate new conceptions of the rights of US citizens abroad and of the role of the United States as an engine of humanitarianism and religious freedom” (p. 12).

Conroy-Krutz displays several notable strengths. First, in an era when historians often cast missionaries solely as villains or heroes, she provides a balanced, respectful, and thoroughly researched account of missionary diplomacy. She treats historical actors not only with humility, but also with a critical eye toward their intellectual frameworks and cultural assumptions. Though her research primarily centers on the ABCFM, she supplements her analysis with material from government archives and other denominational sources, including Baptists and Methodists.

Second, the book is especially helpful in its sustained focus on chronological “connection points” between mission work and American consular activity. Each chapter contributes fresh insights into this evolving relationship, demonstrating not only historical change but also deepening complexity.

On the other hand, some readers may wish for more theological analysis to deepen the book’s argument. For instance, greater attention to the missionaries’ theological frameworks—especially millennial visions of America’s global role or the link between gospel proclamation and civilizational progress—could enrich the study. How central was obedience to Jesus’s command to “preach the gospel to all nations” to their motivations? How did their theological commitments shape both their work and their allegiance to the United States?

Additionally, more reflection on missionary pragmatism would

strengthen the analysis. To what extent did missionaries attempt to “convert colonialism”—adapting aspects of colonial systems that aligned with their goals? This tendency, rooted in theological presuppositions, likely influenced how they navigated their relationships both with local populations and U.S. diplomats. These are not weaknesses though so much as avenues that could strengthen her overall thesis.

In any event, Conroy-Krutz has written an excellent sequel to her earlier work, *Christian Imperialism* (Cornell, 2015), offering scholars and teachers a valuable resource for understanding the entangled histories of American foreign relations and the modern missionary movement.

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Mark R. Glanville. *Preaching in a New Key: Crafting Expository Sermons in Post-Christian Communities*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2025. 238 pp. Paperback. ISBN 978-1514010990. \$28.00.

In *Preaching in a New Key*, Mark Glanville—an accomplished jazz musician from Australia pastoring in Vancouver, Canada—attempts to “re-contextualize expository preaching from start to finish” (p. 19). Lamenting that most recent preaching books have operated within the modern, Christianized western milieu, Glanville submits his “method and theology for expository preaching in post-Christian neighborhoods as an introductory textbook for new preachers and a recalibration for experienced preachers” (p. 19). Drawing on the improvisational nature of jazz music, as a stranger-turned-neighbor in his post-Christian community, Glanville instructs preachers to ensure their sermon’s “through line” (main memorable point) resonates with the central idea of the text. Preachers must also exhort their people creatively to enjoy the tenderness of Christ and invite their neighbors into the contrastive community of church life.

The book has four parts. In Part 1: “Deeper,” Glanville urges a preacher’s deeper self-awareness as he relates to the shared experience of church community within the post-Christian atmosphere of doubt. In Part 2: “Craft,” he discusses tangible matters of sermon preparation. In Part 3: “Tradition,” which he considers the most important, he invites the preacher into a deeper and richer interpretation of Scripture, which he identifies as our Christ-centered, authoritative tradition. In Part 4: “Beauty,” he celebrates creativity in preaching, encourages a posture of sympathetic participation with one’s listeners, invites churches to foster space for shared community experience and development, and explains how to preach the Old Testament. Presenting the latter, especially as it

contains violent texts, relates to contemporary preachers' imperative to call for justice in our post-Christian world.

Positively, Glanville argues that "Christian preaching is a concept that comes to us from Scripture itself" (p. 24). I agree and appreciate his helpful discussions on biblical terms for preaching. I also resonate with his definition of expository preaching as Christ-centered proclamation that explains and applies the Scriptures. His discussions on the preacher's emotional health and trauma-informed preaching are worthwhile and timely, especially his treatment of the "deeper self," in which one is fully aware (and fully at rest) as a person and a preacher. Additionally, the author offers good advice on sermon preparation (including his "preacher's sketchpad"), a helpful template for sermon structure (pp. 89–90), and various checklists that assist a preacher in thinking through and working with a text. Finally, in Appendix A, he outlines a process for thematic preaching.

With those strengths in mind, some concerns arise. First, the alert complementarian reader will hear Glanville's egalitarian tone. Second, when considering the evangelistic element of sermons, I wonder why he stops short at his neighborhood, with little (if any) mention of the nations. Third, his "new key" may fall flat when he prioritizes healing neighborhoods (with the tenderness of Jesus through a contrastive community church witness) rather than clearly proclaiming the biblical gospel to sinners and saints. Fourth, I wish he had provided earlier and clearer definitions of what he means by "tenderness" and "contrastive community." He eventually explains that a contrastive community is one "where every person, especially the most vulnerable among them, could thrive" (pp. 137–38). Fifth and finally, he defines the term in Chapter 13 (the next-to-last chapter): "By the phrase 'contrastive communities,' I mean churches that embody and extend the tenderness of Jesus in their neighborhood" (p. 195). Not only does this definition come late; it also sounds vague as he strums another under-defined term: "tenderness." I may be responding more rationally and less creatively than he would like, but I could not help asking, "What does that mean?"

Throughout, I continued wondering how Glanville would address sin. Sadly, he does not. Perhaps the closest he gets is implicit, when he suggests (quite skeptically, it seems) that at times there *may* be need for a call to repentance (p. 73). Another example is his definition of preaching the gospel. He asserts, "To preach the gospel is to show that Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection, has defeated evil and death and secured a future for the world" (p. 149). Fair enough. But why not include something as central as sin, like Paul does in 1 Cor 15:1–4? Overall, the author's sentiments come across as far too human-centered—perhaps even post-

Christian.

Glanville intends *Preaching in a New Key* for beginning preachers. However, I would recommend it be reserved for veteran preachers and post-graduate theology students. They should be better equipped to compare his thesis and insights with their own preaching experience and the broader field of homiletics.

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Philip Jenkins. *Kingdoms of This World: How Empires Have Made and Remade Religions*. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2024. x + 340 pp. Hardback. ISBN 978-1481319935. \$42.99.

This volume adds to Philip Jenkins's consummate array of published works. Here, he demonstrates the role empires have played in the fluctuating fortunes—and focus—of major world religions. Significantly, this imperial dimension "teaches us how and why given religions reached their current geographical limits" (p. 226). However, while belief systems "resolutely backed by states and kings have an enormous advantage over their competitors," other factors must play a role, "or else Christianity would not have survived the persecutions in either Rome or Persia" (p. 226). The imperial dimension Jenkins introduces should certainly be of interest to students of Christianity and other world religions.

Delving into Jenkins's book, it is important to note the vast expanse of his canvas. Covering over four millennia, he presents a portrait of empire-religion relationships, global in its reach. This breathtaking scope inevitably excludes key elements, some of them regrettable. He nevertheless draws on an impressive 910 sources, delivering a helpful contribution to our understanding of contemporary world religions.

The work is divided into two parts, "Empires and the Making of World Faiths" and "Worldwide Empires and Unintended Consequences." The first begins with valuable pointers on the nature of empires. When "one nation or people rules several or many others, which originally had some kind of independent existence" you have an empire (p. 22). Interestingly, while "colonialism grows out of imperial rule ... empires have existed without colonialism, which means not just occupying a territory but settling it, usually with people of the imperial motherland" (p. 25). On this count, imperial British India was not colonial, given the tiny fraction of British settled in the subcontinent. Conversely, America was both: "If the United States under Andrew Jackson and James Polk

was not an aggressive imperial power, engaged in extensive colonial settlement, then the whole concept of 'empire' has no meaning" (p. 26).

In any event, empires have evidenced widely differing religious manifestations: "Imperial ideologies did matter, but rarely could empires simply decree a new faith and expect universal obedience" (p. 36). Jenkins provides numerous fascinating details in this regard, especially in the book's second part on unintended consequences. However, what he leaves out on the religions side is a matter of some concern. Significantly, he provides no clear definition of religion. In a Western Hemisphere context, he notes sixteenth century (and later) Christians' definition of religion in terms of "resemblance to the known monotheistic faiths" (p. 123). He goes on to describe nineteenth century German-born Oxford scholar Max Müller's view of "other religions through a Judeo-Christian lens" (p. 190). He then makes the telling observation that Asians following multiple traditions simultaneously found themselves classified separately "as Buddhist, Confucian, or Daoist" (and Shinto): "Such a taxonomy could not have emerged without ... imperial intrusion" (p. 198). Important insight though this is, that is the closest he comes to defining religion. He acknowledges modern anthropologists' recognition that "an assemblage of customs and practices" could constitute a religion (p. 123) but ignores Paul Tillich's helpful definition of religion as one's ultimate concern (and neglects to present an alternative definition of his own).

Unfortunately, Tillich's perception is not the only key religious element he ignores. David Bentley Hart (*Atheist Delusions*, 2010), Rodney Stark (*The Triumph of Christianity*, 2012), and Tom Holland (*Dominion*, 2019) convincingly demonstrate the revolutionary (and positive) role Christianity has played in making the West what it is over two millennia. Empires have played their part, but they are not the only (or even the most important) factor. Jenkins does mention "the role of religion in assisting people during disease-related crises" (p. 226), and the "spiritual conquest of multiple Germanic barbarian peoples" (p. 68), but the latter occurred while the (Western) Roman empire was crumbling. Acknowledging the above scholars' prominent contributions, if only in a footnote, would have enhanced his work.

Moving to other religions, he recalls that "Hinduism has been a very dynamic tradition, which has changed greatly over time" (p. 92). In the process, Hinduism virtually replaced the Buddha's reform movement in the Indian subcontinent by the twelfth century AD, but "borrowed heavily from Buddhist practice and thought" (p. 92). He argues that such borrowing led to "attractive new forms of devotional practice to the gods (*bhakti*), with a new focus on such beloved deities as Vishnu and Shiva" (p. 92). However, Jenkins completely neglects the hugely influential (and

quintessentially Hindu) Bhagavad Gita's role in promoting devotional Hinduism from the beginning of the current era, only mentioning that text in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century interactions with Westerners.

As for Islam, he presents a helpful description of the ascendance of that religion over time: "Historically, Islam offers an excellent example of how empires can build up established religions in a way that severely constrains rivals" (p. 100). Here (and indeed, throughout the book) Jenkins's treatment helps us appreciate why the twenty-first century global map of world religions is the way it is.

A final note reflects the perils of the book's huge scope. More work (and sources!) would be necessary, but I missed critical analysis of several taken-for-granted positions. Such analysis might reflect recent scholarly questioning of established (liberal) narratives on the emergence of Judaism and Christianity (and include a more careful reading of Scripture). Also, the legitimacy of referring to Buddhist monastery libraries, which were centers of instruction, as "full-fledged universities" (p. 80, cf. pp. 84, 91, and 93), is rejected by several scholars. And it is particularly unfortunate that Jenkins makes no mention of the serious scholarly interrogations of Islam's foundational story taking place over the past few decades.

This work nevertheless treats the important topic of empires and religions professionally. I would recommend it as a useful addition to the library of any world religions scholar.

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