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The Leader God Uses: A Sermon

INTRODUCTION

Lead from the front! That's the leader's creed, but not so far out front that people lose sight of him. He must be vocal, but not so vocal the people hear his voice instead of God's voice. He must set the pace—fast enough to challenge the strong, slow enough not to discourage the weak.

One of the leader's responsibilities is to work himself out of a job by training someone to take his place. While he can never please everybody and is foolish to try, he dare not indiscriminately offend people in the name of duty. The ideal leader probably does not exist, since "ideal" varies from one person to the next. Let's consider, therefore, one leader in one church.

Where the Leader Serves

He serves a rural church with a highly mobile and growing membership. Unemployment among members is ninety percent and has been for a generation. They've had one building program in forty years. They have no hymnals, no public address system, no Sunday school curriculum, no air conditioning, no pews, no Wednesday night prayer meeting, no Thursday night visitation, and they conduct services once a week. The congregation has produced members whose names, if mentioned now, you would recognize immediately.

The people raise no crops, yet no one goes hungry. They have no factories, yet every member wears warm clothes and shoes that fit. No one has hospitalization insurance. They have no income, yet, during their only building program, members gave so much the leader asked them to stop. On the other hand, this is a church with so little they could not survive unless God did the miraculous every day.

The three-million-member Church in the Wilderness is led by Moses. Exodus 14 says they crossed the Red Sea in one night. If they had gone over in columns of two, the line would have been 800 miles long, and it would have taken 35 days and nights. But they crossed on dry ground, which means God dried a space in the seabed three miles wide and they walked across 5,000 abreast.

What the Church Requires

The Israeli camp in the wilderness was two-thirds the size of Rhode Island (750 square miles). God sent manna each day to feed the people. That would be 1,500 tons of food every day. If they ate as much as we do, it would have taken two freight trains one mile long each day to haul the food and would cost 6 million dollars per day.

What about water? The Bible says, "Behold, he smote the rock, that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed" (Psalm 78:20). It took 11 million gallons daily, and God provided in this fashion for 14,600 days (that's 40 years). When you've been on the receiving end of God's goodness that long at that magnitude, you believe God can do anything, because you see the impossible every morning before breakfast.

Now consider the man who leads this group of people. If you know much about Moses, you already have an idea how this will be approached. Moses' life conveniently falls into three forty-year periods.

THE FIRST FORTY YEARS—MOSES, THE MIGHTY MAN (ACTS 7:20-25)

Qualities of Leadership

Moses stepped from his bulrush ark hungry to be somebody important. If ever a young man had leadership potential, Moses did. His life could not have been better if he had written the script for it himself. He had every quality associated with leadership.

Moses Was Handsome (v. 20). That's what the Bible means when it says he was "exceeding fair." If you don't think a pretty face helps in leadership, take a look at who gets lead roles in television programs and who plays the heavy. When Moses walked by, mothers nudged their daughters and told them to bring one home that looked like him. The point is, it does a leader no harm to sport a photogenic million-dollar smile and a granite jaw. The man looked like a leader.

Moses Was Educated (v. 22). That's what the Bible means when it says he was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians." He was the most highly educated Hebrew of his generation, perhaps the only Hebrew to be cross-culturally trained.

You can be sure that Pharaoh's daughter spared no expense in Moses' training. He was tutored by the finest teachers in math, medicine, religion, and dreams—all intriguing to the Egyptian mind. He knew the social graces. He was at ease with kings and governors, with military

men and business tycoons, with learned professors and the great scholars of his day.

While it is true that a man can lead without the formal training Moses received, it is just as true that men clamor for leaders who can walk among the wise and mighty without losing their sense of balance.

Moses Was Eloquent (v. 22). That is, he was “mighty in words.” Moses knew how to communicate verbally. When Moses talked, people listened. He not only had something to say, he had the wherewithal to say it well. Of course, this is a radical departure from Moses’ lame excuse to God that he was “slow of speech” (Exodus 4:10). But then Moses was not the only man who told God he couldn’t talk before a crowd.

Moses Was a Doer (v. 22). The Bible says he was “mighty ... in deeds.” Some men are talkers, others are doers. Moses was that rare blend of both. Being a doer made him a favorite with men. Moses not only talked big, he walked big. Men respect those who get things done. Simply put, Moses was being groomed as the next Pharaoh. His name could have been carved on Egyptian monuments alongside Ramses, Necho, Thutmosis, and Amen-hotep.

The King-Makers

In every society there is that group of people who help make leaders. Most mighty men don’t get that way without a lot of help. Moses was no exception.

Moses Had a Brave Sister (Exodus 2:4-8). Her name was Miriam, that feisty little girl who stood along the riverbank and watched as the bulrush ark floated down the Nile. From the way the story reads, she must have been fearless. When Pharaoh’s daughter pulled the crying baby from the ark, Miriam burst from the undergrowth, ran right up to the princess (only a big sister would have the nerve to do that), and asked if she wanted a baby-sitter. Turns out the princess needed a nanny. Care to guess who Miriam brought back to do the job?

Amazing, isn’t it, how God’s plans seem immune to men’s opposition? Not only is the child spared, but the government that was killing Hebrew boys bought his clothes, paid for his education, and gave him every possible luxury.

Moses Had a Godly Mother (Exodus 2:8-10; 6:20). Her name was Jochebed. She sacrificed her future for his. We’ll probably never know

how often Jochebed prayed while Moses lay between two worlds—born in one, raised in the other. For three months she defied the law and hid her son from Egyptian baby-killers. But there came a day when his cries could no longer be covered. Perhaps only a mother can know the agony Jochebed felt as she realized that to keep the boy any longer would mean losing him to the sword.

So one unforgettable day, Jochebed placed her baby in an ark where he floated on the bosom of the Nile buoyed by her prayers—and waited. Many mothers will lose their sons unless they turn them loose on the river of God's mercy. They have done all they can for their children, and now if they are to be salvaged, God must work a miracle.

And he did. I would love to have been there when Miriam came scrambling through the door with news that Pharaoh's daughter was looking for a baby-sitter and to have seen the love on Jochebed's face when an Egyptian princess handed her son back to her. She had to lose him to find him. She had to give him up in order to keep him.

Did Jochebed take advantage of the precious years God gave her? She did such a splendid job teaching the boy that forty years later Moses chose God rather than to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Hebrews 11:24-27). Such is the influence of a godly mother to mold mighty men.

Moses Had a Quiet Father (Exodus 2:1; 6:20). Moses had a quiet father who buried himself in anonymity for his son's sake. The man was so anonymous that most people don't know his name. His name was Amram. A good name. A good father. Every father wants his son to be more than he is. Yet, in order for Moses to have his chance in life, Amram seems to march off into the Old Testament shadows. Give us more fathers who don't compete with their sons for attention, men who know their jobs and quietly go about the task of doing them.

Moses Had an Older Brother (Exodus 6:20). Moses had an elder brother who kept a big family secret a long time. It takes a lot of character for children to keep secrets—most can't wait to tell all they know to anybody who will listen. But Aaron, Moses' older brother, kept the family secret from Pharaoh. While some traits about Aaron later in life worry me, I do like this one: the boy knew when to keep his mouth shut.

Moses Had Powerful Unsaved Friends. No mighty man ever lived who didn't know kindness from unsaved people. Moses had political friends

in Egypt. Paul had a great Jewish teacher, Gamaliel. Daniel had a Babylonian monarch and a Persian king.

In your case, perhaps an unsaved man gave you a job when you needed it, or took a chance on you when nobody else would. All of us have been aided, intentionally or unintentionally, by men and women from whom we never expected to receive help. Perhaps, like Moses, they reached out to us on some Nile because a godly mother prayed.

The Voluntary Leader (Acts 7:23-25)

By the time Moses was forty, he knew he was the man to deliver Israel. Verse 25 indicates that Moses thought everybody else knew it too. They didn't. We don't know how Moses knew he was to lead Israel. Maybe God told him, maybe he put the pieces together and figured it out for himself—we don't know. But the fact is, he knew.

And he was right. But he was also wrong. God often tells a leader what he will do before the people are informed. Moses didn't misread the facts; he misread the timetable. Since he was in his prime at forty, had completed his education, had his theology straight enough to reject Egyptian idol worship, and was the only Hebrew qualified to lead, he volunteered to get the job done. Right now.

One problem with mighty men is they think everything can be done if you throw enough money at it or work longer hours. Moses was ready. The people were not. God was not. It takes more than a mighty man to lead God's people. As a mighty man, Moses pushed too far and people despised him for it. Some things Moses needed to learn could not be taught in Pharaoh's court or at his mother's knee.

Moses had many admirable qualities, but he needed seasoning and mellowing that only comes from buffeting, heartache, disappointment ... and more years. Moses was so eager to do right that he killed a man to get the opportunity. Strong men often want to do right so much they hurt people they try to help. Their strength becomes their weakness.

As quickly as the thrust of a sword, Moses changes from a prince to a fugitive with a price on his head. When the curtain falls on the first forty years of his life, Moses is a shattered man. All his training, his skills, his influence mean nothing. It's as if God missed an opportunity to use a man who had much to offer and was ready to give it all.

Moses might have been a George Patton in battle racing across Egypt at the head of his conquering army. But it was not to be. A disaster of unparalleled dimensions snatched his star from the sky and flung it in the mud. Moses would learn the lesson that all men must acknowledge.

When it comes to the work of God, it is “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zechariah 4:6).

Moses the mighty man was not all God wanted him to be, even though he made right moves for the right reasons. He had the strength, the fire, the ability. The one thing he would not do was wait for the Lord. And now, in his all-knowing way, God sends Moses the mighty man back to school, back to a new training schedule, back to discover the weakness of human strength, the folly of human reasoning, the despair of human strategies.

THE SECOND FORTY YEARS—MOSES, THE MEEK MAN (ACTS 7:29-30)

Man on the Run

Moses left Egypt a nobody, in stark contrast to his first forty years when servants catered to his every whim and powerful men courted his favor. But those days were gone forever. Life would never be the same again. It is written that Moses “fled,” that is, he ran to escape punishment. For the first time in his life, he had to use back streets and cover his face when someone in authority passed by.

Mighty men don’t flee, but Moses did. Mighty men stay and fight. They meet in the streets at high noon with six-guns blazing. They duel to the death. But Moses ran, and it’s one of the mysteries of life why. Perhaps it was the shock of unexpected criticism and rejection, perhaps the fear of failure. At any rate, it was the first of many hard lessons.

The Bible calls Moses a “stranger,” an odd word to describe the man who had known nothing but love and admiration. Now he must justify every word, every act, every decision to people who don’t know him and don’t trust him. No one likes to be a stranger. It’s tough being a stranger—hard on the nerves, hard on the human spirit. Moses would learn how precious a kind word could be.

The School of Meekness

Not much is said in the Bible about the second forty years of Moses’ life. Not even God tells us what it took to turn the mighty man into a meek man. His second forty years pass so quickly in Exodus chapter two that in the space of twenty-two short verses, Moses changes from a babe in a bulrush bed to a married man in Midian.

We catch fleeting glances of a pastoral life, quiet streams, and sheep. But it took more than sheep and a wife to change Moses from the man who killed an Egyptian in sudden anger to the man who stood before the burning bush. One thing we know, somewhere in that span of four

decades, Moses learned his lesson well, learned it better than any man who had ever lived, for the Bible says, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Numbers 12:3).

Meekness is like a gyroscope in a ship that keeps the ship level no matter how high the winds or how rough the sea. Men need meekness deep inside the soul to hold the course when life turns upside down and churns from side to side. Meekness is the opposite of sudden anger. Meekness comes from a heart too great to be moved by little insults. Meekness is patience in the reception of injuries.

But most of all, meekness is an in-wrought grace of the soul, having the disposition of Christ. Meekness is that temper of spirit that does not dispute or resist God's dealings. It does not fight or struggle against God. Meekness is no longer at war with the Lord but has surrendered to him.

True meekness is the fruit of power—when a man knows he has the resources of God at his disposal. Meekness is a balanced spirit within man that is neither cast down nor elated, because he is not preoccupied with himself. Meekness is neither surrender of rights to bullies nor cowardice. The meek man is not at the mercy of every mortal who chooses to disturb him.

Remember this saying from the Far East: "When elephants fight, the grass gets trampled." When strong men carelessly use their strength in anger or frustration, many people get hurt in the process.

However, when men come to terms with meekness, the strongest are the gentlest, knowing the power of their own strength. It took forty years to polish the brass and round the sharp edges that were Moses so that God could use him. O how we want to think that Moses was all he needed to be at age forty. Most of us would have snatched him up and anointed him leader on the spot, but it would have done a disservice to him. He had the ability to be more than smart and flashy.

We do men a disservice by convincing them they personify all a man of God could be, and then sending them forth to minister with nothing more than heated personal opinions, a glib tongue and a quick wit. God's work demands more.

The Role Reversal

Moses had a forty-year role reversal. He exchanged a palace for a tent. There is often healing in poverty. Some truths can never be learned in opulence; they surface in the iron furnace of poverty.

Moses Surrendered His Sword. Moses surrendered his sword for a shepherd's staff. He left Egypt with a bloody sword demanding to be recognized as leader, since he killed for the privilege. Too many men have slain their brethren for the right to lead God's people. How foolish we appear when we lift a bloody sword in the camp of God with the dreams and dignity of our brethren skewered on it, and then demand to be called a leader. Every Moses must learn to sheath his sword, for the sheep listen for the shepherd's voice, not the ringing of cold steel against iron wills.

Moses Exhausted a Young Man's Strength. Moses exhausted a young man's strength and gained an old man's patience. Everybody wants to be led into battle by a swashbuckling Samson. Nobody wants to hobble along after a man who could have been drawing social security checks fifteen years, as was the case when Moses returned to Egypt.

The fact remains that if Moses had led Israel out of Egypt at age forty, even if it took the same miracles to accomplish it, you can be sure that a legend would have arisen about the dashing Israeli military genius who outfoxed Pharaoh. No one would make that mistake with an eighty-year-old. It would be clear that only God's power, not Moses' muscle, delivered the nation.

The Burning Bush (Exodus 3, 4)

After forty years of learning meekness, it took the burning bush miracle and God's personal promise before Moses agreed to return to Egypt. At best, Moses was a reluctant deliverer. He had not lost his confidence, but he was a far wiser man tempered by four decades on the back side of nowhere.

Now he was old; only a miracle could deliver Israel, and that was exactly what God wanted! God needed neither Moses' daring nor his strength, just his obedience. It's never too late when we go in God's power, and there's never enough time when we don't.

There must come a turning point in every man's life—a burning bush experience, if you will—when it all comes together the way God intends, and we take our hands off the helm in obedience to him. Every leader needs the bush burning in his memory so when he gets down into some Egypt and the tide turns against him, he can point back to the day when he and God settled it all.

The poet wrote:

Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life,
 Where, in spite of all you can do,
 There is no way out, there is no way back,
 There is no other way but through?
 Then wait on the Lord with a trust serene
 Till the night of your fear is gone;
 He will send the wind, He will heap the floods,
 When He says to your soul, "Go on."

Might chased Moses out of Egypt; meekness sent him back. The fire of uncontrolled strength burned him so badly it took forty years to heal. But the flame of the burning bush would rekindle his faith and purify his nation.

THE THIRD FORTY YEARS—MOSES THE MASTER'S MAN

The first forty years of Moses' life changed Egypt. The second forty changed Moses. The third forty changed the world. As a mighty man, Moses saw Egypt and burned to conquer it. As a meek man, Moses saw the desert and conquered himself. As a holy man, Moses saw God and conquered sin.

The Idolatry

You see, it was Moses the holy man who hated idolatry more than any man had ever hated it. He had seen what idolatry did to the Egyptians, how they worshipped cattle and insects and cats and the elements. The holy man saw the great darkness that idolatry produced. No man cried out against stone gods and man-made deities more than Moses.

As a mighty man, he saw the idols and raised his fist in protest. As a meek man, he remembered the idols and waited on God. As a holy man, he confronted the idols and broke their power hold of fear and superstition over the people.

The Trust

It was to Moses the holy man that God committed the destiny of the nation. What the mighty hands of Moses could not have, the holy hands were given. God gives the destiny of his people in every generation to leaders who are known more for their holiness than for their physical strength. Now we recognize the hand of God in Moses' life moving him from Egypt, hiding him away in Midian until the time was right, and finally exalting him in an hour of national crisis.

The Plans

It was to Moses the holy man that God gave the blueprints for his people from Egypt to Calvary. The holy man was entrusted with the Commandments, the Pentateuch, the Tabernacle and all the majestic truths they contained, all the symbolism, all the foreshadowing of better days ahead.

The Remembrance

Holy men are thoughtful men who remember kindnesses by others. By this time, Jochebed and Amram would have long since been dead, but Moses did remember those he could. He remembered his brave sister who stood so boldly in his defense eighty years earlier. Care to guess who led singing after the Hebrews crossed the Red Sea? That's right—Miriam did (Exodus 15:20-21).

Moses remembered his older brother who kept a family secret. He whispered to Aaron the secrets of the Tabernacle and the priesthood. Through Aaron a line of priests existed from Sinai to Calvary and taught the people until Messiah came (Exodus 28:1-5).

The Man

It was Moses the holy man who stood between the living and the dead to stop the plague (Numbers 16:48). Moses the holy man prayed, "Blot me out of thy book" (Exodus 32:32). It was Moses the holy man who spent so much time with God that his face glowed, and he frightened the people (Exodus 34:29-35). He walked so close to God that he had to wear a veil so the people could look at him.

What a sight he must have been. Moses, the man who wanted to be feared and honored as a young mighty man, became a holy man and found everything that strength and a sword could not give him. There is an awe, a power that only walking close to God brings. Leaders who want to be followed must wait before God. The people know when the cloth veils a man's holiness and when it veils his vanity.

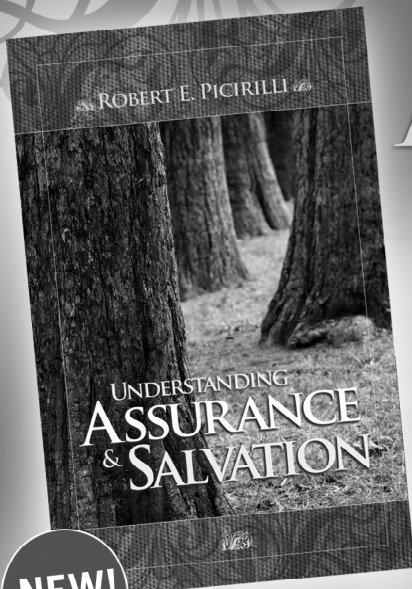
The highest compliment to Moses the holy man came after he had been dead 1,400 years. One day God reached into eternity and found two men to stand with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-3). Jesus represented grace. Elijah represented the prophets. Moses the holy man represented the law. The law, the prophets, and grace met on a hillside in perfect harmony about what must shortly come to pass—the crucifixion. It took a holy man to talk with Jesus about Calvary. Moses had become that man.

CONCLUSION

What kind of leader do you want to be? The choice is yours. Your life can count. There is still time. If you struggle with the strength and excesses of youth, give God those frustrations, those temptations, those terribly confusing years when no matter where you turn you seem to end up with a drawn sword and blood on your hands.

If you find yourself in the wilderness of middle age—racing time to pay the mortgage, put the kids through school, cope with your own mid-life crises—give God those wilderness years when you feel so alone and isolated on the back side of nowhere away from everything that matters.

If you're staring at old age wondering if you will be relegated to society's rubbish heap, or if you face a cold shoulder from friends, or if your health is failing and you're feeling worthless—give your old age to God. You do have worth as a leader in old age. Profit from the mistakes of yesterday. Give God the bloody sword. Let him replace it with something better. There is still time for service, time for holiness, time for your strength to be harnessed in God's service.



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Matthew McAfee

Deuteronomy 13: A Prohibition of Idolatry and Its Implications for the New Testament Church

Translation

Editor's Note: The following is the author's translation from the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 12:32-13:19, as are most other quotations from the Old Testament. This translation will appear throughout the article. The verse numbers follow that of the Hebrew text (rather than the English versions) and will also be used throughout. The reader should therefore regularly refer back to this translation; but comparison with a published English version is easily accomplished by remembering that the verse numbers will be one lower than those used here, and what is verse 1 here is 12:32 in the English versions.

1. Every word which I am commanding you, be on guard to do it. Do not add to it, nor take away from it.
2. If a prophet arises in your midst or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives to you a sign or a wonder,
3. And the sign or the wonder comes which he spoke to you saying, "Let us walk after other gods," which you do not know them, "and let us serve them,"
4. Do not listen to the words of this prophet nor unto the dreamer of this dream, for Yahweh your God is testing you to see if you are loving Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your being.
5. After Yahweh your God you shall walk and Him you shall fear and His commandments you shall keep and His voice you shall hear and Him you shall serve and to Him you shall cling.
6. And this prophet or this dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, for he spoke of turning aside against Yahweh your God who brought you from the land of Egypt and who delivered you from the house of slavery, to thrust you from the way where Yahweh your God commanded you to walk in it, that you will consume evil from your midst.
7. If your brother, son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife of your bosom or your companion who is as your soul allures

you secretly saying, "Let us walk *after* and serve other gods," which you do not know nor your fathers,

8. From the gods of the peoples who surround you, those near unto you or those distant from you, from the extremities of the earth,

9. Do not yield to him and do not listen to him and do not let your eyes have pity upon him and do not spare and do not condone him.

10. For your hand shall utterly slay him, you will be against him first to put him to death, and the hand of all the people afterwards.

11. And you will stone him with stones and he will die, for he sought to entice you away from Yahweh your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery.

12. And all Israel will hear and they will fear and they will not proceed to do as the word of this evil one in your midst.

13. If you hear in one of your cities which Yahweh your God is giving you for a resting place there that

14. men, sons of worthlessness, have come out from your midst and enticed the dwellers of their city saying, "Let us walk *after* and serve other gods," whom you do not know them,

15. You will seek and search out and ask thoroughly, and behold the truth is established, *that is* this abominable thing committed in your midst.

16. And you shall surely strike the dwellers of this city, according to the sword. Devote even all who are in it and its beasts according to the ban.

17. And all its booty you shall gather into the midst of its open plaza, and you shall burn with fire the city and all its booty entirely to Yahweh your God. And it will be a mound forever. Do not build *it* again.

18. And do not cling with your hand to anything from the ban so that Yahweh will turn from the burning of His anger and give to you compassions and He will have compassion on you and He will make you numerous as He swore to your fathers,

19. If you listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep all His commandments which I am commanding you today, by doing that which is right in the eyes of Yahweh your God.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout much of the history of the nation of Israel one problem especially plagued its people—idolatry. The later writings of the Old Testament share a common message to Israel and Judah: "Repent from your idolatry and return to Yahweh your God who brought you up from Egypt, from the house of slavery!" One soon discovers that Israel did not

heed this message against idolatry; instead she was driven from the land of promise and forced to dwell in a pagan land she did not know.

This discussion addresses a key text related to Israel's idolatry. Deuteronomy 13 gives clear instruction concerning what the Israelite must do if idol worship should arise in the nation. This important chapter prohibits idolatry of any kind, prescribing strict guidelines that must be followed in order to keep the land purged from other gods, the gods of the surrounding nations. As will be seen, Deuteronomy 13 provides the prescription for the survival of the Israelite community as it faces the onslaught of its greatest enemy, idolatry.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

From the beginning of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, idolatry reared its ugly head, proving to be the Achilles' heel for God's people. The words of Deuteronomy 13 come to the ears of young Israel from the lips of Moses. Because of the disbelief of a previous generation, Israel witnessed the obliteration of an entire generation while wandering in the desert for thirty-nine years. As Moses journeyed up Mount Horeb a second time to receive further instruction from Yahweh, the nation below ran out of patience with both Moses and Yahweh. Aaron, the "mouth-piece" and brother of Moses, led them to commit spiritual adultery with a god of their own wicked creativity. It appears that Israel left Egypt with an unquenchable hunger for idolatry, a hunger that brought the demise of the nation.

The Decalogue provides the best contextual understanding for the text of Deuteronomy 13. The prologue provides the historical basis for Yahweh's demand for Israel's absolute, exclusive loyalty: "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Deuteronomy 5:6). This statement identifies the historical beginnings of Israel as a nation. Yahweh made them into a great nation and miraculously brought them out of their bondage in Egypt; therefore, he alone owns the worship of his people. The first two of the "ten words" of the Decalogue concern themselves with Israel's need to exercise loyalty to Yahweh and his covenant alone:

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourselves an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, Yahweh your God, am *El Qanna*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, and on the third and fourth generations of those who hate me,

but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments (Deuteronomy 5:7,8).

Of course, one must not forget that Yahweh's demands upon Israel were not repressive and impossible to adhere to; rather, these requirements were liberating and full of blessing. Yahweh shows *hesed* ("covenantal kindness and blessing") to those who love him and keep his commandments.

The three examples of idolatry found in this chapter appear to be connected with two other surrounding narratives: (1) Aaron's role in the incident with the golden calf (Exodus 32) and (2) the story of the destruction of the city of Jericho and the fate of Achan (Joshua 6).¹ These narratives provide a before-and-after picture, the former showing the need for a prescribed process of dealing with idolatry and the latter presenting a picture for how that process should be executed.

Israel quickly forgot Yahweh's demand for covenant loyalty, and history reveals that the people of Yahweh went after and served other gods, gods whom they did not know. The message against idolatry would be one that was rather familiar to the prophet Ezekiel, through whom Yahweh reminded Israel both of his grace toward them and of his rightful claim to their worship:

But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passerby who might be willing.... Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to me, and you sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? You slaughtered my children, and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire. And besides all your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood (Ezekiel 16:15, 20-22).

These words paint a graphic picture of Israel's spiritual adultery with the gods of the nations. Surely, it should have been a joy for Israel to express love by obedience to Yahweh who made this weak and

1. Duane Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-21:9*, vol. 6A (revised & expanded) of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 267. Christensen suggests that it is easy to see how the law played a role in the subsequent shaping of these narrative traditions, as opposed to the law being an abstraction from these narrative accounts. Of course, one does not have to conclude that the narratives were composed arbitrarily. These narratives (especially that of Achan) provide a framework within which Israel might rid itself of idolatry and its deadly effects.

EXPOSITION

Throughout Deuteronomy 13 much of the content repeats itself two and sometimes three times. In an attempt to handle the material in a holistic fashion, this paper will not follow the verse-by-verse structure of the text but instead will seek to deal with the overall thrust of the passage, giving attention to necessary details.

Prologue: Commitment to the Word of Yahweh (v. 1)

In order to understand the overall thrust of this chapter, one must understand the importance of the prologue.³ Verse 1 provides a hinge between chapters 12 and 13. Chapter 12 begins, “These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which Yahweh, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth” (12:1). The chapter proceeds to give instructions as to how Israel was to worship Yahweh on his terms: that is, according to his statutes and ordinances.

Chapter 12 concludes with a warning for Israel to be careful “to listen to all these words which I am commanding you in order that it may be well with you and your sons after you forever” (12:28a). Moses realized the temptation that would come against the people of Israel, to forget these words and follow after the ways of the nations. If Israel would be careful to listen to these words by obeying them, then they would be doing that which is good in the sight of Yahweh their God (12:28b). This condition indicated that in order to maintain favor with God Israel must obey “these words” (i.e., *Torah*). Moses declared that God would cut off these nations from the land of Canaan, making a place for Israel. The danger for Israel resounded: “Watch yourself, lest you are ensnared after them, after they are destroyed from before you” (12:30a). Moses passionately pleaded for Israel to watch themselves, lest they fall into the snare of idolatry. The people of God must not behave as the nations do, “for every abominable act which Yahweh hates they have done for their gods” (12:31b). The possession of the land for Israel resembled a double-edged sword: Israel’s possession was a by-product of Canaanite wickedness. Therefore, Moses charged Israel not to add to or to take away from

3. Most English versions place this verse at the end of chapter 12, beginning chapter 13 with the first example of idolatry. The Hebrew Bible, instead, places the verse at the beginning of chapter 13, which suggests that it sets the stage for understanding the following discourse on idolatry.

“these words.” They needed, instead, to be careful to obey them⁴ by embracing “every word”⁵ with covenant loyalty to Yahweh (4:2; 13:1).

Now Moses turns his attention to the sin of idolatry mentioned in 12:30, prescribing a way for Israel to avoid this deadly snare. He presents his address in a series of three progressive sections: (1) the idolatry of a prophet (vv. 2-6), (2) the idolatry of a close family member (vv. 7-12), and (3) the idolatry of an entire city (vv. 13-18). As stated above, this discussion will examine the various elements of the idolatry: the enticers to idolatry, the message of the idolaters, the response to idolatry, and the penalty for idolatry.

The Enticers of Idolatry Introduced (vv. 2, 3, 7, 13, 14)

The first culprit mentioned is the prophet, or dreamer of dreams (v. 2). Throughout the Old Testament the prophet serves as Yahweh’s spokesman, commissioned to proclaim the word of Yahweh. In later biblical literature, *nābî*⁶ (Hebrew for *prophet*) develops a negative reputation so that “prophet” and “false prophet” are nearly synonymous.⁶ Prophets would claim “Thus says Yahweh” even when Yahweh had not spoken. The overall message of God’s true prophets in later Old Testament writings was twofold: a message of judgment against the false prophets who led Israel into idolatry, and a call to wayward, idolatrous Israel to repent. Clearly, such an anticipation exists in Deuteronomy 13, where Moses warns the people of God that false prophets, proclaiming in the name of Yahweh, would arise among them.⁷

4. Literally, “you shall keep *by* doing”: here the *lamed* preposition suggests manner: see Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Conner, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 126. The phrase explains how one must keep all these words: by doing them, that is, by obeying Yahweh’s words.

5. The usual Hebrew sentence structure has been disregarded here in order to emphasize “every word,” a phenomenon called “fronting.” These words form the basis of the prohibition against idolatry in the chapter.

6. Though a lexical analysis of the Hebrew word (*nb*) is beyond the scope of this paper, a brief summary seems in order. The Old Testament uses of the word are fairly evenly divided between false and true prophets. When false, it usually refers to instances when Yahweh’s name is falsely claimed, as in Jeremiah 23:16, 21, for example; cf. Zechariah 13:2-9. The true prophet, as spokesman for Yahweh, has been directly appointed by God (Jeremiah 1:5) and issues many different kinds of declarations, including exposure of false prophets and their false messages, as in Jeremiah 28:6, 9 and as in the passage before us.

7. The particle *ki* (“if”) could function, here, in two ways: (1) temporally (*when* a false prophet arises) or (2) conditionally (*if* a false prophet arises). In all three examples (cf. vv. 7, 13) the *ki* functions in the same way.

There is a close relationship of meaning between the words *nābîʿ* (prophet) and *hōlēm* (dreamer). Prophets often received their revelations via dreams, so here prophet is further defined by “dreamer of dreams” (cf. Genesis 37:1-10; Numbers 12:6; Deuteronomy 13:1).⁸ Here the prophet undergirds his seductive message with “signs” and “wonders” that are apparently genuine. He does not relate his message to the people and follow up with signs and wonders to validate his claim; instead, he displays awe inspiring signs and wonders to woo the people before unleashing his deadly poison. Such a display results in a loss of attention to the content of the message being promoted.

Signs and wonders have attesting qualities. Christopher Wright sums up his thoughts concerning the seduction of signs and wonders: “The most awful perversions of biblical truth can sometimes be accompanied by the most awesome displays of miraculous signs and wonders.”⁹ He describes the offense of these false prophets as “gross ingratitude” in the face of Yahweh’s covenantal kindness.¹⁰ Given the possibility of such apparently authenticating signs and wonders Moses reminds the people that priority must be given to the *words* of the prophet:¹¹ the message must always be in line with the *Torah*.

Some clarification seems in order concerning the possibility of signs and wonders as it relates to the litmus test for false prophets prescribed in Deuteronomy 18:22: “When a prophet speaks in the name of Yahweh and the word is not so, nor does it come about which he spoke, Yahweh did not speak it; the prophet spoke it with pride; you should not be fearful of him.” Two observations are important. First, this prophet claims to be speaking in the name of Yahweh, whereas the one in 13:2-3 performs signs as an appeal to “walk after other gods.” Second, 18:22 has two parts, both negative: (1) the word is not—it has no substance or truth and does not align with the word of God already revealed;¹² (2) it does not come about—it is a predictive prophetic word that fails to take place. The failed prediction indicates that the prophet has not spoken on behalf of Yahweh but has spoken with hubris; therefore, the Israelite should not fear this fool of a prophet. The contextual situation in chapter 18 involves

8. Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1994), 230.

9. Christopher Wright, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4 of *The New International Biblical Commentary* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1998), 175.

10. *Ibid.*, 174.

11. *Ibid.*, 173.

12. See Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), 263.

a “prophet incognito,” while chapter 13 addresses blatant idolatry without disguise. Furthermore, the negative nature of the text in 18:22 is important; it cannot be inverted to say that if a prophet’s prediction does come true he must be a true prophet.¹³ Chapter 13 forbids such an assessment as it presents an apparent miracle worker enticing the hearts of Israel to turn away from Yahweh and so to trade covenant blessing for cheap tricks in the names of gods whom they have not known. Wright clarifies: “Thus, non-fulfillment would prove falsehood, but fulfillment could not *by itself* prove authenticity.”¹⁴ These two passages provide a much needed corrective for the temptation to look for signs alone; both the wondrous signs and those who claim to work them must always be judged on the basis of *Torah*.¹⁵

Moses proceeds to mention a second possible enticer, “If your brother, son of your mother, or your son or your daughter or the wife of your bosom or your companion” (v. 7). As Moses introduces this new conflict, the intensity increases, involving the closest family relationships. One can see a natural progression: as the spiritual leadership deteriorates and falls into idolatry, so the enticers seduce the families of the larger community. Bernard Levinson describes this example as a test case dealing with the conflict between love of family and devotion to God.¹⁶ Here Moses suggests that those who share the closest relationships with a follower of Yahweh could seek to seduce his loyalty away from Yahweh. It is important to understand that such a statement would arrest the attention of Moses’ hearers, since in Israelite society the ties of kinship were the strongest of all horizontal human relationships.¹⁷ The closeness of the

13. Wright, 218.

14. *Ibid.*, 218-19.

15. The false prophets who claim to speak on behalf of Yahweh are the most difficult to find out, since their message is so appealing to ears. The message of peace and prosperity is a favorite one for false prophets. In 1 Kings 22:19-23, Micaiah attributed such a message to a “deceiving spirit” sent out from the courts of Yahweh to entice the wicked ruler Ahab and all his foolish prophets to their own disaster. Jeremiah’s ministry consisted primarily of denouncing the “peace and prosperity” message of his contemporaries; see especially Jeremiah 14:13-16. In both of these examples the message of the false prophets appeared to be true since a measure of peace and prosperity prevailed at the time. But it was only a matter of time before the true fate of the false prophets and those who followed them would be found out. When Yahweh’s judgment arrived, the word of the true prophet would dispel the message of the ministers of falsehood.

16. Bernard M. Levinson, “Recovering the Lost Original Meaning of *צַלִּי* (Deuteronomy 13:9),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115 (1996): 617.

17. Wright, 175. In v. 7 the final clause, “whom you yourselves do not know nor your fathers,” emphasizes this family relationship. The enticing family member not only violates the word of Yahweh, he goes against the faith of his fathers.

relationship would make it difficult to weigh objectively the message of the enticer, increasing the danger of idolatry even more than in the previous case.

The third case of idolatry portrays a final snapshot of what takes place when the enticers are left unopposed: "If you hear in one of your cities...that men, sons of worthlessness, have come out from your midst and enticed the dwellers of their city" (vv. 13, 14). The progression finds its final stage in the apostate city, since the prophet with his dreams and the families of Israel have been left to spread their rebellious poison to an entire city.

The men in question here are described as *bēnê bēliyya'al* (sons of Belial),¹⁸ a phrase that has caused lexicographers many difficulties in determining its meaning. Benedikt Otzen suggests that "Belial" reflects some mythological term whose meaning the modern interpreter is no longer able to recover.¹⁹ He points out two implications of the word that need to be maintained: (1) concrete-personal (i.e., the Devil) and (2) abstract-conceptual (i.e., uselessness, wickedness).²⁰ The term itself is often employed to portray people who instigate mischief (cf. 1 Samuel 10:27; 1 Kings 21:10).²¹ These mischievous instigators busily spread their poison until they have contaminated an entire city, resulting in widespread covenantal infidelity. The survival of society at large depends upon maintaining communal loyalty to Yahweh, a loyalty that is threatened by these men who are driven to do only that which promotes wickedness and destruction.

The Message of the Idolaters (vv. 3, 7, 8, 14)

In each of these three examples of idolatry a common message is proclaimed by the enticers. Three elements of the message need to be addressed.

The first element of the message speaks of walking after other gods (v. 3). "To walk" (Hebrew *hālak*) is the verb that is most frequently used to describe "the act or process of living."²² This metaphor is similar to Paul's use of "walk" (Greek *peripateō*) in Ephesians 5 and elsewhere,

18. "Men" and "sons of worthlessness" are in apposition: "men, that is, sons of worthlessness."

19. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, s.v. "בליעל," by Benedikt Otzen, 2:131.

20. *Ibid.*, 2:132.

21. McConville, 240.

22. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, s.v. "hlk," by Eugene H. Merrill, 1:1032.

where this verb describes the process of living the Christian life. Moses predicts that someone will arise in the midst of the community and call God's people to leave the covenant of Yahweh to follow after other gods. This call of apostasy would by necessity require the Israelite to abandon the gracious *Torah* that Yahweh revealed to Israel. It would require a new way of life—a way of life that would leave behind the glorious revelation of Yahweh and his intimate relationship for a life that would return to the blindness of the unknown and the distance of remote deities.

Three times Moses interjects, in the midst of the enticers' message, a remark that reveals the foolishness of this apostasy: "whom you do not know." This clause functions as a rhetorical device employed by the orator to reveal the absurdity of the enticers' message.²³ The beauty of Yahweh's covenant with Israel is that he has revealed himself to them, presenting an invitation for relationship. Why would anyone desire to leave such a gracious covenant for gods that one does not know?

The third element involves the counterpart to the enticer's initial call to walk after other gods. The false prophet adds, "and let us serve them" (v. 3). The modern reader may not completely understand the significance of such a call. In the ancient Near East, to be the vassal (servant) of the king would have been a privileged position, highly sought after.²⁴ Here the enticer seeks to draw the attention of the Israelite to what he implies is a more honorable or enjoyable service. Once again, Moses helps his hearers see through such deception by laying bare the utter nonsense of such claims.

The enticer's message threatens everything that underlies the relationship Yahweh shares with his people. It must not be allowed to flourish in the community of God, not only because of its theological perversion but also because of its pragmatic corrosion. Therefore, Moses proceeds to a call for action.

23. Craigie, 223. In v. 3, for example, the interjection is sandwiched between the two cohortatives ("let us walk" and "let us serve them") that make up the heart of the enticer's message.

24. Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 83-84. He points out close parallels between Deuteronomy 13 and both Hittite and Neo-Assyrian treaties, showing similarities in both form and content, 100. Against this see Kenneth Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 283-95, who argues that Deuteronomy is more in line with early Hittite treaties. Bryant G. Wood, "The Rise and Fall of the 13th-Century Exodus-Conquest Theory" (*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:3 [September 2005]), 481, offers a word of caution, critiquing both Weinfeld and Kitchen and their attempt to date these documents on the basis of Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) treaty formats: "The format of the biblical material is varied and complex and cannot be dated to a particular time period based on ANE treaty formats."

The Response to Idolatry (vv. 4, 5, 9)

In all of the cases cited there is a great deal of credibility associated with the social positions of the idolatrous enticers. No doubt the signs and wonders of the prophet would bolster his message so much that one could be compelled by his miraculous demonstration to accept whatever he might say regardless of its content. On the other hand, the close relative or friend is so loved that one's righteous judgment could become clouded by affection and attachment, making the message of this wicked idolater seem rather harmless. The fact that the context of this exchange between family members is "in secret" adds to the seducer's ability to make his claim even more convincing. The apostate city proves to be too powerful an enticement to resist. Perhaps the vast number of people (a whole city!) who have followed after those worthless fellows attests to the validity of their claims?

If any of these examples should occur in the future days of Israel, they must not be ignored, for they will only destroy the community of God. Moses calls on the people to be prepared ahead of time for such instances; he prescribes a twofold response for the people, consisting of both a negative and a positive. He begins with the negative.

Moses calls for an absolute rejection of everything the enticer proclaims. The most extensive list of negative reactions is found in verse 9, probably due to the difficulty that exists for one to reject one's own blood relative. Moses calls for five reactions: (1) Do not yield to him; (2) Do not listen to him; (3) Do not let your eyes have pity upon him; (4) Do not spare him; and (5) Do not condone him. It is interesting to note that this series of five negative imperatives precisely parallels the five intimate relationships: (1) brother of the same mother, (2) son, (3) daughter, (4) wife, and (5) friend.²⁵ Levinson, in an extensive discussion of the meaning of the fifth reaction ("and you shall not cover/conceal him"), suggests that these five responses exemplify a 2 + (2 + 1) literary structure that builds in its intensity.²⁶ Furthermore, he observes that the Hebrew construction used here²⁷ (v. 8) never means simply to conceal, shield, or hush up. He proposes, therefore, that "condone" is the meaning.²⁸

Moses balances the call for rejection with a call to covenant renewal. Verse 5 provides the structural center of this passage, restating the *Shema*

25. Levinson, 617.

26. *Ibid.*, 617-18.

27. Here the verb *kšh* is in its intensive (Piel) form and is followed by the preposition *l*. The traditional rendering ("conceal") would require *kšh* followed by the accusative.

28. Levinson, 620.

("hear") of 6:5.²⁹ As mentioned above, these six statements are constructed in an emphatic fashion, placing the emphasis upon Yahweh. One's tie to Yahweh must be stronger than the tie to a family member or anyone else. It is no coincidence that Moses uses the word *dbq* ("cling") to urge Israel toward covenant loyalty. This term is often used in the Old Testament to speak of the union that exists between a husband and wife (cf. Genesis 2:24). It suggests two entities becoming glued together as one. In the context of this chapter, Moses warns that even in the marital relationship one can be seduced into evil. Therefore, one must cling to Yahweh, even more than to a husband or wife. Only those who are walking after Yahweh—fearing him, keeping his commandments, hearing his voice, serving him, and clinging to him—will be able to recognize the false message of the idolatrous enticer.³⁰

The response in each of these three cases of idolatry is one of absolute rejection. No room exists for the pity of even the closest relationship. Regardless of the convincing nature of the miraculous sign or the intimate relationship between the hearer and messenger or the powerful influence of an entire city, all that is associated with the enticer must be rejected. Moses gives the reason Israel must be vigilant in this area: "For Yahweh your God is testing you to see if you are loving Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your being" (v. 4b). The tension in the text builds as Moses declares that the rising of these enticers is in fact a test of their covenant loyalty to Yahweh alone. Would they be able to pass the test?³¹

The issue does not end here, however, for Moses calls on Israel to exercise drastic measures in an attempt to remove idolatry from the midst of the community completely.

The Penalty for Idolatry (vv. 6, 10, 11, 16-18)

The prescribed punishment for idolatry presents a conflict of interest for those within the community of Israel. The punishment at first glance

29. Christensen, 269.

30. Verse 5 makes use, again, of the device called "fronting," moving the emphasized words ahead of their usual order: "After *Yahweh* your God you shall walk . . . *him* you shall fear . . . *his* commandments you shall keep . . . *his* voice you shall obey . . . *him* you shall serve . . . to *him* you shall cling." In each of the last five the pronouns serve as focus markers pointing back to the first focus marker, "after Yahweh."

31. The phrase is an infinitive construct with a *lamed* of purpose. In this expression *hāyīškem* signals what one is only half sure about; it could be rendered "(to see if you are loving Yahweh), are you?" See P. Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, 2 vols., *Subsidia Biblica* 14/1-2, trans. and rev. by T. Muraoka (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1992), §1541.

appears harsh and unjust. Why would God command that a prophet, a close relative, or even an entire city be utterly destroyed? Could such a command be consistent with Yahweh who lavishes blessing upon the objects of his covenantal love?

The severe punishment prescribed against Israelites who follow after and serve other gods reflects the severity with which God views the sin of idolatry.³² The punishment may seem fierce to the modern interpreter, but the reason for its harshness arises from the nature of the crime.³³ From the human perspective, the existence of the covenant community depends upon allegiance to Yahweh, the creator of the covenant.³⁴ For its very survival the community must exert drastic efforts to rid itself of the contagious disease of idolatry.³⁵

In each of the three examples mentioned in chapter 13, death is absolutely required without exception.³⁶ Moses prescribes two methods of execution. The first is stoning (v. 11),³⁷ a communal experience. No one person is responsible for the death of the condemned criminal, but in the case of public offenses (here idolatry) every citizen is required to take a hand in purging the community of evil³⁸ (cf. Deuteronomy 17:5; Leviticus 20:27; 24:14; Joshua 7:25).³⁹ Levinson describes the goal of such a drastic event saying, "The goal is to extirpate apostasy from the Yahwistic community and to provide an example whose shock value would prevent any repetition of the incident."⁴⁰ Such an experience would reveal the terrible nature of this sin, especially if the enticer were a friend or family

32. Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, in *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 133.

33. In v. 6 *ki* ("for") introduces the serious reason for the punishment of the false prophet; cf. v. 11.

34. Craigie, 222.

35. In v. 6, the *waw* introducing the final clause probably indicates purpose: "that you may consume evil from your midst." See E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, rev. by A. E. Cowley, 2d English ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), §158.

36. In v. 10, the Hebrew doubles the root for "slay" for intensification purposes. The combination of the Qal infinitive absolute with the Qal imperfect strengthens the force of the verbal action: "You shall surely/utterly slay him. Joüon, §123e, calls this a "prepositive infinitive absolute."

37. Here "with" (Hebrew *b*) indicates manner: "with stones"; see Waltke and O'Conner, 196.

38. And so (v. 10) the community is "against" (Hebrew *b* of disadvantage, adversative) the enticer; see Waltke and O'Conner, 197.

39. John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, eds., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2000), 183.

40. Levinson, 602.

member. Craigie describes such an event as a “fearsome and awful experience.”⁴¹

The second form of the punishment against idolatry explicitly mentioned in this text is that of *ḥērem*, that is, complete destruction (v. 17).⁴² Moses specifically prescribes this for the apostate city, calling for the city, its inhabitants (human and animal), and its booty to be utterly destroyed. The only thing that remains after the execution is a mound of rubble, upon which nothing else can ever be built. Perhaps the nature of the situation here demands specific measures. Merrill suggests two reasons such a drastic measure is required in this instance: (1) the failure of the citizens of that town to address the matter themselves, and (2) the fact that they had succumbed to the enticements of that false prophet.⁴³ Such an explanation highlights the structural progression of the text, meaning that failure in one instance of idolatry brings about the circumstances of the next and ends with the apostasy of an entire city.

Before such utter destruction can be enacted, a thorough investigation must be conducted (v. 15).⁴⁴ The three-fold repeated emphasis on investigation—*drš* (“seek”), *ḥqr* (“search out”), and *šʔl* (“ask thoroughly”)—reveals that the charge is serious and that the investigation must be thorough.⁴⁵ All reports of this citywide idolatry must be confirmed.

It is important to understand the nature of this *ḥērem*. The word communicates the idea of a consecration through destruction. What makes Deuteronomy 13 different from other cases in the Old Testament is that here it concerns the destruction of Israelites instead of foreign nations.⁴⁶ The execution of this holy ban reveals the bipolar nature of this consecration to destruction: it manifests itself at the one pole as the “most holy” (Leviticus 27:26) and at the other pole as an “abomination” (Deuteronomy 7:25-26). As the execution unleashes its final blow, *ḥērem*

41. Craigie, 225.

42. Everything placed under the ban (i.e., committed to *ḥērem*) is devoted to destruction. In the eyes of Yahweh, it has become consecrated as an offering to him. Anyone who touches what has been devoted to destruction becomes contaminated and invokes the wrath of Yahweh; compare the sin of Achan in Joshua 7:1.

43. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 233.

44. As in v. 15, several Hebrew Hiphil infinitives have come to be rendered as simple adverbs. Here *ḥēṭēb* has come to mean “careful and thorough performance of an action”; see Kautzsch, §113k.

45. Christensen, 280.

46. Philip D. Stern, *The Biblical Herem: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), 104.

brings together these two poles, removing abomination and creating holiness.⁴⁷

Moses ends his prescription of this severe punishment by stating the reasons for the obliteration of the entire city. Such drastic measures counteract the enticer's call for apostasy. This punishment rises to the occasion and answers the message of the enticer with great devastation. As a result, evil is then consumed in the community of Israel. The severe punishment unleashed against the idolater also invokes a renewed fear for Yahweh, a fear that provides the beginning point for covenant loyalty. Finally, this punishment of destruction appeases the wrath of Yahweh that has been kindled against the community. This process of execution ensures the survival of the nation.

Epilogue: Commitment to the Word of Yahweh Restated (v. 19)

Moses concludes his discussion of idolatry with a final conditional statement, reiterating the central issue of covenant loyalty. Verse 19 serves as a closing statement parallel to verse 1. Here the text indicates how Yahweh's anger will be appeased and his compassion extended to Israel: "if you listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep all His commandments which I am commanding you today, by doing that which is right in the eyes of Yahweh your God." As mentioned earlier, this phrase, "doing that which is right in the eyes of Yahweh your God," is explained in 12:28, "Be careful to listen to all these words which I command you." In other words, that which is right in the sight of Yahweh is to obey "these words" (i.e., the *Torah*).⁴⁸ The life of obedience to *Torah* is a life that maintains God's favor in the covenant relationship.

THEOLOGICAL AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Deuteronomy 13 presents many important theological and practical issues that need to be considered in the life of today's Christian. Theologically, this text has much to say about the awesome nature of God. Modern Christianity has grossly neglected to emphasize the reality of God's holiness. Clearly, in Deuteronomy 13 one cannot ignore the holiness of God and his judgment against sin, especially the sin of idolatry. The tension between God's righteous judgment and covenantal love

47. *Ibid.*, 104.

48. In v. 19 (as in v. 1; see note 4), again, the infinitive with *lamed* is used after a verb to express an action which gives more details about, or explains, the action—in this instance *manner*: "by doing." See Joüon, §124o.

must be maintained, since lessening either one of these seemingly polar characteristics will produce a warped understanding of God's nature.

On a different level, this text reveals God's concern for the preservation of his covenant community. One must not forget the grace of God's revelation, for he has revealed what he expects from his people, for both the glory of his name and the good of his people. Deuteronomy 13 presents a procedure for maintaining covenant loyalty to Yahweh alone, so that he would be glorified through the gracious preservation of his people.

This prohibition of idolatry says a great deal about man, on both the personal and the communal levels. Personally, this text calls the modern reader to examine his own life in order to see if he has erected any idols there. If anyone or anything challenges God's rightful position as the sovereign ruler and exclusive object of human worship, it must be removed. There are no exceptions to this requirement. Yahweh demands from his people exclusive covenant loyalty, the strongest loyalty in one's life, even stronger than for the closest loved ones. Jesus' words present the same requirement in the New Testament: "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.... And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 10:37-39).

The text of Deuteronomy 13 also addresses the communal concerns of the New Testament church. The church needs to be on strict guard against the enticers of today who might arise in her midst. Every message must have its validity measured by the rule of Scripture, regardless how miraculous its accompanying signs and wonders may be. Just because signs and wonders are fulfilled does not necessarily mean they are attesting the truth; they may attest falsehood. John Calvin makes a striking statement concerning these signs and wonders:

The difficulty here is still increased, because in chap. xviii., God appears to distinguish false Prophets from true ones by this very test [the test of Deuteronomy 13]. Thus I resolve the difficulty, God's claiming to Himself the glory of foretelling events does not prevent Him from occasionally conferring even on the ministers of Satan the power of prophecy respecting some particular point.⁴⁹

49. John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, trans. Charles William Bingham, vol. 2, part 1, of *Calvin's Commentaries*, 22 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 441.

Such an understanding of Deuteronomy 13 suggests that men are often dazzled by signs and wonders performed by ministers of evil claiming to bear witness to the truth. These messengers of wickedness must not be left unchallenged and free to spread their poison. Church discipline must confront them with the standard of the truth (Matthew 18:15-20). One must sadly admit, however, that this process has been arrogantly ignored. Deuteronomy 13 reminds us that church discipline must be practiced—with firm love—so that Christ's bride may remain pure for her own survival and for the glory of his name!

John's Twofold Question: Doubt or Perplexity?

Matthew 11:2-6; Luke 7:18-23

INTRODUCTION

It is obvious from even a casual reading of the Gospels that doubt and confusion as to the identity of Jesus are nothing new; nor are they limited to agnostics and atheists. Their roots are as old as Jesus' ministry. Even John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets and the remarkable forerunner of Jesus, introduced him with certainty and conviction, only later to send two of his disciples to Jesus with the astonishing inquiry, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" Perhaps most of us have said at one time or another, "Lord, I believe; help thou my unbelief" (Mark 9:24b).

Admittedly, arguments abound offering conflicting explanations as to the precise meaning and intent of John's question, and solidarity among scholars will likely remain elusive. However, one's understanding of and appreciation for the last of the prophets and the ongoing debate swirling around this unforgettable question will surely be enhanced by any serious examination of the twin passages enwrapping this intriguing episode. But before we address John's question and possible explanations, it is critical that we first examine the background or setting of the incident for any helpful clues it might divulge.

THE BACKGROUND OF JOHN'S INQUIRY

A thorough background search requires an examination of both the literary and cultural-historical context before focusing on the text itself. First, and perhaps of least importance in this study, is an analysis of the literary purpose of each writer. Where is this episode placed sequentially in each Gospel and its overall relationship to other materials in each account, and how does that arrangement contribute to the advancement of each writer's theme or overall purpose and our understanding of the matter in question?

Secondly, and in this case of greater importance, is the investigation of the historical setting and related cultural influences. For example, John's question dealt with the Messiah, a prominent figure in prophetic literature and Jewish expectation during John's day. Thus, to evaluate properly John's question we need to ask "What characterized messianic thinking during his time period, and how did contemporary opinion shape John's own messianic theology?" It is also important to ask, "What was happening in the life of John at the time he birthed the question and forwarded it to Jesus by way of his disciples?" Of course, our conclusion will only be as accurate as our ultimate interpretation of the text and its supporting context, supplemented by our effectiveness in penetrating John's spiritual, mental, and emotional state at the time.

Only two Synoptics, Matthew and Luke, record the incident, and each places it somewhat differently. This very detail leads to various suppositions as to what each writer might have desired to accomplish by his sequential placement of the episode. With that in mind we start our research with an examination of the literary background and purpose of both gospel accounts and how each relates to the Baptist's inquiry.

The Literary Purpose of Matthew's Account

Matthew's overarching literary purpose is to present Jesus as Messiah. Therefore, his selection and arrangement of material under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is aimed at accomplishing that purpose. Like a master craftsman, he skillfully weaves his material together to construct a solid case that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah of Jewish prophecy. The pattern is obvious from the beginning of Matthew's Gospel as chapters 1-4 describe the person of the Messiah King, followed by chapters 5-7 which declare the principles of his Kingdom. Then the next three chapters shift to miracles that demonstrate the supernatural power of the Messiah. By the time chapter 10 concludes, a verdict is being demanded and John the Baptist is asking "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" (11:3)

With the demand for a verdict comes the possibility for a variety of responses, including opposition and even rejection. John the Baptist, who served as the lead witness at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, reappears again as a witness. R. T. France demonstrates the vital link between the works of Christ and the diversity of human reactions.

"The deeds of the Christ" (11:2), which have been set out in chapters 5-10, provoked different responses from different

groups. These responses, most of which consist of misunderstanding if not outright rejection, will be examined in chapters 11-12, and explained in the parables of chapter 13. Further examples of the response to Jesus will occur in chapters 14-16, until the true response is found in Peter's confession in 16:13-20, which will bring the second main part of the Gospel to its climax. This is the thread which runs through these chapters with their apparently miscellaneous selection of incidents. Through them we are led from a view of Jesus as others saw him to the true confession of his Messiahship which eluded most of his contemporaries, conditioned as they were by false or inadequate ideas of the messiah.

The Forerunner, whose proclamation introduced Matthew's presentation of the Messiah (3:1-12), is now appropriately called as the first witness to the meaning of his ministry. His response is equivocal, positive but uncertain, and Jesus' comments on his role go on to point out the contrast between his preparatory role and the true time of fulfillment. John remains the one who points forward.¹

With the reintroduction of John the Baptist, opposition to Jesus intensifies, ultimately climaxing with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. As Matthew's account ends, worship and doubt are still a common part of the mixed reaction toward the Messiah (Matthew 28:17).

The Literary Purpose of Luke's Account

Whereas Matthew's selection and arrangement of material was topical for accumulative effect, the Gospel of Luke is characterized by chronological arrangement as the author "takes in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us" (Luke 1:1a). Darrell L. Bock describes Luke's Gospel as immediately launching into a unique comparison of John the Baptist and Jesus, both representing the fulfillment of God's promises. John is like Elijah (Luke 1:17), but Jesus possesses a unique supernatural origin and has Davidic roles to fulfill (Luke 1:31-35). However, everything in chapters 1 and 2 points to the superiority of Jesus.²

Both men remain side by side in chapters 3 and 4 where John is portrayed as the "one who goes before" (3:1-6) and Jesus is the "one who

1. R. T. France, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, The Gospel according to Matthew* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 191-92.

2. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 20.

comes" after (3:15-17).³ The relationship between John and Jesus again returns as the controlling motif in chapter 7, where, Bock reminds us, Luke gives the first indication of what Jesus thinks of John, and the passage shows that those observing Jesus are struggling to understand the nature of his ministry. John the Baptist's inquiry brings into focus the fundamental question "Is Jesus the Coming One?" at the crest of Jesus' popularity. Luke capitalizes on their relation and uses it to imply that "if John is greater than a prophet (Matthew 11:9) and Jesus is greater than John, then what category is left for Jesus but Messiah?"⁴

The Cultural-Historical Setting

Any attempt to understand John's question regarding the identity of Jesus must also be evaluated against the cultural-historical setting of the first century and the prevailing messianic views among the Jews and any influence these may have had on John. Roman occupation and oppression had obviously churned up a national expectation among the Jews that Messiah's appearance was imminent. But the very thing that fueled their heightened expectations might also have unduly slanted their theological perspective toward political rather than spiritual deliverance.

General Confusion regarding the Messiah

Donald Guthrie maintains that the Jews had no unified concept about the one who was to inaugurate the coming age but that during the intertestamental period it took on many different forms. The most predominant was that of a Davidic king who would establish an earthly kingdom for Israel and banish their enemies. Accordingly, the Messiah would be a political agent with a religious bias, a curious mixture of nationalistic and religious hopes. Guthrie is convinced that the idea of a coming Messiah was widespread among the Jews but that the origin and character of that individual remained unclear to them. Understood in that light, it is easy to explain why Jesus avoided the use of the term and on several occasions commanded secrecy regarding the fact when some recognized him as Messiah.⁵

Ernst Jenni in the *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* claims:

A Messiah who suffers and dies as a substitute for all men in the NT sense was unknown in Judaism. To be sure, there is

3. *Ibid.*, 21.

4. *Ibid.*, 657.

5. Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1981), 237-39.

evidence for suffering or death of the Messiah, but not for a Messiah who suffers *and* dies. . . . The suffering of the Messiah is connected with his effort in establishing the messianic kingdom; or with the fact that all the just must suffer; or, finally, with the fact that before he reveals himself and is publicly recognized, he must lead a hidden and despised existence.⁶

Charles Ryrie also acknowledges that the Jewish concept of the suffering Messiah had become displaced in Jewish theology by the time of Jesus, largely due to the nationalistic desire to be rid of the Roman yoke. The misconception prevailed despite the fact that the nature of the person of the Messiah was well-defined in the Old Testament under various concepts such as King, Son of Man and the Servant of Jehovah. He asserts that the title of King envisioned the kingdom, while Son of Man and Servant were associated with humiliation and suffering that would actually culminate in a vicarious death of this messianic individual. The clear intent was to unite in the minds of the Jews the Savior with the kingdom alongside the idea that the kingdom was to be built on a suffering and humiliated Savior.⁷

The Disciples' Confusion regarding the Messiah

Evidence is also lacking to demonstrate that the disciples, prior to post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, understood and embraced the Old Testament prophetic message of a suffering Messiah who would die and then be raised again from the dead. The idea of a suffering Messiah proved to be an offense even to Peter (Matthew 16:21-23), and of course it was the ultimate offense to the Jews as indicated by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:23. Despite repeated references by Jesus regarding his death and resurrection, the apostles never grasped the concept as Mark 9:9-10 amply illustrates. It seems quite obvious that their messianic theology had no room for a dying Messiah. A crucified and risen Messiah was totally unthinkable to them.

This sentiment was so stubbornly anchored in their minds that reports of Jesus' resurrection from certain women in their group could not dislodge it. For example, the hopelessness of the two disillusioned travelers on the Emmaus road later that same day was captured and preserved for us by Luke. As they recounted the pivotal historic events of

6. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: An Illustrated Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Messiah, Jewish," by Ernst Jenni.

7. Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), 53.

those tragic days, they were forced to blurt out their shattered hopes that Jesus had been the long awaited Messiah. Their once lively hope had died and was buried with him, requiring special divine intervention to renew it (Luke 24:20-24). Why? The death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah did not fit their messianic theology.

The consistent expectation of the Twelve remained locked onto the misguided and erroneous conviction that the kingdom would appear immediately (Luke 19:11). They were so convinced of its imminence that they squabbled among themselves as to who was the greatest (Matthew 22:24). "The sons of thunder," urged on by their mother, mounted a brazen attempt to position themselves on the right and left side of the Lord's throne when he came into his kingdom (Matthew 20:21; Mark 10:37; 15:27; Luke 23:33).

The Religious Elite's Confusion regarding the Messiah

Confusion regarding messianic theology reached even to the top ranks of the most learned in the religious community. This is verified by a look at the investigative committee of priests and Levites sent by the Jews from Jerusalem to interview John the Baptist. John confesses that he is neither the Christ, Elijah, nor "that prophet" (John 1:19-22). Does John's threefold denial imply that official expectations might have anticipated at least three persons in connection with the appearance of Messiah?

This corresponds with Frederic Godet's claim, "We know in fact that several divine messengers were expected. Might not Jesus be *that prophet* whom some distinguished from the Christ (ix. 19; John i. 20, 21, 25), but whom others identified with Him (John vi. 14, 15)?"⁸ Robert H. Gundry also affirms that while the Jews were looking for the Messiah, some awaited a variety of messianic figures—prophetic, priestly, and royal—but they did not generally expect him to be a suffering, dying savior or a divine being. Rather, they were looking for God to use a purely human figure to bring military deliverance from Roman domination, or possibly God himself would deliver his people and then introduce the Messiah as ruler.⁹

John the Baptist's Apparent Confusion

In light of all this, we should not consider it strange if John also did not have messianic prophecy clearly figured out. Much of what the

8. Frederic Godet, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, n.d.), 1:345.

9. Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 48.

earlier prophets had to say concerning the first coming of Christ remained a mystery to them (1 Peter 1:10-12). So why should we expect that the same would not be true of John? His role was simply to introduce Jesus, and he did it with clarity and precision. That does not mean, however, that he had a comprehensive understanding of the entire ministry of the Messiah.

The Resurrection's Dispelling of the Confusion

In fact, it was not until after the death and resurrection of Christ that messianic theology began to clear up. Ryrie sees the first manifestation of this in Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36), a doctrine he further developed later in his Epistles. According to Ryrie, Peter was driven to the distinct conclusion that the fact the Messiah must be raised from the dead necessarily included the requirement that he must also die. Thus a risen Messiah meant a crucified Messiah. This, he concludes, was Peter's principal contribution to messianic doctrine.¹⁰ Without question the rejection, suffering, and resurrection of the Savior become the keynote theme of apostolic preaching on the day of Pentecost and throughout the remainder of the Book of Acts (2:25-28; 3:18; 8:32-35; 13:32-35; 17:2-3; 26:22-23).

THE OCCASION OF JOHN'S QUESTION

The medium by which John's question reaches Jesus, according to Matthew 11:2, is through (*dia*) two of John's disciples. A delegation of disciples is necessitated because of the Baptist's imprisonment, a fact alluded to in all the Gospels (Matthew 4:12; Mark 1:14; Luke 3:20; John 4:24). The rest of the story is told later in Matthew 14:1-12. That John sends two of his disciples may be explained in the light of Deuteronomy 19:15, requiring that matters be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses.

The Increased Popularity of Jesus

The popularity of Jesus seems to have ratcheted up to a new level when "this rumour of him went forth throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about" (Luke 7:17). The immediate context and perhaps the catalyst was Christ's miraculous raising of the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7:11-18). Such rapid and far-reaching publicity of the activities of Jesus can hardly be explained except on the basis of wide scale messianic expectations.

10. Ryrie, 272-73.

The amazing ripple effect of this powerful miracle is disclosed in part by Luke's description of the extent of the report "throughout all Judea, and throughout all the region round about" (Luke 7:17b). This is the practical equivalent of all of Palestine and its immediate surroundings, including such unlikely places as the secluded prison cell of John the Baptist and the less concerned ears of Herod (Luke 9:7).

Luke chooses two words to unpack the dynamic impact this life-restoring miracle produced on the masses: "And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God" (verse 16a). The reaction of fear is characterized in the strongest of terms—*phobos*, the same word from which we get the English word phobia, meaning "fear, alarm, or fright." It is the same word used to describe the reaction of the disciples in the storm (Matthew 14:26), Zechariah's response in the presence of the angel as he ministered in the Temple (Luke 1:12), and the reaction of the frightened soldiers stationed at the tomb the morning of the resurrection of Jesus (Matthew 28:4). But in this context commentators generally prefer the idea of reverential awe, although R. C. H. Lenski appeals for strong shock and says we need not reduce it to awe and reverence because one able to snatch death's prey exhibits a power that must make us tremble. He also adds that the imperfect tense describes actions that both *began* and *continued* after the first shock had subsided.¹¹

As for the glory they gave God, it too is summed up in two claims: "that a great prophet is risen up among us" and "that God hath visited his people" (verse 16b). Their claim that Jesus was a great prophet falls disappointingly short of recognizing him as Messiah, but it definitely reveals the messianic expectations of the populace. The term *epeskepsato*, (God did visit or look upon his people) is consistent with Jewish expectations regarding the coming of the Messiah (cf. Luke 1:68, 78).

Reports of Christ's Works

John, as already mentioned, had been arrested and imprisoned by Herod Antipas because of his bold and uncompromising condemnation of the king's immoral behavior in divorcing his own wife and luring his sister-in-law Herodias into leaving his brother to marry him. According to Josephus, Herod shut John up in the fortress of Machaerus, east of the Dead Sea, in one of two fortresses owned by him in that region.¹² It must have been a terribly agonizing experience for this free-spirited child of the desert accustomed to a freedom that embraced the expanse of the

11. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of Luke* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1943), 401.

12. Josephus, *Antiquities*, XVIII, 119.

earth for a floor, the limitless firmament as his ceiling, and the spacious horizons as his walls.

But despite his imprisonment, the faithful disciples of John kept him informed of the activities of Jesus. Nor should we find it unusual that the Forerunner's disciples would be so well informed about the ministry of Jesus, since John's ministry from the very start had been directly linked to that of Jesus. At least two of his prior disciples observed Jesus walking by and heard John proclaim "Behold, the Lamb of God," whereupon they followed Jesus (John 1:36). On another occasion John's disciples approached Jesus desiring to know why his disciples did not fast, a religious practice they observed along with the Pharisees (Matthew 9:14). It is also significant that they considered it important to notify Jesus of the Baptist's death (Matthew 14:12).

It was when John heard of "the works [*ta erga*] of Christ" (Matthew 11:2) that he sent to inquire of him. "Works" is regarded by some to include the entire activity of Jesus' preaching, teaching, and performing miracles. However, Gundry disagrees, saying the deeds only of Jesus are meant as distinct from his words or teachings, insisting that "elsewhere in Matthew words do not fall within the meaning of 'works.'"¹³ The immediate context tends to support Gundry's argument that it was the miracles, the last one serving as a special catalyst. At the same time, surely the works would not have had the same impact without the words.

AN OVERVIEW OF JOHN'S QUESTION

The dramatic effect of John's question is significantly heightened due to the escalating popularity of Jesus, John's influence on the masses, and the fact that he poses the question from his prison cell. As for the question itself, Donald Hagner, among others, points out that it is verbatim in Matthew 11:3 and in Luke 7:19 and 20, except for Matthew's use of *heteron* and Luke's use of *allon*.¹⁴ There is also general agreement that both words mean "another," but opinions vary as to whether they are used synonymously in this instance, a discussion to be taken up below.

Matthew's recording of the answer Jesus sends back to John is also in verbatim agreement with Luke's except for very minor differences. Matthew adds three *kai*'s (and), and the only other difference is his

13. Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1982), 204.

14. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David H. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 299.

akouete kai blepete, “you are hearing and seeing” (verse 4), versus Luke’s *eidete kai ēkousate*, “you saw and heard” (Luke 7:22). Matthew places the emphasis on hearing whereas Luke places it on seeing. It might also be pointed out that Matthew’s statement is in the present tense showing action in progress whereas Luke uses the aorist tense to indicate completed action.¹⁵

The practical outcome of all this is that there are no major textual tensions to be resolved between the two accounts, and the paragraph conveniently divides itself into two primary sections: John’s question followed by Jesus’ response. The casual reader may then wonder as to the value of critically analyzing the question at all, but its significance is found in the fact that it reveals John’s assessment of Jesus, a timeless issue for people of all ages and cultures. The fact that a man of John’s stature might struggle with such a question late in his career serves both as a warning to us on the one hand and as an encouragement on the other.

A number of explanations have been offered to explain John’s question. Some of them tend to tarnish our pristine image of John a bit because they reflect a weakening of his faith. Other views are less negative but tend to be lacking in solid textual support. The list below represents some of the more common views and therefore the ones that will be addressed in this article.

1. Was John perplexed and entertaining thoughts of a second Messiah?
2. Did John doubt that Jesus was the Messiah?
3. Was John’s intent to convince his own disciples of Jesus’ messiahship?
4. Was John attempting to accelerate the progress of Jesus’ work?
5. Did John’s budding faith need confirmation?

Our examination of possible explanations will be limited to this list, and we will approach them in reverse order.

15. *Ibid.*, 300.

COMMON INTERPRETATIONS OF JOHN'S QUESTION

1. *Did John's Budding Faith Need Confirmation?*

Interpretations designed to explain John the Baptist's question regarding the Messiah come in many forms. Some believe the seed of faith was planted in John's heart at the time he baptized Jesus and that he has wanted to believe all along. That being true, he has been diligently watching the ministry of Jesus until now at last his miracles, especially the raising of the dead, finally bring him to the brink of certainty. All that is lacking at this point is for Jesus to give him a faith-affirming answer and he will gladly and willingly embrace his messianic claims. John's question becomes the culmination of a long journey that began at the time he introduced Jesus to the expectant crowds.

Others take a slightly different approach, viewing John's question as the first sign of a budding faith that is just coming into existence. Ulrich Luz, for example, insists that the most natural interpretation is that John had not previously thought of the possibility that Jesus might be the Messiah and that he had just begun to wonder about such a possibility as reports of his miraculous works began circulating. He seems to take comfort in the fact that this means that John had not begun to doubt the messiahship of Jesus; rather the very opposite had occurred. "The Baptist heard about Jesus and then began to wonder: Could Jesus be the 'the coming one'?"¹⁶

H. K. Luce also sees John's question as the first flicker of faith and that John is hoping rather than doubting. According to him, John is just beginning to understand and is checking to confirm his hopes. But in order to arrive at this view he challenges the historicity of Matthew 3:14-15 and John 1:29.¹⁷ Robert C. Tannehill also defends this position by arguing that in Luke's Gospel John has not recognized Jesus as the fulfillment of John's prophecies and therefore John's question represents no weakening of previous belief but the hopeful exploration of a possibility, sparked by the reports of all that Jesus is saying and doing.¹⁸

There are at least two problems with these views. First, Tannehill totally ignores John 1:29-34 where John unequivocally gives witness to

16. Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), 132.

17. H. K. Luce, *The Gospel according to St. Luke, Cambridge Greek Testament for Schools and Colleges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 155.

18. Robert C. Tannehill, *Luke, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 129.

the identity of Jesus. Nor is Luce effective in attacking the historicity of the passages highlighting John's early witness regarding Jesus.

Secondly, as Robert H. Stein correctly observes, there is not a single shred of biblical evidence to support the idea of a "budding faith" on John's part.¹⁹ The question must be addressed as to how John could introduce Jesus as "the Lamb of God" and "the Son of God" (John 1:29-34) and yet fail to believe that he was the predicted Messiah. Even Tannehill admits that John's use of "the one who is to come [*ho erchomenos*]" is linked to the Messiah (cf. Luke 3:15 with verse 16 and 19:38).²⁰ While this view may represent a novel idea and preserve the image of John the Baptist, it truly defies reason and biblical evidence.

2. Was John Attempting to Accelerate Jesus' Ministry?

Another interpretation of John's question represents him as being driven by the desire to force Jesus' hand and thereby press him into openly declaring his messianic role. C. A. Hase believes John's design was to stimulate Jesus and accelerate the progress of his work.

The idea is that the raising of the widow's son, the first miracle of its kind in the ministry of Jesus, had made a great impression on everyone. John's question is therefore attempting to seize the moment and draw Jesus' claims into the open. Hase sees John's question as being more one of impatience than of doubt.²¹

Alfred Plummer also thinks that the question was not asked for the sake of the disciples but that it is more probable that John's patience was failing rather than his faith. He argues:

John had had such convincing evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, that he could hardly doubt now. And if he did doubt, what use to send to Jesus? A false Messiah would not own that he was an impostor. More probably it was John's patience that was failing, not his faith. He wished Jesus to come forward more publicly and decidedly as the Messiah. "If Thou do these things, manifest Thyself to the world." To do Messianic works and not claim the position of the Messiah seemed to be futile inconsistency.²²

19. Robert H. Stein, *Luke, an Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, vol. 24 of *The New American Commentary, NIV Text*, gen. ed. David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 225.

20. Tannehill, 129-30.

21. See Alfred Plummer, *The Gospel according to St. Luke*, 5th ed., *International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1922), 202.

22. Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, 3d ed. (London: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), 159-60.

This view, like the first, has one noble feature about it: it protects John from the embarrassing possibility that he came to have doubts about his earlier faith in Jesus. Yet this heroic but misguided view has the same fatal flaw as the first one addressed above: it simply has no hint of scriptural support. In fact, neither explanation provides a natural response to John's question. Good interpretation often finds the best answer to be the one most natural, unless the context clearly calls for a different one altogether. Creative answers to difficult problems should generally be second-guessed.

3. *Was John's Intent to Convince His Disciples of Jesus' Messiahship?*

A number of writers insist that there is no reason to attribute doubt to John. They rather urge that his disciples' faith in Jesus needed strengthening. This view, championed by many of the early Church Fathers such as Origen, Chrysostom, Jerome, and Augustine, was also defended by prominent Reformers, including John Calvin and John Albert Bengel.

The idea is generally put forth that perhaps John's disciples approached him in prison inquiring about the identity of Jesus. While John is fully convinced himself that Jesus is Messiah, he nevertheless sends his disciples directly to Jesus for their own benefit. This way, they get an up-close, personal look so that they can arrive at their own conclusion as to his identity. Even the timing was ingeniously orchestrated to coincide with the heightened popularity of Jesus.

Calvin supposes that John had good reason to dread his own approaching death and to fear a falling away of his disciples because, despite his best efforts, he had been unable to arouse in them a transfer of allegiance to Jesus. As a last resort, he crafts the question and sends them to Jesus, doing so in the full confidence that they had known from childhood that Christ "was to come" and they would therefore be bound to receive it once they saw it exhibited in him. Calvin argues: "The opinion entertained by some, that he sent them partly on his own account, is exceedingly foolish; as if he had not been fully convinced, or obtained distinct information, that Jesus is the Christ."²³

If, however, both Gospel writers regarded John's question sufficiently important to record it, and if the relationship of John's disciples to Jesus is such a priority for John, then why is no prior or follow-up mention made of it, especially by Luke, since he also authored the Book of Acts. In fact, when John's disciples are mentioned later in Acts, they have

23. John Calvin, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke*, vol. 2, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Baker, n.d.; reprint ed. 2003), 8-9.

no trouble embracing Jesus once they are given a full explanation (Acts 18:24-19:7).

An even stronger argument against this position is that it appears to present both Jesus and John acting in a totally unnatural and uncharacteristic manner. Calvin even claims that Jesus goes along with the “new character” assumed by John and sends word back to him, linking his miracles with messianic prophecies so John will have a “larger subject of instruction.”²⁴

One problem with this is that neither John nor Jesus is characterized elsewhere as being inclined to engage in word games. In fact, quite to the contrary, both consistently distinguish themselves for directness and boldness of speech, and Jesus’ ability to foreknow the thoughts and pretensions of others is well documented in Scripture. It may even be argued that their uncompromising boldness of speech was a key factor, humanly speaking, leading to their executions.

It stands to reason that Jesus would surely have known if John intended the question for the benefit of his disciples and would therefore have directed his answer to them, instead of John. It may be argued that such a perceptive unveiling of John’s so-called masked motives most likely would have strengthened the impact of the mind-reading Jesus on the unsuspecting disciples of John, increasing the likelihood that they would have believed in Jesus. His mind-reading powers are well known from other incidents in Scripture.

Lenski cautions that this view casts reflections on the integrity of John who pretends to ask the question when in reality it was being asked by his disciples. Furthermore, it reflects on the integrity of Jesus who instructs them to report to John, thus perpetuating the pretense. Thus, in an effort to preserve the integrity of one, the integrity of the other is sacrificed.²⁵ In his commentary on Luke’s Gospel, Lenski offers the following matter-of-fact comment regarding whether John or his disciples were behind the question: “Note that it is John who calls two of his disciples to him, (*pros* in the participle) it is John who sends them, and it is John who asks the double question. And this fact that Jesus is throughout dealing with John is emphasized again in v. 20 in the same pointed way.”²⁶

Bock also concludes that the statement is directed to John and it seems forced or unnatural not to believe that John, not his disciples, is

24. *Ibid.*

25. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew’s Gospel* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg Press, 1943), 427.

26. Lenski, *Luke*, 403.

struggling with doubt about Jesus.²⁷ The argument against the charade is strengthened by Stein who argues that the beatitude in Luke 7:23 is singular although the plural is more normal in beatitudes (cf. 6:20-22), thus the question was John's and the answer was directed to John.²⁸

The interpretations above have one thing in common: neither actually represents John as personally doubting whether Jesus was the Messiah. However, at least two other possible scenarios bring his reputation into question in some measure, suggesting that he did doubt or, at the least, was confused. We turn our attention now to those views.

4. *Did John Doubt That Jesus Was the Messiah?*

It is inevitable that we ask, "Did John suffer a lapse of faith and genuinely experience an uncertainty regarding Jesus as the Messiah?" Many contend that John had become demoralized like his namesake Elijah and that he truly was having second thoughts. Francis Beare points out that John's preaching warned of judgment and urged his hearers to flee the wrath to come (Matthew 3:7). He anticipated his successor to be the agent of divine judgment, but what he heard about Jesus made him wonder whether he was mistaken in his initial conviction. Thus Beare concludes that the best interpretation is that John actually experienced real doubt and questioning and that it was quite understandable since Jesus was so unlike what he had expected.²⁹

Stein also believes that the best interpretation is that John did indeed experience real doubt as to whether Jesus, in whom he had originally believed, truly was the Christ. In fact, he uses John's doubt to build a case defending the historicity of the event on the basis that placing John in such an embarrassing light would hardly be what one would expect if the church had subsequently created this account.³⁰

Bock also accepts John's doubt as the most natural reading of this episode. John is in prison, having faithfully proclaimed the coming of a powerful Messiah. What John is seeing, however, stops short of all one might expect of God's chosen king.³¹ France agrees, explaining John's hesitation as "probably due to a discrepancy between his expectations for the coming one...and what he actually heard about Jesus."³² John's

27. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 664.

28. Stein, 225.

29. Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel according to Matthew: Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 256.

30. Stein, 225.

31. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 137.

32. France, 192.

predictions regarding the Messiah anticipated aggressive judgment (Matthew 3:11-12), but judgment had certainly not been a major part of Christ's ministry. Frederick Bruner links John's doubts with the Old Testament which is replete with references to the "Coming One" in judgment and blessing. He maintains that John's understanding of the "Coming One" was accompanied by a much larger measure of judgment, vengeance, and retribution than John was noticing in the activity of Jesus. Perhaps somewhat tongue-in-cheek, Bruner gives the following observation of Christ's ministry from John's perspective:

In a word, Jesus is out in the provinces healing sick, insignificant little individuals here and there, but not doing anything to change the basic structural problems in Israel's life. The Pharisees still control popular religious life; the Sadducees still control the temple; the whole rotten religio-ideological system seems thoroughly unthreatened by Jesus' do-goodism in the hills. What is more, John (the propagandist of The New Order) is in prison, and Herod (the embodiment of the oppressive Establishment) is still on the throne and about to have John's head. What kind of a Messiah is this who works so individually, so piecemeal?³³

Any admission that John doubted the messiahship of Jesus must assume that he had presented Jesus as the "Coming One" and the "Lamb of God" without understanding the ramifications of these titles or that for some reason he had come to doubt Jesus' messianic role and was about ready to abandon his former conviction. To deny that John initially accepted Jesus as the Messiah is to reject the most natural interpretation of Scripture. But to suggest that John was ready to abandon his faith in Jesus as the Messiah seems to defy logic.

John was a man of exceedingly strong convictions, and his testimony regarding Jesus was based on prophecy and reinforced by supernatural testimony associated with his baptism of Jesus (Matthew 3:17; John 1:29-34). It hardly seems possible that a man of such rugged strength of character could easily adopt an entirely opposing view without overwhelming evidence to the contrary, none of which is even hinted at in Scripture. Furthermore, this view fails to take into account the gracious words of commendation Jesus publicly spoke about John as the prophet's disciples turned to take Jesus' answer back to the imprisoned preacher (cf. Matthew 11:7-14; Luke 7:24-28). Jesus could hardly have been kinder

33. Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Christbook: A Historical/Theological Commentary, Matthew 1-12* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, 1987), 409-10.

than to announce that “among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John” (Luke 7:28a) and to reject in the strongest of terms any hint that John was vacillating like “a reed shaken with the wind” (Luke 7:24).

G. Campbell Morgan rejects any idea of a lapse of faith by a depressed and disheartened prophet wavering like Elijah under a juniper tree. Instead, he envisions a stalwart man of God too accustomed to loneliness to be disloyal as a result of being confined by the narrow walls of his prison cell. He is convinced that John’s question was prompted as a result of perplexity and not as a matter of disloyalty or doubt and that the answer is to be found by contrasting the works of Jesus with the earlier predictions John had made regarding the ministry of the Messiah. When John examined the ministry of Jesus in that light, he was forced to conclude that it was characterized by mercy rather than judgment, a method unexpected by the Forerunner and totally perplexing to him. This leads Morgan to conclude that it is not the Master that John doubts, but the methods of the Master, methods standing in stark contrast to John’s expectations. In other words, it was not Jesus or the things he was doing that raised questions in John’s mind but the things he was not doing.³⁴ This leads to a fifth interpretation of John’s question.

5. Was John Perplexed and Entertaining Thoughts of a Second Messiah?

Morgan may have been correct in using the word perplexity and rejecting the word doubt to describe the motivation prompting John’s question. He defends John’s question by suggesting that John was not “disbelieving” but his faith had met a difficulty. He calls it a doubt due to faith perplexed by the missing element of judgment. Where was the fan, the baptism of fire, and the ax laid at the root of every tree?³⁵

The Possibility That John Entertained the Idea of a Second Messiah

Perhaps John is still acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah but at the same time beginning to entertain the idea that an additional Messiah might yet be expected who would perform certain functions not being fulfilled by the ministry of Jesus. The difference between this view and the one discussed in the previous section is quite simple. The former implies that John once believed Jesus to be the Messiah but came to doubt its validity and therefore was ready to abandon his formerly held

34. G. Campbell Morgan, *The Gospel according to Matthew* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1929), 111-12.

35. *Ibid.*, 112.

belief in order to embrace “another” Messiah in place of or instead of Jesus. To stop short of this implied conclusion is to leave the second half of John’s question unanswered.

Proponents embracing the idea that John may have been wondering about a second Messiah include Herschel Hobbs and Godet, the latter making the following comments:

Most assuredly John does not doubt whether Jesus is a divine messenger, for he interrogates Him. He does not appear even to deny Him all participation in the Messianic work. . . . What he cannot understand is just this, that these *works of the Christ* are not accompanied by the realization of all the rest of the Messianic programme which he had formerly proclaimed himself, and especially by the theocratic judgment. . . . This contrast between the form of the Messianic work as it was being accomplished by Jesus, and the picture which John had drawn of it himself, leads him to inquire whether the Messianic work was to be divided between *two different persons*,—the one, Jesus, founding the kingdom of God in the heart by His word and by miracles of benevolence; the other commissioned to execute the theocratic judgment. . . . This is the real meaning of John’s question: “Should we look for (not properly another, but) a different one. . . . We know in fact that several divine messengers were expected.”³⁶

The Meaning of “Another” and the Possibility of a Second Coming One

The word translated “another” in Matthew 11:3 is *heteros*. Luke 7:19, however, uses a different Greek word, *allos*. Some argue that Matthew’s word means “another of a different kind” while Luke’s refers to “another of the same kind,” and a number of key passages may be cited to demonstrate such a pattern of usage. For example, in John 14:16 Christ promised to send “another Comforter” (*allos*, another like himself). Paul says in Romans 7:23, “I see a different . . . law” (*heteros*), a law different from that of the spirit of life (not *allos*, a law of the same sort). After Joseph’s death “another king arose” (*heteros*), one of quite a different character (Acts 7:18). Paul speaks of “a different gospel (*heteros*), which is not another” (*allos*, another like the one he preached, Galatians 1:6, 7). However, if a sharp distinction of meaning is maintained in John’s question, then we must account for the fact that Matthew and Luke use different words.

36. Godet, 1:344-45. Second italics not in original.

To be sure, the expression "or look we for another" hardly seems rhetorical; nor does it necessarily imply that Jesus is not the Messiah. *Allos*, in its strictest sense, according to A. T. Robertson, means "another" and a common idea behind *heteros* is a second of a pair. The word itself does not mean "different" but speaks of "a second of two" It does not necessarily involve the secondary idea of different in kind. At times the words are used together for the sake of variety while at other times they are used to accentuate difference.³⁷

As noted above, Godet believes the real meaning of John's question is this: "Should we look for a *different one*." He claims that the strictest meaning of *heteros* is *a second one*, therefore attributing to Jesus the office of the Christ.³⁸ Robert H. Gundry seems to take the view that allows for the possibility of a different Messiah, explaining that Matthew's choice of *heteros* is deliberate in order "to emphasize difference." Both *su* (you) and *heteros* (another) are emphatic and, according to him, should be translated "Are *you* the Coming One, or should we expect *another*?" as in a different kind of Coming One.³⁹

Others declare that the Hebrew and the Aramaic had but one word for "another" and that the Greek words *heteros* and *allos* are virtually interchangeable. Hermann Beyer acknowledges that in the ancient Greek it is difficult to make a clear distinction between the two words and that by the time of the New Testament this kind of distinction becomes quite impossible.⁴⁰ One thing is certain: although John may have had perplexities or doubts about Jesus, neither Matthew nor Luke had any. Matthew uses the word "Christ" in his introduction of the question (11:2), and Luke uses the word "Lord" in reference to Jesus' compassion on the widow (7:13).

To sum up, the most natural approach to the second half of the question is to assume that it at least raises the possibility of another Messiah, either in addition to Jesus or one in place of him. I prefer the former since the latter denies everything we know about John. Another advantage of this view is that more than one Messiah is consistent with what some argue to be the popular Jewish expectations of that day. Furthermore, it does not require John to doubt Jesus' person or messianic role.

37. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 747-48.

38. *Ibid.*, 345-46.

39. Gundry, *Matthew*, 205.

40. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley, s.v. "*heteros*," by Hermann W. Beyer.

CHRIST'S RESPONSE TO JOHN'S QUESTION

Morgan insightfully observes that if we are surprised by John's question, we are even more surprised at Jesus' answer.⁴¹ Lenski describes the answer as being a typical answer from Jesus: "strongly suggestive yet reticent, decisive in substance yet not direct as far as the form of the question is concerned."⁴²

Jesus instructs John's disciples to "go and show him again those things which ye do hear and see" (Matthew 11:4b). In Matthew Jesus points to his words (chapters 5-7) and works (chapters 8-9), in that order, and Luke's "in that same hour" (7:21) demonstrates the impressive opportunity they had been afforded to observe before reporting back to John.

Jesus links his works directly to the fulfillment of messianic prophecy by referring to the list of six types of miracles he has performed. The list correlates with the miracles recorded in Matthew 8-9 and coincides with Old Testament phraseology (cf. Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:4-6; 42:1-7). Jesus read a similar passage (Isaiah 61:1) in the synagogue at the introduction of his ministry (Luke 4:18-19), but then and now he conspicuously omits any reference to judgment, the missing element that may have been at the root of John's perplexity. The implication is that Jesus' deeds are consistent with messianic expectations if not with every detail of John's expectations. The one thing left unrevealed is the interval of time between the first coming with grace and mercy and the second coming with judgment. The prophetic picture is without perspective as to time; grace and judgment are simply predicted, but the point of time when they will occur is left with God (Acts 1:7).⁴³ A comma separates the phrases, but two thousand years have already separated their fulfillment.

The list concludes with a clear messianic prophecy, "the poor have the gospel preached to them" (Isaiah 61:1; Matthew 9:35). As the last mentioned item, the preaching of the gospel intentionally receives special emphasis, for this is ultimately the meaning of the preceding miracles.⁴⁴ We may think of this as the least impressive of the things he is doing, but Jesus counts good news to the poor as his best work, even greater than raising the dead. All the other works receive their value from this last work. The principle work of Jesus was not the relief of disability

41. Morgan, 112.

42. Lenski, *Matthew*, 427.

43. Lenski, *Matthew*, 426-27.

44. Hagner, 301.

but the preaching of the gospel to the poor.⁴⁵ Jesus quoted from this same passage as he initiated his ministry and again as he validates it on this occasion to John.

While Jesus did not answer John's question directly, he did provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that he is the Christ who was to come and that his credentials are the result of his ministry. "If these things were taking place in Jesus' ministry, then God's kingdom, i.e., the messianic age, has already begun; and the one who has inaugurated that age must be 'the one who was to come.'"⁴⁶

Jesus has kind words to say to and about John. Rather than shame him for questioning his messianic role, Jesus blesses him for not stumbling because he had different expectations (Luke 7:23). Blessed (*makarios*) carries the idea of "to be congratulated" in a deeply religious sense and with more emphasis on divine approval than on human happiness, according to Gundry.⁴⁷ Robertson says "happy" will not do, having been devalued by modern usage.⁴⁸ This blessing is a kind of enviable spiritual discernment that prevents one from stumbling or falling away due to personal misguided preconceptions about Jesus.

This general beatitude includes John but obviously has broad application for anyone (*hos ean*) not offended because of Jesus. While "blessed" (*makarios*) is singular and individualizes the application to focus on John, "anyone" opens Jesus' words to any who respond and functions as a call not only to John but to all who encounter Jesus' remark, including Luke's readers.⁴⁹

Offense is from the Greek word *skandalon*. In Luke it appears only here and in 17:2 but is used 29 times in the New Testament and is often connected with Isaiah 8:14 (cf. Romans 9:33; 1 Corinthians 1:23; and 1 Peter 2:8). It is also used by Mark in reference to Peter's fall (Mark 14:29), and it literally means to trip or stumble and then fall or be entrapped. It is used figuratively here, pointing to those who refuse to believe the claims of Jesus (cf. Matthew 13:57; 26:31, 33; John 6:61).⁵⁰

Scholars through the centuries have arrived at different conclusions in their search for a correct interpretation of John's question, and this paper will certainly not end the debate. However, a search for the truth

45. Bruner, 412.

46. Stein, 227.

47. Gundry, *Matthew*, 68.

48. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1930), 1:39.

49. Plummer, *Luke*, 203.

50. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, 669.

that suggests John either doubted or was confused about the Messiah, certainly does not diminish the lofty stature of this giant among prophets.

As the disciples of John turn to leave (Matthew 11:7ff.), Jesus pays the highest of tributes to him, and he seems to be quite confident that John's faith will receive the reassurance needed from the words of Jesus and from the report taken back to him by his disciples. Jesus was counting on John to recognize the words of Scripture and to make the connection that their messianic message was being fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

A number of things may be learned from this episode. First, the question of John is the overarching question of all mankind: "Who is this Jesus?" It is the question of us all and it presupposes the need to reexamine personal presuppositions for their consistency with revealed truth. Objectivity requires that Jesus be considered on his own merits. Simply to refuse to consider any possibility of his claims is prejudice of the first order. The unalterable answer of Scripture is that Jesus is the only way to God. Neither personal opinion nor life experience will alter that fact.

The social idealist, as John has been categorized by some, who finds it hard to separate religion from politics, may find himself asking whether Marxism or western style democracy is man's salvation. Or is salvation to be found in a certain religious movement or in some humanistic philosophy? Even well meaning missionaries from the United States may at times find themselves guilty of "Americanizing" rather than "Christianizing" other cultures. The two are not one and the same. Radical and rapid change, such as that experienced in the last few decades, forces the church continually to reexamine its traditions and preconceptions in order to sort out preferences as opposed to essentials, that which is negotiable versus the nonnegotiable. And while the process is painful and perplexing at times, it must be successfully achieved by each generation to give the church (not the Bible) relevance.

Second, we discover that John was greater than any prophet before, yet he too was subject to like passions as we. This we say not by way of criticism but to encourage ourselves with the fact that God uses imperfect vessels as we grow toward maturity. Suffering and reflection are often part of God's plan for developing faith and character in us.

Third, this episode also provides a lasting reminder of the power of the Word as our source of faith. Adolf Schlatter wrote: "Seeing what Jesus

does and hearing what he says is the only way that leads to faith. Another means by which we could make ourselves or others into believers simply does not exist."⁵¹ As Bruner put it: "The way to this faith is hearing what Jesus says and seeing what he does."⁵²

This provides a powerful argument for faithful exposure to the words and works of Jesus. It is a clarion call back to expository preaching of the Word of God and a powerful reminder that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (Romans 10:17). We want easy answers and quick deliverance. God's approach is often very different from our selfishly biased expectations. "Blessed" is the individual that does not stumble over heart-wrenching perplexities brought on because of a lack of understanding or unscriptural expectations.

Finally, when perplexed or in doubt, we should keep on trusting. Scripture, not our expectations, must shape our theology. John's unfilled expectations regarding the Christ are an indirect admission that not all goes according to our plans or personal desires. In his case, judgment was not immediate, and the consequence for John was continued imprisonment and eventual martyrdom. As for Christians today, we must be prepared to face the undeniable effects of evil in the world. The Messiah's first coming falls short of the consummation.⁵³

John's difficulty with Jesus, then, is Israel's problem with Jesus to this day: Jesus does not seem sufficiently messianic. . . . He seems to promise more oppression, not liberation from it. This is hard to take. John's question, then, is the question of us all: "Are you really the promised Liberator or should we be looking for someone else?"⁵⁴

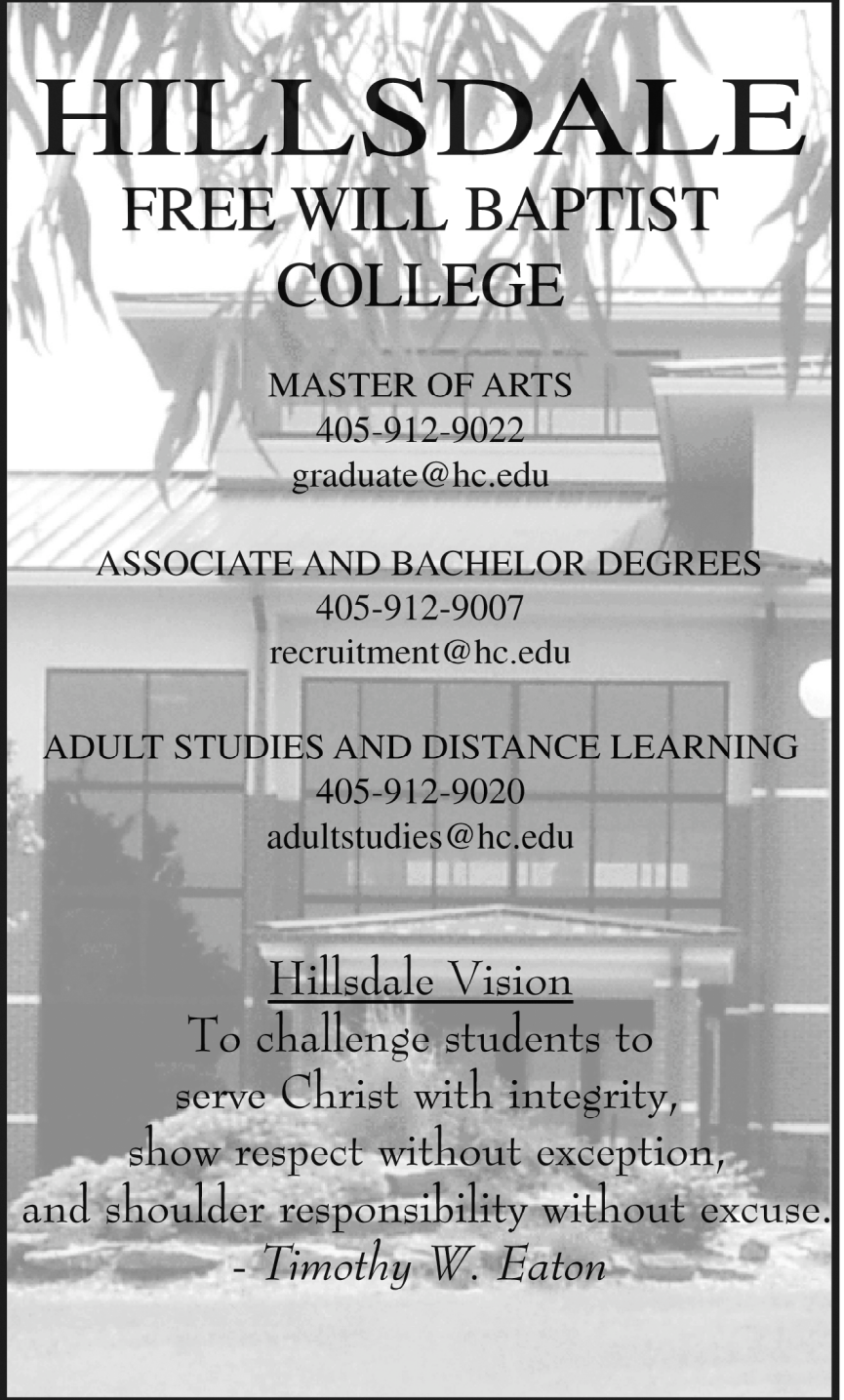
Sufferings and doubts can be a means of reflection and growth. Many believers still ask: Why does Jesus not answer my prayer? Why does he not intervene in this or that situation in my life? Why does he allow this or that to occur? These questions feed on the misunderstandings and inconsistencies of our theology and personal experience. Until we no longer "see through a glass darkly" there will doubtless be situations that bring tension between our view of who Jesus is and our expectation of how he should or will act in a given circumstance.

51. Quoted in Bruner, 411.

52. Bruner, 411.

53. Hagner, 301-2.

54. Bruner, 410.



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Jeff Turnbough

Understanding Culture: From a Missiological Perspective

What is culture? As Christians, is it important for us to know the answer to that question? With so many other important subjects and fields of study, why do I, or anyone else for that matter, need to dedicate time to this subject?

It is extremely important for all Christians to have at least some understanding of the nature of culture. Every one of us is immersed in at least one culture, and it impacts everything from the food we eat and the clothes we wear to the values that cause us to view the world the way we do.

For most evangelical Christians, the study of culture has been relegated to individuals who, in obedience to the mandate of God, cross cultures to make disciples of all nations. The mission of all believers in all times is to communicate effectively the gospel of Jesus Christ to every individual. The urgency to do this lies in the biblical teaching that everyone everywhere who dies without knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior will spend eternity in hell, separated from God. The good news is that all people everywhere who accept Jesus Christ will be saved from hell and will spend eternity in heaven with God. Reinforced by the Great Commission passages, these biblical truths compel us to communicate the gospel message to all people everywhere. The effective and meaningful communication of this message becomes more complicated when a believer from one culture enters another to fulfill Christ's last command. There are many cultural barriers, but an immediate hurdle that must be overcome is language. The language barrier illustrates the importance of a basic understanding of culture for those interested in communicating Christ's message to all the nations. Most people no longer live in homogeneous (one culture) societies, but rather heterogeneous (multiple culture) ones. Therefore it is increasingly more significant for every Christian to give thought to the nature of culture and how it impacts his efforts to communicate to people, regardless of geographical location.

DEFINING TERMS

For the sake of clarity, a precise definition of terms is needed. A narrow definition of culture emphasizes a certain sense of enlightenment and sophistication acquired through education and exposure to the arts, music, literature, and related intellectual activities. However, the broader definition of culture includes all shared values, beliefs, and practices that tend to characterize a particular group of people. At times we refer to “popular culture” as if we were somehow disconnected from it. However, all of us are immersed in culture. Missiologist Charles Kraft writes that “culture consists of two levels: surface and deep levels. The surface level is largely visible and consists of the patterns according to which people behave. These behavior patterns are, however, closely linked to a deep level of largely unconscious and invisible assumptions we call worldviews.”¹ Missiologist Paul Hiebert adds, “Meaning is found in people’s heads and in cultures . . . people can understand external messages only in terms of their own paradigms.”² Culture is the result of people’s adaptation to their particular environment (geography, climate, and historical events), and it reflects the richness of God’s image present in human beings, as the ways of living and coping are so diverse from one place to another.

Sometimes confusion exists between the terms culture and society. A society is the sum of relationships among a particular group of people bound together by the same culture, whether the ties that bind them be similar traditions, institutions, or nationality. Societies are the networks of people that tend to reinforce the given values, beliefs and practices of a particular culture.³ I will use the term sociocultural system to refer to both the cultural and social aspects of a given people.

WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF CULTURE?

While culture is a compilation of human responses to environment, ultimately God created it, or at least put everything in place for it when

1. Charles Kraft, *Christianity and Power: Your Worldview and Your Experience of the Supernatural* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Servant Books, 1989), 53.

2. Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 62.

3. The impetus and background for this article come from the author’s doctoral dissertation, a qualitative research project carried out in Madrid, Spain. See: Jeffrey A. Turnbough, “A Religious Paradigm Shift for Adult Spaniards in the Conversion Process to Evangelical Christianity” (D. Miss. diss., Biola University’s School of Intercultural Studies, 2004).

he created the world. In that sense we can truly speak of culture as an indicator of God's image in humans, as it reflects a richness of creativity and diversity. Human beings, created in the image of God, demonstrate their ability to be creative and to adapt to any environment in diverse ways. The cultures of the world, including the one where you live, are the result of that God-given ability to live, work, and enjoy his creation.

Like the rest of creation, cultures also demonstrate the devastating effects of the fall of man into sin and the resulting curse of God upon his creation. God created languages at the Tower of Babel because humans were not fulfilling his desire for them to fill the earth. Some Bible scholars believe confounding the languages also helped curb the process of degeneration. But, just as it was in the days of Noah, humankind continues to degenerate. In spite of continual advances on all fronts of human knowledge, cultural systems continue to reflect the sinful nature at the very core of every human being. God created human languages and did so with the knowledge that humans were marred by sin.

From a spiritual perspective, the Bible clearly teaches that no one is good, and, left on our own, we can never establish a relationship with God. In the same way, we can speak of both good and evil in sociocultural systems. There are aspects of culture that are good, there are other aspects that are neither good nor bad, and then there are other aspects that are evil. Many missiologists refer to these latter aspects of any sociocultural system as systemic evil.

Individual versus systemic evil can become confusing for believers at times. We may decry sin as we see it in the lives of individuals, but it is much more easily explained away when it is a part of our particular sociocultural system. This form of thinking causes us to trample over clear and basic biblical principles, which, for the believer, must always supersede human sociocultural systems. We are so much a part and product of our sociocultural system that it is easier to see fault in other cultures than it is to see it in our own. When taken to an extreme, the human tendency is to think that our own sociocultural system is not only the best, but also the only "right" way to do things. Our sociocultural system is the center of the universe to us. This is ethnocentrism. While some individuals are more ethnocentric than others, every single one of us has traces of ethnocentric bias. It is healthier simply to admit it, understand our personal bias, and adjust our thinking accordingly.

No sociocultural system is immune to systemic evil because all systems are made up of fallen human beings. We may argue for superior ways of doing things from one culture to another and, indeed, may have valid arguments, at least from a very human and limited perspective. In

the end, however, we must all recognize that our own sociocultural system is fallen and in need of what only God can offer.

THE NATURE OF CULTURE IN ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEORY

Some readers may be skeptical about the use of the secular sciences for a Christian understanding of anything. There are Christian scientists that argue that a "Judeo-Christian worldview played a crucial role in the birth of modern science, and that modern science was born in Christianized Europe."⁴ Aside from the proposal that "the intellectual climate that gave rise to modern science (roughly three centuries ago) was decisively shaped by Christianity, most of the founding fathers of science were devout Christians including Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Boyle, and Pascal."⁵ The idea was to discover more about God's creation. A basic premise was that ultimately all truth is God's truth. Therefore, discoveries in the various disciplines of science, albeit skewed by human frailty, were often helpful for Christians, as well as for the human race. It is extremely unfortunate that during the Enlightenment (18th century, mainly in Europe), science and Christianity experienced a divorce of sorts, and during the Modern Era (20th century) they were even at odds. The contention of many Christians is that ultimately all truth is still God's truth, and therefore we must attempt to glean the best information from scientific investigation and discovery. Scripture is the final judge of truth, and we always reject anything contrary to the Bible.

Several fields of study inform missiology. Biblical truth or theology is the principal one. Another source Christian missiologists use, especially for studying culture, is anthropology. Different schools of thought concerning culture exist in anthropology. As all disciplines change with time, over the years anthropologists have changed ideas concerning the basic nature of culture. Missiologists may differ concerning their view of culture because they ascribe to differing anthropological theories. For that reason, we can enhance our understanding of culture by understanding basic anthropological theory, as well as the missiological application of these theories.

Christian missiologists are well aware of the limitations of science, but, at the same time, they must also recognize their own weaknesses.

4. Michael Bumbulis, *Christianity and the Birth of Science*, Internet Edition (Retrieved September 23, 2004, from <http://www.Idolphin.org/bumbulis/>, 1996).

5. Richard Kenneth Samples, *The Historic Alliance of Christianity and Science*, Internet Edition (Retrieved September 23, 2004, from <http://www.reasons.org/resources/apologetics/christianscience/shtml?main>, 1998).

Modern social sciences have helped us understand people and cultures, but it is extremely important to realize that neither these disciplines nor Christians are free from ethnocentric bias.

It should be pointed out that the discipline of anthropology, while it can at times serve an indispensable purpose in liberating our minds from the captivity of ethnocentrism, remains a very Western endeavor, resting on entirely Western philosophical foundations; in this it is exactly like all the rest of modern science. As such, paradoxically, it can also serve to maintain our cultural captivity. We need to gain freedom not only from the naive world-taken-for-granted of our common Western civilization, but also from the equally Western if more sophisticated scientific tools of Western civilization, including cultural anthropology.⁶

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM

One theory that has been very influential in the field of anthropology, since the latter part of the 19th and the early part of the 20th centuries, is structural functionalism. The British social scientist Anthony Giddens explains, "Functionalism sustains that society is a complex system whose diverse parts function together in order to generate stability and solidarity."⁷ Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Émile Durkheim (1858-1917) were early proponents of functionalism, arguing that society functions to serve the common good of the particular sociocultural group or system. For this reason, the theoretical approach of structural functionalism focused on society as functioning to preserve itself as well as the group dynamic of people operating within the given sociocultural context.

Claude Lévi-Strauss, one of functionalism's strong proponents during the 20th century, viewed culture functioning as an integrated unit and society functioning to meet human needs.⁸ A functionalist approach to the study of society examines how the different parts relate to one another within a closed sociocultural system. Lévi-Strauss emphasized that societies are organized units with different but interrelated structural levels. He believed the purpose of anthropology was to study culture as a whole system, while understanding that it is made up of what he referred to as orders. "This idea of society as a network of orders or as a composite of different levels is very important within structural anthro-

6. Charles R. Taber, *The World Is Too Much with Us: Culture in Modern Protestant Missions* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1991), 11-12.

7. Anthony Giddens, *Sociología* (Sociology) (Madrid, Spain: Alianza Editorial, 2001), 44.

8. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Antropología estructural* (Structural Anthropology) (Barcelona, Spain: Ediciones Altaya, S.A., 1996).

pology.”⁹ In other words, structural functionalists view culture as a closed system, made up of different parts that function and make sense within the system.

From this theoretical standpoint, anthropologists determined that people are the product of their culture, with little hope of differentiation. Anthropologists operating within this theoretical framework constructed models like that of Mary Douglas’s grid-group model that placed individuals into categories that, in theory, predicted their behavior.¹⁰

Charles Taber points to six major components of functionalism:

1. There are many cultures, but each one is discrete, bounded, and self-contained.
2. Each culture is unique and *sui generis*, not comparable to any other.
3. Whatever exists, exists because it functions, it works.
4. Basically everything is harmonious in cultures—a tight fit between the various domains: economy, social structure, political structure, religion, the arts, worldview, etc.
5. Under such circumstances, change could not be anything but pathology, usually perpetrated by outsiders (like missionaries).
6. The proper sources of information about a culture are its most successful and influential members.¹¹

Missiologists that have operated within the theoretical framework of structural functionalism have tended to have a high view of culture. They have demanded a great deal of respect for culture and attempted to explain the rationality of the different components. To its credit, in the early part of the 20th century functionalism helped give Protestant missionaries respect for and understanding of people of different cultures. This led to an emphasis on communication (learning the local language and culture) and translation. The missiological concept of indigenization, or the three selfs (self-government, self-support, self-propagation), grew out of the functionalist framework. This concept provided a noble goal for Protestant mission work. However, one of the weaknesses was that many mission works never fully arrived at perfectly indigenous states, frustrating the work and workers. A better understanding of culture and cultural bias helps us to realize that the “three selfs” grew out of a specific cultural context—democracy with a market economy. While these

9. Alan Jenkins, *The Social Theory of Claude Lévi-Strauss* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 42.

10. Mary Douglas, “Cultural Bias,” in *The Active Voice* (London: Routledge, 1982).

11. Taber, 100-101.

concepts are not evil, neither are they of biblical origin. They certainly have their limitations and are not an infallible plan for all works in all places.

A common theme of missionaries operating under this anthropological theory was what could be summarized as biblical absolutes and cultural relativity. The second part of this equation was driven in large part by the anthropological theory of functionalism. Many missiologists, such as Kraft,¹² viewed culture as a neutral roadmap, and others such as Marvin Mayers¹³ saw it as a tool for communication. While this helped deliver many Western missionaries from their ethnocentric bias, it also opened the door to excessive cultural relativism.

In particular, Malinowskian functionalism pressed missions in the direction of excessive relativism, in over-reaction against the ethnocentrism and iconoclasm of earlier periods; it encouraged missions to think of cultures as closed, bounded systems, and to overlook the dynamic interconnections between cultures; and it led missions to exaggerate the stability of cultures and their resistance to change.¹⁴

The idea that many missionaries had concerning cultural relativity may have been misguided, based on a structuralist-functionalistic view of culture in which cultural anthropologists understood that cultures were cohesive integrated systems. For example, there was a time when language was defined as a neutral element of culture. Language was considered to be neither right nor wrong, but merely a tool to be understood and used to communicate the gospel. Granted, the greater idea was to reinforce the concept that in order to communicate the gospel effectively in different cultures, missionaries needed to learn the local language. That is a good thing. It is also true, however, that languages are not completely neutral. Whether or not we agree with them, ask the feminists if they believe language is neutral. Hiebert writes, "Each language gives expression to a worldview . . . no language is philosophically or theologically neutral."¹⁵ For example, for a long period of time in the Spanish sociocultural system the word Protestant had very negative connotations, due to negative historical baggage. A Protestant coming from a

12. See: Charles Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), *Communicating the Gospel God's Way* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1979), and *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996).

13. Marvin Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987).

14. Taber, xxi.

15. Hiebert, 109.

sociocultural system where this word has positive connotations may find this difficult to accept, and it may seem unfair. While there are many examples like this, this one serves to give credence to the idea that language is not neutral.

It is also interesting to note correlations between a functionalist approach to culture and historic Calvinism. Some view the functionalist approach to culture as one in which humans are trapped in the structures of a determined system, which seems to coincide with the historic Calvinistic concepts of predestination and what non-Calvinists view as Calvinistic determinism.

Taber makes an interesting point concerning the relationship between modern Protestant missions and the influence of structural functionalism.

What makes functionalism particularly important for our study is the fact that it dominated cultural anthropology in the English-speaking world during the second quarter of the twentieth century, which was precisely the period when missionaries and missiologists became fully aware of this discipline as one that could be useful to their endeavors.¹⁶

It is also significant to note that this period of history coincided with significant advances in Protestant mission work.

There can be no doubt that anthropological functionalism helped improve Protestant missiological thought and efforts around the world. Missiologists that studied and applied functionalism to missiology helped many missionaries recognize the common human trait of ethnocentrism. However, it is also important to note that in spite of the help, social science theories reflect the limitations of their human authors. In this case, these imperfections limited both anthropologists and missiologists. Once again, Taber's insight is instructive when he points to five major problems with functionalism, specifically for Christian workers:

1. The overemphasis of functionality and relativism leads to a dulling of ethical sensitivity; almost anything can be excused because it works.
2. Ignoring minority and dissenting voices exaggerates the harmony and consensus of a culture, and overlooks the extent to which it may be dysfunctional for at least some of its members.

16. Taber, 94.

3. Exaggerating the stability and harmony of a culture also leads us to underestimate both the need for and the possibility of change through the impact of the gospel.
4. Assigning sole causative power to ideas and denying or ignoring the impact on culture of the material conditions of existence has much the same effect as the old-fashioned physician's approach to psychosomatic illness: It's all in your head.
5. In Christian circles, anthropological idealism reinforces our centuries-long tendency to be dualists, to emphasize the spiritual, the heavenly, and the eternal to the neglect of the material, the earthly, and the temporal in ways that are quite congenial to Gnosticism but quite often alien to the Bible.¹⁷

There were other aspects of culture that functionalism did not address. "These limitations have hindered missions from seeing and dealing adequately with cultural change, with the nature of ethical absolutes, and with the implications of the global political-economic system."¹⁸

With the revelation of new insights in anthropology, ideas concerning culture changed. Giddens believes the theoretical approach of functionalism gave too much emphasis to factors that lead to cohesion and not enough attention to other factors such as conflict and division in society.¹⁹ The theoretical approach of structural functionalism failed to explain culture change. Cultures are dynamic and not static. Many began to view functionalism as "reductionism of a disturbingly deterministic sort."²⁰ Nonetheless, Stanley Barrett writes, "While no one today claims to be a functionalist, there remains something functionalist about both anthropological fieldwork and anthropological comparison—in spite of the challenges from later approaches to anthropological inquiry."²¹

CONFLICT THEORY

As a result of the deficiencies of functionalism, another school of thought concerning culture emerged, called conflict theory.

17. Taber, 105-8. These are the major points Taber makes in these pages. He also adds an explanation after each point. I have quoted only the major points.

18. *Ibid.*, xxi.

19. Giddens, 44.

20. Jeffrey C. Alexander, ed., *Durkheimian Sociology: Cultural Studies* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 107.

21. Stanley Barrett, *Anthropology: A Student's Guide to Theory and Methods* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 78.

Anthropologist Richard Adams focused on the relationship between energy, resources, and leadership in cultural systems.²² He argued that he who has control of the energy and resources ultimately has the power to lead. Central to his thinking was the idea that control is nonreciprocal (objects do not respond), but power is reciprocal, because it is a relationship. Conflict theorists center their attention in power, interests, inequality, and the struggles of individuals within society. The theory assumes that different individuals and groups within a given society work for different interests, and this inevitably leads to conflict. In stark contrast to structural functionalism, theorists from this school of thought argue that conflict plays a central part in culture, resulting in change. Anthropologists from this theoretical framework view conflict and change not only as normal, but positive and a logical explanation of culture change.

Ralf Dahrendorf wrote that functionalists only looked at the aspects of social life where harmony and agreement exist.²³ As a conflict theorist, he argued that conflict and division are equally if not more important. This focus changed the perspective and turned the attention of the study of culture to elements functionalism had ignored.

The conflict theory school of anthropology influenced Christian missiology in significant ways. Christian missiologists following the structural functionalist theory of culture tended to have a high view of culture, while missiologists following the conflict theory of culture tended to have a low view of culture. A missiological orientation based on conflict theory respects and understands that sociocultural systems are the result of human beings adapting to their environments and recognizes within the system the existence of conflict, human interests, and power—all elements Christians believe are marked by sin. Therefore, the need for change and transformation of cultural systems comes into focus. In contrast to the functionalist idea of attempting to preserve culture, missiologists informed by conflict theory approach culture change not only as normal but also as positive. Cultural systems are not neutral systems that must necessarily be kept in place. They do change, they will change, and in many cases they contain elements that must change.

22. Richard Newbold Adams, *Energy and Structure: A Theory of Social Power* (Austin: University of Texas, 1975).

23. Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (London: Routledge, 1959).

Drawing from the theoretical framework of other anthropologists (Archer²⁴ or Giddens²⁵) Sherwood Lingenfelter argued that cultures and societies are neither ideal nor neutral.²⁶ Unlike missiologists driven by functionalism that viewed culture as a neutral road map or a tool for communication, Lingenfelter argued that culture is more like a slot machine that is built to make the individual lose. Cultures were affected adversely by the fall of mankind into sin and therefore can become what Lingenfelter calls “prisons of disobedience” (or “palaces of disobedience”) that suppress people from coming to a true knowledge of God. Borrowing from the Apostle Paul’s terminology in Romans 11:32, this Christian missiologist contends that individuals must be freed from these cultural “prisons of disobedience.”²⁷

While the idea of cultures as prisons of disobedience may tend to overstate reality, the concept opens up our thinking to some interesting truths. A sociocultural system can be anything from a large group of people in a given area of the world, to a local club, church, or civic organization. Since all these groups, even Christian entities, are made up of fallen human beings, they are flawed. An example of this is when an entity supports something clearly contrary to biblical truth, yet members of the group attempt to rationalize that this belief or action is necessary because of the unique circumstances within the particular entity. Regardless if it is a church or Christian organization, all Christians must be aware that when humans form groups, the fallen nature of man is present and therefore flaws will be present in the system. If a belief or practice is clearly unscriptural, Christians must refuse to accept it. To accept or follow the flaw because of membership in the group can cause the entity to become a prison of disobedience. The nuances of this concept at times are so subtle that it is often difficult for the best of Spirit-led believers to realize what is happening. For that reason, it behooves believers to scrutinize continually any and all sociocultural associations through the lens of biblical truth. After all, ultimately every individual must give account to God.

Kraft challenged Lingenfelter’s ideas by writing that “Culture may not be as neutral as I once thought it was, but it is not the structures of

24. Margaret S. Archer, *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

25. Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems and Social Theory* (London: Macmillan, 1979).

26. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) and *Agents of Transformation: A Guide for Effective Cross-Cultural Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996).

27. Lingenfelter, *Transforming*, 17.

culture that lock people in prisons, but rather the sinful choices of people who are continually affected by the uneven playing field of the structures, but [who] are not totally determined by them."²⁸ He agreed that cultural structures are infected with evil, conflict, and misuse of power, and that people within cultural structures place pressure on others to conform, often in very negative ways. Kraft insisted, however, that not every aspect of culture is evil. Some aspects are good and can be used for godly purposes.

Anthropologists such as Margaret Archer argued that in addition to the various systems of thought that exist within culture, ideas influence individuals and competing interests impact relationships within societies. Many missiologists believe this is important for missionaries to understand and apply in cross-cultural ministry. Lingenfelter stated: "The dynamic interplay of ideas and interests inevitably results in contradictions and complementarities in our logic (cultural system) and relationships (social system)."²⁹ Culture serves as a structure to hold people's worlds together, to help them make sense of things. But, at the same time, there are conflicts and contradictions within every cultural system. The interests of humans are marked by self-interest or selfishness, and these interests do not always favor the ultimate good of the individuals within the sociocultural system.

Under the paradigm of functionalism the tendency was to view culture with a romantic, idealistic outlook, as something harmless, neutral, to be accepted just as it was presented to us. Anthropologists did not want to change the culture but rather to enter it and to work within whatever framework it dictated. As Christians, operating under the principle that culture was neutral, many embraced it uncritically. They sought the richness of the creativity of God's creation in the diversity of ways humankind had discovered and developed to deal with life in different contexts. After undergoing a change in their understanding of the basic nature of culture, missiologists still appreciated the richness of culture and understood the ways people in different cultures may go about the same tasks. The ideas and values that underlie different approaches may or may not be wrong.

The change that came about as a result of the influence of conflict theory was that missiologists no longer approached cultural norms in the same uncritical way as they did before. Understanding that culture is marked by human sin, they realized that, ultimately, at some point, there

28. Kraft, *Anthropology*, 34.

29. Lingenfelter, *Agents*, 227.

would be contradictions not only within the cultural system itself but also with Ultimate Truth. As Christians, we can glean important insights from this understanding of culture. We seek a proper balance. On the one hand, we should not approach cultures as we would a witch-hunt, but neither do we approach them naively. We understand that we will operate within the cultural system and therefore need to understand the constructs that make up a given culture. We can be open and accepting of those things that are good and helpful. At the same time, we must recognize inherent problems within cultures and adjust our thinking and our approach accordingly. It is important to recognize that if this is true with other sociocultural systems it is also true with yours and mine. This should help give us a clearer perspective on our personal ethnocentric bias, as well as that of the people we are attempting to reach.

While missiologists have maintained some elements of functionalism in their approach to culture, their views of culture have been altered by conflict theory. Fortunately, gone are the days when missionaries must feel the pressure from anthropologists not to change the culture where they work. Just as the Apostle Paul exhorted Christians to be transformed by the renewing of their minds (Romans 12:2), so Christian missiologists following the conflict theory school concerning culture will encourage cross-cultural workers to begin with the transformation of individuals but will then encourage these individuals to work for positive, biblical change and transformation of their sociocultural systems. This leads us to another school of anthropological thought concerning culture.

SOCIAL ACTION THEORY

Max Weber (1864-1920) was probably one of the first defenders of the ideas related to social action theory. Weber gave credence to the existence of social and class structures, but his focus was on the social action of individuals that created them. He argued that Protestant social values, in contrast to Roman Catholic social values, fueled much of the industrial revolution.³⁰ This gave rise to the well-known concept of the Protestant work ethic. "While the perspectives of functionalists and conflict theorists work for models that explain how society as a whole functions, social action [theorists] center in on the comportment of individual actors or in how they relate to one another among themselves and with society."³¹ Rather than attempting to maintain equilibrium in existing

30. Max Weber, *Ensayos sobre la religión* (Studies about Religion) (Madrid, Spain: Taurus Ediciones, S.A., 1983 edition).

31. Giddens, *Sociología*, 47.

sociocultural systems, social action theorists, such as Victor Turner (1920-1983), emphasized the normalcy of change. Socialization ensures that individuals internalize norms and values as they grow up. Social action theory attempts to show how the individual action relates to the larger sociocultural system, as well as how human action and interaction give rise to social action.

Just by reviewing the basic tenets of social action theory, we can begin to imagine how the application of these ideas can illumine the task of Christian missions. The Christian message is directed at individuals that live and operate within sociocultural systems. The event and/or process of Christian conversion is nothing less than a paradigm shift for individuals from their former way to a new way of viewing life. What is involved in that process has much to do with the comportment of individual actors within sociocultural systems and how they relate to others in that context.³²

For these reasons and more, missiologists call missionaries to be agents of transformation—transformation of individuals within sociocultural systems and also transformation of sociocultural systems themselves. Missionaries attempt to understand the cultural system in order to determine where the truth of the gospel challenges it for positive change. Primarily, the Christian mission focuses on individuals, with a view of their individual transformation eventually impacting society at large, not the other way around. For that reason, the primary focus of social action theory is an interesting perspective of culture for missiologists.

POSTMODERN ANTHROPOLOGY

The contemporary epistemology of postmodernism has impacted all disciplines, and anthropology is no exception. In his work *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn argued that knowledge is subjective because it is understandable in large part only to those who operate within certain paradigms and is largely unintelligible to those outside those paradigms.³³ This reduced knowledge from the realm of the knowable, empirical, and absolute to the realm of the pragmatic. One of the consequences of Kuhn's theory was "deconstruction—giving up the search for one grand unifying theory of knowledge."³⁴

32. For one particular case study of this phenomenon, I refer the reader to my dissertation.

33. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

34. Hiebert, 62.

Postmodernists such as Jean-Francois Lyotard argue that we must reject narratives and metanarratives.³⁵ In other words, there is no overriding story nor is history leading society in a particular direction. For the defenders of the postmodern school, classic anthropologists were wrong in their notion that history was proving that progress was taking humanity in a certain direction. Following this rationale, anthropology becomes interpretative or dialogical description in which individuals speak for themselves. Postmodern anthropologists such as Clifford Geertz suggest that fieldworkers or researchers work for “thick descriptions” of individuals within different cultures.³⁶ The focus is on the individual experience, and all opinions or perspectives are legitimate as they give meaning to their particular experience within any given sociocultural system. Most postmodern theorists would consider arrogant fieldworkers who attempt to interpret the experience of others. According to this theory, not only must individuals interpret their own experiences, but they are in fact the only ones capable of doing so.

Postmodernists would argue that not only can we not defend an idea of general progress but also that history is irrelevant.³⁷ For that reason, anthropological ideas based in the writings of men like Weber, that argued that human societies were destined toward certain ends, are no longer considered valid. Postmodern theorists argue that societies are not directed by history or progress, and there are no large narratives that guide their development. For them, societies are diverse and pluralist. As early as October of 1988, Stuart Hall wrote:

Our world is reconstructing. Mass production, consumption on a large scale, the big city, the omnipotent State, the deconcentration of real estate property, the nation-state is in decline; flexibility, diversity, differentiation, mobility, communication, decentralization and internationalization are increasing. In the process, there is a transformation of our very identity, our ideas of self, and our very subjectivity. We find ourselves in the transition to a new era.³⁸

French social theorist Jean Baudrillard believes that electronic communications have destroyed our relationship with the past and that meaning is now established by the images and symbols propagated uni-

35. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).

36. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).

37. Giddens, *Sociologia*.

38. Stuart Hall, “New Times,” *Marxism Today* 88 (October 1988):23.

versally by mass media.³⁹ Giddens writes, "The majority of contemporary theorists accept that the technologies of information and new systems of communications, along with other technological changes, are causing major social transformations that affect us all."⁴⁰

However, not all contemporary social scientists agree with some of the principal arguments of postmodern theorists. "The Marxist dreams of an alternative socialist state to replace capitalism are dead. But some of the values that drove the socialist project—a social community, equality, and help or assistance for the weak and vulnerable—are still very much alive."⁴¹ Briton Anthony Giddens, Spaniard Manuel Castells, and Germans Jürgen Habermas and Ulrich Beck are examples of some contemporary professionals in the social sciences who argue the need to continue to develop general themes about the social world that will foment positive intervention.

It appears that in rebuttal to postmodern theory, some anthropologists are defending older theories of culture and combining different approaches to the study of sociocultural systems. "Anthropology is indeed a discipline which, though vigorous in its scholarly efforts, is in considerable disarray about its philosophical foundations."⁴² Exactly where postmodern thought will lead anthropology and in what ways it will impact it remain to be seen.

There are ways in which postmodern anthropological theory challenges missiology, but there are other ways in which it opens new doors for unique opportunities. Probably the most significant challenge has to do with Christianity's promise of certain outcomes when converts follow certain truths. Since proponents of the postmodern theory reject such metanarratives, they would also reject that basic Christian assumption. However, since every individual's perspective is legitimate, people's stories of conversion must also be considered legitimate and accepted for what they are—valid individual experiences. This is a welcome change to life under a modern epistemology that required an empirical approach to all areas of life, pushing religious experience into the realm of the subjective and unscientific. During the modern epistemological era a gulf existed between science and religion, or empirical and experiential knowledge. Ironically, in the postmodern era both may be in the same camp and viewed as equally valid.

39. Jean Baudrillard, "The End of the Millennium or the Countdown," *Theory, Culture & Society* 15 (February 1998):1-9.

40. Giddens, *Sociologia*, 845.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Taber, 120.

As Hiebert suggests, when dealing with postmodernists, "The issue is not secularism but relativism and pragmatism."⁴³ The Christian challenge is to maintain a central biblical truth, the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ as the only way of salvation. Jesus clearly said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).⁴⁴ This is one truth that Christians cannot compromise at any time or in any place. As Hiebert asserts, we must use caution not to proclaim our sociocultural systems but to proclaim solely and exclusively the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Hiebert's challenge for missiologists to take a critical realist approach to cultures is significant. As imperfect human beings, we do not have perfect knowledge, and as searchers for the truth we must demonstrate a humble attitude toward other interpretations of reality. Hiebert challenges missiologists to approach diverse cultures using what he refers to as a "metacultural grid."⁴⁵ The idea of the metacultural grid is to recognize the complementary nature of human knowledge. No human is capable of understanding the whole of reality. For that reason, the critical realist values different perspectives. For the Christian, this challenges him at least to consider different Christian perspectives from differing sociocultural systems. Christians crossing cultures are challenged to assume the attitude of a learner as they approach sociocultural systems different from their own. This does not mean that we abandon absolute truth. However, we humbly admit that, even though we firmly believe it exists, our knowledge of absolute truth is limited because we are finite and imperfect human beings.

We must be extremely careful in our examination of postmodern thought to avoid unintentionally defending modernity or even arguing from a modernist perspective. The Christian's responsibility is not to defend any human sociocultural system or a particular (human) epistemological persuasion but rather to find ways to communicate the eternal message of the gospel effectively, regardless of the sociocultural system or prevailing epistemological approach.

WORKING FOR A BALANCED MISSIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CULTURE

As should be clear by now, there are many different ideas concerning culture and, therefore, different approaches to sociocultural systems.

43. Hiebert, 69.

44. All Scripture quotations in this article are from the Holy Bible, New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).

45. Hiebert, 69.

While we continue to observe and learn, this is not a new subject. Christians have thought about how to approach culture for a long time. Long ago Richard Niebuhr proposed five different possible relationships between Christ (the Christian) and culture.

(1) Christ against culture: In this viewpoint, the Christian views Christ as totally opposed to, separate from, and even hostile against human culture. There have been significant proponents of this position, such as Tertullian and Tolstoy.

(2) Christ of culture: As you can probably anticipate by the words, this perspective is just the opposite of the Christ against culture perspective. It attempts to view Christianity and culture together, in spite of the differences that may exist.

(3) Christ above culture: This view attempts to correlate the fundamental questions of culture with biblical revelation. Thomas Aquinas took this approach.

(4) Christ and culture in paradox: Individuals that adopt this view are sometimes called dualists because they believe that the Christian belongs to two realms (the spiritual and temporal) and must live in the tension of fulfilling responsibilities to both. Church reformer Martin Luther adopted this view.

(5) Christ the Transformer of culture: Individuals that adhere to this perspective are sometimes called conversionists because they attempt to convert the values and goals of secular culture into the service of the kingdom of God. Augustine, Calvin, John Wesley, and Jonathan Edwards are some of the proponents of this last view.⁴⁶

It is safe to say that all of these views probably contain some element of truth. A position that aligns itself with Scripture is one in which the Christian understands that his primary responsibility is to be a personal follower of Christ and his ways within a given human sociocultural system. He then attempts to communicate the transforming message of the gospel to individuals, as opposed to societies or sociocultural systems. In addition to this, each Christian must address the way he views culture, what his relationship with it will be, and if he believes there is value in working for transformation.

A closer examination of the nature of culture gives us reason for caution. As Hiebert has observed:

Cultures are not morally neutral entities, and cultural change cannot be a matter of ethical indifference. . . . [There is] good in all cultures, because culture is created by humans and humans

46. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

in the image of God . . . but . . . [there is also] evil in all cultures and societies, for human sin is not only individual but also corporate and systemic.⁴⁷

From a Christian perspective, we must be aware of evil, wherever it exists. However, at the same time there is tremendous hope for any and every individual that desires a life-changing relationship with the Creator God. God sent his Son to die on the cross for every individual in every sociocultural system that has ever existed or ever will exist. Every individual has the possibility of being transformed by the power of the gospel message. While sociocultural systems exert great influence and pressure on individuals to conform, no one is trapped in the system. For all those who accept Jesus Christ, there is the possibility and hope of following a totally different way.

The Christian's perspective of his sociocultural system should change and be different from those around him. In this new condition, Jesus Christ calls us to be salt and light in the cosmos (worldly system). While the precise explanation for the Christian's job as salt and light is not clearly defined in Scripture, one possible function of salt and light is transformation. Our supreme example and model is Jesus Christ. He did not destroy the sociocultural system of his time; he challenged it with eternal values. He refused to get involved in Israel's politics (although many wanted him to become an earthly king) because, as he reiterated on many occasions, his business was about a spiritual kingdom not of this world. He did not become Israel's number one supporter and defender as opposed to other people groups, insisting that Israel was number one in the world. However, neither did Jesus belittle all the sociocultural norms, customs, and traditions of his birthplace. He condemned some things, but he participated in and even used other things to teach eternal truth. This does not mean that we should not express gratefulness to God for what we consider his blessings on us in a particular sociocultural system. As believers, we can and should be grateful to God at all times, whatever our sociocultural circumstances. Somehow or other, we have to find the same balance Jesus demonstrated in our interaction with our sociocultural systems.

47. Paul G. Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Trinity, 1999), 111.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I believe there are some significant observations that we can and should draw from our study of culture. The following four thoughts are suggestions for your consideration.

1. *Work to communicate effectively the gospel within your sociocultural context.*

As evangelical Christians, our primary mission in this world is to communicate the transforming message of the gospel to every individual in every sociocultural system. Note the word communicate. It is one thing simply to proclaim a message; it is quite another thing to communicate. If the God of the universe humbled himself, was born into a human family and sociocultural system, learned the local language and culture, and went to such lengths to communicate eternal truth to the human race, we can do no less. In order truly to communicate the message of the gospel in a meaningful way, we must understand the local sociocultural context in which we wish to communicate the message. Whether we happen to like or agree with everything associated with a particular culture is secondary to the greater need and responsibility to communicate effectively eternal truth. If I must immerse myself in a local culture in order to learn the language and culture, this immersion is more to use language and culture as a means to an end than it is to fall in love with a particular way of living. I may indeed find certain things about a particular culture that I like and enjoy, and there is nothing wrong with this as long as they do not violate Kingdom principles.

A more complex issue is the fact that many times we Christians separate ourselves from the world to the extent that we do not really understand how our target audience thinks or what is important to them. It makes no sense for me to travel halfway around the world but then refuse to cross the street to get to know non-Christians. In order truly to communicate with lost people, you and I must spend time with them. What are the felt needs of the people outside your local church? What about those that have no contact with Christians? In order to communicate the gospel to them effectively, we will have to communicate the never-changing message of the gospel in ways that are meaningful to our target audiences.

A significant issue is whether sociocultural systems form walls and therefore become prisons of disobedience for individuals that operate within the system. Many missiologists believe that society and culture form walls which, along with spiritual blindness, keep people from

coming to the knowledge of the Truth. Lingenfelter argues that “social environment exerts decisive pressure upon individuals, and that individuals resist this pressure at great personal and social cost.”⁴⁸ Hiebert agrees and argues that an uncritical approach tends to affirm social organizations and cultures as essentially good when they are human creations marked by sin. Barriers to the gospel exist in the minds of humans, but barriers can also be systemic within the broader sociocultural context. The only way to know if these exist where you work is to immerse yourself in the culture. That is precisely what Jesus did, and that is how he was able to condemn ideas that imprisoned people and blocked them from coming to the knowledge of the Truth.

Once again, this calls for balance. We cannot destroy or completely do away with sociocultural systems. Neither can we naively believe that everything within the system is redeemable. For that reason, Lingenfelter’s call for us to be agents of transformation within the system is merited and biblical. We must discover and warn others of sociocultural paradigms that attempt to destroy individuals’ free course to knowledge and truth. We must be aware of paradigms or walls that exist in any sociocultural system that block or thwart people from freely seeking truth and God. Once converted, we must be agents of transformation to live justly and righteously before God, with or without the support of, yet within, our existing sociocultural systems. This calls for much wisdom on the part of God’s people. It is a large part of our work in the extension of the Kingdom of God throughout the earth.

2. *Guard against syncretism.*

One of the most difficult problems for Christians around the world is syncretism. Syncretism is mixing local culture with the supracultural eternal message of the gospel. On several occasions I have heard missions professors refer to various forms of Christian syncretism in places such as Africa. It is a fact that people groups in some parts of the world have mixed their own ideas with Christianity, in effect producing a weakened version of the faith. In a turn of events, while studying in a Christian university in the United States, I sat across the room from an African sister. She began to refer to forms of North American Christian syncretism. Linking distinctly North American ideas and values with Christianity is ultimately no less syncretistic than animists that profess to follow Jesus and yet still visit the fetish. For that reason, it behooves all believers everywhere to make a healthy distinction and separation between Christianity and their sociocultural system. Extreme loyalty and

48. Lingenfelter, *Transforming*, 203.

patriotism to any given sociocultural system tends to cloud believers' perspectives of what is truly biblical Christianity. Just because we like a certain form of government or way of doing things in a particular sociocultural system does not necessarily make that way of living Christian or biblical. If not careful, Christians anywhere can mix their feelings of assurance of eternal absolute truth with their particular sociocultural ways of doing things and tend to insist, or at least take for granted, that everyone should live as they do. Aside from the ever-present problem of ethnocentrism (believing our sociocultural system is not only the best but the only logical form of operation for everyone in the world), if we add anything to Christianity that is not "thus saith the Word of God," we may be guilty of syncretism.

Specifically in light of these ideas concerning culture or sociocultural systems, in recent years one biblical metaphor of the Christian life stands out in my thinking—the Christian as a pilgrim. I find it interesting and significant that the Bible repeatedly compares the Christian life on earth to living temporarily in a foreign country. For Christians, neither our place of birth nor our present place of residence is our permanent home or our final destination. Consequently, we must live our lives accordingly. The Bible uses terms such as alien, ambassador, foreigner, pilgrim, stranger, traveler, and visitor to describe the Christian's stay on earth. Christians are pilgrims passing through. However, while the Scripture clearly teaches that we are pilgrims, it also clearly instructs us that we are not hermits. Christians are called to engage, not retreat from, human and earthly sociocultural systems.

While we must immerse ourselves in local cultures in order to communicate eternal truth effectively, we must be careful not to mix local wisdom with godly wisdom. This is probably most difficult when we stay in one culture all our lives, especially if the nation claims to be a Christian nation. We must pledge our allegiance first and foremost to God and heaven and treat our present location (as ambassadors of a heavenly kingdom) with diplomacy and respect, without betraying our loyalty to our eternal homeland. If we fall in love with a specific earthly and human sociocultural system, that love and allegiance will tend to distort and skew our perspective of eternal values. That is dangerous for the Christian pilgrim. Divided allegiances usually lead to varying forms of syncretism. Ultimately, in order to avoid this problem, we must follow the biblical exhortation to "fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (2 Corinthians 4:18).

3. *Allow for variations in Christians' worldviews.*

From a missiologistical perspective, the idea of worldview is usually closely identified with one's sociocultural system. For that reason, if we talk about culture, we are also talking about worldview. Missiologists define worldview as "the core assumptions, concepts and premises by which people interpret, understand and respond to the world around them,"⁴⁹ or "the culturally structured assumptions, values, and commitments underlying a people's perception of reality."⁵⁰ Hiebert understands worldview as the most encompassing framework of thought that relates various systems or paradigms to one another. It is "the fundamental givens with which people in a community think, not what they think about."⁵¹ It is so encompassing that most missiologists argue that one's worldview flows from one's culture, even that of Christians. I tend to agree.

It is difficult, if not naïve, to operate under the principle that all Christians hold to the same worldview. Obviously, this depends on how you define worldview. Even though true Christians from around the world share common values because of our acceptance of the absolutes of the Bible, individuals continue to function in and view the world from distinct cultural perspectives, even after conversion to Christianity. Truly born-again Spanish Christians tend to view world politics and economic issues in a way that is very different from that of most American believers. If they truly had exactly the same worldview, this would not be the case. Is either group less Christian because it views the world differently? I do not think so. Does one cease to be a Spaniard or an American after conversion? While the ideal of becoming a Christian pilgrim is always before us, the imprints of our sociocultural systems will continue to impact us until we get to heaven.

Obviously, this subject is highly complex with many facets to consider. But let it suffice to state here that after considering many of the ramifications, I believe there are strong grounds to argue that one's culture plays a significant part in one's worldview, even in the lives of individuals that have truly converted to Jesus Christ. This, of course, leaves room for the discussion of how various biblical principles may have different cultural applications.

We understand that culture impacts worldview in that it is the context in which worldviews are formed. Culture also provides the vehicle or language with which we express our worldviews. As culture is not

49. Doug Hayward, "Reflections on Worldview Studies" (Files of the author, 1996), 1.

50. Kraft, *Anthropology*, 52.

51. Hiebert, *Missiologistical*, 40.

completely neutral, neither are worldviews. So, as long as we remain in human flesh, we will have to allow for different worldview perspectives on certain issues. My point is not to name a specific issue but rather to state the fact that there will be differences. This is true because we come from different sociocultural systems and because we all continue to suffer the consequences of a fallen nature.

It will be glorious when we are in heaven and all God's children will have the benefit of God's perfect, eternal perspective! What things do we value now that will have little or no value then? May God help us all in the pursuit of the answer to that question, and then may he grant us grace to live our lives accordingly. Since we "see but a poor reflection ... [and only] know in part" (1 Corinthians 13:12), until we see Christ face to face, until we have perfect knowledge, we must expect and give grace for varying perspectives (obviously on nonessential issues). This is especially true among sincere brothers and sisters that form a part of the family of God from sociocultural systems unlike our own.

4. Unashamedly cling to the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ and the absolutes of the Scriptures, regardless of sociocultural values.

In a world increasingly impacted by globalization and postmodern thinking, one conclusion is imperative for evangelical Christians. We must unashamedly uphold the eternal truth of the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ and the universal absolutes of the Scriptures. Regardless of the time, regardless of the sociocultural values, there are eternal, absolute truths that supersede culture and, therefore, apply to every human being in every location. The functionalist idea of cultural relativity placed strains on the very idea of universal absolutes. A much more subtle yet equally daunting challenge for the idea of universal absolutes is a post-modern view that denies metanarratives. It is an enigma of our time that, while globalization is impacting the world by mass-producing not only products but also ideas, one of the most significant values emerging is individual truth and personal experience. One of the most important values of many modern sociocultural systems is tolerance of anything and everything, making the individual's perspective concerning universal absolutes and eternal truth the ultimate judge. From this viewpoint, any and every belief is acceptable in society, as long as everyone has freedom to decide for himself. The problem is that within this paradigm many people view healthy debate and persuasion as coercion and intolerance. Regardless of the label members of any sociocultural system give it, Christians must humbly cling to the eternal truth of the exclusiveness of

Jesus Christ as the one and only Savior of the human race and to the universal, supracultural absolutes clearly revealed in the Scriptures.

Christians are not called by God to adopt a monastic lifestyle. In fact, the challenge is to continue in the sociocultural system in which we were converted, in order to be salt and light, as Jesus exhorted. Some are called to cross cultures to communicate the gospel message of Jesus Christ. In all cultures, however, we will find traces of both good and evil because both are present. The ideas examined above can serve to give us balance in our approach to the sociocultural systems where we live and work.

From a missiological perspective, we understand that our mission is not to replace cultures completely, but the message we proclaim most certainly should impact and transform both individuals and their cultures. We must follow the biblical principle and mandate to “demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God . . . to take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:5). In order to do this, we must have at least some understanding of culture. May God give us wisdom in our pursuit of this understanding.

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Can God Handle Sin Sinlessly? Determinism and the Relationship between God and Evil

INTRODUCTION

*[Thou art] of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity.
Habakkuk 1:13*

I received my inspiration for writing this paper while listening to a systematic theology lecture given by Douglas Kelly of Reformed Theological Seminary. It was during this lecture that I heard a statement that shocked me and struck me as truly alarming. Kelly was quoting theologian William Still who claimed, "God handles sin sinlessly."¹ I had never heard or entertained such an idea before, and the concept immediately seemed problematic.

The relationship between God and evil has always been an elusive and mysterious one. In fact, many people are convinced that the most formidable arguments against the Christian faith are arguments from the problem of evil. Throughout the history of philosophy and Christian thought various attempts have been made at answering this challenge to the faith. After having read some of the more prominent and well respected Reformed theologians, like Herman Bavinck and Louis Berkhof, I must say that I am disturbed by their approach to this difficult subject.² If I have understood their teachings correctly, as well as those of Kelly, and even that of John Calvin, their argument leads logically to a relationship between God and evil that is both inconsistent and highly problematic. It is my purpose in this paper to show that, even though they would deny the claim, the logical conclusion which must be drawn

1. Quoted in lecture 10 of Douglas Kelly's Systematic Theology I class for Reformed Theological Seminary.

2. Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) taught as Professor of Theology at Kampen from 1883 to 1902, after which he succeeded Abraham Kuyper as the chair of Systematic Theology in the Free University of Amsterdam. He authored many books but is most famous for his great work, the *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (*The Doctrine of God*). Louis Berkhof (1873-1957) taught for thirty-eight years as professor at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Berkhof produced many books as well, his magnum opus being his *Systematic Theology*. (Bibliographical information will appear below when their works are cited.)

from their teachings is that God is the author of sin, the cause of evil. I will also show that this conclusion has devastating implications for their system as a whole. In fact, God cannot handle sin sinlessly.

REFORMED CLAIMS OF GOD'S DETERMINISM

In the following pages, I will provide statements by the above mentioned Reformed theologians and the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (WCF) that describe God's determination as it relates to his creation. This will enable the reader to have a more rounded understanding of Reformed theology—specifically regarding how Calvinism paints the picture of God's ordering of his creation.

The WCF states,

God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.³

In this Reformed confession we find the claim that “whatsoever comes to pass” only comes about because of the determining power of God's sovereign will. Bavinck agrees with the WCF, for he defines God's eternal decree as, “his eternal purpose whereby he has foreordained whatsoever comes to pass.”⁴ He elaborates on this definition by saying, “Apart from his knowledge and will nothing can ever come to pass.”⁵ Kelly, quoting Wolebius, defines the decree of God as “an internal act of the divine will by which he determines from eternity freely with absolute certainty those matters which shall happen in time.”⁶ Statements such as these elucidate the strong emphasis within Reformed theology on the determining nature of God's will. This will according to these definitions is first “eternal,” meaning that it transcends time; thus there is no chronological ordering in his decrees but only a logical ordering. Second, it reflects God's “purpose” and so establishes what, in fact, God foreordains to happen, not based on anything other than what he so chooses. Third, it

3. *Westminster Confession of Faith*, “Of God's Eternal Decree” (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian, 2001), 3:1, 28.

4. Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendriksen (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1997), 369.

5. *Ibid.*, 369.

6. Douglas Kelly, “Systematic Theology I,” course notebook (Charlotte: Reformed Theological Seminary, 2003), 75.

is done “freely and with absolute certainty”: there is no outside force compelling God to act in a certain fashion, and what he decides to foreordain must happen without the possibility that it will not come to pass.

Bavinck, describing God’s sovereignty, says God’s “will is decisive everywhere and always” and “is the final ground of all things and of their being what they are. Everything is derived from it.”⁷ One must understand that this decisiveness and certainty of what comes to pass as a result of God’s will also includes human actions, not just the movement of other created bodies within space and time. Nothing happens outside of God’s ordaining power.

This is the means by which God foreknows what will come about in the future: he foreknows because he determined everything to be as it will be. No course of events will be produced that surprises God because he is the one who has ordered their arrangement. Along with Bavinck, the other Reformed theologians describe God’s foreknowledge as a result of his determining all future events, including human actions. Thus, God does not foreknow these events as free human actions merely because he foresees them; rather, he ordains all events, including human actions, to their fruition.

One cannot help but wonder how this affects the human will in decision making. Accordingly, Bavinck refers to Augustine on this matter, showing that church father’s attempt at reconciling God’s foreknowledge and the freedom of the human will:

He [Augustine] is aware of the fact that whenever God foreknows an act, its fruition is certain; otherwise the entire structure of divine foreknowledge would collapse like a house of cards. “If foreknowledge does not foreknow things that will certainly happen; it is nothing at all.” Hence, he states that man’s will together with its entire nature and all its decisions is included in, established, and maintained by God’s foreknowledge, and is not destroyed by it.⁸

Berkhof discusses how the freedom of God’s deterministic will relates to his creatures’ actions:

God’s creatures . . . are the objects of His *voluntas libera*. God determines *voluntarily* what and whom He will create, and the times, places, and circumstances, of their lives. He marks out the path of all His rational creatures, determines their destiny,

7. Bavinck, 223.

8. Bavinck, 190.

and uses them for His purposes. And though He endows them with freedom, yet His will controls their actions.⁹

Berkhof specifically affirms that God's will "controls their actions." Thus he agrees that man's actions are wholly determined, by the will of God, to be what they will be. Calvin also understands this as the proper explanation for God's foreknowledge. He writes, "Since he [God] foresees future events only by reason of the fact that he decreed that they take place . . . it is clear that all things take place rather by his determination and bidding."¹⁰ Hence, if "all things take place" as the result of God's "determination and bidding," then logically there can be nothing that happens outside of this determination or God's plan for the universe.

Enquiring minds may wonder, "What is God's rationale behind why he determines things to be as they are?" By this question, I do not mean to sound blasphemous, as though I were challenging God for a reason. On the contrary, I am positing this question to the Reformed theologian. Bavinck offers his answer: "'God's good pleasure' is the final ground of all things. Beyond this we cannot go. The final answer to the question why a thing is and why it is as it is must ever remain: 'God willed it,' according to his absolute sovereignty."¹¹ Hence, the answer to the question is that there is no answer known. The reason God determines things to be as they are or will be is left as a mystery, for one cannot go any further in investigating the will of God. For the Calvinist, to ask the above question would be akin to asking God why he exists. God does not owe man an answer for what he, in his sovereignty, wills. This should be sufficient to shut the door in the face of any challenges to his determined arrangement. "Who art thou, O man?" is the common rejoinder.¹²

God's determining influence on his handiwork could not be more evident than what has been discussed in the preceding. The terminology used by the Reformed theologians depicts the absoluteness of God's control over everything, without exception. It is not unnatural to wonder, then, how this certainty of all events and actions as a result of God's determination relates to sin and evil. As the above quotations seem to

9. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 78.

10. John Calvin, ed. John T. McNeill, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 2:955.

11. Bavinck, 371.

12. Stephen M. Ashby refers to this appeal to Romans 9:20 by Calvinists, whenever their system is challenged, as their "default mode." The problem with the Calvinist using this "default mode" as a comeback is that the challenge is not made to God, as is the case in the passage in Romans 9, but it is posed to the Reformed system. No system of theology should be considered exempt from such a challenge, lest it become an idol.

imply, did God determine these two antitheses of his character and will just as he did everything else? Does "whatsoever comes to pass" really mean everything, including sin and evil? That would seem to be the natural reading of these Reformed writers. We must therefore examine Reformed statements concerning God's relationship to sin and evil.

REFORMED CLAIMS THAT GOD IS NOT THE AUTHOR OF SIN

Again, quoting from the *WCF*,

The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is, nor can be, the author or approver of sin.¹³

Clearly the *WCF* denies that God is the author of sin. It claims that God's providence extends to even "the first fall"; nevertheless, the confession attributes the origin of sin to God's creatures (angels and humans). Bavinck also wants to avoid the notion that God is the author of sin, as does each of the Reformed theologians presented in this discussion. They often indicate that sin can only result from a corrupt will but that God's will is perfect and without vice. The real will in God is the "will of 'God's good pleasure,' identical with God's being, immutable and efficacious."¹⁴ Sin and evil are the antitheses of God; they are completely contrary to his divine being. Thus, God could not have anything to do with being the cause of them.

It should be said emphatically that *God cannot sin*. He can only do that which is logically possible, and sinning would be logically impossible for God, though logically possible for humans. Bavinck addresses this while speaking of the relationship between God's will and his omnipotence in which he declares, "Scripture . . . clearly teaches that there are certain things which God cannot do. . . . He cannot deny himself. . . . If God could go astray, if he could sin, etc., this, indeed, would be an

13. *WCF*, "Of Providence," 5:4, 35-36.

14. Bavinck, 239.

indication of impotence."¹⁵ Berkhof expresses similar thoughts: "In general it may be said that God cannot will anything that is contrary to His nature, to His wisdom or love, to His righteousness or holiness."¹⁶ The fact that God cannot sin is not to be seen as a weakness on his part. Rather, the ability to sin is a sign of weakness on the part of man.

We queried above the *WCF* claim that God decrees "whatsoever comes to pass." Both the *WCF* and the Reformed theologians wish to exclude sin from the list of things God caused or authored, though they will admit that he authored everything else. Berkhof further distinguishes between the two, both of which are included in God's decree:

In the case of some things God decided, not merely that they would come to pass, but that He Himself would bring them to pass, either immediately, as in the work of creation, or through the mediation of secondary causes, which are continually energized by His power. He Himself assumes the responsibility for their coming to pass. There are other things, however, which God included in His decree and thereby rendered certain, but which He did not decide to effectuate Himself, as the sinful acts of His rational creatures. . . . God assumes no responsibility for these sinful acts whatsoever.¹⁷

Hence, God has nothing to do causally with the sinful actions of man. He did cause man. But, it is claimed, man caused sin. God allowed or permitted man to cause sin for a resulting greater good, God's glory. He did not will sin to happen simply as sin, but for the accomplishment of something greater he willed it. Bavinck offers more light:

Sin and punishment, considered in and by themselves, can never have been willed by God. They are in conflict with his nature. He is far removed from wickedness, and he doth not afflict willingly: he does not do it "from the heart." Hence, sin and punishment were willed by God in this sense only as means unto a different, better, and greater good.¹⁸

Upon reading the varied claims presented in the last two sections, I am amazed at the Calvinists' willingness to accept their obvious inconsistencies. To be fair, these Reformed theologians are not completely

15. Bavinck, 244.

16. Berkhof, 78.

17. *Ibid.*, 103.

18. Bavinck, 400-401.

happy with them either. Indeed, they recognize the problem of God's relationship to evil and sin. However, the resolution is typically sought in an appeal to mystery. One must swallow hard at the *prima facie* contradiction found in the affirmation that God ordains, determines, decrees, establishes, maintains, and controls "whatsoever comes to pass"—"everything" and "all things" including human actions—by his sovereign will, yet somehow man is responsible for sin. This seems to be nothing more than double-talk. Something is not settling right here, and this apparent contradiction requires further examination.

INCONSISTENCY AND CONTRADICTION IN THE REFORMED CLAIMS

Once again, we turn to the *WCF*, which concerning the free will of man stipulates, "God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that it is neither forced, nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil."¹⁹ But how does this harmonize with what we saw in the statements above concerning God's determination, human actions, sin and evil? Are they contradictory?

Bavinck expresses the problem:

A special difficulty, however, confronts us in the study of the doctrine of God's will; namely, the fact of evil, both "evil as guilt and evil as punishment." It may be ever so true that God controls evil; nevertheless, evil cannot be the object of God's will in the same sense and manner as is its opposite. Hence, with a view to these two entirely different and opposite objects, viz., good and evil, we must make a distinction in regard to the will of God.²⁰

Berkhof appeals to antinomy with reference to the relationship of God's will to sin. He claims, "Problems arise here which have never yet been solved and which are probably incapable of solution by man."²¹ When confronting the objection that the divine decree makes God the author of sin, he amazingly grants, "This, if true, would naturally be an insuperable objection, for God cannot be the author of sin."²² He continues by saying that the charge is not true, but that "the decree merely makes God the author of free moral beings, who are themselves the authors of sin."²³

19. *WCF*, "Of Free Will," 9:1, 51.

20. Bavinck, 236.

21. Berkhof, 78.

22. *Ibid.*, 107.

23. *Ibid.*, 108.

However, at the same time that Bavinck wants to make a distinction between good and evil as objects of God's will, he unequivocally maintains that, in fact, "God controls evil." He says this again in the following statement, "God does not will sin, he is far from iniquity, he forbids it and punishes it severely; but sin nevertheless exists and is controlled by him."²⁴ Bavinck cannot escape the idea that God's hands are directly on the reins of the chariot of evil, though he wants to deny God's causal relation to it. Similarly Kelly says, "God is specifically in control of evil,"²⁵ adding "specifically" to his description of the relationship.

In like manner, Berkhof states, "It should be borne in mind that God's will to permit sin carries certainty with it."²⁶ Berkhof emphasizes both the certainty of sin and God's control of it:

It is customary to speak of the decree of God respecting moral evil as permissive. By His decree God rendered the sinful actions of man infallibly certain. . . . It should be carefully noted, however, that this permissive decree does not imply a passive permission of something which is not under the control of the divine will. It is a decree which renders the future sinful act absolutely certain, but in which God determines (a) not to hinder the sinful self-determination of the finite will; and (b) to regulate and control the result of this sinful self-determination.²⁷

Thus, it is clear from Berkhof that the sinful acts of man are rendered "infallibly certain" and "absolutely certain." Although Berkhof says that this certainty does not interfere with man's "self-determination," he admits that it regulates and controls what is produced by it. The question persists, then: How is it that God has this control of evil, as stated by these theologians, without having some kind of causal relation to it as he does for everything else he controls?

In describing Calvin's position on predestination, Bavinck states, "Let not the reprobate view God's decree as the cause of his perdition, but let him rather look upon his own corrupt nature with respect to which he himself is guilty."²⁸ Here again, the move is made from God to man in finding a source for the results of sin in man's corrupt nature. But that cannot be the ultimate source. Bavinck notes: "The fall in Adam is the *nearest* cause of reprobation,"²⁹ not its primary cause. This is a subtle

24. Bavinck, 236.

25. Kelly, 127.

26. Berkhof, 79.

27. *Ibid.*, 105.

28. Bavinck, 362.

29. *Ibid.*, 362. Italics added.

shift in accountability: the fall cannot be the primary cause for Bavinck, but only the "nearest" cause, because he believes the fall is the result of the nature of man, which in turn is only a proximate cause. Since human nature is caused or created by God, it is God who then becomes the primary cause.

This conclusion is inevitable considering that man was created in an original state of righteousness. Prior to the fall, man's nature did not include an inclination or bent towards sinning. Consequently, for Adam's original nature, completely innocent and without blemish, to cause him to sin would require something from outside his nature to compel him. For Bavinck, then, the fall is only the "nearest" cause for reprobation; his determinism requires that a deeper cause than the fall must be found. He locates this in the will of God. Thus, in a roundabout way, Bavinck implicitly admits God's causal relation to sin, even though he tries to deny this relation by blaming man's nature. Nevertheless, this nature cannot be finally responsible for the fall since it is only a proximate cause and man was created in an original state of righteousness.

This also appears to be Calvin's sentiments. For Calvin, according to Bavinck's interpretation of his writing,

Sin may be the proximate cause of perdition, it is, nevertheless, not the deepest cause. . . . Foreknowledge and permission do not solve the problem, because God, foreseeing the fall, could have prevented it; accordingly, he voluntarily permitted the fall because it seemed good to him. Accordingly, the fall of Adam, sin in general, and all evil, were not only foreseen by God but in a certain sense were willed and determined by him. . . . The final and deepest cause of reprobation as well as of election is the will of God. . . . Accordingly, there must have been a reason, unknown to us, why God willed the fall: there is "a deeper divine decree" logically preceding the fall.³⁰

According to Bavinck, Calvin taught that the fall was not only foreseen by God but was "in a certain sense . . . willed and determined by him." The primary or "deepest" cause for Calvin is God himself, not man's nature.

Nor can it be otherwise for the Calvinist. Man's nature was originally perfect and cannot be blameworthy. Likewise, man's corrupt nature cannot be responsible for sin because sin must be present in order that the nature might become corrupt. Thus man was only a sufficient cause,

30. Bavinck, 363.

but God's decree was the efficient cause. God created man and decreed that he would fall, not based on man's free actions (refer to the discussion above concerning the Reformed view of God's foreknowledge) but based on God's hidden will. Calvin offers support for this claim. Speaking of God's decree of the fall, he reveals his loathing of the idea at first but then immediately offers an explanation: "The decree is dreadful indeed, I confess. Yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree."³¹ Then, seeking a further defense of this decree, Calvin states something startling when he suggests,

And it ought not to seem absurd for me to say that God not only foresaw the fall of the first man, and in him the ruin of his descendants, but also *meted it out in accordance with his own decision*. For as it pertains to his wisdom to foreknow everything that is to happen, so it pertains to his might to rule and *control everything by his hand*.³²

Calvin could not be clearer as he locates the origin of man's sinful nature in God. He clearly states that the fall of Adam was not merely permitted or allowed as a part of God's plan but that God "meted it out [i.e., the fall] in accordance with his own decision." Moreover, God's "hand" was in "control" of the whole act, as it is of "everything." He further states that "the first man fell because the Lord had judged it to be expedient; why he so judged is hidden from us."³³ Once again, the decision of the fall is said to rest in the judgment and determination of God; yet, in order to doctor the apparent inconsistency, the ever-convenient appeal is made to mystery.

Just then, however, when it would seem Calvin had established God as the decisive factor in the fall, grounded in the mysterious will of God, in the very same section of his writing he affirms,

Man falls according as God's providence ordains, but he falls by his own fault. Whence, then, comes that wickedness to man, that he should fall away from his God? . . . By his own evil intention, then, man corrupted the pure nature he had received from the Lord. . . . Accordingly, we should contemplate the evident cause of condemnation in the corrupt nature of humanity

31. Calvin, 2:955.

32. *Ibid.*, 2:955-56. Italics added.

33. *Ibid.*, 2:957.

. . . rather than seek a hidden and utterly incomprehensible cause in God's predestination.³⁴

This is nothing more than a repetition of the contradictory statements that have been cited by prominent Reformed theologians throughout this study. Calvin has located the determining factor of the fall in God's judgment and has appealed to what is "hidden" from us as an explanation. But only sentences later, he argues that though the fall was ordained by God's providence, it is man's fault alone; and at the same time he warns against an appeal to what is "hidden" and "incomprehensible" as an explanation for this event.

In fact, these are two contradictory ideas about God and his relation to his creation. It is inescapable under this kind of deterministic system to identify God as the cause of "whatsoever comes to pass" and yet somehow exclude him as the author of sin. Bavinck is guilty of this same contradiction when he writes concerning the difference between supra- and infralapsarianism:

On the one hand, supralapsarians as well as infralapsarians teach that God is not the Author of sin, but that the cause of sin lies in the will of man. Though, as the Omnipotent One, God predestined the fall, and though, as Supreme Ruler, he executes his plan even by means of sin; nevertheless, he remains holy and righteous; of his own accord man falls and sins: the guilt is his alone: "Man falls according to the appointment of divine providence, but he falls by his own fault. . . . Man's fall, sin, and the eternal punishment of many was not the object of 'bare knowledge' but of God's decree and foreordination. Hence, the difference does not concern the content of God's counsel. Both infra- and supralapsarianism deny the freedom of the will, reject the idea that faith is the cause of election and that sin is the cause of reprobation."³⁵

Here, Bavinck admits that God decreed and foreordained the fall and sin. Both positions (supra- and infralapsarianism) on the order of God's decrees reject sin as the cause of reprobation. Logically it follows that if sin is not the cause of reprobation, but rather God's decree, then God would have to cause the sinful nature in man. For the only way one could manifest this reprobate character would be by sinning. In other words, reprobation comes prior to sin, and not the other way around. Therefore,

34. *Ibid.*

35. Bavinck, 385.

God creates, originates, and authors beings that sin, not by their own self-determined desires, but by what God orders them to do by their nature, which he creates. By this understanding, God causes sinful human actions by creating humans in the state of reprobation. Though this sounds astonishing, Bavinck offers further support for his position:

Faith and good works, to be sure, are not the cause of election, but neither is sin the cause of reprobation; God's sovereign good pleasure is the cause of both; hence, in a certain sense, the decree of reprobation always precedes the decree to permit sin.³⁶

The cause of reprobation is not found in sin, but in "God's sovereign good pleasure" according to Bavinck. However, he is not consistent in putting the blame on God for this system. He admits that it is a curious arrangement and that we do not know God's reasons for determining it as such. He takes for granted that God's reasons were good, and thus does not think to challenge the deterministic system itself. Instead, as is usually the case when it comes to this point, an appeal is made to mystery because of the recognizable inconsistency. He says, "We are not able to say why God willed to make use of this means and not of another."³⁷

The problem in this causal chain is that God becomes the primary cause. If *a* implies *b*, and *b* implies *c*, then it logically follows that *a* implies *c*. This is an example of the basic principle of logic known as transitive relation.³⁸ Here *a* represents God, *b* represents reprobation, and *c* symbolizes sin. The result, which flows from this relation, yields an unavoidable conclusion. At the same time, it meshes with the statements above affirming the Reformed system of determinism. Bavinck unknowingly confirms the validity of this relation, and the connection could not be any clearer. He states, "Reformed theologians all agree that the entrance of sin and punishment was willed and determined by God."³⁹ Therefore, the source, author, originator, artificer, creator, and primary cause of sin is God, based on this Reformed deterministic system.

Finally, it should be noted that there are examples of recent Reformed theologians using language that identifies God as the cause of sin and evil. Respected Reformed theologian John Frame, during a lecture given at a seminar for Reformed Theological Seminary, asked, "Is God's will

36. *Ibid.*, 386.

37. Bavinck, 387.

38. Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University, 1995), 879.

39. Bavinck, 388.

the ultimate explanation for everything?" Frame then gave his own reply: "*He foreordains sinful acts.*"⁴⁰

C. S. LEWIS'S MODEL FOR ADDRESSING THE PROBLEMS
OF A DETERMINISTIC SYSTEM

C. S. Lewis, in his book *Miracles*, proposes a defeating challenge to the worldview known as Naturalism. Naturalism holds to the claim that only an eternal, totally uniform, self-explanatory, and *completely deterministic* natural order exists. What is relevant about Lewis's argument is his attack on the determinism of such a worldview. Because the system of Naturalism is characterized by a cause and effect arrangement in every respect regarding the relations between what exists within the system, Lewis locates a problem that is detrimental to its viability as a worldview:

Inside the total system every particular event (such as your sitting reading this book) happens because some other event has happened; in the long run, because the Total Event is happening. Each particular thing (such as this page) is what it is because other things are what they are; and so, eventually, because the whole system is what it is. All the things and events are so completely interlocked that no one of them can claim the slightest independence from the "the whole show." None of them exists "on its own" or "goes on of its own accord." . . . Thus no thoroughgoing Naturalist believes in free will; for free will would mean that human beings have the power of independent action, the power of doing something more or other than what was involved by the total series of events.⁴¹

Lewis thus explains the completely interlocking and interdependency of everything within the "Total Event" and how everything within the system only acts or is caused by something else within the system. Accordingly, free will is not a possibility because this would require something to act of "its own accord," as Lewis says. In other words, it would have to maintain a state of being or action that is independent of the system as a whole. But this just simply is not possible for Naturalism.

40. Quoted in the unpublished paper by Stephen M. Ashby titled "The Pastor's Proving Ground," presented on July 22, 2003, at the Theological Trends Seminar for the National Association of Free Will Baptists Convention in Tampa, Florida. Frame's lecture was presented on January 7, 2002, at a seminar for Reformed Theological Seminary in Charlotte, North Carolina.

41. C. S. Lewis, *Miracles* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 8.

Lewis goes on to show how this determinism inevitably destroys Naturalism. He explains,

If naturalism is true, every finite thing or event must be (in principle) explicable in terms of the Total System. . . . If Naturalism is to be accepted we have a right to demand that every single thing should be such that we see, in general, how it could be explained in terms of the Total System. If any one thing exists which is of such a kind that we see in advance the impossibility of ever giving it that kind of explanation, then Naturalism would be in ruins. If necessities of thought force us to allow to any one thing any degree of independence from the Total System—if any one thing makes good a claim to be on its own, to be something more than an expression of the character of Nature as a whole—then we have abandoned Naturalism.⁴²

Lewis then proceeds to delineate certain things that we accept as basic beliefs that cannot be explained by Naturalism's determinism: for example, the laws of logical inference. If one thing exists outside or transcends the system, Naturalism as a worldview must be rejected. This is the plight of a system that is grounded in determinism.

It is interesting to note Bavinck's description of God's decree as it relates to the universe. His description sounds remarkably similar to the determinism of Lewis's "interlocking" and "Total System" of Naturalism. According to Bavinck,

God's decree should not be exclusively described . . . as a straight line to indicate a relation merely of before and after, cause and effect, means and goal; but it should also be viewed as a system the several elements of which are coordinately related to one another. . . . As in an organism all the members are dependent upon one another and in a reciprocal manner determine one another, so also the universe is God's work of art, the several parts of which are organically related.⁴³

Though Bavinck shies away from the straightforward cause/effect description of his system, he clearly thinks of it in terms of an interdependent, reciprocally determining composition of all that is within the system. One only needs to recall his earlier affirmations of this determinism. He describes God's determining power over all the elements of this system as grounded in God's decree:

42. Lewis, *Miracles*, 17-18.

43. Bavinck, 394.

God's decree is all-comprehensive and therefore applies first of all to the universe as a whole. Everything exists and takes place in accordance with God's decree: this is true with respect to the inorganic as well as the organic realm. All things rest upon God's ordinances.⁴⁴

Bavinck makes this even clearer when speaking of God's providence. Concerning what kinds of things are included in the determined order of God's decree, he says, "Of great significance is the fact that all things are included in this decree: not only the determination of the eternal destiny of rational creatures (predestination), but the arrangement and ordination of all things *without any exception*."⁴⁵ Again, he offers an explanation of the created order that parallels the "Total System" and even affirms that secondary causes should not be mistaken for the real, primary cause of all events:

The harmony between the phenomena and happenings in the world of reality is a perfect reflex of the harmony in the sphere of God's ideas and decrees. Scripture often limits itself to a discussion of these "secondary causes" and Reformed theologians have accepted them in their full significance. But these secondary causes do not constitute the final and deepest cause. . . . An appeal to the nature or character of these things is not a satisfactory answer, for also that nature has been determined by God.⁴⁶

Although Bavinck provides us with a portrayal of the deterministic harmony that exists among God's physical, natural creatures, this determinism should not be limited to the physical sphere. The moral sphere should not be considered as somehow distinct and unaffected by this determinism. Berkhof makes this clear: "The decree includes whatsoever comes to pass in the world, whether it be in the physical or in the moral realm, whether it be good or evil."⁴⁷ Thus, again, we have an implicit admission that God determines the sinful and evil actions of man. Finally, Berkhof offers a denial of self-determined human actions by relegating them to secondary causes; this means that they are only instrumental in their action, logically making God the initiator. At the same time, Berkhof affirms the specificity of these human acts, meaning that

44. Bavinck, 374.

45. *Ibid.*, 374. Italics added.

46. *Ibid.*, 402-3.

47. Berkhof, 105.

whether they are good or evil they are determined with certainty. He states,

There is no absolute principle of self-activity in the creature, to which God simply joins His activity. In every instance the impulse to action and movement proceeds from God. . . . God causes everything in nature to work and to move in the direction of a pre-determined end. So God also enables and prompts His rational creatures, as second causes, to function, and that not merely by endowing them with energy in a general way, but by energizing them to certain specific acts.⁴⁸

As Lewis has dealt a deathblow to Naturalism by showing that there are certain things that exist outside of the "Total System," I would suggest that this line of argumentation becomes the Achilles' heel for the Reformed system of determinism as well. By showing that there is something that exists which remains unaccounted for by their system, that is, man's actual sins and the existence of evil, the system in its entirety collapses. It is a system designed to explain everything within itself, and yet there exists something that cannot be resolved by an appeal to anything else within the system.

Admittedly, for Lewis the key difference between Naturalism and Supernaturalism is that God does not exist in the former, while he does exist in the latter, outside of the natural order. Thus, technically speaking, God is not a part of the natural system. But this distinction is irrelevant for the present discussion. For Lewis, something outside of the natural order was evidence for the existence of the supernatural. However, the distinction between natural and supernatural has no bearing on the problem with determinism being examined here. It is also unimportant that God's creatures do not reciprocally determine him in the Reformed system, whereas in Naturalism everything determines everything in some form or another. The problem with determinism still stands whether God is viewed as part of the system or outside of it. Moreover, his determining action within the system makes him a part of the system, regardless of the natural/supernatural distinction and the lack of reciprocal determination. Thus, the Reformed view of determinism should be treated as a total system similar to Naturalism. It is evident that this is the methodology used by many Reformed theologians, as witnessed by the above descriptions of the created order as such.

48. *Ibid.*, 173.

The question at hand is, "Can the Reformed deterministic model of the created order explain all that exists within that order?" Based on determinism, the answer is, *absolutely not*. The only way the answer could be "yes" is if God were made to be the author of evil and thus determined all of the evil actions of man. But this is impossible, for God cannot be the cause of evil and yet be God. I have already discussed above the contradiction involved in associating God with evil. Proposing God as the author of sin would be a violation of the law of noncontradiction. God can no more be or cause evil than two plus two can equal five. Causing sin would be entirely antithetical to what is essential to his character as *the Good*. Reformed theologian Jonathan Edwards recognizes this in defending his deterministic doctrine against the accusation that it makes God the author of sin. He states,

If by the Author of Sin, be meant the Sinner, the Agent, or Actor of Sin, or the Doer of a wicked thing; so it would be a reproach and blasphemy, to suppose God to be the Author of Sin. In this sense, I utterly deny God to be the Author of Sin; rejecting such an imputation on the Most High, as what is infinitely to be abhorred.⁴⁹

Edwards continues his effort to show that the doctrine he had "laid down" does not result in making God the "Author of Sin." However, the logical implications of his determinism are not different from those of Bavinck, Berkhof, and Calvin. The Reformed view, as presented by the theologians analyzed above, is left wanting as an adequate picture of reality. It either makes God the author of sin and evil, which would mean the affirming of a logical contradiction, or it must give up its determinism and allow for *genuine* (as opposed to the inconsistent presentation above) self-determination of God's creatures as a more viable option. A libertarian conception of freedom for God's creatures (a view accepted by Lewis) is the only valid explanation for the existence of sin and evil in God's created order.

It must be understood that sin, or evil, is not a metaphysical reality. As Augustine explains, evil has no being; rather, it is the "privation of the

49. Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards with a Memoir by Sereno E. Dwight*, revised and corrected by Edward Hickman, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 1:76.

good."⁵⁰ The existence of sin and evil is not a question of being or substance; instead, it is a problem of volition, that is, a willful departure from doing what is good.⁵¹ Sin and evil could not exist without the existence of a volitional being. Thus, in order for sin and evil to exist within the Reformed deterministic system, God becomes the only volitional being who is able to will them.

Lewis maintains that Naturalism becomes a self-defeating worldview because in order to defend it, one would have to cease to be a Naturalist. The only way a Naturalist can argue for the viability of his system by logical reasoning is to step outside of it in order to escape the determinism. Otherwise, all the Naturalist's reasoning is also determined, like everything else in the system, and cannot be trusted. Likewise, I would argue that Calvinistic determinism is also self-defeating. For, the only way a Calvinist can rationally defend his position on the problem of evil is to cease to be a Calvinist and to propose a position supporting a libertarian conception of free will.⁵²

CONCLUSION

On the one hand, the Reformed theologian speaks of man in terms of God's providence as completely and totally controlled and determined, as if free will were impossible. On the other hand, he blames sin and evil on man as a result of his free will. This is theologically inconsistent and philosophically unsound. It is nothing more than the old attempt to "have one's cake and eat it too." It is absurd to say that God can realize

50. "What, after all, is anything we call evil except the privation of good? . . . evil is not a substance. . . [It] is an accident, i.e., a privation of that good which is called health. Thus, whatever defects there are in a soul are privations of a natural good." (*Enchiridion* 3:11, also see chapter four of the same and his *Confessions*, Book VII.)

51. Again, to quote Augustine on this matter: "I inquired then what villainy might be, but I found no substance, only the perversity of a will twisted away from you, God, the supreme substance, toward the depths—a will that throws away its life within and swells with vanity abroad" (*Confessions*, Book VII:16, 22).

52. It may be possible to argue that the moral dilemma is not the only problem for Calvinism; similar to what Lewis raises in his attack on Naturalism's determinism. But, the matter of reasoning may also be a problem for the Calvinist. As Lewis explains, reason entails genuine freedom of thought, and so argues that Naturalism cannot provide us grounds for trusting our reasoning (not even our arguments for Naturalism!). However, if our thoughts, as well as our actions, are determined by God, as Calvinism seems to suggest, then it would appear that we would have a problem trusting our reasoning capabilities. Sure, we believe God is good and would thus determine us to think rationally, but even this belief is based on an appeal to reason. Any appeal to reason in a deterministic system simply cannot be made unless one steps outside the system. Thus, how can the Calvinist trust his reasoning faculties?

such a state of affairs simply because he is sovereign. Lewis makes this clear when he writes,

If you choose to say "God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it," you have not succeeded in saying anything about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words "God can."⁵³

If a theological system gets it wrong from the very first scene of the drama, then what profit is there in trying to salvage whatever is left of its story? This holds true, particularly considering that each act thereafter is dependent upon how everything began in the first place. To the contrary, one must begin anew. Wipe the slate clean. "Go back to the drawing board," as they say, just as one needs to do after having gone wrong in an arithmetic problem. Adding more math signs and doing further calculation becomes futile at this point. Rather, the problem should be given a *new* approach, starting from the very beginning. Thus, the Calvinist, obligated to resolve this tension between the existence of both God and evil within his system of determinism, needs to resharpen his pencils.

Furthermore, the commonplace appeal to mystery within Calvinist circles as a solution to the problem is no more than an appeal to ignorance. Ignorance cannot and must not be our grounds or foundation for understanding God's divine plan for humanity. Who God is, his divine plan for humanity—these are essential foundations for our understanding of all we know about reality, including the very possibility of knowing anything at all. They influence all our beliefs concerning theology, metaphysics, epistemology, anthropology, and ethics. The entirety of Scripture, following the creation account, is itself rooted in that very account and in what took place at the beginning of time. The whole of redemptive history rests on a proper understanding of God's character. If we are mistaken on the character of God and his divine plan for his creatures, then the inferences we draw concerning everything else will lead us away from the best explanations. Consequently, the foundation for our belief system cannot be rooted in an ineffable mystery, within which the Calvinist grounds God's decrees concerning the fate of man and the existence of sin and evil. Rather, an alternative system must be chosen, one that has more to offer.

Without intending to sound presumptuous, I wish to make it clear that I am not merely proposing a challenge for the Calvinist to supply a

53. C. S. Lewis, *Problem of Pain* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 18.

rational solution for this critical predicament of Reformed theology. On the contrary, I am *professing* that Reformed theology is incapable of providing such a solution because of the blatant contradiction within, and the heretical implications of, its system. This problem for Reformed theology is irremediable. Berkhof admitted above that if it could be shown that his system makes God the author of sin, then this would be an “insuperable objection”—and indeed it is. The only way to avoid the contradiction is to reject determinism and opt for libertarian free will.⁵⁴ However, this would entail the discarding of Reformed theology because it is caught in the trap of its own determinism.

When judging between competing systems of thought on questions of ultimate reality, one must practice the principle of inference to the best explanation. This principle can be defined as “accepting a statement because it is the best available explanation of one’s evidence; deriving the conclusion that best explains one’s premises.”⁵⁵ It is not my intention at the present time to offer this alternative best explanation, although I do believe it is presently available. Rather, my purpose in this study is to point out the dire need for another way.

54. Some have proposed compatibilism, or soft determinism, as an alternative to hard determinism (the kind discussed in this paper). But, this is not a viable option. Compatibilism logically leads to hard determinism. Compatibilism is the view that man can be both free and determined at the same time. It is argued that man chooses what action to take based on his own strongest desire, while God influences this desire to his appointed end. Accordingly, it is believed that man wills what he, in fact, desires to perform freely, though what he wills is determined by God. However, this only pushes the problem of determinism one step back. All the compatibilist has done is to introduce an intermediary element in the causal chain, that is another domino in the series, that being man’s desires. These desires are determined to be what they are by God and are only proximate, not primary causes. Thus, we are still left with the problem that the only reason man desires to act in a certain way is that God has determined him to do so. This view of freedom excludes any notion of self-determination. Unless self-determination is upheld, man cannot be said to determine his sinful choices. Rather, God remains the primary agent. Therefore, compatibilism does not work, and the only remaining options are either hard determinism or libertarianism.

55. Honderich, 407.

Ron Callaway

The Omniscience of God and Open Theism

Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. (Psalm 139:16 KJV)

Your eyes saw me when I was an unborn fetus. All the days ordained for me were recorded in your scroll before one of them came into existence. (Psalm 139:16)¹

Chuck is driving west along a two-lane “Farm to Market” road in Texas. He has left Memphis where his life, as he once knew it, was over. He has money, but he has no direction. He has taken care of one last piece of unfinished business and now is stopped at a crossroads in West Texas.

He looks at a map. He walks to the center of the intersection (no need to worry about traffic). He looks north and then turns back to the east. He turns to the south and then to the west. Finally he looks back again toward the north. Which way will Chuck go?² Does God know the direction that Chuck will finally take or is he having to wait with us to find out Chuck’s decision?

Our Reformed brothers will quickly assure us that God indeed knows not only the direction that Chuck will take but also what he will do, when he will do it, and every other aspect and detail of the rest of Chuck’s life. They tell us that the reason the Lord knows Chuck’s future direction and destiny is because he is sovereign and has decreed all that will occur (without being or becoming the author or cause of evil). Therefore, by the fact of his sovereign predetermination of all things, it is only logical and natural that he also foreknows all aspects of everything in the universe.

As Free Will Baptists (along with many other evangelical³ Christians) we also affirm that God does know Chuck’s next move, and the next, and the next, and so on; that is, we believe, as do our Reformed brothers, that our Lord knows not only the direction that Chuck will take but also every

1. *New English Translation*, online translation and notes found at www.bible.org.

2. The idea for the illustration is based on the motion picture *Castaway*.

3. In this paper all I mean by the term “evangelical” is one who is truly born-again from above by the gracious work of the Holy Spirit, that is, a true Christian.

other aspect and detail of the rest of Chuck's life. However, we differ with our Calvinist brothers as to the reason God knows all the aspects of Chuck's life. While we affirm the complete sovereignty of God, we deny that his foreknowledge of Chuck's future decisions is a result of his foreordination of Chuck's choices.

We have not been told in the Bible exactly how our Lord knows the future so perfectly and precisely,⁴ but we are instructed as to the factuality of his omniscient foreknowledge. He is sovereign. In his sovereignty, he grants to every person a limited free will which the person exercises within the eternal sovereign plan of God for the past, present, and future. The biblical texts teach that God is always aware of all past, present, and future events. He is not like the idols of men who know nothing (Isaiah 41:21-24). Rather, his name is Yahweh, and he says: "My glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images. Behold, the former things are come to pass, and new things do I declare: before they spring forth I tell you of them" (Isaiah 42:8, 9).

Within recent years a different group of Christian scholars has arrived on the scene. As these men observe Chuck in the middle of this West Texas crossroads, they confidently tell us that we and our Reformed brothers are mistaken. God does not know which direction Chuck will take when he drives away from the crossroads. Yes, they say, God indeed is omniscient, but since Chuck has not yet made a decision as to his next future move, God is waiting with us to see what he will do. These scholars, often called open theists, are quick to tell us that since God knows all that is possible, and since he knows perfectly Chuck's past and present, he probably can predict what Chuck's decision will be for he knows all the probabilities. He knows Chuck very well. But since Chuck has been created with a free will, he may take an unexpected turn, and, for a brief moment, at least, what happens will not be what God thought Chuck would do.

Open theists affirm that God, who is sovereign, is limited in his knowledge of the free will choices of human beings to the extent that he cannot know their exact future deeds and thoughts. We are told that he cannot know the future because, until a future act happens, it does not exist. God knows all that does exist (and all that he has preordained for the future), but since a future decision made by a person with a real free will does not exist until it is made, God cannot know with certainty (in this case) which direction Chuck will take.

4. F. Leroy Forlines, *The Quest for Truth: Answering Life's Inescapable Questions* (Nashville: Randall House, 2001), 332-33.

Although we disagree with our Reformed brothers as to *how* God knows the future (i.e., the basis of his foreknowledge), we are in agreement with them as to the reality that God does exhaustively know the past, the present, and all the future (including all the possible turns that man could have taken in the past or might take in the future). But the open theists are bringing strange teachings to our ears. Their ideas are new and obviously different from what we have heard before. They are quick to assure us that their teaching is based on what the Bible really has to say about God and his creation. In fact, they tell us that their position is more biblical than those of the other two positions (Reformed and Arminian).⁵

Let us leave Chuck in the middle of the crossroads for a few minutes and consider our Lord's foreknowledge (1) as we believe it to be and (2) as it is being taught by open theists.

INTRODUCTION TO THE DEBATE

From its beginning, and from its biblical roots, Christianity has continually affirmed that God is omniscient (*omni* = all; *scientia* = knowledge): that is, he eternally possesses all knowledge—past, present, and future. Christians have also understood God's omniscience to mean that he knows all possibilities (contingents) that might or might not occur. Christians have believed that this understanding of God's omniscience is taught directly and clearly by the Word of God, Old and New Testaments. However, open theism or presentism, as it is sometimes called, sets before us a different version of the omniscience of God.

While proclaiming their belief in the omniscience of God, open theists teach that God does not and cannot know the future free acts of human beings. According to this teaching, God knows the past and the present perfectly, and he knows those areas of the future that he has sovereignly decreed (determined, foreordained). The open theist affirms the omniscience of God but denies that this omniscience includes God's exhaustive knowledge of future human free decisions because these acts or thoughts do not yet exist. Something that does not yet exist cannot be known by anyone until it happens.

Any new doctrinal teaching that appears within the boundaries of evangelical Christianity must expect a critical analysis by all those who believe that "the truth has set them free." In particular, a doctrine that directly touches the person and character of God will certainly come

5. Clark Pinnock et al., *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 9-10.

under quick scrutiny by Christians who love and try to obey the Word of God. The open theists, some of whom act surprised by the turmoil created by their teaching,⁶ have quickly found themselves “under fire” from many (and most) quarters of evangelical biblical scholarship.

The open theists insist that their position goes far beyond the issue of God’s foreknowledge. Rather than emphasizing the sovereignty of God, they focus on the love of God as he desires to interact with human beings. He is the God who puts himself at risk by being the God of the possible, “a God who can work with us to truly change what *might* have been into what *should* be.”⁷ It is their contention that classical theism does not present God as interacting with humans in such a manner. As we will see, open theists go to lengths to establish what they see as a vivid contrast between the loving, caring, interacting God of presentism and the rigid, unmovable God of classical theism.

However, it is with God’s foreknowledge of the future that this paper will deal. His foreknowledge of mankind’s actions and thoughts is seen by all involved in the debate as the key point of difference between open and classical theism. In a paper presented at the 2002 Evangelical Theological Society meeting in Colorado Springs, Bruce A. Ware responded to the question “Why draw the line at foreknowledge?” raised by Clark Pinnock in his work, *Most Moved Mover*. Ware writes:

First, it is precisely here, in open theism’s denial of exhaustive divine foreknowledge, that the open view has separated itself from classical Arminianism specifically and from all versions of classical theism generally.... The second reason Pinnock is right to raise the foreknowledge question is this: Open theism has, by this denial, entertained and promoted a reformulated understanding of God and God’s relationship to the world in ways that are massive in its implications both theologically and practically.... It seems to me that before we can think responsibly about whether open theism should rightly be conceived as within or without the bounds of evangelicalism, we must ponder as carefully and fully as we can just what open theism’s distinctive doctrine (i.e. its denial of exhaustive divine foreknowledge) leaves us with theologically and practically. After all, open theism is nothing without this doctrine.⁸

6. Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 12; and Clark H. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God’s Openness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), ix-xi.

7. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 18.

8. Bruce A. Ware, “Defining Evangelicalism’s Boundaries Theologically: Is Open Theism Evangelical?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (June 2002):194-95.

For this reason, in this analysis of open theism, the three principal views of God's foreknowledge will first be set forth for comparison. Then open theism's arguments for acceptance as a viable theological option will be evaluated from a biblical viewpoint. Afterwards, we will examine some of the advantages that proponents of open theism expound for their position and look at some of the repercussions of open theism in the ecclesiastical, evangelical community.

TWO "CLASSICAL" VIEWS CONCERNING THE FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Both Reformed theology and Reformation Arminian⁹ theology affirm what is usually known as the "classical" view of the foreknowledge of God. This viewpoint states that the biblical data teach that God exhaustively knows the future. He is not learning the future as it happens. He knows what will happen in the physical universe, in the spiritual universe, and in the life of every single individual that has or will ever come into existence. Both Calvinists and most Arminians affirm this biblical teaching because for God to be God, it is his nature to know all things. This belief concerning the Lord's omniscience (past, present, and future) has been the belief of the Christian Church since its beginning (as it was also the belief of the believers of Old Testament times). The belief in man's libertarian free will was also the belief of the early church until the time of Augustine and continues to be the belief of the majority of Christian believers outside the specifically Reformed traditions.¹⁰

9. The Free Will Baptist theological position is a classical Arminian position. By "classical" we mean a theology that is very similar in its belief to that of Jacob Arminius and the original Remonstrants. Today there are various terms used to express our theological stance. Robert Picirilli prefers to refer to our belief as "Reformation Arminianism." Stephen Ashby and J. Matthew Pinson speak of "Reformed Arminianism." F. Leroy Forlines uses "Classical Arminianism," and A. B. Brown writes of a "Modified Arminianism." There is no theological difference in the basic tenets of the writings of these men, only a preference for one term over the other. For an excellent historical summary of the roots of our Arminian heritage, see chapter one of Robert E. Picirilli's *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting views of Salvation: Calvinism & Arminianism* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002). For a Reformed Arminian view of perseverance, see Stephen Ashby's "A Reformed Arminian View," in *Four Views on Eternal Security*, ed. J. Matthew Pinson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

10. John Frame, *The Doctrine of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2002), 138: "Libertarianism has a long history in Christian theology. Most of the church fathers more or less held this position until Augustine, during the Pelagian controversy, called it into question." In footnote 12 (same page), he notes: "Those Calvinists who place great weight on antiquity and tradition will have to concede, therefore, that the oldest extracanonical traditions do not favor their position."

While this is the “classical” view of God’s foreknowledge, Arminians are said to believe in God’s “simple foreknowledge.” This is the affirmation that the foreknowledge of God—“uncomplicated by exceptions, additions, qualifications et cetera—is by itself wholly compatible with human freedom, divine agency and enhanced providential control.”¹¹

If we reserve “classical” to refer to the view (both for the Calvinist and the Arminian) that God exhaustively knows the future, and if we use “simple” foreknowledge to refer to the Arminian view, then we will use the term “Calvinist”¹² to refer to the Reformed view of God’s foreknowledge. As noted in the story of Chuck at the crossroads, the difference between the two “classic” viewpoints has to do with the *way* in which God knows the future, not *whether* he knows it.

The Calvinist’s view of foreknowledge is based upon God’s sovereign decrees. What God decreed to be is what will be. His sovereignty is such that any thought that he had in eternity “past” must, by necessity, come to be at the time he has so predetermined. This view rejects completely the libertarian free will of mankind, that is, that people are able to make free moral choices that might “go one way or the other” (i.e., decisions that are contingent).

The Reformed teaching is that all things are determined by God. The sovereign decisions of God preclude any libertarian freedom on the part of mankind. All mankind’s seemingly free will choices are responses to God’s choices (decrees) that have come first, and he does not base his foreknowledge on a future knowledge of mankind’s libertarian free choices. John Frame writes from the Reformed perspective:

Reformed theologians have often rejected the antecedent-consequent distinction, because of its association with libertarian freedom. But they have adopted a rather similar distinction, between God’s decretive and preceptive wills. God’s *decretive* will (or simply his “decree”) is synonymous with his foreordination.... It is his eternal purpose, by which he foreordains everything that comes to pass. God’s *preceptive* will is his valuations, particularly as revealed to us in his Word (his “precepts”). God’s decretive will cannot be successfully opposed; what God has decreed will certainly take place. It is possible, however, for creatures to disobey God’s preceptive will—and they often do so.

11. David Hunt, “The Simple-Foreknowledge View,” in *Divine Foreknowledge: Four Views*, ed. James K. Beilby and Paul R. Eddy (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001), 67.

12. Sometimes referred to as the Augustinian-Calvinist view.

This distinction is somewhat similar to the antecedent-consequent distinction, although the two distinctions tend to appear in different theological traditions. God's preceptive will, like the antecedent will, consists of his valuation of every possible and actual state of affairs. His decretive will, like the consequent will, determines what will actually happen. The difference between decretive and consequent is that the concept of a decretive will excludes libertarianism. God's decision as to what will actually happen is not based on his foreknowledge of the libertarian free choice of men.¹³

According to the Calvinist viewpoint, what appear to be free choices made by humans are really decisions that can only conform to what they desire, given their fallen state. They are not really making undetermined libertarian choices. The seemingly free choices that people make are compatible with God's decretive will. God's sovereignty remains intact, people make the choices they can, given their moral, spiritual condition, and the Calvinist declares them morally responsible for their own sins. Of course, this point moves us beyond the point of the exhaustive foreknowledge of God, but it is this viewpoint that the open theist attacks more than the Arminian view of "simple foreknowledge."

The Free Will Baptist observes Chuck standing in the crossroads, and, while he might venture a guess as to which direction the man may go (by probably eliminating the direction from where he came, and perhaps from another piece of data also known to him), he is absolutely certain that God does know which direction he will take. God may be bringing some influence on Chuck's life that will cause him to respond in one direction or another, and although not probable it is also possible that God could directly force Chuck to go in one certain direction. However, regardless of the final choice that Chuck may make, God simply knows it already because he is God, and God knows all things completely. His knowledge of the future is "certain" but is not causative of the free acts of mankind. "All things that occur are certainly foreknown by God. Every happening is certain and known as such by God from all eternity."¹⁴

As noted above, the Arminian viewpoint does recognize that God could become the direct cause in Chuck's decision if he so desired. After all, God is sovereign. To leave Chuck again, we can think of

13. John Frame, *No Other God: A Response to Open Theism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2001), 109.

14. For an excellent discussion of the terms *certainty*, *contingency*, and *necessity*, see Picirilli, 36-43.

Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, as he stands before two roads, one that will lead him against Rabbah of the Ammonites and the other against Jerusalem (Ezekiel 21:18-23). In the king's right hand are found the pagan signs for divination indicating an attack on Jerusalem. At the same time, God was foretelling the punishment that was to fall upon a rebellious Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar's "free" decision resulted in God's will being done. While not condoning the use of the pagan divination practices, God worked through them to assure the direction of the Babylonian attack. He was the direct cause of the action taken.

The "simple" view of God's foreknowledge does not expound a particular theory of how God exhaustively knows the past, present, and future (as well as all possible contingents). While a detailed examination of God and time is beyond the scope of this paper, we can know from the Bible that God himself is timeless. Moses sang: "Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Psalm 90:20). Of the Father and of the Lamb it is written: "I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last" (Revelation 1:8; 4:8; 22:13).

Wayne Grudem writes:

The fact that God never began to exist can...be concluded from the fact that God created all things, and that he himself is an immaterial spirit. Before God made the universe, there was no matter, but then he created all things.... Before God created the universe, there was no "time," at least not in the sense of a succession of moments one after another. Therefore, when God created the universe, he also created time. When God began to create the universe, time began, and there began to be a succession of moments and events one after another. But before there was a universe, and before there was time, God always existed, without beginning, and without being influenced by time.... The fact that God always existed before there was any time [indicates] to us that God's own being does not have a succession of moments or any progress from one state of existence to another.¹⁵

Grudem explains that although in some sense all time is "present" with God in his consciousness, he does see all events of time equally vividly as well as seeing them at their point in time.¹⁶

15. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994), 169.

16. *Ibid.*, 171.

Others do not wish to speak of an eternal present (or “eternal now”) of God, as in the sense that all past, present, and future acts are equally present before him to the extent that he is “timeless.” If time is viewed not as a succession of events (which necessitates a beginning of time) but rather as the “possibility of now and then,” then time can be viewed as the possibility of a succession of events that may or may not be present. In this view, God remains the God of History, participating in time but at the same time being the eternal Lord.¹⁷

Regardless of how a proponent of simple foreknowledge may try to explain how God knows, all are in agreement that God is not learning the future as it develops. He knows the future, at any time, as vividly as he knows the past and the present.

OPEN THEISM AND THE TEACHING OF THE BIBLE

There are three men whose writings seem to have made them the principal “spokesmen” for open theism. Gregory A. Boyd, Clark H. Pinnock, and John Sanders are usually considered to be the leaders of this movement, although there are others whose writings are also well-known in this area.¹⁸

While there is a very clear consensus concerning the basic tenets of open theism among all these writers, there are also some differences of opinion concerning various aspects of the teachings. Some of these differences will be noted in this paper, but, by and large, the paper will focus on the main teaching of these three men, taken as representative of the view.

In this section, I have chosen to focus on two aspects of open theism’s position: (1) Why was the classical view of God’s foreknowledge questioned? (2) What biblical argument can be mounted in favor of this new position? A growing body of books and papers can be consulted to examine other important aspects of this subject.¹⁹

17. Forlines, 67-70.

18. Among other important open theist writers are David Basinger, William Hasker, and Richard Rice.

19. Among other important aspects of open theism’s teaching are: its hermeneutical approach to the Scriptures; its view of the inerrancy, inspiration, and authority of the Scriptures; and its view of God’s future knowledge of those who will be saved or lost.

Why Did Open Theists Begin to Question the "Classical" View of God's Foreknowledge?

What in the classical explanation of God's foreknowledge failed to convince open theists? When did they begin to see these supposed weaknesses with the acknowledged and accepted view of the church concerning the Lord's foreknowledge?

Why did these men choose the path they now openly advocate? I readily admit that one cannot know all the reasons behind certain decisions or beliefs, and I do not profess to have found *the* real reason these men have become open theists. I do see, however, what seems to be a very real possibility behind some of their arguments for open theism.

In his work *God of the Possible*, Boyd tells us that he has been considering the question of God who "changes His mind" for seventeen years. After three years of study he became convinced "that the customary view—that the future is exhaustively settled²⁰ and that God knows it as such—was mistaken."²¹ From there he moved toward what is now known as open theism or presentism.

In chapter three of the same book, Boyd writes of the practical difference that the belief in open theism will make in the life of the believer. Among the practical differences he speaks of is that of confronting the problem of evil (theodicy). Boyd is the author of *Letters from a Skeptic*, a book that arose from letters that he and his agnostic father wrote to each other concerning apologetic issues.²² One question concerned why God would allow Adolf Hitler to be born, knowing that he would later kill millions of Jews. In a later work Boyd reflected on the answer he gave his father: "The only response I could offer then, and the only response I continue to offer now, is that this was not foreknown as a certainty at the time God created Hitler."²³

In a more recent work, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, Boyd expounds a theodicy ("trinitarian warfare worldview") that explains the presence

20. That the future is "settled" seems to be the favorite or "settled" expression that Boyd uses continually to express the "classical" view of God's knowledge of future events. While "settled" could mean the same as "certain," it usually carries a different connotation, i.e., that which is settled is that which is determined or caused. "Settled" is not the word that Reformation Arminian theology uses to speak of our Lord's foreknowledge of the future. The future is certain, not "settled."

21. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 8.

22. Gregory A. Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles with His Father's Questions about Christianity* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1994).

23. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 98.

of evil in the world predicated upon the basis of open theism.²⁴ He rejects the “classical” Christian worldview which, he believes, makes God responsible for the evil in the world and for doing nothing to stop some of it. His critique has to do with how a good God could allow such evil in the world in order to carry out some sort of good providential purpose.²⁵

Sanders begins his work *The God Who Risks* with examples of the problem of evil in the world. His view is that the traditional biblical view of God’s providential care is not adequate to answer the question of evil in the world. His work is an attempt to set forth a doctrine of divine providence in which God is a “risk taker.” He states that his work is not about the problem of evil but rather about a personal God who enters into a give-and-take relationship with human beings.²⁶

Because open theists see their principal battle as one against the Calvinistic viewpoint of God’s foreknowledge (i.e., sovereign determinism), they often ascribe to this position extremes that do not coincide with Reformed theology. Pinnock, in a critique of the criticisms brought against his position, writes:

It astonishes me that people can defend the “glory” of God so vehemently when that glory includes God’s sovereign authorship of every rape and murder, his closing down the future to any meaningful creaturely contribution, and his holding people accountable for deeds he predestined them to do and they could not but do.²⁷

In trying to think about the “why” question, it is difficult for me to escape, at least in part, the idea that the open theists are seeking an answer for our postmodern society that will satisfy mankind’s questions concerning the presence of evil in the world. All those who write for presentism state that the problem of evil was not the primary motivating factor in their arrival at their position, but all their works (except the more philosophical arguments²⁸) seem to return to answers that seek to explain God and man in terms of their relationship to the existence of evil in the universe.

24. Gregory A. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil: Constructing a Trinitarian Warfare Theodicy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2001).

25. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 11-14.

26. John Sanders, *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998), 14.

27. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 16.

28. Even William Hasker in his “A Philosophical Perspective” in *The Openness of God* (149, 152) brings into partial play the question of evil.

I believe that we all agree that God is not the cause of evil. However, the open theist's affirmation that God cannot know for sure what evil will occur and at times is unable to prevent such evil is unacceptable.²⁹ It is unacceptable as an answer because open theism's biblical arguments do not support their conclusions. We turn now to those arguments.

The Biblical Arguments of Open Theism.

Before looking at some of the principal "biblical" arguments of open theism, I believe it will help to understand why presentism (with its Arminian "roots") rejects the Arminian view of "simple foreknowledge." One of the basic arguments of open theism against "classical" foreknowledge is that the idea of God's having exhaustive future knowledge is a Hellenistic philosophical insertion that entered into Christian thought with the early church fathers. The open theist claims to be reading the biblical texts as they truly are meant to be understood. "Classical" theologians understand those texts, for example, that speak of God's changing his mind or repenting to be presenting an unchangeable God by using human manners of expression to express aspects of his being or action without contradicting his immutability.

Presentism claims its view is correct in reading these texts. When the Bible says the Lord "changed his mind," that is exactly what it means. Either God realized that he made a mistake or had to reevaluate the situation, so he repented or changed his mind. The open theist challenges the classical viewpoint's principle of interpretation, charging that it comes from a mixture of biblical interpretation with Hellenistic philosophy.

The view of God worked out in the early church, the "biblical-classical synthesis," has become so commonplace that even today most conservative theologians simply assume that it is *the* correct scriptural concept of God and thus any other alleged

29. Boyd, *Satan*, 16: "The warfare worldview is not without difficulties. Foremost among these is the question of how this view can be reconciled with the biblical teaching that God is the all-powerful Creator of the world. Since the warfare worldview denies that God always has a specific reason for allowing evil deeds to occur, must it not deny that God is able to prevent events he wishes would not take place? We may state the dilemma as follows: It seems we must either believe that God does not prevent certain events because he chooses not to or because he is unable to. The warfare worldview denies that God always chooses not to intervene, for this would require the belief that there is a specific divine purpose behind everything. Hence the warfare worldview must accept that at least sometimes God is unable to prevent them. But how then can we continue to affirm that God is all-powerful?" (emphasis in this quotation and in all hereafter in original)

biblical understanding of God (such as the one we are proposing) must be rejected. The classical view is so taken for granted that it functions as a preunderstanding that rules out certain interpretations of Scripture that do not “fit” with the conception of what is “appropriate” for God to be like, as derived from Greek metaphysics.³⁰

However, the classical theologian is not the only one with presuppositions. The open theist also approaches the Bible with a certain presupposition concerning the free will of man.³¹ Presentism argues that if the Lord already knows all of our thoughts and feelings and actions, then we are not really free beings. What difference do our prayers make? Do our ideas really count for anything? For the open theist, real human freedom is only possible if the future is not known by God, that is, if it is “open.” Ware summarizes this philosophical presupposition of open theists:

If God *knows* all that will occur in the future, then we are not free to do differently than what God knows, and hence we are not truly free. Furthermore, since God can know only what is real, he cannot by definition know the future—because it has not as yet happened and so is not real.³²

Open theists reject the “simple” view of God’s foreknowledge, claiming that there is a logical incompatibility between God’s exhaustive foreknowledge and the free will of man.³³ An open theist’s explanation (and thus, his rejection) of God’s simple foreknowledge of which direction Chuck will take upon leaving the crossroads might be something like the following:

- It is true that Chuck will soon decide to leave the crossroads and travel in one direction.
- It is not possible for God, at any time, to believe something that is false. He must always believe what is true.

30. John Sanders, “Historical Considerations,” in *The Openness of God* (60). See this entire chapter by Sanders (59-100) to understand open theism’s rationale for charging classical theology with constructing a synthesis of biblical teaching and Hellenistic philosophy. Similar open theist arguments are also found in Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 65-79.

31. It should be noted that all open theists are Arminian (or “neo-Arminian”). However, most Arminians are not open theists.

32. Bruce A. Ware, *God’s Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), 19.

33. See William Hasker’s argument that simple foreknowledge and human freedom are not logically compatible in “A Philosophical Perspective” in *The Openness of God*, 147-50. See also Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 200-206.

- God has always believed that Chuck will move in the direction that he will eventually take.
- If God eternally has believed that this certain event is true, no one can ever make it happen that God would believe anything different (the past cannot be changed).
- For this reason, Chuck does not have the power to go in any direction except in the one which God has always believed that he would go.
- It is not possible for God to have believed that Chuck would travel in one certain direction and then for Chuck not to go in said direction.
- Therefore, Chuck has no freedom or power to travel other than in the direction that he will travel. So Chuck's free will choice is not really a free will choice at all.³⁴

William Hasker rejects the simple foreknowledge argument that God's foreknowledge does not cause the future decision to be made. He says that it does not really help our understanding of what happens in the present because his simple foreknowledge cannot be used in any providential way to help us.³⁵

The above open theistic argument against simple foreknowledge fails in what it assumes. That is, it assumes that the fact that God knows what Chuck will choose is incompatible with Chuck's being free to choose. If Chuck chooses to go east, for example, God knows that in advance and therefore he cannot choose any other direction. This logical (and fallacious) assumption winds up—like Calvinism—making God's knowledge of the future the factor that determines the event.

Against the open theist's cause for rejection of the simple model of God's foreknowledge, Robert Picirilli writes:

Once we speak of any future event (or of the future in general) as "foreknown," and then say that even God cannot change it because this would make his foreknowledge wrong, *we have created the logical problem with our way of expressing it*. We have turned foreknowledge on its head. When we assume, in formulating an illustration, that the future will be a certain way, then we have logically put ourselves "on the other side" of that future. In such a case, then, of course what will be "cannot" be otherwise. Even God cannot make a fact of history a non-fact.

But no fact of *future* history is fixed by the knowledge of it: everything that God knows about the future, he knows only

34. Hasker, 148.

35. *Ibid.*, 149.

because it will happen, not vice-versa. It would be utterly foolish to say, for example, "Since the Holocaust happened, it cannot *not* have happened!" It is precisely the same "logic" to say, assuming by foreknowledge a perspective on the other side of a future event, that the event must occur to keep foreknowledge from being wrong. The error in that is self-evident.³⁶

Picirilli continues with his critique of the position of Sanders (the same basic position as that of Hasker):

On the broadest level, Sanders's objection is that once God decided to create the world as it is, knowing every event in its history in advance, the world cannot be other than it is and the events of its history cannot be other than they are. The answer is the same: God determined to create a world with true contingencies and foreknows it as a world with contingencies. If the world operates with human beings who make real, libertarian choices between alternatives, then that is both the world God decided to create and *the world which he foreknows*.

If, then, our formulation of such issues seems to tie us in logical knots, it is our formulation that does it, not the real world itself. In the real world, knowledge of the facts (even future facts) flows logically from the facts. If the eternal God is aware of facts before they become facts, the *knowledge* still bears the same relationship to the *facts known*. To put this simply, he knows what I will do (and what he will do in response) *only if I do it*.³⁷

The simple viewpoint of God's foreknowledge does not equate "certain" with "settled" in the sense that the future is determined by God (in the case of free will choices) before these choices are made. The future is certain. It will be what it will be, which, by the way, is the exact same outcome that would exist even if open theism were to be true. Even with God not knowing man's future free choices, the future would be what it would be. I believe that open theism's acceptance of Calvinism's definition of God's sovereign predetermination of all things in the universe over against the traditional and classical viewpoint of God's "simple foreknowledge" has led its proponents to a position that removes from God those powers and knowledge that the Bible clearly ascribes to him.

36. Robert E. Picirilli, "An Arminian Response to John Sanders," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44 (September 2001):473.

37. *Ibid.*, 474.

It is clear that one of the basic tenets of open theism is that the Scriptures do not teach “that the future is *exhaustively* settled. We hold that God determines (and thus foreknows as settled) *some*, but not *all*, of the future.”³⁸ According to presentism, God exhaustively knows the past and the present, and he exhaustively knows all of the future that he himself has preordained. However, he does not completely know the future acts and thoughts of mankind. He does, however, have perfect knowledge of all future probabilities.

When the improbable happens, as sometimes is the case with free agents, God genuinely says he “thought” or “expected” the more probable would happen. Because God is infinitely intelligent, we cannot conceive of God being altogether shocked, as though he did not perfectly anticipate and prepare for this very improbability (as much as if it was a certainty from all eternity). But *relative to the probabilities of the situation*, the outcome was surprising (*viz.* improbable).³⁹

Open theism has a broad impact on theology and biblical studies. Three areas in particular deserve special attention.

1. Open theism bases its teaching on a reading of scriptural passages in a “straightforward manner,” that is, what the text says about what God feels is what the text means. The following biblical passages are cited by open theists in their attempt to demonstrate their teaching that God is “open” to the future.⁴⁰

Isaiah 40-48

Through Isaiah the prophet, Yahweh speaks to Israel concerning its idolatry and the future liberation of Israel from captivity. He calls upon Israel to compare him with the pagan idols. In particular open theism calls attention to Isaiah 46:9-10 and 48:3-5. These two passages are seemingly chosen because of their strong statements concerning the foreknowledge of God.

38. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 23.

39. Gregory A. Boyd, “Christian Love and Academic Dialogue: A Reply to Bruce Ware,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (June 2002):237.

40. Among other biblical passages cited by open theists to demonstrate their teaching are:

Genesis 3	Exodus 32-34	1 Samuel 15:35
Genesis 6	Numbers 11:1-2	1 Samuel 23:10-13
Genesis 9:14-16	Judges 10:12-16	Jonah 4:2
Genesis 18:22-33	Jeremiah 3:7, 9	Ezekiel 12:3

Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is no one else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure. (Isaiah 46:9-10)

I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I shewed them; I did them suddenly, and they came to pass. Because I knew that thou art obstinate, and thy neck is an iron sinew, and thy brow brass; I have even from the beginning declared it to thee; before it came to pass I shewed it thee: lest thou shouldest say, mine idol hath done them, and my graven image, and my molten image, hath commanded them. (Isaiah 48:3-5)

Classical theology has understood that these passages (as well as the entire scope of Isaiah 40-48) speak (and teach) of the sovereign calling and action of Yahweh (to call Cyrus). Tied up with that is his divine foreknowledge of all future events.

Open theists understand that to some extent the passage is talking about what God has determined to do in the future: "My counsel (purpose) shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure (intention)." But they deny that the passages are all-encompassing truth that teach God's future knowledge of Israel (and the rest of the world). God is only saying that the idols and images do not know anything and have done nothing. The Lord is only showing to Israel what he is doing so that the nation will not claim that their idols have brought about the deliverance. It was not that God had information about what might happen, but rather it was his determination to bring about his will and to tell Israel about it. Boyd writes:

Passages such as these beautifully demonstrate that the future is settled to whatever extent the sovereign Creator decides to settle it. God is not at the mercy of chance or free will.... Open theists...maintain that God can and does predetermine and foreknow *whatever he wants to* about the future. Indeed, God is so confident in his sovereignty, we hold, he does not need to micromanage everything. He could if he wanted to, but this would demean his sovereignty. So he chooses to leave some of the future open to possibilities, allowing them to be resolved by the decisions of free agents. It takes a greater God to steer a world populated with free agents than it does to steer a world of preprogrammed automatons.⁴¹

41. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 31.

Free Will Baptists are in agreement with Boyd's last two sentences, but not with open theism's assertion that God does not know (and cannot know) what these decisions of free agents will be. These Isaiah passages do set forth Yahweh's own claim to be the only God, doing what he will do in the future and also knowing the future. He shows or declares what he will do and what other free agents will do. "That which he declares (and hence foreknows) will happen in the future includes *innumerable future actualities involving free creaturely decisions and actions not yet to take place.*"⁴²

Psalm 139

Psalm 139:1-18, 23-24 has long been a source of delight and comfort to Christians troubled with their own sins and failures. God's intimate knowledge of his children (not to mention the entire human race) encourages Christians in all lands with thoughts of his greatness and with the need to guard holiness in their lives. Verse 16 states: "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them." The term translated *members* (*days* in other versions) is *yamim*, the plural of the normal Hebrew word for "day." Therefore, God know all the *days* of our lives.

Open theists often seem to indicate that such biblical passages could just as easily be understood to support their view. Boyd states:

Even if this verse said that the exact length of our lives was settled before we were born, it wouldn't follow that *everything* about our future was settled before we were born, and certainly not that it was settled from all eternity. God can at *some point* predetermine and/or foreknow *some* things about the future without *eternally* predetermining and/or foreknowing *everything* about the future. We must be careful not to outrun what Scripture teaches.⁴³

While we will be quick to recognize that David is writing a song or poem and that we must understand what type of literature it is, the literary type used does not diminish the truth taught. In verses 1-3 it is obvious that David believes Yahweh has present knowledge of him and of his thoughts. Additionally, verse 4 indicates that the Lord also has future knowledge of David's next words. As David writes his meditation on

42. Bruce A. Ware, "Rejoinder to Replies by Clark H. Pinnock, John Sanders, and Gregory A. Boyd," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 45 (June 2002):254.

43. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 41.

God's knowledge, he is overwhelmed by the greatness of what God knows and of his presence. Whether the term in verse 16 is translated "members" or "days," the clear biblical teaching is that God knew them before they existed.

Open theism speaks much of the changing of God's mind. Two passages used to demonstrate their view that God does not exhaustively know the future are Genesis 22:1-15 and 2 Kings 20:1-11.

Genesis 22:1-15

Genesis 22 is the well-known and beloved story of Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac in order to obey the command of God. The first verse of the passage tells us that God was "testing" ("tempt" KJV) Abraham. In verse 12, the Angel of Yahweh tells Abraham not to harm the boy, "for now I know that thou fearest God."

Open theism, against classical Christian belief, says that the purpose for the test was for God to "know" or to find out if Abraham really did fear him. While Abraham probably benefited from the experience, God needed to know whether Abraham really feared him. He apparently thought that he did, but he needed to be sure. "If one presupposes that God already 'knew' the results of the test beforehand, then the text is at least worded poorly and at most simply false."⁴⁴

Classical Christianity has understood the use of "now I know," spoken by God in this passage, to be an anthropomorphic manner of God's expressing what he already knew concerning Abraham's faith. Rather than being a test for the Lord, it was Abraham himself who was "justified by his works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar" (James 2:21; cf. Hebrews 11:17; Genesis 22:5).

Open theists claim that they are the ones who are reading the text correctly by denying that this is an anthropomorphism. God needed to know, so he put Abraham to a genuine test. But the classical theologian asks, "Then what about Genesis 3:9-13 in which God asks Adam a series of questions? Was God also looking for information in this case as well?"

2 Kings 20:1-11

When he was some 39 years old, King Hezekiah of Judah received a prophetic word from Yahweh (via Isaiah) that he should "put his house in order," for he was soon to die. In verses 2-3, Hezekiah, weeping, prays and begs God to grant him more life. In verse 5, Yahweh grants Hezekiah 15 more years. Isaiah gives him God's answer and instructs him

44. Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, 52.

medically and spiritually as to what he should do. Hezekiah obeys, and he is given 15 more years to live.

Here, we are told, is a clear example of God's changing his mind after listening to the prayer of one of his people. For open theism, the future is open. Pinnock writes:

Thus the time of the king's death was shifted to a date more remote in time. This shows that the exact time of death was not forever settled in God's mind but was something flexible, depending on the circumstances. . . . The future is not something fixed in God's mind in meticulous detail, some things can go one way or another. The future is still in the making and open to as yet unrealized possibilities.⁴⁵

Of course, Reformation Arminianism, along with Reformed theology, notes that in 2 Kings 20:1 Yahweh seems very emphatic as to the fact that Hezekiah's sickness was going to result in his death (a future event at the time which God knew). After granting Hezekiah's petition for more life, the Lord tells him, "I will add unto thy days fifteen years" (v. 6a). That is not moving his death to a date "more remote in time." Fifteen years more is the amount of time that Hezekiah lived (another future fact known by God fifteen years before it happened). The fact that God responds to the prayer of his people does not mean that he does not know what is going to happen and how he is going to respond when it does happen (i.e., in this case, the prayer of Hezekiah). Open theists strive to prove that theirs is the true viewpoint that connects prayer with a relational God. The "changing of God's mind" to answer a prayer indicates neither that God is a liar nor that he does not know what will happen in the future to an answered prayer. Open theists must not be allowed to give the idea that they have arrived and discovered that our Lord is a relational God who desires the prayers of his people.

In fifteen years much can happen. In fact, just three years later, Manasseh was born to Hezekiah, and he was the most wicked king ever to rule over Judah. Did God know that was going to happen? Did he regret his decision to give Hezekiah fifteen more years?

Surely the Lord knew what would happen with Manasseh. Without a doubt, God was to be grieved due to the wickedness that would come during the fifty-plus years of Manasseh's reign, for the Bible does teach that God is a Being with emotions. He regretted the wickedness of humanity in the days of Noah (Genesis 6). He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (cf. Ezekiel 18:23, 32), and he does rejoice in the

45. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 48.

fulfillment of righteousness and holiness (Isaiah 52-53). These emotions of God of which the Bible speaks are not indications of changes in the ontological being of God but rather show forth his immanent, relational, and salvific character.

Classical theology has never tried to enclose God in a box as if he experienced no feelings or emotions. Though open theists try hard to paint a caricature of the God of classical theology as one who has no feelings and is never changing, yet the historical understanding of God's immutability does not mean that he is immobile. God is love, and he can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19; Matthew 23:37; John 11:34-38).

2. Open theism understands biblical prophecy differently from the interpretation given by classical Christian theology. Those who hold this position view much of biblical prophecy as not necessarily dealing with specific free choices of individuals in the future.

Open theists do see some precise, predictive prophecy in the Bible, for example, the Isaiah prophecies concerning the Lord's servant, Cyrus (Isaiah 45:1-3); the naming of Josiah (1 Kings 13:1-3); and the naming of Jesus and John the Baptist (Luke 1:13, 31). Obviously in such cases, some of the free will of these individuals (or that of their parents in these last three cases) would be limited as it had to do with their preordained activities.⁴⁶

However, other prophetic utterances that have to do with specific people and their free will are said to be examples of God's knowledge or foreknowledge of a person's behavior. Presentism emphasizes that it proclaims a God who has infinite knowledge of all probabilities and of all people's past and present (actions, behavior, character). Therefore, open theism sees much prophecy simply as God predicting accurately how a person will behave under certain circumstances.

In Matthew 26:34, Simon Peter's denial of the Lord Jesus is considered by presentism as an example of our Lord's infinite knowledge of a person's behavior patterns under all circumstances. Boyd believes that this was the case with Jesus' prediction concerning Peter's triple denial.

Contrary to the assumption of many, we do not need to believe that the future is exhaustively settled to explain this prediction. We only need to believe that God the Father knew and revealed to Jesus one very predictable aspect of Peter's character. Anyone who knew Peter's character perfectly could have predicted that under certain highly pressured circumstances (that

46. Boyd, *God of the Possible*, 34.

God could easily orchestrate), he would act just the way he did.⁴⁷

Other biblical prophecy is seen as conditional prophecy, that is, the future is open in the sense that if a condition is fulfilled, then a certain thing will happen, but if not, then the prophecy will not come about. Most Christians would agree that this type of prophecy is found in the Bible. While not explicit, Jonah's proclamation of the doom of Nineveh carried within itself a conditional promise. If there was repentance, there would be no immediate, promised destruction. But once again, the difference between open theism and Reformation Arminianism is the question of whether God knew (in this case) that there would be a repentance on the part of the people of Nineveh. Open theists deny that he had such exact foreknowledge. We affirm that he did.

Perhaps the area of prophecy where the greatest difference is seen is what open theism might call "imprecise prophetic forecasts."⁴⁸ Ware writes that a better name for this presentist category would be "God's best guess."⁴⁹

According to the presentists, these are prophecies that had to do (or will have to do) with a present situation, and they should not be held to any sort of precision. These prophecies were not always fulfilled to the exact letter of the original prophecy. The future was open and God was free to fulfill his word as he chose once the time arrived for some sort of fulfillment. They are promises "in general terms and a blessed hope more than . . . a precise prediction."⁵⁰

Classical Christian interpreters have always understood biblical prophecy in two senses. First of all, the prophets of the Old and New Testaments did proclaim a prophetic word concerning righteousness and against injustice. However, the prophetic word of God (via his prophets and prophetic writings) did include many truths that would find their fulfillment in the future with complete precision as spoken from the Lord. In *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* Ware mentions a biblical survey done by Steve Roy that concerns divine foreknowledge.⁵¹ In the survey, there were 128 texts that state what the Lord will do in the future through nature; 1,893 texts that predict that God will do something in the future either in or through human beings; 1,474 texts that state what humans will do apart from what God might do directly

47. *Ibid.*, 35.

48. Pinnock, *Most Moved Mover*, 50.

49. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory*, 132.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*, 100.

through them; and 622 texts that speak of what unbelievers will have happen to them in the future or will do to others in the future. That is an immense amount of prophetic biblical material that God apparently knows ahead of time through his exhaustive foreknowledge.

One prophetic category that open theism does not seem to mention is that of unconditional predictions. These are prophecies that God declares will certainly come to pass, which are based on his divine foreknowledge of the future with all of the involved free will choices of mankind. There are many biblical examples of unconditional prophecy. For example, on the Day of Pentecost Peter preached concerning the Christ and his death. He told his listeners: "Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:23). In his paper "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically," Ware seeks to draw the open theists' attention to Daniel 11:1-4. His point is that while the open theists deny that God has exhaustive foreknowledge of future events, "the number of free choices and actions predicted—either explicitly or implicitly—from just these four verses boggles the mind!"⁵²

Deuteronomy 18:18-22 lays out the criteria for prophecy given by a false prophet:

But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die.... When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously; thou shalt not be afraid of him (vv. 20, 22).

The question must be, If God has such strict criteria for prophecy and prophets, how can he not be precise in his predictions? If he does not know the future and yet makes general prophecies that might or might not come true with some sort of precision, how can he require a stricter standard from finite, sinful beings?

3. Open theism's understanding of the incarnation of the Lord Jesus reveals just how deeply their thinking impacts the basic message of Scripture. For example, Sanders states that while the incarnation was always part of the divine plan of God, the death of Jesus on the cross was not.

In *The God Who Risks* Sanders has a section on the New Testament materials entitled "Gethsemane: The Pathos of Jesus." We are told that

52. Ware, "Defining Evangelicalism's Boundaries Theologically," 202.

Judas did not betray Jesus, only handed him over, perhaps hoping for some sort of a resolution of differences between Jesus and the high priest, and that Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane to the effect that the "cup pass" from him meant that Jesus himself was unsure about the necessity of the cross. Sanders explains that the incarnation had always been part of God's plan from eternity, that "the incarnation is not a contingency plan for redeeming fallen humanity but a means of accomplishing the type of relationship God always intended with his creation."⁵³

My own view is that the incarnation was always planned, for God intended to bring us into the joy and glory shared among the triune Godhead. . . . Human sin, however, threw up a barrier to the divine project, and God's planned incarnation had to be adapted in order to overcome it.⁵⁴

Sanders cannot allow God to have conclusively foreknown that Adam and Eve would sin, thus bringing sin into the world. But he is faced with the problem of the incarnation. He is also faced with several seemingly very clear Bible passages that speak of the predetermined and foreknown death of Jesus. Peter writes of our redemption that comes through "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" (1 Peter 1:19, 20). John is told in a vision (Revelation 13:8) that there will be a time when all unbelievers on earth will worship the beast. Those who worship him are those "whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The phrase "from the foundation of the world" (i.e., from eternity) probably modifies "the Lamb slain,"⁵⁵ though Sanders makes "from the foundation of the world" refer to "names . . . written in the book of life."

Sanders's explanations, however, as to how the incarnation itself was planned without sin being foreknown are not satisfying. He first of all says Jesus was not literally slain in eternity but rather in Palestine during the reign of Pilate. Then we are told that perhaps what John and Peter meant by their phrase "from the foundation of the world" was that for a very long time God's wisdom had been working toward the salvation of lost man.

53. Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 98-104.

54. *Ibid.*, 103.

55. See Picirilli's explanation of this probable linkage in "An Arminian Response to John Sanders," 481-83.

Picirilli points out that regardless of whether “from the foundation of the world” modifies “written in the book” or “the Lamb,” the problem for open theism remains. If it modifies the Lamb, then sin was foreknown because “the Lamb” (notice its Old Testament implications) implies sacrifice for sin. If it is writing in the book that is modified, then those whose names are written in the book are individuals who were foreknown from before the beginning of the world, and the fact that there are many whose names are not written in the book indicates the presence of sin.⁵⁶

The death of Jesus paid for every specific sin (Colossians 2:13), thus indicating that there must have been in God’s mind specific individuals who committed said sins. Thus, those who are redeemed have had their names written in the book of the Lamb from all eternity.⁵⁷

Open theism professes to base its principal tenet concerning God’s definite (rather than exhaustive) foreknowledge on biblical evidence. Open theists examine the classical biblical texts that have been used from the beginning of the church and conclude something to the effect that, “Yes, but they don’t have to mean that exclusively. They could mean what we say they mean.” But saying that a text “could” mean something falls short of demonstrating that it *does*. Open theism has failed to show that God does not know the future free acts and thoughts of mankind. It has not shown that God has not given specific prophecies which have been fulfilled and continue to be fulfilled, all based on his exhaustive foreknowledge, and many of them requiring that he foreknow the free acts of human beings.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS THAT RESULT FROM THE ACCEPTANCE OF OPEN THEISM

1. Prayer, as seen by the proponents of open theism, is an experience in which the believer is working together with God to accomplish the purposes of God. In open theists’ writings, prayer is repeatedly put forth as one of the great new gains of presentism. While God is absolutely sovereign, a Being who does not need us to accomplish his will, he has,

56. *Ibid.*, 482-83

57. Other passages in the New Testament also indicate that the Lord knows who individual believers are (will be). For example, Ephesians 2:10 speaks of divinely predetermined good works that God’s workmanship is to walk in. Does that mean that the Lord simply has some sort of general guideline of good works in which the corporate body of believers should walk? No, this is another passage that teaches that God has a complete foreknowledge of all those whose names are written in the book of the Lamb and that he has individual plans for each of them that will, in the end, result in their becoming his masterpiece of work.

however, created the universe in which he desires that redeemed mankind work together with him to carry out his work and plans.

Open theism critiques the exhaustive foreknowledge view, saying that prayer to a God who has already decided everything is not very effective, even if it does honor him. According to presentism, prayer in the openness arena allows God “genuinely” to respond to us.

Our prayers make a difference to God because of the personal relationship God enters into with us. God chooses to make himself dependent on us for certain things. It is God’s sovereign choice to establish this sort of relationship; it is not forced on God by us.... God wants us to be his partners not because he needs our wisdom but because he wants *our* fellowship. It is the *person* making the request that makes the difference to God. The request is important because God is interested in us.... The relationship is not one of domination or manipulation but of participation and cooperation wherein we become collaborators with God.... It did not have to be this way. It is so only because God wanted a reciprocal relationship of love and elected to make dialogical prayer an important element in such a relationship.⁵⁸

While we can affirm much of what Sanders has written concerning God’s desire for our prayers and our fellowship with him in prayer, we cannot affirm the underlying tenet that God does not know precisely what will happen in the future. Sanders writes that it is God’s choice to establish this type of relationship. That is true, as far as it goes, but according to open theism he cannot know for certain what we will say or do.⁵⁹

In prayer, as God’s dependent children, we are not working out together with him the best plan for ourselves or for our family or for our church. Rather we come to him who knows all, and we speak with him with confidence. We know he wants to listen to us, and we know that the Holy Spirit takes our prayers and makes them “effective” before the Father. We pray “may thy will be done,” not “may our will be done as we have worked it out together.”

2. Open theists claim that their view of divine guidance and comfort offers better answers for Christians who are buffeted by the evils of the

58. Sanders, *God Who Risks*, 271-72.

59. Some open theists apparently believe that God could have exhaustively known the future but has chosen not to know it, which in itself seems totally impossible. How could God have the ability to know all things and then decide not to know all things? See Boyd, “Christian Love and Academic Dialogue,” 223.

world than does the providential guidance and exhaustive foreknowledge taught by classic theology.

Classical theology has not given us all the answers for the presence of evil in the universe. We do know that evil and death are in the world because of sin. We know also that the universe itself is under the curse of God until that time when he himself lifts it. We are told that everything that happens to us (good or bad) can be made to work together for good (Romans 8:28). While we do not understand all that this passage implies, it does give us comfort that our God does know the reason why bad things happen and that he will work his purpose through "all things."

Open theism tells us that sometimes bad things happen that God did not expect to happen. He is not caught off guard for very long, but even knowing all the probabilities that could happen in every circumstance, there are times where human free will goes against what he thought or intended would occur.

Open theists profess great comfort in knowing that God did not plan the bad things that happen to them (once again reading determinism into their definition of God's sovereign foreknowledge). The bad things that happen to them sometimes also come as a "surprise" to God as well. Not everything in the universe has a purpose in God's grand plan. That is supposed to be a comfort to people. I personally fail to see how I can gain any comfort from God if I am not sure that he knows what is going to happen next and why it is going to happen.

The Old and New Testaments clearly explain and give examples of how God sometimes permits tests (i.e., bad things, difficult times) to come into the lives of his people. He does so in order to bring about maturity and to "test" their faithfulness, causing their sanctified faith to grow.

Today's society does not want to listen to an answer that speaks of the need to suffer and to grow through adversity. While I do not claim that this is one of the purposes behind open theism's boast that their model of divine comfort and guidance is superior to that of classical theology, it certainly is the type of answer that fits well with the attitude of the present, postmodern worldview.

3. The possible future direction of the open theistic movement brings questions to the mind of many concerned Christians. The direction of thought seen in at least two of the representatives of this movement does offer some concern for the future of the brothers involved.

Pinnock is well-known in evangelical circles for his "pilgrimage" from Reformed theology to Arminianism, and now to some sort of "neo-

Arminianism." He no longer believes in an eternal punishment in hell for unbelievers but along with others has adopted belief in annihilationism.

In his recent work *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, Boyd also writes of the eternal end of those who reject the love of God. Rather than being annihilated, they move into some sort of eternal *nothingness*. "This torment is their eternal dignity and humiliation, their choice and their damnation, and it expresses God's eternal love as well as his eternal wrath."⁶⁰

Boyd continually refers to this current life as the probationary period. In a chapter entitled "On Incomplete Probationary Periods," he seems to be indicating that deceased babies and mentally incapacitated people may have to undergo some sort of future probation (purgatory?).⁶¹ Later in speaking about the believer's judgment, he talks of the possibility of a "refining chastisement" that could occur after death in order to complete *then* what was not completed *now*.⁶²

These ideas seem to go far beyond the pale of biblical teaching. What will be the next move in speculative theology? Will open theists move further and further towards universalism?

CONCLUSION

Chuck is still standing in the West Texas crossroads. What have we learned? Our Reformed brothers have yet to convince us that Chuck can only go in one direction because one direction was preordained by God from the beginning of time. We certainly do have much in common with these brothers, but they have been unable to convince us that the Book says that.

Now open theists want us to believe that, although God probably can figure out the direction Chuck will eventually choose, he does not know for certain—does not "foresee"—what the man will do. Unless God has some specific predetermined purpose in Chuck's going in one particular direction, Chuck is free to move about the country as he chooses. If he moves in a direction that God did not think he would, that is okay too, because God will certainly know with a higher probability next time which way Chuck may choose.

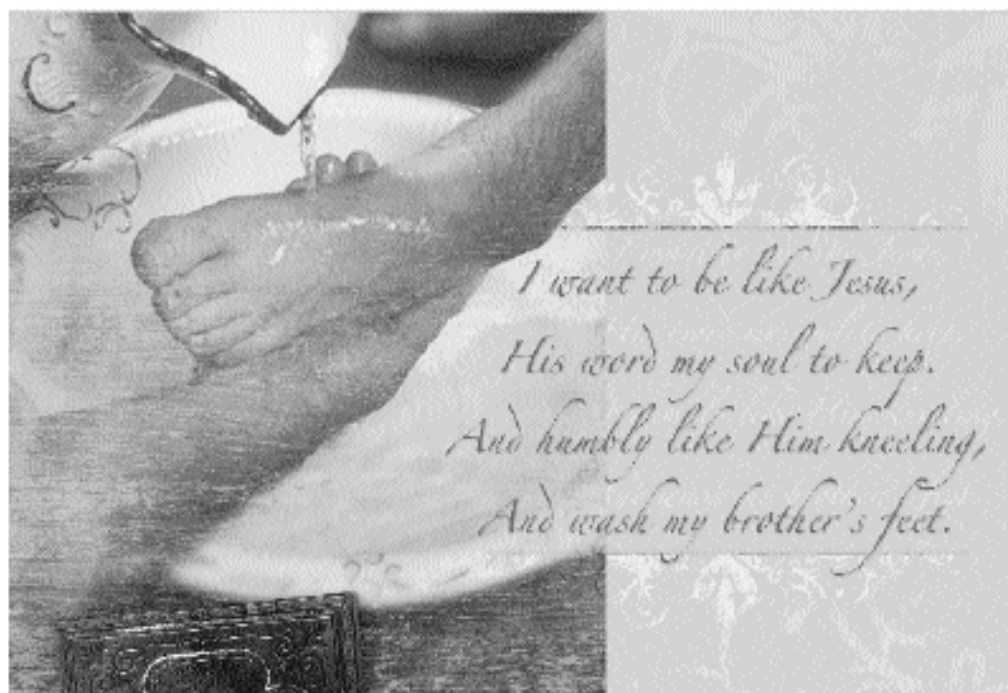
I affirm, instead, that Chuck is free to choose what he will choose (under the given circumstances). I also affirm that God already knows the way he will finally choose. I choose to live my life with the sovereign

60. Boyd, *Satan and the Problem of Evil*, 357.

61. *Ibid.*, 383.

62. *Ibid.*, 385.

God of the universe who loves to listen to me, who knows what is always going on and what will always go on, and who gives me, within obvious limitations, the ability (free will) and responsibility to choose the way in which I will go when I arrive at the next crossroads in my life.



*I want to be like Jesus,
His word my soul to keep.
And humbly like Him kneeling,
And wash my brother's feet.*



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An Overview of Francis Schaeffer's Worldview

Alvin Toffler wrote, "Every person carries in his head a mental model of the world—a subjective representation of external reality."¹ This mental model of the world influences much of what people do. In his helpful book *How to Read Slowly*, James Sire applies that observation to help readers comprehend the message that a writer is trying to communicate. He comments, "When writers write they do so from the perspective of their own worldview."²

The term worldview refers to the philosophy that guides people as they live. Such models of life are not exclusive to writers and philosophers. R. C. Sproul emphasized the universal nature of worldview when he wrote: "We are not all philosophers but we all have a philosophy."³ By this he meant that everybody has a way of viewing life and the world, whether or not he is a professional philosopher.

In order for a worldview to work well, it must answer the basic questions of life that confront people. While everyone experiences life's questions in various contexts, the questions themselves are similar. Sire listed seven of the most essential questions that face men and women:

- 1) What is prime reality, the really real?
- 2) What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
- 3) What is a human being?
- 4) What happens to a person at death?
- 5) Why is it possible to know anything at all?
- 6) How do we know what is right and wrong?
- 7) What is the meaning of human history?⁴

A good worldview should be able to provide adequate answers for these questions. If a person is unable to answer any one of these

1. Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock* (New York: Bantam, 1971), 155.

2. James W. Sire, *How to Read Slowly* (Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw, 1978), 15.

3. R. C. Sproul, *Lifeviews: Making a Christian Impact on Culture and Society* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Revell, 1986), 25.

4. James Sire, *The Universe Next Door* (Grand Rapids: InterVarsity, 1982), 30-37.

questions, it exposes a weakness in his worldview that may result in confusion and error.

There is a plethora of worldviews. As unique as the individual that holds them, so is the worldview. In *The Universe Next Door* Sire explored several major worldviews: Deism, Naturalism, Nihilism, Existentialism, Eastern pantheistic monism, and the New Age thinking. Each one of these provides different answers and different ways to answer the questions that people face in life.

The different worldviews are not equally valid. Some give false answers to major questions, confuse the issues, or give no answers at all. Norman Geisler offered several tests for determining the strength of a worldview. First, a view of life should be consistent. It should not contradict itself. Second, a view of life should be comprehensive. All of reality needs to be included. Third, a view of life must be livable. If it is not, it is useless. Fourth, a view of life must be consistently affirmable. It must not be self-refuting.⁵

Of twentieth-century evangelical writers who thought in terms of worldview, few compare to Francis Schaeffer in the influence he had among evangelical preachers, thinkers, activists, and writers. Schaeffer was born in 1912 to working-class parents near Philadelphia. After his conversion as a teenager Schaeffer soon exhibited the characteristics of a thinker. He received his education at Virginia's Hampden-Sydney College and furthered his education with seminary studies at Westminster and Faith.

Schaeffer served as a pastor and missionary to Europe before starting a study center named *L'Abri* in the Swiss Alps in the summer of 1965. Through lectures and writing Schaeffer's thoughtful approach to the Christian faith gained worldwide attention before his death in May of 1984. Schaeffer's influence is still felt through the ministry of current evangelical thinkers who were influenced by his thinking and writing, including Os Guinness, Chuck Colson, John Whitehead, Tim LaHaye, and Jerry Falwell. This paper will seek to investigate the major categories of Schaeffer's worldview along with its specific content.

THE CONTENT OF SCHAEFFER'S WORLDVIEW

God

Of primary importance to Schaeffer's worldview was his understanding of God. As Steve Brown has written: "The answer to the

5. Norman Geisler, *Worlds Apart: A Handbook on World Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 263-68.

question of God's nature will not only determine how I will act, but it will also determine who I am."⁶ Three ideas prove to be of monumental importance for anyone interested in understanding Schaeffer's thought.

First, Schaeffer doggedly defended the true existence of God. Theism may seem to be an obvious inference for a Presbyterian preacher, but Schaeffer spoke of it with a deliberateness and fervency reflected in the title of his book *The God Who Is There*. In that 1972 release he explained, "The greatest antithesis of all is that God exists as opposed to His not existing: He is the God who is there."⁷ Later in the same book he emphasized the crucial nature of God's existence: "Christian faith turns on the reality of God's existence, His being there."⁸

When declaring God's existence, Schaeffer did not mean merely that the idea of God was helpful or that some type of divine being exists. He clarified: "Let us notice carefully that in saying God is there, we are saying God exists, and not just talking about the word god, or the idea god. We are speaking of the proper relationship to the living God who exists."⁹ Although Schaeffer sought to offer a defense for the existence of God, he avoided couching his arguments in Thomistic terminology. R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley observed this tendency, noting that, "Instead of strongly stressing theistic proofs these Evangelicals [i.e., presuppositionalists] almost gloss over them in their eagerness to come to biblical data. But theistic proof is there."¹⁰

Sproul accurately stated that theistic proof exists in Schaeffer's writings. Three such implicit proofs show themselves repeatedly. One is that there is no meaning behind truth without God. Two is that the existence of God is the only solution to the problem of man. Three is the idea that only a personal creator could create humanity with personality. These three, which serve as proofs in Schaeffer's mind, are introduced in *The God Who Is There* and form the bedrock for discussions in later books.

The second idea is that Schaeffer's arguments for the existence of God naturally lead into his concern for the personal nature of God.

6. Steve Brown, *If God Is in Charge: Thoughts on the Nature of God for Skeptics, Christians, and Skeptical Christians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 13.

7. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, 5 vols. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1982), 1:47. *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* is hereafter cited as CWFS.

8. *Ibid.*, 145.

9. *Ibid.*, 146.

10. R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 128.

Existence and personality tie in at the point of logical necessity. He reasoned that it would be impossible for a personal creature to originate from anything less than a personal creator. His best explanation of this idea came from an illustration:

Imagine you are in the Alps, and from a high vantage point you can see three parallel ranges of mountains with two valleys in between. In one valley there is a lake, but the other is dry. Suddenly you begin to witness what sometimes happens in the Alps; a lake forming in the second valley where there was none before. As you see the water rising, you may wonder what its source is. If it stops at the same level as the lake in the neighboring valley, you may, after careful measurements, conclude that there is a possibility that the water has come from the first valley. But if your measurement shows that the level of the second lake is twenty feet higher than the first, then you can no longer consider that its source may be from the neighboring valley and you would have to seek another explanation. Personality is like that; no one has ever thought of a way of deriving personality from nonpersonal sources.¹¹

Personality in man and God thus forms the hinge of Schaeffer's thought. He reasoned that, if man is personal, then God must be personal as well.

It would be difficult to overstate the significance of the idea of personality to Schaeffer's overall approach. He started with an observable fact, namely, man is a personal being. From that vantage point he reasoned that such personality could not be the product of chance but the creation of a God who exists in reality. Not only must this God exist, but he must also be a personal being in order to create such a being. Finally, he reasoned that it only makes sense that a personal being would communicate to others in order to make himself known. One can safely regard personality as a major element in the thought of Schaeffer concerning God, man, and the relationship that they enjoy.

Third, Schaeffer earnestly contended for the idea that the personal God who is really there communicates to his people. The necessity of God's communication shines in *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*. Interestingly, God's communication is dependent on his existence and personal nature.

God's communication to humanity is another step in the logical sequence evident in much of Schaeffer's thought. Schaeffer is not alone in this emphasis. Gerald Bray utilized a similar approach:

11. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 94.

How is Christian belief different from other kinds of knowledge? We have already said that God makes himself known to us by revelation. This means that unless he tells us about himself, we cannot know him. This may seem unacceptable to those who think that God should be available for investigation in the same way as the roundness of the earth is, but if we think about it a little more we shall see that we are talking about two different kinds of knowledge. If God is a personal being, it is not surprising that we can know him only by revelation, since the same is true of every person. Other people know us only to the extent that we reveal ourselves to them.¹²

The point is obvious: if a personal being desires to be known, he must reveal something about himself to someone else.

Schaeffer's emphasis upon God as a personal being who exists and reveals something about himself to his creatures is key to watching his worldview unfold. These three theological ideas form the foundation from which the rest of Schaeffer's worldview grows.

Man

Man's relationship to God was a primary concern to Schaeffer who described himself more frequently as an evangelist than an apologist or theologian. His understanding of the nature of man is an essential part of his worldview. His thoughts about humanity may be categorized under two headings. First, he wrote of man as a being created in the image of God. Second, he presented man as a being who has fallen into sin.

Lest there be any confusion, Schaeffer stated bluntly: "In historic Christianity a personal God creates man in His own image."¹³ This is not a fact without consequence. Louis Parkhurst remarked on the consequence: "We are finite, personal miniatures of the God who created all that is. If we say we are only animals or machines or nothing, and if we try to live on that basis, we cannot do so consistently in the world God has made for us to live in."¹⁴ This uniqueness from the rest of creation is most evident in human personality. It would be frustrating to live without recognizing such uniqueness.

Previously, we observed that personality was a key factor in Schaeffer's understanding of man. He coined the phrase "manishness of

12. Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God*, Contours of Christian Theology Series, ed. Gerald Bray (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 15.

13. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 99.

14. Louis Gofford Parkhurst, *Francis Schaeffer: The Man and Message* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1985), 159-60.

man" to refer to "those aspects of man, such as significance, love, rationality and the fear of nonbeing, which mark him off from animals and machines and give evidence of his being created in the image of God."¹⁵ The fact that people are created in the image of God means that they are personal beings, they possess significance, and one should communicate to them as such.

Personality is the factor that separates people from the rest of God's creation. At the point of God's infinite attributes a gap stands between God and all of creation. At the point of personality, however, "the break comes between man and the rest of creation."¹⁶

Personality is also key to redemption in Schaeffer's thinking. Because man is a personal being, "the incarnation and the death of the Son of God for the sake of man's salvation are sensible."¹⁷ Only in bearing God's image did man stand eligible for salvation. There could have been no incarnation through an animal without rational or moral capacity.

Schaeffer challenged Christians to realize that the world is searching for "the reality of personality." Their problem is that their view of an impersonal or chance universe cannot support the idea of personality. On the other hand, Christianity holds the answer they need because it shows that personality is "rooted in the personal God who has always been."¹⁸ Personality affords man a unique place in relation to God; man "was made to have a personal relationship with Him. Man's relationship is upward and not merely downward."¹⁹

Consequence number two arising from the image of God in man is that man is endowed with special significance. Schaeffer responded to the Marquis de Sade, Francis Crick, Sigmund Freud, and B. F. Skinner, who saw man as the result of chemical, psychological, and sociological factors. Schaeffer countered by stressing that God made a universe outside himself and that man is "a significant man in a significant history, who can choose to obey the commandment of God and love Him, or revolt against Him."²⁰

Significance flows from the fact that man as a personal being has a personal relationship with his creator whether that relationship be one of obedience or rebellion. Schaeffer wrote concerning the command to love God, "Surely it is the first commandment because it is the one that

15. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 201.

16. *Ibid.*, 102.

17. *Ibid.*, 103.

18. *Ibid.*, 169.

19. Francis Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*, in *CWFS*, 1:222.

20. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 113.

expresses the purpose of man and individually, my purpose." In his excitement he not only derives from this command that God exists, is personal, and reveals something about himself to man, but also that "it tells me something very fundamental and exciting about myself."²¹

Man's significance has a meaning that Schaeffer intended to use as an evangelistic tool. When working outside the Christian framework, man has difficulty seeing purpose or meaning. Schaeffer observed that, "Man made in the image of God cannot live as though he is nothing; so he places in the upper story all sorts of desperate things."²² Here his thought touches the area of epistemology, but the connection illustrates a valuable point. Man, being designed for a personal relationship with God, finds it nearly impossible to live without recognition of that relationship. Millard Erickson also expressed the importance of the image of God in man:

Every human being is God's creature made in God's own image. God endowed each of us with the powers of personality that make possible worship and service of our Creator. When we are using those powers to those ends, we are most fully what God intended us to be. It is then that we are most completely human.²³

People may try to place something else in that relationship, but, in general, the relationship must exist because that is where man finds his significance.

A third consequence of the image of God in man is that this image should be recognized when communicating to people. One sees this thought clearly when Schaeffer declared that "we cannot apply mechanical rules"²⁴ when speaking to people. Certain principles generally apply to every person, but "if we are truly personal, as created by God, then each individual will differ from everyone else."²⁵

Mindful of the value of God's image-bearing people, Schaeffer encouraged Christians: "We must remember that the person to whom we are talking, however far from the Christian faith he may be, is an image-bearer of God. He has great value, and our communication to him must be in genuine love."²⁶ This communication of love also demands that we

21. *Ibid.*, 159.

22. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*, 242.

23. Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 517.

24. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 130.

25. *Ibid.*

26. *Ibid.*, 130-31.

speak to the man as a unit. Anything less would be irresponsible in light of what Christians know about the nature of man. Schaeffer later explained that redemption is for the whole man and “there is the real Lordship of Christ over the whole man.”²⁷ Ministry and evangelism must consider this wholeness.

The second heading in Schaeffer’s view of man concerns man as a fallen creature. One can only see the true significance of this idea against the backdrop of the first heading. Sin is a problem for people precisely because it damages the image of God in them.

Sin is a menace to God’s image-bearing creatures because man, though possessing God’s image, is a flawed creature. The problem is what Schaeffer called the dilemma of man. John E. Voss attempted to clarify Schaeffer’s usage of the term:

There is a certain amount of ambiguity in Schaeffer’s use of the term “dilemma of man,” but it is essentially this: man has moral motions, yet he consistently fails to meet the expectations of his own standards. The short-fall between man’s “nobility,” or morality, and his “cruelty,” or immorality, is man’s dilemma.²⁸

It is a dilemma because the image of God is what makes man both the most significant of God’s creatures as well as the most troubled. Schaeffer also observed, “Man is able both to rise to great heights and to sink to great depths of cruelty and tragedy.”²⁹ Ironically, this sin is most tragic in man because of the presence of God’s image. Anthony Hoekema chastised: “What makes sin so heinous is that man is prostituting such splendid gifts. *Corruptio optimi pessima*: the corruption of the best is the worst.”³⁰

Richard Winter revealed something of Schaeffer’s stress on the fall when he wrote, “I had heard the fall mentioned vaguely before, but not until my time at L’Abri did I understand its full and momentous significance.”³¹ Schaeffer further commented on the nature of the problem in man when he wrote:

27. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*, 224.

28. John E. Voss, “The Apologetics of Francis A. Schaeffer” (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), 75.

29. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 109.

30. Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 85.

31. Richard Winter, “The Glory and Ruin of Man,” in *Francis A. Schaeffer: Portraits of the Man and His Work*, ed. Lane T. Dennis (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1986), 90.

Christianity says man is now abnormal, he is separated from his Creator, who is his only sufficient reference point, not by a metaphysical limitation, but by true moral guilt. As a result he is now also separated from himself. Therefore, when he is involved in cruelty, he is not being true to what he was initially created to be. Cruelty is a symptom of abnormality and a result of a moral, historic, space-time Fall.³²

Two concepts in this statement deliver a subtle hope to the fallen race. First is the fact that man in his sinful state is seen as abnormal. Second is that sin imposes true guilt. One may look at these two concepts and wonder how they could hold any hope for man. Hope springs from the fact that, if guilt is real and sin causes man to be abnormal, then a real solution may be possible. The solution, however, must help man become what he was designed to be.

Although full deliverance from the human dilemma is not expected in this life, a partial but real step toward it can be experienced. Winter explained:

In the area of healing, Dr. Schaeffer often spoke of “substantial, but not complete healing this side of glory.” He was deeply aware of the struggle and battle against sin and of how much we groan with the whole creation, waiting for the completion of our redemption. And, in psychiatry, I am forced to come to terms with the pain and suffering of a fallen world as I see a few people recover quickly, but many who are caught in desperate vicious circles of their own and other’s sin, who need many hours of help.³³

The hours of help are required as a result of man’s fallen condition. As broken or abnormal as sin causes people to be, however, Schaeffer saw hope for real but partial healing now and complete healing later.

Metaphysics

Schaeffer’s discussions in the area of metaphysics run along lines parallel to his understanding of God and man. The reason for this is quite simple. Metaphysics is concerned with the problem of ultimate existence. God and man are key players in existence. Therefore, many ideas and problems discussed in the sections on God and man are also of major concern in the consideration of existence.

32. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 114.

33. Winter, 92.

Although this question is often relegated to the dusty shelves of philosophy departments, the basic consideration is almost inevitable for anyone who thinks about the basic questions of life. Schaeffer summarized the problem: "We must realize that the existence of man is no greater problem as such than is the fact that anything exists at all."³⁴

Solutions to this "problem" of existence can be divided into two classes. Some surrender the chase and declare that there is no rational answer. Schaeffer responded that, though some hold to the idea that everything is meaningless, they cannot hold this position with rigid consistency. Irrational answers will be dealt with below under the heading of *Knowledge*.

According to Schaeffer, those who consider that a rational answer to the problems of existence is attainable face three general possibilities. The first option offers that the universe and all that exists came from absolutely nothing. This did not seem to be a defensible position to Schaeffer, so he dismissed it as absurd. Another option holds that the universe and what exists had an impersonal beginning. Personality and what Schaeffer called the "manishness of man" seem to be inexplicable under this scenario. The third option says that the universe experienced a personal beginning. Within the implications of this option Schaeffer set up camp for his exploration of metaphysical problems.

A personal beginning is a necessity in Schaeffer's mind because anything less is incapable of accounting for the complexity of personality that people witness in the world. Cornelius Van Til's influence on Schaeffer is very evident in this reasoning. One senses the strength of personalism in Van Til's statement, "In the Trinity there is completely personal relationship without residue."³⁵ He further asserted that "covenant theology furnishes the only completely personalistic interpretation of reality."³⁶ One Van Tillian reviewer noted:

Van Til finds a close relationship between divine sovereignty and the divine personality. This relationship is very illuminating. It is edifying to observe that only a personal God can be sovereign and only a sovereign God can be an absolute person. That is to say, only a personal being can make choices and carry

34. Francis Schaeffer, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, in *CWFS*, 1:277.

35. Quoted by John M. Frame, *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1995), 59.

36. Cornelius Van Til, *Defense of the Faith*, 2d ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1963), 98.

them out, and only a sovereign God can avoid being subject, ultimately, to impersonal principles.³⁷

For Van Til, personalism was an important motif that was transferred to many who sat in his classes and read his books. Although Schaeffer does not give direct credit to Van Til's influence, the connection is readily apparent.

Although inextricably intertwined with the doctrine of God and man, the idea of personalism is the backbone of Schaeffer's metaphysics. One sees the essence of his metaphysical use of personality when reading:

The biblical Christian answer takes us back first to the very beginning of everything and states that personality is intrinsic in what is; not in the pantheistic sense of the universe being the extension of the essence of God, but that a God who is personal on the high order of Trinity created all else.³⁸

Several key facts emerge from this statement. First, Schaeffer believed that Scripture connects personality to the metaphysical problem. Second, he used the idea of personality as a distinguishing mark between Christianity and a pantheistic worldview. Third, he identified God as the personal source of a universe which demonstrates personal characteristics.

Schaeffer felt that personalism not only accounted for personhood but also gave an answer to another problem. In explicating the values of personalism Schaeffer introduced the need for both unity and diversity. Unity gives a sense of ultimate truth and meaning to the universe, while diversity is needed to assure that the particulars have meaning as well.

Once again the face of Cornelius Van Til emerges in Schaeffer's thought. In *Defense of the Faith* Van Til wrote:

The many must be brought into contact with one another. But how do we know that they can be brought into contact with one another? How do we know that the many do not simply exist as unrelated particulars? The answer given is that in such a case we should know nothing of them; they would be abstracted particulars. On the other hand, how is it possible that we should obtain a unity that does not destroy the particulars? We seem to get our unity by generalizing, by abstracting from the

37. Frame, 60.

38. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 93.

particulars in order to include them into larger unities. If we keep up this process of generalization till we exclude all particulars, granted they can all be excluded, have we not stripped these particulars of their particularity? Have we then obtained anything but an abstract universal?³⁹

For Van Til, and later for Schaeffer, it was not enough simply to assert that the universe had a personal source. For such a source, some might suggest gods or forces other than the Triune God of Christianity. When adding the problem of unity and diversity to the equation, however, the Trinity is seen not only as reasonable but as an idea that fits a hole in the puzzle of the universe.

When analyzing Van Til's use of the concept, John Frame explained:

God's plan is a personal one and many, because his nature is one and many. The "manifoldness" of God is seen in the diversity of his attributes, his thoughts, and his plans. But it is seen preeminently in the three persons of the Trinity. There is nothing in the persons that is not in the divine unity, and there is nothing in the divine unity that is not fully expressed in the persons. In God, all particularities are fully united, and all unity is fully expressed in detail. Indeed, God's oneness is a unity of the richness of his nature, and God's richness is his "self-contained fullness," the richness of his uniform character.⁴⁰

Far from being an idea without foundation, this concept gives ultimate meaning and individual significance. Frame made clear that it is rooted in the Person of God.

Schaeffer, though far from Van Til's depth, employed the same idea in his plea for the metaphysical necessity. He argued: "We need a personal unity and diversity. Without this we have no answer. Christianity has this in the Trinity."⁴¹ He added, "It is not that this is the best answer to existence; it is that it is the only answer."⁴²

He explained that the only reason we have this answer to the complex problems of human existence is because the God who is there is not silent. Instead, he has spoken to us in terms that we can understand and provided answers to the problems that weigh upon the human soul. These answers are not simply good philosophy; they are the right

39. Van Til, 25.

40. Frame, 75.

41. Schaeffer, *He Is There*, 287.

42. *Ibid.*, 288.

answers to the real problems of life. Schaeffer was not interested in mere philosophical speculation. He explained, "The truth of Christianity is that it is true to what is there."⁴³ Anything less in his mind would be meaningless, arrogant, and cruel. Christianity answers the real questions that people ask of life.

SCHAEFFER'S APPROACH TO KNOWLEDGE

Schaeffer understood the critical problem of this generation to be an issue of knowledge. He wrote: "Epistemology is the central problem of our generation; indeed, the so-called 'generation gap' is really an epistemological gap, simply because the modern generation looks at knowledge in a way radically different from previous ones."⁴⁴ External signs of this gap such as fashion and music are only the edge of a wide chasm that separates two different thought patterns.

Schaeffer's penetrating insights on this point could not have been fully appreciated until the explosion of studies concerning postmodernism. Postmodernism is "the movement in late twentieth-century thought that rejects enlightenment rationalism, individualism, and optimism."⁴⁵ As an end result there is a depreciation of absolute truth which spreads into a failure to establish meaningful moral categories. This causes many to scramble in an effort to communicate ultimate values and meaning to a generation that does not seem to speak the language.

Schaeffer attempted to trace the shift in values and thought from Kant and Hegel, to the religious existentialism of Kierkegaard, into the secular existentialism of Sartre, Camus, Heidegger, and Jaspers. He coined the phrase "line of despair" to mark an imaginary boundary between the time when thinkers pursued knowledge with the notion that there are absolute truths and the time when the pursuit of knowledge is governed solely by relativism. He summed up the results of his tracing with this observation:

Before [the shift in thought] man had a romantic hope that on the basis of rationalism he was going to be able to find a meaning to life, and put universals over the particulars. But on this side of Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard, this hope no longer exists; the hope is given up. People today live in a generation that no longer believes in the hope of truth as truth.⁴⁶

43. *Ibid.*, 290.

44. *Ibid.*, 305.

45. Dennis McCullum, *The Death of Truth* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996), 283.

46. Schaeffer, *He Is There*, 312.

This analysis appears to be a critique of postmodern thought before such evaluations were thought to be needed. He attempted to ground Christians in an understanding of knowledge and the nature of truth that would effectively counter the hopelessness experienced by those following a wayward epistemological path.

Schaeffer's epistemology rests upon three pillars which he attempted to establish early in his writing. First, he sees all truth in unity. In contrast to the mind that sees scientific truth with one eye and religious truth with a different one, Schaeffer contended: "Historic Christianity has never separated itself from knowledge. It insists that all truth is one, and we must live and teach this even if twentieth-century thought and theology deny it."⁴⁷ No difference can be made between truth in the so-called "real" world and truth in the "religious" world. In *Escape from Reason* he used an image of a two-story building to illustrate the division often made. Knowledge in the lower story was based on sensory data. It was scientific. Upper story knowledge consisted of religious truths supposedly based on faith rather than fact. Schaeffer maintained that such a line of demarcation jeopardizes epistemology and morality alike. For this reason Schaeffer spoke of "true truth" to signal the presence of truth backed by epistemological and moral certainty. Such certainty demonstrates a unifying link between moral ideology and real world scenarios.

This perception of unity stands in stark contrast to the approach of postmodernism. Josh McDowell's observations support Schaeffer's diagnosis of the epistemological crisis: "Postmodernism rejects the idea that there exists any 'grand story' that explains an individual, local story or any universal Truth by which to judge any single 'truth'."⁴⁸

If religious truth were not just as real as scientific investigation, then Schaeffer saw it as unnecessary. Instead Christians must speak of "true truth" and then "exhibit that it is not just a theory."⁴⁹

The second pillar on which Schaeffer's epistemology rests is that people naturally think in terms of antithesis. He attributed this characteristic to divine design when he wrote, "Our minds are so created by God that we think in antithesis."⁵⁰ J. I. Packer observed:

47. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 153.

48. Josh McDowell and Bob Hostetler, *The New Tolerance: How a Cultural Movement Threatens to Destroy You, Your Faith, and Your Children* (Wheaton, Ill: Tyndale House, 1998), 37.

49. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 163-64.

50. *Ibid.*, 184.

Schaeffer's fiercest polemics were accordingly launched against professed Christians who seemed to him to have lost sight of the true antithesis between what God tells us in the Bible and the false alternatives developed by fanciedly autonomous man in the folly of his fallenness.⁵¹

Schaeffer believed that antithesis was fundamental to the pursuit of knowledge. One must start with the ability to say that "a" is not "non-a." He saw this as a line in the sand which could not be surrendered without suffering major defeat.

Others observed this feature as well. David Wells saw it when he wrote concerning biblical writers and their prophetic utterances:

They had a certainty about the existence, character, and purposes of God, a certainty about his truth, that seems to have faded in the bright light of the modern world. They were convinced that God's revelation, of which they were the vehicles and custodians, was true. True in an absolute sense. It was not merely true to them; it was not merely true in their time; it was not true approximately. What God had given was true universally, absolutely, and enduringly.⁵²

Absolutes offended many of Schaeffer's contemporaries in much the same way that they offend the present postmodern thought structure. McDowell explained that in postmodernism, "Truth, whether in science, education, or religion, is created by a specific culture or community and is 'true' only in and for that culture."⁵³ Such a view virtually inoculates one against the gospel in the world. Throughout his ministry, despite difficulty and criticism, Schaeffer steadily maintained that antithesis must be a fundamental feature of the Christian approach to knowledge. The Christian biblical view of reality is either true or false, and if it is true, other views are false.

There are, however, certain dangers lurking in the black and white waters of antithesis. James B. Hurley remarked that this approach seemed to lead Schaeffer "to select extreme examples and pose them as polar opposites of the positions that he favored."⁵⁴ Guilt on this and

51. J. I. Packer, "No Little Person," in *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer*, ed. Ronald Ruesseger (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 11.

52. David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 259-60.

53. McDowell and Hostetler, 37.

54. James B. Hurley, "Schaeffer on Evangelicalism," in *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer*, 298.

similar charges may be correctly assessed to Schaeffer, but that problem merely demonstrates a danger in excess. Potential excess from a person's examples does not destroy the validity of the principle itself. The same may be said about Schaeffer's position concerning antithesis. There may be critiques that do not call for an absolute verdict, but if true antithesis is not maintained, no one can be right.

The third pillar of knowledge for Schaeffer is that all people think from established presuppositions. Everyone has presuppositions even if they are not consciously acknowledged. One sees the importance Schaeffer placed on this when he wrote: "The flood-waters of secular thought and liberal theology overwhelmed the Church because the leaders did not understand the importance of combating a false set of presuppositions."⁵⁵ These presuppositions are the foundation upon which the epistemological superstructure is to be constructed.

In his survey of Schaeffer's works Ronald Ruesegger identified the following presuppositions that seem basic in Schaeffer's construct: there is an infinite, personal God; the universe has a personal beginning; and nature is an open causal system. Of these the first is primary and the others are corollaries. On the other side the non-Christian in Schaeffer's scheme holds the following: there is no infinite, personal God; the universe has an impersonal beginning; and nature is a closed causal system.⁵⁶

In addition to the three main pillars of knowledge that Schaeffer stressed, he also used several helpful illustrations to assist in the communication of his analysis in the areas of truth and knowledge. Two are foundational to his writing. In *The God Who Is There* Schaeffer introduced "the line of despair," mentioned above.⁵⁷ Schaeffer explained, "Above this line we find men living with their romantic notions of absolutes, though with no sufficient logical basis."⁵⁸ The line of despair is the point when this approach to truth changed. In Schaeffer's scheme this change occurred in Europe around 1890 and in the United States around 1935. He traced the general movement of the change through geography, society, and finally through disciplines in the order of philosophy, art, music, general culture, and theology.

Escape from Reason introduced the idea of upper and lower story knowledge, the second of his two fundamental epistemological

55. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 7.

56. Ronald Ruesegger, "Schaeffer's System of Thought," in *Reflections on Francis Schaeffer*, 33.

57. Schaeffer, *God Who Is There*, 8.

58. *Ibid.*, 8

illustrations. Emerging from the "line of despair" concept, this illustration refers to the absolute dichotomy some established between knowledge reached exclusively by sense data (lower story) and knowledge that is beyond the capacity of the senses (upper story).

CONCLUSION

Schaeffer's thought was intentionally broad. Other thinkers plumbed the depths of theological issues in a far greater way than he did. His goal, however, was to understand and then explain how all the issues of life are related. Having discovered the commonality between key issues, the Christian can then see how all of life is subdued under the Lordship of Christ.

An understanding of Schaeffer's worldview thinking provides three challenges for Christian thinkers. First, Christians need to see the value of thinking in the broad categories that Schaeffer utilized. In order for such breadth of thought to be beneficial, it must be well organized; otherwise, it is simply a mass of unrelated knowledge. Broad thinking is only beneficial when developed in the framework of a Christian worldview.

Second, God's people should be willing to think deeply about matters of life, politics, education, and faith. Christian minds should be well exercised in developing all sides of an issue. Inevitably, the Christian mind will be guided by its major, nonnegotiable principles. These first principles, however, should encourage and enable deep thought, not prevent it.

Finally, God's people should never apologize that Christ is at the center of their thought. If one follows a map to a particular location, choices are thereby restricted, but efficiency is enhanced. The glory of God in Christ is the ever present center of the Christian's thought on any issue. While secular philosophers see religious principles as dead weight that inhibits deep thinking, the Christian realizes that these principles, rather than restricting choices, direct one to the desired destination of thought.



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Michael Karounos

“They have a power given to them, like that of the evil principle, to subvert and destroy, but none to construct.” Edmund Burke¹

“Who will rise up with me against the wicked?” (Psalm 94:16)

A Call to Faith in “These Dregs of Time”

BACKGROUND

Edmund Burke, writing in 1793 of the revolutionists in France and England, understood that their operative mode was change without improvement, a principle that tended toward destruction rather than construction. The French revolutionists destroyed the church and the Christian calendar, and for a while they threatened to destroy the concept of the individual and replace it with *citoyen*—“citizen” or “comrade.”

John Wesley confronted a similar evil in his time on a spiritual level. On January 30, 1763, Wesley preached to the Society for the Reformation of Manners on the decay of manners in everyday society. For the Christians of the time, it seemed as if the moral fabric of society was unraveling at an alarming pace in what Wesley memorably called “these dregs of time.”² The objective of the Society was to address the growing problems of prostitution, gambling, pornography, alehouses serving alcohol on Sundays, and immoral behavior in general. The mechanism by which the reformers sought to curtail immorality was through a combination of legal means and social pressure. As concerns its membership, Wesley noted that the Society chose a would-be reformer ecumenically, with “no regard to any particular sect or party.”³ In his sermon Wesley addressed the benefits, the methods, and the objections which comprised the campaign for reformation. As Francis Schaeffer observed: “Secular historians acknowledge that it was the social results coming out of the Wesley revival that saved England from its own form of the French

1. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Penguin, 1986), 161.

2. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3d ed., 14 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978), 6:154.

3. *Ibid.*

Revolution. If it had not been for the Wesley revival and its social results, England would almost certainly have had its own 'French Revolution.'"⁴

Yet, the objections fellow Christians raised to Wesley's project remind one of Moses' desperate excuses to God. Some Christians argued that it was the government's role to reform its citizens ("Are there not Constables...?"); that some reformers were acting out of self-interest (they are just trying "to get money"); and that such a campaign was impractical ("Vice is risen to such an head that it is impossible to suppress it"). This demonstrates that there have always been Christians willing to do good by doing nothing, and to do ill by preventing other Christians from doing good.

Fortunately, faithful Christians overcame these exhortations to irrelevance, and by the early part of the nineteenth century Evangelicals had inspired legislation which abolished the slave trade, reduced the number of offenses for the death penalty from over two hundred to less than twelve, abolished the flogging of soldiers and sailors for minor offenses, instituted reforms in child labor laws, and implemented a host of other changes that dramatically changed the society around them for the better. Perhaps as importantly, secular scholar Richard D. Altick wryly documents that "the drive for souls was successful enough in the 1790's to produce the spectacle of high society taking up religion as a fascinating new diversion and an example to the lower classes."⁵ For a comparable effect, imagine today's ruling elite in the media centers of New York and Los Angeles getting religion as a consequence of public preaching.

Now, what does Wesley and the Society for the Reformation of Manners have to do with culture and the production of culture? In a word, everything. In Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* (1814), the soon-to-be-ordained Edmund Bertram notes a distinction that believers of the time would have implicitly understood: "The *manners* I speak of might rather be called conduct, perhaps, the result of good principles."⁶ As Altick succinctly put it, the Evangelicals of the time "believed that public morality depended upon private virtue."⁷ If we are to judge the private virtue of our day by the public morality we see everywhere displayed, we might argue like the defeatists of two centuries ago that "vice is risen to such an head that it is impossible to suppress it." But if vice has achieved such a

4. Francis Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1986), 65.

5. Richard D. Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 182.

6. Jane Austen, *Mansfield Park* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 93. Emphasis in original.

7. Altick, 181.

frightening height, then Christians should be more willing to combat it rather than less willing.

Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* is considered the founding text of conservative philosophy. In it Burke insightfully observes:

Nothing is more certain than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with manners and with civilization have, in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles and were, indeed, the result of both combined: I mean the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion.⁸

The spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion correspond precisely to public morality and private virtue. Keeping in mind the meaning of manners as moral conduct, the consequences of manners are not trivial. John Witherspoon, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a Presbyterian pastor, observes that "nothing is more certain than that a general profligacy and corruption of manners make a people ripe for destruction. A good form of government may hold the rotten materials together for some time, but beyond a certain pitch, even the best constitution will be ineffectual, and slavery must ensue."⁹

The slavery that Witherspoon identifies is a slavery of both freedom and faith. When a people become enslaved to their own carnal desires, they become complicit in a restriction of their civil and religious freedoms because they are too self-absorbed to care. The principle that the decay of manners results in the decay of government is foreign to us but was a commonplace principle of the eighteenth century. In our own time, the most striking instance of the progress from decadent manners to a breakdown in law is the implementation of homosexual policies in our society. What began with one character on one sitcom after ten years has multiplied into a cottage industry of representing gayness in seemingly every drama and comedy. In direct proportion to the loosening of manners in any one area, laws in that area will soon change. Consequently, following the lead of liberal Hollywood, the liberal Supreme Court of Massachusetts has legalized gay marriage. Scholars are fond of airily dismissing the slippery slope argument as a logical fallacy, but the

8. Burke, 173.

9. John Witherspoon, "The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men," as quoted in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era: 1730-1805*, ed. Ellis Sandoz, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1998), 1:553. I am indebted to John Couretas, of Acton.org, for this citation.

following quotations about the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) debate from the 1970s and 1980s supply anecdotal proof that the slippery slope argument sometimes exists in fact as well as in theory:

What foes of ERA contend were valid arguments and what advocates claim were emotional scare tactics also seemed to sway sentiment among the women against the amendment [in North Carolina]. Opponents, for example, suggested passage of ERA would mean abortion on demand, legalization of homosexual marriages, sex-integrated prisons and reform schools—all claims that were hotly denied by ERA supporters.¹⁰

While the counterarguments may have seemed like “scare tactics” in 1975, time has proven them to be reasonable fears based upon an historical understanding of human nature. Similarly, observe the dismissive editorializing in this quotation from the liberal *New York Times* in 1981: “Discussion of [the ERA] bogged down in hysterical claims that the amendment would eliminate privacy in bathrooms, encourage homosexual marriage, put women in the trenches and deprive housewives of their husbands’ support.”¹¹ Again, to the Left in 1981 this may have seemed like “hysteria,” but all four of those fears have slid down the slope of theory into the gutter of bare fact: unisex bathrooms are common in college dormitories, American mothers in Iraq are being killed and maimed, the divorce rate has accelerated to unprecedented levels, and homosexual marriage is now a fact in one state with the danger of its becoming so in forty-nine others.

In 1982, the arguments that unintended consequences would result from the loosening of laws as a consequence of the loosening of manners were treated with disdain by the other pillar of East Coast liberalism, the *Washington Post*: “The vote in Virginia [against the ERA] came after proponents argued on behalf of civil rights for women and opponents trotted out the old canards about homosexual marriages and unisex restrooms.”¹² Just twenty-four years later, we not only have homosexual marriages and unisex restrooms, but we also have unisex showers in some college dorms. As these quotations over a seven-year period from our

10. *U.S. News & World Report*, April 28, 1975. As quoted in *The Volokh Conspiracy* (November 18, 2003). Accessed at: http://volokh.com/2003_11_16_volokh_archive.html, August 3, 2004.

11. *New York Times*, July 5, 1981. As quoted in *The Volokh Conspiracy* (November 18, 2003). Accessed at: http://volokh.com/2003_11_16_volokh_archive.html, August 3, 2004.

12. Judy Mann, *Washington Post*, February 19, 1982. As quoted in *The Volokh Conspiracy* (November 18, 2003). Accessed at: http://volokh.com/2003_11_16_volokh_archive.html, August 3, 2004.

recent past demonstrate, arguments about social consequences which seem only remotely possible in the present moment have enormous ramifications for the future.

Manners and laws are inextricably linked. A change in mores is inevitably codified by a change of legislation to recognize officially behavior that society has implicitly acknowledged *de facto* but not yet *de jure*. Thus, there is nothing more important for Christians to recognize than the fact that society produces culture by gradations in its manners, by daring leaps in its media (witness Janet Jackson's outrage during the Super Bowl), and by fiat legislatively and judicially. Presently, Christians are doing little about any of these. Note how far the public culture in Tampa Bay has slid in order for the University of South Florida to advertise coed sex as a selling point for one of its dormitories: "One ad for the privately owned dormitory just off campus shows a bare-chested, toned man in the shower, sandwiched between two dripping-wet women in nighties. The women are caressing him as they giggle and grin." Another ad on campus portrays a similar message of licentious fun: "A much larger banner hangs on the front of the 13-story residential tower facing Fletcher Avenue. It shows a bare-chested man pressed against a woman in a nightgown."¹³ How many Christian parents will send their children to a "top" school only to discover that a nine-month lease in a unishower dormitory results in a baby and not an education? Babies are cultural productions, too, but not ones you want to get at college.

Can we emphasize too much that our very civilization depends on manners and religion? Manners, in the meaning of the eighteenth century, comprise good external conduct proceeding from good inward principles based on a foundation of sound religious teaching. Today, culture and the production of culture similarly depend on principles and ideology. It is plain to see whose principles and ideology are productive and whose are not. Strictly speaking, secular values are trampling religious values not only in music, in art, and in literature, but also in the print and electronic media, in our schools, and in our courtrooms. The general consensus from individual Christians seems to be one of resignation: "What can I do about it?" Keeping in mind those limitations, the argument here asserts that the production of culture is the primary responsibility of Christians in every walk of life. In order to establish this thesis, our first task is to define both "production" and "culture."

13. *St. Petersburg Times*. Accessed at: http://www.sptimes.com/2004/07/15/news_pf/Hillsborough/A_desirable_dorm.shtml, August 2, 2004.

CULTURE

Simply put, “culture” as used here means any human expression resulting in an intellectual, behavioral, or material product. Ideas are products of culture; manners are products of culture; art is a product of culture; and *laws* are a product of culture. Taking that principle a step further, politicians are a product of culture; hence the saying that a society gets the leaders it deserves. Glimpsed at any one moment in time, society is a kaleidoscopic portrait of the morals of the time. Even the musician Prince recognizes that the general tone of society has taken a downward turn: “The culture is in trouble. All you see on television are debased images.”¹⁴ If television seems debased by Prince’s standards, we surely are living in the dregs of time.

Culture is the material in the stream of time. In keeping with that metaphor, the constant flow of cultural sound, images, and products would overwhelm us were it not for laws that restrained them. These laws all have their origin in the Ten Commandments, which cover the basic crimes of killing, stealing, and illicit sex. These prohibitions are the foundation for all our laws today. Thus we can say that the production of culture has always been guided by religion. Peter Berger, in his classic sociological text *The Sacred Canopy* (1990), argues that religion is the “sacred canopy” that a society constructs over its world to give it meaning. He further states that “the reality of the Christian world depends upon the presence of social structures within which this reality is taken for granted and within which successive generations of individuals are socialized in such a way that this world will be real *to them*.”¹⁵ This is a loaded sentence which bears analysis. First, we would agree with him that for Christianity to reproduce itself it must do so institutionally. This was once the case when our public school teachers, our doctors and nurses, our policemen and firemen, were one form of Christian or another. The social bond of a common Christian culture transcended institutional barriers and created a “reality” which socialized the individuals within each “social structure.” That sacred canopy is now entirely gone except as it is maintained here and there in small communities. Without belaboring the point, we know that Christianity is now at its ebb tide in our society, as it found itself in England in the nineteenth century, famously figured by Matthew Arnold’s poem “Dover Beach”:

14. *World Magazine* (May 29, 2004), 18.

15. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor, 1990), 46.

The Sea of Faith
 Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
 Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
 But now I only hear
 Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
 Retreating, to the breath
 Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear
 And naked shingles of the world.

If, to repeat Berger's stark phrase, "The reality of the Christian world depends upon the presence of social structures," the idea of nationhood is the first social structure within which any culture replicates itself. The social construction of a Christian American society depends upon a certain percentage of households seeing themselves first as Americans. This may seem insultingly self-evident, but an American nation can no longer be taken for granted. One part of the multicultural agenda is to allow unlimited immigration from the Near East and Mexico. The latter, in spite of its Catholic history, is an aggressively secular society. By increasing the balance of nonnative households, the reflective mirror of cultural institutions such as schools, hospitals, universities, government bureaucracies, etc. will also become less Christian (if that were possible) over time.

Does this sound like apocalyptic rhetoric? Consider these signs of the times. According to Ira Mehlman, spokesman for the Federation for American Immigration Reform, the new official in charge of border crossing at Tijuana, Arturo Gonzalez Cruz, wants to see the border eliminated: "It is clear that their objective is to affect the domestic policies of the U.S. . . . and in a way that makes it easier for people who come to the U.S. illegally to get away with breaking the law number one, and to get access to all sorts of government benefits."¹⁶ Well, one might argue, what does it matter what a border official thinks? Here are some revealing comments from a Mexican-American as well as a Mexican government official which shed light on why what a Mexican border official says in Tijuana is important to us:

Co-founder of MALDEF, Mario Obledo, to whom President Clinton awarded the U.S. Presidential Medal of Freedom, boasted, "California is going to be a Hispanic state. Anyone who doesn't like it should leave." He added: "Every constitutional office in California is going to be held by Hispanics in the next

16. "Mexican Official Wants Border Eliminated." *Foxnews.com* (July 10, 2004). Accessed at: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,124212,00.html>, August 3, 2004.

20 years." Jose Pescador Osuna, former Mexican Consul General in Los Angeles, said, "Even though I'm saying this part serious and part joking, I believe we are practicing 'La Reconquista' in California."¹⁷

"Anyone who doesn't like it should leave." Is it not ironic that the argument once used against *anti*-America protestors may soon be used against *pro*-American citizens? This perhaps sounds overly dramatic, and skeptical readers may well wonder how this can be accomplished short of force. Well, one way to accomplish the de-Americanization of the United States is through the vote. There is a measure being proposed in New York City giving legal immigrants the right to vote in civic elections.¹⁸ For once, New York is behind the curve, as these developments reveal:

In the last decade, five towns in Maryland have allowed noncitizens, even illegal immigrants, to vote in local elections. Campaigns for immigrant voting rights are under way in several cities, including Hartford; Cambridge, Mass.; and Washington, where Mayor Anthony Williams has said he supports giving legal immigrants the vote in District of Columbia elections.¹⁹

What are the ramifications of the spreading of such a policy? Is this another slippery slope argument of "hysteria" and "scare tactics" by right wing conservatives? Consider: the same article estimates that there are *ten million* illegal aliens in the United States, most of whom may qualify for an amnesty in the near future. How many people does it take to influence an election? There is an organization called Christian Exodus which is in the process of moving 50,000 Christians to South Carolina in order to influence the policies of that state in dramatic fashion:

17. Marty Nemko, "The Overwhelming of America." *Jewish World Review* (March 23, 2004). Accessed at: <http://www.jewishworldreview.com/0304/nemko1.asp>, August 3, 2004.

18. Robert F. Worth, "Push Is On to Give Legal Immigrants Vote in New York." Accessed at *New York Times*, April 8, 2004.

19. Robert F. Worth "Push Is On to Give Legal Immigrants Vote in New York." Originally accessed in the *New York Times*, April 8, 2004. Now accessed at: <http://www.usafounhcr.org/archives.cfm?ID=1457&cat=Archives>, August 3, 2004. See also Kelley Beaucar Vlahos, "Immigrant Voters Could Change Election Landscapes" *Foxnews.com* (May 17, 2004). Accessed at: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,120080,00.html>, August 3, 2004.

ChristianExodus.org is coordinating the move of thousands of Christians to South Carolina for the express purpose of re-establishing Godly, constitutional government. It is evident that the U.S. Constitution has been abandoned under our current federal system, and the efforts of Christian activism to restore our Godly republic have proven futile over the past three decades. The time has come for Christians to withdraw our consent from the current federal government and re-introduce the Christian principles once so predominant in America to a sovereign State like South Carolina.²⁰

Compared to 10,000,000 potential voters, 50,000 does not sound like very much, but if 50,000 voters can change the outcome of a state election, then a number of voters 200 times greater can irrevocably change the Christian identity of our nation. But not only does the Left want to give immigrants who have not become citizens the right to vote, they want *children* to vote as well:

A proposed amendment to California's constitution would give 16-year-olds a half-vote and 14-year-olds a quarter-vote in state elections. State Sen. John Vasconcellos, among four lawmakers to propose the idea on Monday, said the Internet, cellular phones, multichannel television and a diverse society makes [sic] today's teens better informed than their predecessors. The idea requires two-thirds approval by the Legislature to appear on the November ballot.²¹

For State Senator John Vasconcellos, to qualify for the vote, all a teen has to do is program the family's VCR. The underlying message here is that the Left is certain of their children because they are indoctrinating them at home. In one sense, they can do a better job than Christians because all the Left has to do is let them watch TV and affirm what the culture teaches. There is no contradiction between the social message and the home message. The liberal production of culture is uniform, publicly and privately. It is only the Christian message that is jarring because it is nowhere represented publicly. There are no positive images of Christians praying and preaching, visiting nursing homes and hospitals, caring for AIDS patients and Alzheimer's patients. In short, there are *no* positive

20. *Christian Exodus*. Accessed at: <http://www.christianexodus.org>, August 3, 2004. See their Appendix A for full details.

21. Jim Wasserman, "California Lawmakers Propose Lowering Voting Age to 14 for State Elections," Associated Press. Accessed at: sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/news/archive/2004/03/08/national2139EST0788.DTL, March 8, 2004.

images of Christians whatsoever, *anywhere* in the public eye. This is truly a remarkable fact given that there are many more millions of believing Christians than there are radical abortionists, for example, and that the culture that Christians produce is life-giving while the culture the radical abortionists produce is tragically life-taking.

For readers unfamiliar with the discourse taking place in our nation's universities and legislatures, these excerpts must read like bad science fiction or the product of a paranoid imagination. I only wish it were so. So far we have been discussing the production of culture in the context of nationhood. What does it mean to be American? How might that change as a result of illegal immigration combined with changes in voting rights laws? There is another locus for the production of culture and that is the home. One way to dilute the influence of Christian households is to redefine "home." The legitimization of gay households and the gay lifestyle by the courts privileges a gay identity over a Christian identity by making specific provisions for the gay identity under law, enforcing that provision with penalties and institutionalizing it in the nation's fabric by a zealous media which supports it in every medium of print, radio, film, Internet, and school curricula. Recently a "born-again" Colorado woman, Cheryl Clark, was granted joint custody of her adoptive child with her former lesbian partner who had no legal rights to the child. The judge, John W. Coughlin, issued a stay against her, preventing her from teaching the child that homosexuality is a sin. The lesbian partner had no such injunction prohibiting her from teaching the child homosexual practices.²² This follows the cultural pattern of erasing Christian rights while simultaneously manufacturing gay rights.

How will gay marriage affect the homes of our country? There is already empirical evidence from the countries of Scandinavia, as Stanley Kurtz gloomily illustrates:

MARRIAGE IS SLOWLY DYING IN SCANDINAVIA. A majority of children in Sweden and Norway are born out of wedlock. Sixty percent of first-born children in Denmark have unmarried parents. Not coincidentally, these countries have had something close to full gay marriage for a decade or more. Same-sex marriage has locked in and reinforced an existing Scandinavian trend toward the separation of marriage and parenthood. The Nordic family pattern—including gay marriage—is spreading

22. David Limbaugh, "More News from the Front Lines of the Culture War" in Townhall.com. Accessed at: <http://www.townhall.com/columnists/davidlimbaugh/dl20031104.shtml>, November 4, 2003.

across Europe. And by looking closely at it we can answer the key empirical question underlying the gay marriage debate. Will same-sex marriage undermine the institution of marriage? It already has.²³

Another way to dilute the influence of home is to dilute the quality of Christian home life by infusing it with media that contradict its Christian values. While visiting Greece in 1978 I was struck by something my Orthodox aunt told me: "The devil is in every home and his horns are on every roof." She understood something in those comparatively restrained times that some conservative Christians do not understand even today.

We already see evidence of the dilution of Christian culture in the nation's elementary, middle, and high schools, and especially in its universities. Prayer has been banned from the classroom, and now it is banned from some states before high school football games. The year 2003 saw the opening in New York (at taxpayer's expense to the tune of \$3.2 million) of the nation's first public high school for gays, Harvey Milk High School, which calls itself "the nation's first accredited public high school designed to meet the needs of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth."²⁴ At the University of Michigan, another taxpayer-supported enterprise, a faculty member introduced the course "How to be Gay: Male Homosexuality and Initiation."²⁵ If, as Berger writes, the "reality of the Christian world depends upon the presence of social structures within which this reality is taken for granted," it is evident that there is no longer a Christian "reality." We are now living in a postmodern, post-Christian reality in which the Christian religion has to be established all over again as "true and reasonable" (Acts 26:25), to use Paul's words, necessary not only to individuals but to society at large. To do this Christians must produce Christian culture as assiduously as non-Christians are producing anti-Christian culture. The question is, "How?" Or is that really the question?

23. Stanley Kurtz, "The End of Marriage in Scandinavia." *The Weekly Standard*. Accessed at: <http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/003/660zypwj.asp>, February 2, 2004.

24. Armstrong Williams, "Is Harvey Milk High School Really a Good Idea?" *Townhall.com*, August 6, 2003. Accessed at <http://www.townhall.com/columnists/Armstrongwilliams/aw20030806.shtml>, July 13, 2004.

25. George Archibald, "'How to Be Gay' Course Draws Fire at Michigan." *Washington Times*, August 18, 2003. Accessed at <http://washingtontimes.com/national/20030818-122317-3268r.htm>, July 13, 2004.

Non-Christians replicate themselves and seek to convert our children through the media. Confronted with this fact, Christian institutions publish tracts, preach to Christians on Christian radio and television stations, write books for Christian audiences, and expend hundreds of millions of dollars and millions of man-hours preaching to the choir. The question is not *how*, since we know how to produce Christian culture for Christians; the unasked question is "What?" What kind of cultural productions should we be producing? In what media should we be producing Christian culture?

The distinction made here between *how* and *what* may puzzle some readers since Christians assume that every church, every mission organization, every Christian college and homeless shelter are reaching out to the lost. However, as a Christian who watches developments in the world, I see very little evidence of Christian culture. To my knowledge, there are no Christian art exhibits currently showing in my city (Nashville); there are no Christian sitcoms (Providence?) showing on television; there are no Christian songs on the mainstream charts; and recently there were only three explicitly Christian movies shown in all the four thousand plus movie screens across the nation: *Luther*, *The Gospel of John*, and *The Passion of the Christ*.²⁶ "But," my hypothetical Christian friend will argue, "we're feeding the poor, clothing the naked, and visiting the sick. The gospel is preached around the world, people are being saved, and God is glorified in all our works."

Is he? Where is the proof? Show me the Christian "reality," show me the Christian "social structures" in our nation's institutions, structures indicating that there is a Christian consensus in the culture around us. Show me the news articles, the television shows, the art exhibits, the public school textbooks which illustrate this reality. The social construction of reality is based on perception. Where is the evidence of Christian culture when Christians and non-Christians look upon the images of our world as it is represented on billboards, radio, television, magazines, newspapers, and film? The reality is that our Christian culture is invisible.

To the society it inhabits, Christianity, in so far as it has any presence, is the ignorant slave: toiling, laboring, suffering, unappreciated, abused, jeered, denigrated, punished, marginalized, and scorned. Is this not so? Does Christianity have any credibility in the mass media markets of our day? Beyond the parameters of *Fox News*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *U.S. News & World Report*, and the *Washington Times*, I cannot name a secular

26. Thankfully, there have also been moral movies, such as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, which manifest Christian values.

outlet that even occasionally reports on the Christian production of culture in a positive light. Indeed, we are all witness to the spectacular cultural moment in time represented by the release of *The Passion of the Christ* in February of 2004. Now, there was coverage! The Pynchonesque screaming that came across the sky from every media entity in the nation hoarsely shouted how gory the movie was, how hatefully anti-Semitic, how pornographic in its violence, how gratuitous in its masochism, until they screamed themselves into exhaustion trying to prevent millions of Christians from going to the movie for no other reason than that it is Christian. Accusations such as these came from people who celebrated the Mapplethorpe "art"—masochistic homosexual pornography—and the Serrano blasphemy, neither of which I can describe here. This is the same media which celebrated the limb-chopping, blood-gushing orgy that is Tarantino's *Kill Bill: Volume I*.

Let me repeat: the reality is, our Christian culture is invisible. Since Christian culture does not register on the face of the nation's media, it therefore does not exist in the public consciousness and has no spiritual influence on our culture. However, when Southern Baptists issue a statement to evangelize Jews or remove their children from public schools, such examples of Christian culture are reproduced in the media as *anti-culture*. What we intend for good they convert into evil. The evidence of the receding sea of faith is everywhere, and even our churches are no longer bastions of immunity.

Churches are the third locus of the co-optation of Christian culture. First, our nationhood ceased to be defined by distinctly Christian cultural productions: conservative and liberal peoples around the world revile us for the crass movies and sitcoms that Hollywood sells globally without realizing that Hollywood does not represent *Christian America*. Secondly, our homes have been co-opted by intrusive laws and a corrupt culture which is performing on our televisions, computers, and CD players (for proof of this, you need only look at your children's consumption of culture, not yours). And third, we now find churches under attack for being Christian. Although my first examples come from Canada and Sweden, remember the principle identified above: extremist activity at the fringes—whether nationally or internationally—soon finds its way to our cultural heartland. Mary Rettig of the *Agape Press* reports:

The Canadian government recently passed a law that prohibits advocating violence or hatred toward homosexuals. Although there is a provision in the law that excludes religious groups, Janet Epp Buckingham of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada

fears that may not be enough. . . . "I think one of the big concerns about this legislation is that it came at the same time that same-sex marriage was a very hot topic in Canada," Buckingham says, "and so there was concern on the part of the Christian community that it was an attempt to silence the religious opposition to same-sex marriage."²⁷

As proof that such fears are not so farfetched, a Saskatchewan man was prosecuted for taking out an ad that presented Bible references (Romans 1; Leviticus 18:22; Leviticus 20:13; and 1 Corinthians 6:9-10) in opposition to homosexual behavior: "Under Saskatchewan's Human Rights Code, Hugh Owens of Regina, Saskatchewan, was found guilty along with the newspaper, the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix*, of inciting hatred and was forced to pay damages of 1,500 Canadian dollars to each of the three homosexual men who filed the complaint."²⁸ Owens explained: "I put the biblical references, but not the actual verses, so the ad would become interactive. . . . I figured somebody would have to look them up in the Bible first, or if they didn't have a Bible, they'd have to find one."²⁹ This is a chilling revelation. Since Owens was not prosecuted for what he said, but for the *source* he cited, this, technically, classifies the Bible as hate literature and reflects the malignant tendency hidden in our own courts and media to do the same.

When a Swedish Pentecostal pastor was sentenced to a month in prison for condemning homosexuality, a Slovakia government official took action: "Slovakia's Christian Democratic Movement, and one of the party's officials, Interior Minister Vladimír Palko, protested to the Swedish ambassador in Slovakia, Cecilia Julin, July 13, reported the Slovak Spectator newspaper."³⁰ It is surely a great irony of our time when a member of a former Communist country rebukes a member of a former Christian country for his country's abuse of religious freedom. One of the advantages of living in a former Communist country is that you recognize oppression and propaganda when you see it. Just as many Polish citizens dismissed Michael Moore's hate film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, as propaganda,³¹

27. Mary Rettig, "Canada's Hate Speech Law to Impact Same-Sex Marriage Debate." *Agape Press* (May 24, 2004). Accessed at: <http://www.crosswalk.com/news/1264606.html>, May 29, 2004.

28. Art Moore, "Bible Verses Regarded As Hate Literature." *WorldNetDaily.com*. Accessed at: http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=31080, August 3, 2004.

29. *Ibid.*

30. "Pastor's Imprisonment for Sermon Protested." Accessed at: http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=39687, July 30, 2004.

Vladimir Palko correctly characterized Sweden's actions as "an example of how 'a left-wing liberal ideology was trying to introduce tyranny and misuse the [European Union]' to quell freedom of expression."³² The EU has already famously left out all mention of God and of Europe's Christian heritage from the draft of its new Constitution, but what is interesting is Europe's introduction of a new secularism so soon after it tried and miserably failed with the catastrophic instruments of Communism and Nazism.³³ Given a choice between religion and secularism, the European elite have consistently chosen what have proven to be ideologies of mass destruction.

The most important social dynamic to observe in the production of culture in our society consists of erasure and replacement. In an essay entitled, "When Homosexuals Take Over a Church," Bill Fishburne, a radio co-host at WTZY in Asheville, North Carolina, describes how his Anglican church gradually lost its scriptural and *sexual* identity through a combination of passive conservatism and aggressive activism.³⁴ The Christian content of the church was diluted through membership, committee participation, and program changes. Eventually his once Christian church became a gay worship hall for a drag costume fashion show. As a cultural metonym, that example illustrates news items from across the country which get lost in the irrelevant noise of our media-saturated world.

Ann Coulter wrote a trenchant column detailing how the cultural elite are determined to remove any public evidences of faith from our society. In her inimitable style, Coulter describes the process and the personalities:

From the Chelsea section of Manhattan, the gay, Bronx-born Puerto Rican executive director of the ACLU, Anthony Romero, tossed and turned all night thinking about the Ten Commandments display on the Elkhart, Ind., municipal building,

31. "Poles Say 'Fahrenheit 9/11' Is Propaganda (one condemned movie as a 'foul pamphlet')." Accessed at: <http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/1177317/posts>, August 3, 2004.

32. "Pastor's Imprisonment for Sermon Protested." Accessed at: http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=39687, July 30, 2004.

33. "EU Constitution Omits Reference to Christianity" in *The New American* (July 26, 2004). Accessed at: <http://www.thenewamerican.com/tna/2004/07-26-2004/insider/eu.htm>, August 3, 2004.

34. Bill Fishburne, "When Homosexuals Take Over a Church." Accessed at: <http://freerepublic.com/focus/f-religion/1024260/posts>, August 2, 2004.

which had been there, without incident, since 1958. The ACLU sued and the monument was hauled off.

In Ohio, Richland County Common Pleas Judge James DeWeese had a framed poster of the Ten Commandments in his courtroom. The ACLU sued and the Ten Commandments came down. Compare that to the late New York judge Elliott Wilk, who famously displayed a portrait of communist revolutionary Che Guevara on his office wall. (Che, Castro, Hussein – evidently the only bearded revolutionary these people don't like is Jesus Christ.) And yet, no one from Ohio ever sued Wilk.

The ACLU got word of a Ten Commandments monument in a public park in Plattsmouth, Neb. (pop. 7,000), and immediately swooped in to demand that the offensive symbol be removed. Not being from New York, Plattsmouth didn't want to litigate. Soon cranes were in the park ripping out a monument that had sat there, not bothering anyone, for 40 years.

ACLU busybodies sued Johnson County, Iowa, demanding that it remove a Ten Commandments monument that had been in a public courtyard since 1964. Within a year, the 2,500-pound granite monument was gone.

Mail-order minister Barry Lynn's Americans United for Separation of Church and State—a group curiously devoid of both Americans and churchgoers—sued little Chester County, Pa., demanding that it remove a Ten Commandments plaque that has hung on the courthouse wall since 1920.³⁵

With such cultural pressures in view, Tom Minnery, speaking in a prophetic mode, is not sanguine about the church's preparedness for the coming times:

Some pastors and elders who steadfastly oppose involvement in "politics" or social action say that if the government should ever become oppressive and seek to prevent the church from worshiping God, then they will simply resist the government and accept whatever tribulations come their way. . . . A pastor who believes that his congregation can simply sit out the culture war and then somehow resist at the end is foolish.³⁶

35. Ann Coulter, "When Blue States Attack" in *FrontPageMagazine.com*. Accessed at: *FrontPageMagazine.com*, December 29, 2003.

36. Tom Minnery, *Why You Can't Stay Silent: A Biblical Mandate to Shape Our Culture* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2001), 58-59.

People who will not resist the erasure of their faith when there are no harmful consequences surely will not resist when the consequences are disenfranchisement and imprisonment. Samuel Johnson famously said that "patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."³⁷ A correlative to that statement is that religiosity is the last refuge of cowardice. Using faith as an excuse to exempt oneself from fighting the culture war is no different from using faith to exempt oneself from fighting to defend our country from a hostile invader. The only difference is that the enemy is already inside the gates.

A CALL TO FAITH

Schaeffer wrote compellingly in support of civil disobedience when all other measures fail:

If there is no final place for civil disobedience, then the government has been made autonomous, and as such, it has been put in the place of the Living God . . . because then you are to obey it even when it tells you in its own way at that time to worship Caesar. And that point is exactly where the early Christians performed their acts of civil disobedience even when it cost them their lives.³⁸

Many Christians today speak in a facile manner of giving up their lives for Jesus when in fact they cannot even give up a vacation or a dessert. There is a lack of intellectual and moral seriousness in our country that precludes Christians from acting like Christians when it matters most.

It is not as if we do not have ample examples from our nation's past. In January 1776, Peter Muhlenberg read from a sermon at Woodstock, Virginia: "There is a time for all things, a time to preach and a time to pray, but those times have passed away. There is a time to fight, and that time has now come."³⁹ This may sound like more heated rhetoric, but one

37. James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 615.

38. Schaeffer, 130.

39. As quoted at: <http://www.marksquotes.com/Founding-Fathers/index6.htm>. Also, see: "Peter Muehlenberg" in *Wikipedia*. Accessed at: http://www.fact-index.com/p/pe/peter_muhlenberg.html, August 3, 2004. "On January 21st, 1776, Rev. Muhlenberg started the services in the Anglican church in Woodstock as usual. For the sermon, he took his text from the third chapter Ecclesiastes, which starts with 'To every thing there is a season. . . .' When he got to the eighth verse, he declaimed '. . . a time of war, and a time of peace, . . . and this is the time of war.' He removed his clerical robe to reveal his Colonel's uniform. The

wonders how much secularization and de-sacralization is too much for today's decadent Christianity? One wonders when Christians of all denominations will ask with Wesley, "Who will rise up with me against the wicked [Psalm 94:16]?" This is what the people of Hamtramck, Michigan, must be asking. On April 24, 2004, their spiritual 9/11, they received the following news: "The Hamtramck City Council's unanimous approval Tuesday night of a plan to allow the Muslim call to prayer to be broadcast on loudspeakers five times a day in Arabic has outraged many of the city's Polish Catholic residents."⁴⁰ Note that this is an amplified broadcast—loud enough to be heard by the faithful throughout the city—blared five times a day, lasting two minutes each time. Consider that this will inevitably disrupt Christian services, Christian marriages, Christian funerals, Christian dinner prayers five times a day. Not only must the Christians of Hamtramck feel betrayed by their elected officials, but they must listen to the muezzin knowing that this is the text:

Allah is most Great, Allah is most Great, Allah is most Great, Allah is most Great. I bear witness that there is no god except Allah, I bear witness that there is no god except Allah. I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Come to prayer, come to prayer; come to success, come to success. Allah is most Great, Allah is most Great, there is no god except Allah.⁴¹

This travesty of civic and judicial administration also falls under the production of culture. At a time when Christians cannot display the Ten Commandments in our courtrooms or our Christmas decorations in public spaces or say prayers before ballgames, Muslims are given the right to disrupt an entire Christian community five times a day.

Christians are fond of calling for revivals. We travel to other cities for mass meetings held in the spirit of a virtuous carnival atmosphere, we buy souvenirs, we eat lunches with friends at nice restaurants, we buy books to improve our spiritual lives—in short, we produce a popular

next day he led out 300 men from the county to form the nucleus of the Eighth Virginia. The unit was first posted to the South, to defend the coast of South Carolina and Georgia."

40. Cecil Angel, "Hamtramck Prayer OK Prompts Outrage" in *Detroit Free Press* (April 28, 2004). Accessed at: http://www.freep.com/news/locway/pray28_20040428.htm, August 3, 2004. See also, Doug Guthrie "Islamic Beliefs Enter Mainstream" in *The Detroit News*. Accessed at: <http://www.detroitnews.com/2004/religion/0408/09/a01-236403.htm>, August 9, 2004.

41. *Immigrants for America*. Accessed at: <http://www.immigrantsforamerica.com/hamtramck.michigan.city.allows.public.muslim.calls.to.prayer.html>, August 3, 2004.

Christian culture that is ephemeral, superficial, and which ultimately is deadly to our living faith. Just as habitual sin, over time, hardens the heart and weakens the believer's ability to feel remorse and to repent, so too a habitual shallow practice produces a weak faith which finds it increasingly more difficult to feel remorse and to repent. What Christians forget is that weak faith calls for repentance as much as sin does, because weak faith is sin: weak faith is a failure either to trust in or to obey God. When churchgoing Christians live for Christ without sacrifice, without discipline, without service, and without conscience, they are guilty of being lukewarm.

Such, I am afraid, is the life of the vast majority of Christians of my acquaintance and often of myself. In times of peace, such weak practice is forgivable. But in times of war, it is tantamount to cowardice and perhaps even treasonous in certain circumstances. And we are living now in a time of spiritual and cultural warfare unparalleled in our nation's history.

When, in the future, there are calls for revival, let us remember what Schaeffer wrote: "The old revivals are spoken about so warmly by the evangelical leadership. Yet they seem to have forgotten what those revivals were; . . . they also called for social action."⁴² We have a long way to go before we can arrive at social action. We must not be like those people that Wesley condemned who found excuses for doing nothing because sin had risen to too great a height or because it is not our job, for then we will stand condemned with the weak believer who wanted to bury his father first (Matthew 8:19-22). Nor must we be like the hypothetical pastors Tom Minnery warns us about who, in effect, will become false prophets in times of danger. Let us not abstain from helping those of a different denomination, like the Polish Catholics in Hamtramck, but be like Wesley and have "no regard to any particular sect or party" in the prosecution of our duties. Let us not withhold our vote from a politician because he does not satisfy us in every particular, because then we will have far worse politicians who will satisfy us in none. Edmund Burke recognized the dilemma of political choices which were not always spiritually optimum: "The rights of men in governments are their advantages; and these are often in balances between differences of good, in compromises sometimes between good and evil, and sometimes between evil and evil."⁴³ Since we must choose, let us always choose the lesser evil

42. Schaeffer, 64.

43. Burke, 153.

so as not to bring down upon us an even greater evil by our prideful inaction.

As we consider the Christian need for the production of culture, let us produce culture that is visible and which has a palpable effect on our society. Mel Gibson, a member of a splinter Catholic sect, has done perhaps more than any Christian since George Whitefield to galvanize Christians of all sects. For *The Passion of the Christ* he was viciously persecuted. No other Christian movie, not *The Ten Commandments*, or *The Robe*, or the recent *Luther*, or *The Gospel of John*, nor any of the fringe films, has had such an effect on the Christian culture of its time. We need Christians to make films to counter the vicious anti-Christian propaganda which is destroying our children. Many parents, because they do not watch teen movies, do not realize the subtle ways in which Hollywood degrades Christianity through mockery. Hollywood writers do not engage the ideas of our faith in serious debate; rather, they distort them and then hold them up to ridicule.

Finally, the Christian production of culture will result in its society's male citizens being decisive and unafraid to confront misconduct. Unfortunately, conflict avoidance is a production of culture, one that is no longer limited to the South. One of the most disturbing stories of the past three years is the conduct of fourteen Syrian musicians on a June flight from Detroit to L.A.⁴⁴ Their conduct was described as a "dry run" for a hijacking and left the passengers and stewardesses shaking. The federal air marshals on board did not break their cover because there was only intimidation and no violence, but once the plane landed agents from three government agencies rushed the plane and detained the men. They were eventually released, and only later did the federal agents realize that their visas had expired. What was troubling about the story is that the men congregated around the washrooms, behaved in an intimidating fashion, and forced the women to walk through their groups. Not a single man stood up to confront them. Our politically correct culture has produced a generation of politically correct men who, apparently, would rather die than give offense. This would not have happened if it were a plane full of American men from the 1940s or 1950s. A man who had fought at Normandy or in the Ardennes or at Iwo Jima would have rebuked them. And if necessary, he would have fought them all.

44. Audrey Hudson "Scouting Jetliners for New Attacks" *Washington Times* (July 22, 2004). Accessed at: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/national/20040721-101403-1508r.htm>, August 3, 2004.

This example illustrates that one of the most important values that has been erased from our society is shame. Without the concept of shame, the associative virtue of honor cannot exist. Since we cannot be shamed except by acting, we choose not to act so as not to be shamed. Forty years ago a man would have been shamed for *not* acting and therefore would have acted. The cultural objective has shifted to the acquisition of a negative value: striving for *unshame* rather than striving for honor. Our society has successfully produced a cultural value that, in effect, manufactures cowardice on a national scale. The object of the new value is the pacification of American manhood.

When I accepted the assignment of writing about culture in our society, the original intent was to write about music, film, and literature. But the continuously unfolding consequences of 9/11 have changed all that. As important as those things are, as important as abortion is, as important as evangelism is, all of those must take a backseat to a matter of the utmost urgency. In 1787 the great English Christian reformer and abolitionist William Wilberforce wrote in his diary, "God has put before me two great objects: the Abolition of the Slave Trade and the reformation of manners." As Peter J. Blackburn describes him, "He drove these two crusades in tandem; but abolition, as the greater evil, consumed most of his time, thought and energy."⁴⁵ We are in a similar position today. There is a "greater evil" which must consume our time, thought, and energy. In 1812 Benjamin Rush wrote to John Adams: "Some talked, some wrote, and some fought to promote and establish it [the Continental Congress], but you and Mr. Jefferson thought for us all."⁴⁶ Each of us must likewise fight according to his own abilities.

If in the coming years Christians do not begin to produce a living culture, a culture that is virtuous and manly, honorable and unashamed, vital and *visible*, then we will not recognize our country in a short twenty years. It may very well be that in our Free Will Baptist communities of Thomaston, Georgia, and Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and Spartanburg, South Carolina, and Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, we may have to endure the amplified call of the muezzin drowning out our own prayers because we chose not to vote, not to fight, and not to reproduce the Christian social structures that had been the jewel of our inheritance. In our foolish sowing of the seeds of isolationism, we stand the risk of inheriting the whirl-

45. "Heroes of the Faith." Accessed at: <http://www.peterjblackburn.com/people/wilbrfce.htm>, August 3, 2004.

46. *Founding Fathers Quotes*. Accessed at: <http://www.marksquotes.com/Founding-Fathers/index5.htm>, August 3, 2004.

wind of an alien prayer and will doom our children and our children's children to water the withered fruit of our faith with their tears.

"Who will rise up with me against the wicked?" This is no longer a historical or a hypothetical question. Like Wilberforce, we must recognize that a greater evil is before us. As Christians we must continue to evangelize, to work on behalf of the unborn, and to reach out to the lost nations overseas. These issues, like the poor, will always be with us. However, the greater evil is the global erasure of Christianity from our public documents, from our public spaces, and, more frighteningly, from our homes and churches. The compelling battles before us, in our very towns, are illegal immigration, voting rights, and the erasure of our cultural and religious symbols. A Christian nation can endure any amount of external terrorism. What we cannot endure is the internal terrorism which is methodically and maliciously erasing every sign of our faith from the nation's cultural life.

These, then, are some of the cultural winds sweeping across our land. To counter this offensive, we must respond in kind. We must pass laws that protect the institution of marriage, the integrity of our nation's borders, our country's voting procedures, and, finally, protect our institutional practice of prayer in public proceedings. In response to a threat by the ACLU to have lunchtime prayer banished at the U.S. Naval Academy, Representative Walter Jones of North Carolina said: "I have seen the federal courts take one right after another away from people of faith in this country . . . and I think it's time to fight."⁴⁷ Muhlenberg said something similar in 1776. Believing Americans responded then with historic results. Only time will reveal what character and what faith today's Christians possess and what legacy they will leave their children tomorrow.

47. Terence P. Jeffrey, "ACLU Targets Navy" in *The Washington Times*, December 29, 2003.

Mark R. Paschall

The Changing Landscape of the Abortion Debate

This article will focus on recent developments in the abortion debate and will explore the changing course of argument by abortion proponents over the past ten to fifteen years. This discussion has evolved on three levels as the focus has been first the humanness of the developing fetus, second the personhood of the unborn, and finally the issue of the mother's rights. Several assumptions will be made at the outset to lay the groundwork for what will follow, and given the readership of this journal this should pose no controversy.

Assumption #1: God is the sole creator of all life, and every human being is created in the image of this omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent Being.

Assumption #2: Life begins at the moment of conception. There is no "later event" which must take place, no developmental milestone which must be reached to consider this newly created being "human" in every sense of the word.

Assumption #3: The taking or termination of this newly created life is tantamount to murder at any stage of a pregnancy.

The first level of this debate concerns the humanness of the fetus; without a doubt, the explosion of new technology, particularly in the area of fetal imaging, has drastically changed the landscape of the abortion discussion. Now, all but the staunchest and blindest of abortion proponents will concede this point. While one used to be able to surmise what a fetus was doing based on indirect measures such as electrical waves from the heart, and diffuse, broad ultrasound beams, one now has imaging techniques available that can show 3-dimensional virtual pictures of minute details of movement and physical development. What used to be assumed to be the heart beating can now be studied in 3-dimensional color detail, with pictures of blood flowing through actual chambers and vessels.

Microscopic cameras can now monitor every step towards maturity, and one finds that these developments have been a great source of embarrassment to the proabortion forces. The developing preborn infant can now be viewed to have purposeful movements throughout his/her nine-month confinement. Furthermore, fetal comfort seems to be the

motivating factor in these intrauterine gyrations, and, consequently, no longer can one argue with any degree of credibility that this is just a “blob of tissue” or an extension of the mother. Just as modern archeology has continued to confirm the biblical historical record, the study of the developing infant has consistently supported the biblical view of the unborn as a unique, individual human being.

This technology has now opened up an entire branch of surgery, as physicians are training to operate on infants before they are born. These developments further underline what Francis Schaeffer referred to as the schizophrenia of our society, when we spend millions of dollars developing technology to save the very lives we choose to kill.¹ These recent discoveries have ended centuries of guesswork and controversy concerning the humanity of the fetus. For a generation that considers itself intellectually curious and insists it prefers scientific fact to philosophy and faith, one might have expected this technology to have engendered a new respect and appreciation for the preborn infant. Instead, we find a systematic campaign clamoring for the destruction of the embryo and fetus as a cure-all for social and personal problems.

Unable to continue the discussion on this level of the humanness of the preborn, abortion proponents entered the second level of the discussion. The focus of the abortion issue shifted back to a more philosophical realm, and proabortion forces preferred to debate when this developing life can be called a “person” as opposed to a mere being. This distinction is, of course, contrived, but much of the literature advocating abortion is directed toward denying that the unborn is indeed a human person. It is no longer possible to deny that a unique individual life with its own genetic code begins at conception, but it is argued that this life is not conferred with personhood until a certain decisive moment or event occurs in its development.

To no one’s surprise, abortion advocates cannot agree on what this decisive moment should be. Their feeble attempts to support their individual points of view, as they all struggle with their false premises, illustrate the floundering that takes place by abortion proponents. Various attempts to define this decisive moment have included the detection of brain waves,² visible at 40-43 days, or the advent of purposeful movement

1. Francis Schaeffer and C. Everett Koop, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming Revell Company, 1979), 35-37.

2. Francis Beckwith, “Abortion, Bioethics, and Personhood: A Philosophical Reflection,” Commentary for *The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity* (November 19, 2001). Accessed at: http://www.cbhd.org/resources/bioethics/beckwith_2001-11-19_print.htm, December 16, 2005.

which would be detected some days later. Others have suggested “sentience,” the ability to feel and sense as a conscious being, often accepted to occur at about twenty-five weeks of gestation. Still others would define a person as one who can communicate in a sophisticated manner and has consciousness, one who can solve complex problems and has a self-concept.³ This is rather extreme, of course, and would place the arrival of personhood at some time after birth!

This line of reasoning is really only a throwback to some thirty years ago when the discoverers of the DNA molecule were flexing their existential muscles and pushed the limits of acceptability with their defense of infanticide. In May 1973, James Watson, the Nobel Prize winner who discovered the double helix of DNA, stated: “If a child were not declared alive until 3 days after birth, the doctor could allow the child to die if the parents so choose and save a lot of misery and suffering.”⁴ In January 1978, his partner, Francis Crick, declared in the *Pacific News Service*, “No newborn infant should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowment.” He added: “If it fails these tests, it forfeits the right to live.”⁵ At that time, our society still generally viewed such opinions as too Orwellian and did not give them much consideration. However, as we consider the state of the abortion debate in this young twenty-first century, these ludicrous views have found fertile ground in the humanistic mind.

These various proposed criteria all have one thing in common in that they claim that a certain function is required before an entity can be considered a person, that is, they attempt to define personhood in terms of function rather than being. This argument of functionality, as it is known in proabortion literature, makes a clear distinction between being human and being a person. They would agree that a fetus is a member of the species *homo sapiens* and in that sense is human but would also contend that they are not yet persons with any rights to protection until they fulfill a particular set of personhood criteria.

The problem presented by the argument of functionality is that when a human being is asleep, unconscious or comatose, he is not functioning as a person but is obviously still a human being with personhood. When a person is sleeping, there may be no purposeful thought or movement taking place, but that does not make him a nonperson. Even an abortionist would not advocate killing a human being because he was sleeping

3. Mary Anne Warren, “On the Moral and Legal Status of Abortion,” *The Monist* 57 (1973): 55.

4. Quoted in Schaeffer and Koop, 73.

5. *Ibid.*

and thus not meeting "personhood" criteria. What is important, then, is the being of a person, not the functioning. A human person does not come into existence only when certain functions are performed, but rather a human person is an entity who has the capacity for human functions. It does not even matter if those functions are ever attained or not. The unborn human has this inherent capacity to give rise to human functions from the moment he comes into existence and is thus a person as long as he exists. Philosopher J. P. Moreland points out that "it is because an entity has an essence and falls within a natural kind that it can possess a unity of dispositions, capacities, parts and properties at a given time and can maintain identity through change."⁶

This idea of change has come to the forefront of the abortion discussion as well. It is clear that living organisms maintain their identity through change. If this were not true for humans, then one would never literally be the same person from one week to another, as a teenager, a ten-year-old, an infant, or in the preborn state. People certainly change, but it is always the same person who has changed. If one is a valuable human person now, then he was a valuable human person at every moment in the past, including those nine months spent in the womb.

The third level of the abortion debate that has evolved recently is the resurgence of another philosophical discussion, which would accept the obvious fact of the humanity of the preborn, even admit the personhood of the fetus, and yet still seek to justify abortion in virtually all cases. The crux of this level of debate is the right of one individual, the mother, over the right to life of the preborn infant. Much of this discussion has centered around two analogies with which pastors and those on the side of life must be conversant. Judith Jarvis Thomson, in her article "A Defense of Abortion," provides two of the most well-known arguments that would justify abortion in virtually all cases while accepting the humanity of the unborn. Pastors and lay people alike should be aware of these common arguments and their obvious fallacies. The first of these arguments asks the reader to imagine he wakes one morning to find himself attached to a famous violinist. He is informed by the Society of Music Lovers that he must spend nine months connected to the violinist because the violinist's very life depends on this connection. He is thus a living kidney dialysis machine whose existence preserves the very life of the violinist. Now, reasons Thomson, some might be decent, if not heroic, and be willing to tolerate this violinist for nine months, but certainly no one is under any obligation to do so, and it would be wrong to

6. J. P. Moreland, "James Rachels and the Active Euthanasia Debate," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31 (March 1988): 86.

prevent the unplugging of the violinist, even though it would result in his death.⁷

Though somewhat bizarre, this illustration is very popular among abortion proponents but must be seen as a false analogy for a number of reasons. First, abortion is more than the mere “unplugging” of another individual. As crass as it may seem, the analogy would be more accurate if, rather than being merely unplugged, the violinist were hacked to death with an axe or boiled in a hypertonic saline solution. The violinist would be killed by a disease, and the unplugging would allow him to die. Conversely, the preborn human dies from a perpetrated act of violence.

A second consideration is that surely parents have duties to their own children that strangers do not have towards anonymous violinists. Remarkably, Thomson would deny this and even claims that “they (parents) do not simply by virtue of their biological relationship have a special responsibility for it (their child).”⁸ This chilling train of thought reveals the utter depravity of the unregenerate mind as it considers these issues. If carried to its logical end, however, this particular argument becomes untenable. Parents would then have the right to “detach” themselves from a child at any time, if that child were deemed burdensome. Parents could abandon an infant, a toddler, an adolescent whenever it was convenient. These obvious faults in this analogy must be pointed out whenever possible.

Thomson’s second analogy suggests that the developing child is like a burglar who has broken into a house through an open door. If someone were to enter a house unlawfully, it might be an example of extreme patience and longsuffering to wait for the burglar to leave on his own, but the homeowner is certainly within his rights forcefully to remove the trespasser. There is no blame in expelling the unwanted guest, even if the person might die in the process. Thomson reasons that in the same way, a woman has the right to remove an unwanted fetus from her body. The analogy is expanded to say that if bars had been placed over the windows, this would be analogous to failed contraception and such persons would have an even greater justification for removal of the burglar-child from the house-womb.

The flaws in this thinking are obvious but nevertheless must be articulated to those inclined to be swayed by Thomson. First, a burglar enters

7. Judith Jarvis Thomson, “A Defense of Abortion,” in Tom L. Beauchamp and LeRoy Walters, *Contemporary Issues in Bioethics*, 3d ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1989), 191-200.

8. *Ibid.*, 199.

a person's house under his own power, with ill intent. Having broken the law, he does not necessarily merit our sympathy or restraint. Consider, however, if the trespasser were a two-year-old child or an elderly person with dementia who had accidentally wandered into the house. Not only is this person not responsible for his actions; he likely does not even realize where he is. Are we prepared to say that it is acceptable to kill such a person to obtain our desired end of having him out of our house?

A second point is that simply leaving a door ajar does not translate into trespassers and burglars as sure as sexual intercourse leads to children. If we wanted the analogy to be more accurate, we would have to postulate a situation where, in fact, leaving a door open would invite unwanted guests in and would be a generally accepted method for inviting strangers in. Once we decided it was time for the stranger to leave, if we could not find another way of getting him out of our house, we would be justified in killing him, according to this line of thinking, even though we were, in a very real sense, responsible for his being there in the first place.

Thomson's arguments ultimately fail, but they do reflect these recent deep desires to justify abortion even when it is understood that a human life is being destroyed. Thomson's powerful imagination must be matched by an equally powerful and persistent imagination which would seek to transform our culture of death into a culture of life.

The legislation which protects the barbaric, violent act known as "partial birth abortion" illustrates the consequences of accepting this argument based on women's rights. It should never cease to be a chilling experience for the Christian to hear a politician speak out in favor of partial birth abortion as we have recently witnessed. While most readers are probably aware of the level of depravity and Satan-induced blindness required to perform this act, its existence cannot be ignored in any discussion of the current state of the abortion debate.

Partial birth abortion is known in the medical literature as "intact dilation and extraction" (D & X), and a brief description makes this clear. After dilating the cervix for two days, the abortionist pulls the live infant, feetfirst, out of the womb. Carefully leaving the head inside the mother, because failure to do so would leave the doctor open to murder charges, he then punctures the base of the skull with scissors, inserts a hollow tube into the wound, and sucks out the baby's brain. This then allows the largest part of the baby, the head and skull, to be crushed, and now the recently murdered child can be easily extracted from the mother and the corpse disposed of. As difficult as it is to believe, this procedure is the

rallying cry of many politicians as they pander to any group which might boost their chances of election.

Partial birth abortion came to the forefront of public awareness in 1995 during a congressional debate on a bill banning the procedure. During this debate, opponents of the ban asserted that the procedure was rarely performed (450-500 times per year) and used only in extreme cases when the mother's life was in danger.⁹ However, following President Clinton's veto of a congressionally approved ban, conflicting information surfaced. It was found that the vast majority of intact D & X procedures were in fact not done in response to extreme medical conditions but on healthy mothers and healthy infants.¹⁰ Furthermore, physicians acknowledged performing thousands of such procedures each year. Most practices mirrored that of the late abortionist James T. McMahan, who related to the U.S. Congress that only 9% of his partial birth abortions involved the health of the mother, and, in fact, the depression of the mother was the leading factor justifying this procedure.¹¹

Despite what abortion proponents and their lackey politicians claim, the real concern in the vast majority of these cases is not the life of the mother but the death of the infant. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists declared in a policy statement that they "could identify no circumstances under which this procedure . . . would be the only option to save the life or preserve the health of the woman."¹² Furthermore, this procedure poses serious medical risks to the mother. There are inherent risks associated with any third trimester abortion, including hemorrhage, infection, and uterine perforation. However, intact D & X places mothers at two additional unique risks. First, in order to deliver the feet and body first, an "internal podalic version" must be performed during which the physician reaches into the uterus, grasps the fetus's feet, and pulls the feet down into the cervix. This internal "version" carries serious risks of uterine rupture, amniotic fluid embolus, and trauma to the uterus. The leading textbook in this field, *Williams Obstetrics*, warns about this dangerous maneuver and states that "there

9. C. Jouzaitis, "Foes Line Up Anew on Late Abortions," *Chicago Tribune* (February 27, 1997), 3.

10. P. M. Gianelli, "Abortion Rights Leader Urges End to 'Half-truths,'" *American Medical News* (March 3, 1997), 3-4, 55-56.

11. "Key Facts on Partial-Birth Abortion," *National Right to Life* (February 14, 2003). Accessed at: <http://www.nrlc.org/abortion/pba/keyfactsPBA.htm>, December 16, 2005.

12. M. LeRoy Sprang and Mark Neerhof, "Rationale for Banning Abortions Late in Pregnancy," *The Journal of the American Medical Association* 280 (August 26, 1998): 744.

are very few, if any, indications for internal podalic version."¹³ A second potential complication is the risk inherent in blindly forcing scissors into the birth canal which has been filled up with the fully developed body of the soon to be murdered infant, in an attempt to puncture the base of the skull. Lacerations and secondary maternal hemorrhage are frequently encountered, which can lead to severe bleeding, shock, and even maternal death.

The negative consequences of this procedure for the fetus could not be more absolute—the snuffing out of life itself. There is the further inhumanity, though, of performing this procedure with absolutely no consideration for the baby's pain and suffering. The centers for pain perception develop at about 20-24 weeks of gestation, and these procedures are performed on infants all the way up to 40 weeks of gestation, that is, full-term infants. When infants of similar gestational ages are delivered and given medical attention, pain management is an important part of their care in the nursery. However, with intact D & X, pain management is not provided for the fetus who is literally within inches of being delivered. Forcibly incising the cranium with scissors and then suctioning out the intracranial contents is excruciatingly painful. It is beyond ironic that the pain management practiced for an intact D & X on a human fetus would not meet federal standards for the humane care of animals used in medical research.¹⁴

Even the American Medical Association, which has been notoriously pro-abortion, has concluded the following: "(1) Intact D & X should not be performed because it is needlessly risky, inhumane, and ethically unacceptable. This procedure is closer to infanticide than it is to abortion. (2) Abortions in the periviable period (currently 23 weeks) and beyond should be considered unethical unless the fetus has a condition incompatible with prolonged survival or if the mother's life is endangered by the pregnancy."¹⁵

At the time of this writing, President Bush has signed the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act into law. Senator John Kerry voted against this

13. F. G. Cunningham *et al.*, *Williams Obstetrics*, 20th ed. (Stamford, Conn.: Appleton and Lange: 1997), 507.

14. "Report of the American Veterinary Medical Association Panel on Euthanasia," *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 202 (1993): 229-49.

15. Sprang and Neerhof, 746.

bill six times, calling it “a step backwards for women,” and now the ban has been ruled unconstitutional by three federal judges.¹⁶ The final decision rests with an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, and this promises to be an ongoing battle for years to come.

Senator Kerry’s comments about women point out the real issue behind this level of the abortion debate. Abortion proponents have tried to debase a serious discussion concerning life as a call to protect the rights of a woman to do as she pleases with her body, including killing a developing life within her. Lest readers think this is an exaggerated analysis, consider the following direct quote from Planned Parenthood.

At the most basic level, the abortion issue is not really about abortion. It is about the value of women in society. Should women make their own decisions about family, career, and how to live their lives? Or should government do that for them? . . . The anti-abortion leaders really have a larger purpose. They oppose ideas and programs which can help women achieve equality and freedom. They also oppose programs which protect the health and well-being of women and their children. . . . Such stances reveal the ultimate cynicism of the compulsory pregnancy movement. “Life” is not what they are fighting for. What they want is a return to the days when a woman had few choices in controlling the future. They think that the abortion option gives too much freedom.¹⁷

One need not be reminded that the abortion debate is not about a woman’s inherent rights. We do not have the personal freedom to kill our babies; this is not one of our inalienable rights since we did not choose life but rather were given the gift of life by God himself. This aspect of the debate ultimately comes down to a matter of the will. Abortion is sin and is thus tantamount to defiance against God. Multiple studies have shown that the overwhelming reasons for abortion are not medical or health related, as abortion proponents would have us believe. Rather, it almost always relates to the convenience of the mother, while the inherent right to life of the human person developing inside her is trampled.

16. “The Case against Kerry, Reason #5: Kerry Is a Pro-Abortion Extremist,” *Human Events Online*. Accessed at: <http://www.humaneventsonline.com/article.php?id=4973>, December 23, 2005; and Sam Kastensmidt, “Judges Prevent PBA Ban from Taking Effect,” *The Inside Track*. Accessed at: <http://www.reclaimamerica.org/pages/NEWS/newspage.asp?story=1447>, December 23, 2005.

17. “Nine Reasons Why Abortions Are Legal: A Statement from Planned Parenthood Federation of America.” Accessed at: http://www.coolnurse.com/abortion_legal.htm, December 23, 2005.

Our founding fathers had much to say on this subject of rights, and we are very familiar with what one of them said: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.” It is no accident that Thomas Jefferson not only listed life among our unalienable rights but made it first among them. The right to life inherently comes before all other rights, for without life there can be no meaningful discussion of other rights. If the right to innocent life is not held absolute, then there are no absolutes, and there is no rule of law. There is no way around this: debasing the right to life means embracing the arbitrary rule of man, and no nation that does that can remain free. Chipping away at the fundamental right to life—especially for the weakest in a society—is a dire assault on all our liberties and shows a breathtaking arrogance on the part of those who would see it done.

Abortion represents the greatest tragedy of our age, having claimed more lives than all of the twentieth century wars combined, or over six times as many lives as Nazi Germany’s concentration camps. It is estimated that 3,534 unborn infants are killed each day in this country.¹⁸ This means that 3,534 potential voters, citizens of the U.S., teachers, doctors, lawyers, have been annihilated since this time yesterday. Those who advocate abortion rights have aligned themselves with the heartless butchers in history in saying “We will kill whomever we please.” Of course, the easiest to kill are those who cannot defend themselves. These unborn infants cannot speak up for themselves. Babies do not vote; they do not elect Congressmen; they do not appoint judges. It is precisely for this reason, however, that pastors and leaders of our denomination must be prepared to address the abortion issue on all three levels of this debate. We must fervently advocate for the humanness of the preborn, the personhood of the preborn, and the inherent right to life of the preborn.

Make no mistake. Truth will win out over untruth. Light will win over darkness, because Light has come into the world, and this Light dispels darkness. This Light is Jesus Christ, and the victory that he has won is the victory over death itself. We must restore the concept that life comes from God—that it is special, that it is replete with dignity.

18. This 2002 statistic, extrapolated from 1.29 million annual abortions, is taken from the Guttmacher Institute. Accessed at: <http://www.agi-usa.org/media/presskits/2005/06/28/abortionoverview.html>, December 23, 2005.

Book Reviews

360-Degree Preaching. By Michael J. Quicke. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003. 233 pp. \$16.99 paperback.

Michael Quicke fills the C. W. Koller Chair of Preaching and Communication at Northern Seminary in Lombard, Illinois. He previously served as president of Spurgeon's College in London and wrote this book after thirty years of preaching. Quicke acknowledges that his aging process has made him more impatient with dull preaching that puts believers in a comatose state and "pretty preaching" that merely tickles listeners' ears. Out of his years of experience and his frustration with much modern-day preaching springs his *360-Degree Preaching*.

Having read over thirty books on the art and craft of preaching, I wondered what this volume would say that had not already been stated. To my pleasant surprise I found this book to be an overall delightful and beneficial read. Quicke's passion for preaching is obvious on every page, and the reader will find himself regularly challenged about his own approach and goals for preaching the Word.

The book has two main divisions, part one dealing with "Pulpit Realities" and part two addressing "Preaching Opportunities." In chapter one the author contends that preaching is about "God communicating his will and purpose with power and immediacy to effect change" (p. 27) and that preaching is part of the DNA of the church and absolutely vital for its life.

Quicke addresses negative factors affecting preaching at the beginning of the twenty-first century, factors any conscientious preacher should evaluate and seek to overcome in his own ministry. Those factors include a loss of holistic engagement with Scripture, a poverty of Holy Spirit power, increased pressure on preachers, a lack of good models to follow, and changing times.

A significant portion of the book is used to present a more adequate preaching model. Many preachers are familiar with John Stott's model, described in his *Between Two Worlds*, which uses the metaphor of "bridge building" (the Bible is at one end, the listeners at the other, and the preacher seeks to build a bridge between the two). While Quicke commends Stott's model as having many merits, he contends that it fails to

accommodate all the various factors that are involved in the preaching event. His answer to the “model malaise” is a 360-degree model (hence the name of the book).

Quicke admits that his model is “untidy, multidimensional, and risks confusion.” He further states that the 360-degree model “contains many arrows flowing in many directions and shows how preaching happens within a trinitarian framework through a symbiosis of human and divine actions. It illustrates the role of preaching in moving the community of God from worship to service and witness to the world” (pp. 50-51). At first, the model does create confusion, but Quicke does a good job of clarifying his concepts in the ensuing chapters.

Chapters four through six are worth the price of the book. Quicke does an excellent job of helping the reader understand current culture and the paradigm shifts that have taken place. Particularly helpful is his material on orality shifts. Though admittedly oversimplified, Quicke divides the history of spoken words into three eras: aural-orality (communication through spoken and heard words—“Let anyone who has ears to hear, listen”), writing and print (with the invention of the printing press the eye became primary instead of the ear—“Let anyone with eyes to see, see”), and secondary orality (marked by the electronics revolution—“Let anyone who has ears to hear and eyes to see, listen and see”). Quicke argues that twenty-first-century preachers cannot avoid new technology and the opportunities it affords for “stereo language.” Many preachers will find his exhortations for incorporating technology into the preaching event both unnecessary and intimidating, but they are certainly thought-provoking and I believe worth careful consideration.

The second half of the book deals more with typical homiletics and the actual development and delivery of a sermon. What is not typical is Quicke’s analogy for describing the process from text to sermon: a “preaching swim.” The five major stages of the “preaching swim” include immersion in Scripture (“listening” in the *past* tense), interpretation for today (“listening” in the *present* tense), designing the sermon (not just what to say but *how* to say it), delivering the sermon (“incarnational preaching” that involves the preacher’s spirituality, voice, and body), and experiencing the outcomes (whereby both the preacher and the congregation respond with obedience to the preaching).

Quicke’s “preaching swim” model offers nothing that is revolutionary, but he does a good job of encouraging the preacher to think constantly about the people in the pew throughout the designing of the sermon. Particularly helpful is his instruction regarding a “stereo draft,” whereby the preacher writes his sermon both for the eye and the ear.

Quicke urges the preacher to write the way we talk. When this is done it will lower the vocabulary a level or two, sentences will be shorter, and third-person descriptions will be avoided.

Quicke does address the “new homiletic” and narrative theology, sharing cautions and concerns about such an approach to interpretation of Scripture and development of sermons. I felt, however, that his warnings were insufficient and should have been stronger to make sure authorial intent is never overlooked. Accordingly, the author seems to be more congenial toward the likes of Fred Craddock and Eugene Lowery than I am comfortable with. The author also addresses women preachers with no disclaimers about whether women should even be behind the pulpit.

Another concept that troubled me was that of “collaborative preaching,” where the preacher meets with members of his congregation and generates discussion about the upcoming sermon. While the preacher retains primary responsibility for preparing the sermon, his “preaching discernment group” helps him focus on contemporary issues and “safeguards” the sermon from being irrelevant. Not surprisingly, no biblical support is offered for such an idea. And with no experience or research to support my suspicions, I would think such “collaboration” could lead to tickled-ear preaching, “sermonic gossip,” and a usurping of the preacher’s divine calling to preach the Word.

Overall, Quicke’s book would make a fine addition to any preacher’s homiletical library, and a careful reading of its contents would prove to be a worthwhile investment of time and energy. The reader will be challenged, convicted, and convinced that preaching is an incredible privilege that demands nothing less than excellence.

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Christian Theology: An Introduction. By Alister E. McGrath, 3d ed. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 2001. 616 pp. \$39.95 paperback.

As Professor of Historical Theology at Oxford University, Alister E. McGrath is eminently qualified to discuss Christian theology with anyone on any level. Yet this work seeks to introduce the uninitiated to the “basics” of Christian theology, assuming that the reader knows nothing of the subject. In so doing, McGrath does not confine himself to an eru-

dite conversation about the finer points of faith. Instead, in Part 1, he sketches development of theology from its infancy, showing how the various points of doctrine developed throughout history. In Part 2, he outlines the sources of and methods for the development of theology, discussing their influence within a historical and philosophical context. Having constructed the proper context, in Part 3 he turns his attention to a more detailed discussion of specific doctrines.

McGrath broadly divides theological history into four periods: Patristic Period (c. 100-451), Middle Ages and Renaissance (c. 1050 - c. 1500), Reformation and Post-Reformation (c. 1500 - c. 1750), and Modern Period (c. 1750 - present). Within the first four chapters he defines terms associated with each period, then outlines key theologians and theological developments associated with that particular era. His discussion of the patristic period predictably centers its focus on the development of Christology and the political and theological pressure exerted by Constantine and other Roman Emperors to find a unity of faith that would unite the empire. McGrath attributes the development of a solid theological foundation to the providential contributions of key theologians such as Athanasius and Augustine. Other doctrines examined include the fixed canon of Scripture and the creedal statements of faith which defined the nature of the Godhead.

In chapter two, McGrath discusses the Middle ages and the Renaissance. The influence of such scholastics as Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus defined theology during the early part of this period and led to more detailed explanations of the faith. Yet McGrath shows that it was not a monolithic age. While the church held great sway over public debate, the divisions between East and West and between scholasticism and humanism eventually led to a division of the church on the one hand and the dawning of the Renaissance on the other.

McGrath goes on to trace the birth of the Reformation from the seeds of the Renaissance. He considers the Reformation in four distinct traditions: Lutheran, Calvinist, Radical, and Catholic, discussing the important characters and distinguishing characteristics of each. Rounding out this section, McGrath outlines the development of the Modern period including the Enlightenment and its philosophical offspring. He concludes by sketching the potpourri of theological movements that have sprung up in the last two hundred years of church history.

In Part 2 McGrath examines the sources and methods of discovering theological truth. In so doing, he briefly considers the definitions of the various aspects of the discipline, revealing how different theological approaches yield different views of truth. While not defending any one

position, he shows how each approach invariably leads to its outcome and how each may fall within the spectrum considered "orthodox" or "heretical." He follows this with a discussion of the four sources of theology: Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. It is important to note that he does not promote one above the other, since his purpose is simply to describe reality, not critique it. From his concise description one is left to draw his own conclusions as to the value of one above another.

Chapter seven focuses on the ultimate source of reality, God himself, examining the various approaches to the question of God's self-revelation. Analyzing the context of theological history, he discusses how theologians from Aquinas to Barth have viewed God's revelation through Scripture, history, nature, and experience. Next follows an examination of the sometimes uncomfortable relationship between Christian theology and philosophy, showing how various philosophers and philosophies have framed doctrinal issues either through their direct comment or through their appropriation by other theologians.

In the book's third part, McGrath finally arrives at the subject with which most theological texts begin: a discussion of the various doctrines of theology. He proceeds to explain the doctrine of God; the Trinity; Christ; salvation; human nature, sin, and grace; the church; the sacraments; world religions; and "last things" (his term for eschatology). Two important characteristics distinguish his examination of these doctrines. First, they are all discussed in a historical context. For instance, McGrath traces the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, outlining six different models of the doctrine from the Cappadocians to Karl Rahner and John Macquarrie. This historical background illumines the rationale and development of both orthodox and heretical positions, rendering a complete picture of current Christian thought.

The second characteristic distinguishing this work is its philosophically broad yet conceptually focused approach. Because of his obvious grasp of the subject, McGrath is able to present all salient points of view on any doctrine without losing coherence. That coherence results from an overall organization that makes the book "flow." Even though it represents a myriad of theological and philosophical opinions, various strands of thought are organized into a presentation that covers a large amount of intellectual territory and yet makes sense.

The value of a work like this should be obvious. It is recommended first of all because of its scope. While there are many books available on theology, no one covers the field quite like McGrath. The combination of historical breadth and philosophical depth makes this book an unparalleled accomplishment. It succinctly and logically presents disparate infor-

mation so that it is understandable. Additionally, McGrath is an excellent writer. Though not many consider theology texts entertaining, this author has a way of engaging his reader and making the complex simple enough to be enjoyed.

A couple of cautions may be warranted. Prospective readers should be aware that the theology presented here is not as much biblical as it is historical and philosophical. There is little or no consideration of the scriptural basis of theology. While some might consider this a glaring weakness, McGrath's purpose must be remembered. He is not trying to promote a particular theological stance but simply describing the historical stances that others have assumed, in order to allow the readers to make informed decisions for themselves. (See Preface, p. xxiii.)

A second caution is that those unaware of various liberal theological concepts may find McGrath's egalitarian approach unnerving, and in some instances even confusing. For example, his multi-page discussion of Moltmann's concept of the "crucified God" (pp. 275-79) and its relation to Luther's "theology of the cross" was left without any clear conclusion and, since Moltmann's concept was so closely associated with Luther's, it seemed to give the former view some legitimacy. Remembering, however, that the author seeks to describe, not to persuade, can allow the reader to sift through such ideas, aware that theology must ultimately find its foundation in Scripture, not the opinions of Moltmann, Luther, or any theologian.

Therefore, given these caveats, this book is highly recommended. The serious student will find a complete and historically rooted exposition of theology. The busy pastor will find that this book will help him put his theology into a historical framework that not only defines what he already knows but fills gaps in his knowledge. The denomination that needs to place its various debates into historical context will find that this work can help it emphasize the important and trivialize the irrelevant. In short, this work is a necessary addition to the library of any serious student of theology.

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Signs of Intelligence: Understanding Intelligent Design. Ed. William A. Dembski and James M. Kuchiner. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. 224 pp. \$14.99 paperback.

The title of this book may lead you to think that you are about to read another creation science tome. Instead, this compilation of fourteen essays, written by current leaders of the Intelligent Design movement, will introduce you to a whole new group of scientists that are distinct from, yet allied with, creationists in the fight against the spread of Darwinian evolution. The two movements complement each other in that they both oppose Darwinian evolution by arguing that our world was designed and did not evolve randomly by chance.

The theory of intelligent design holds that a “designing intelligence” is required to account for the complex information-rich structures in living systems. Design theorists emphasize that their opposition to Darwinian theory rests strictly on scientific grounds, and they refuse to speculate about the nature of that designing intelligence. They concern themselves less with the fact that the claims of Darwinian evolution conflict with Genesis than that they conflict with the evidence of biology. That being said, many of the authors write from a Christian perspective and do recognize that there are theological and cultural implications of Darwinism’s demise and replacement by intelligent design.

Sadly, among scientists today, Darwinism has achieved the status of inviolable science. One need only look as far as the November 2004 issue of *National Geographic* magazine to find the latest apogetic of Darwinian evolution. While it is frequently stated that the evidence for such evolution is overwhelming, the authors of *Signs of Intelligence* persuasively show the fallacy of such a statement.

As even the editors of *National Geographic* attest, despite the widespread acceptance of Darwinian evolution in the scientific community, it has not caught on among the general population. The thoughtful essays in this book reassure us that even in the scientific community growing numbers of researchers doubt evolution and favor a theory of origins that relies on an intelligent designer.

William Dembski’s opening chapter actually serves as a helpful introduction to the subject of intelligent design as a whole. Clergy, teachers, laity, and students would do well to peruse carefully this chapter in order better to understand the essays that follow.

Some of the essays are quite technical, while others are readily within the reach of the lay reader. Chapter one, by Philip Johnson, emphasizes the ongoing battle for the minds of the youth of our country and that

Darwinist educators are determined to persuade rather than to educate—even if it takes bluffing their way through the facts. Chapter two, by Nancy Pearcey, is one of the more overtly Christian chapters and warns of the destructive nature of a Darwinian worldview. These sentiments are echoed and expanded in chapter four, by John G. West, Jr., wherein a Darwinian worldview, among other negative things, is shown to lessen personal responsibility, weaken traditional morality, and threaten the sanctity of human life.

Chapter seven, by Michael J. Behe, is particularly helpful in making clear the incredible claims of Darwinian evolution. The nitty-gritty of DNA and cell biology are dealt with in a surprisingly clear and accessible way in chapters nine and ten, by Jonathan Wells and Paul A. Nelson respectively. Chapter twelve, by Walter L. Bradley, emphasizes that the evidence for an intelligent designer becomes more compelling the more we understand the carefully crafted world in which we live. This is the reason so many scientists have been changing their minds in recent years, agreeing that the universe cannot reasonably be explained as a cosmic accident. Dembski, in chapter thirteen, masterfully demonstrates that the world has not come about by chance and that in his opinion “intelligent design is just the Logos theology of John’s Gospel restated in the idiom of information theory.”

A caveat for the reader: Unlike the leaders of the creation science movement, who hold to a literal interpretation of the creation account in Genesis and generally conclude that the age of the Earth is around ten thousand years, most of the authors of *Signs of Intelligence* argue for an earth age of fifteen billion years. This discrepancy is rather well discussed in Appendix B of *Dismantling Evolution: Building the Case for Intelligent Design*, by Ralph O. Muncaster (2003, Harvest House Publishers), another book that the serious student of the theories of origins would do well to read.

Do I recommend the book? Yes, as it shows the broad range of viewpoints that exist among those who are battling against the false religion of Darwinian evolution. Though one might not agree with every detail of the arguments, this work is a useful compendium for those who would seek better to understand and to revel in the marvelous world in which we live.

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Christian Apologetics. By Cornelius Van Til. 2d ed. Ed. William Edgar. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2003. 206 pp. \$12.99 paperback.

Cornelius Van Til, a very respected Christian apologist of the twentieth century, after receiving his doctorate from Princeton Theological Seminary, pastored briefly and then began his teaching career at Westminster Theological Seminary, which continued until his retirement in 1975. During his career Van Til wrote over twenty books, as well as thirty syllabi. Among his greatest works are *The Defense of the Faith*, *A Christian Theory of Knowledge*, and *An Introduction to Systematic Theology*.

This second edition to Van Til's *Christian Apologetics* is extremely helpful to anyone wishing to understand his system of thought. In addition to the thoughts and teachings of Van Til, the editor, William Edgar, has added an introduction to the book. Edgar comments on Van Til's writings and clarifies many of the difficult statements that are to be found throughout this work.

Van Til, a revelational presuppositionalist, believed that a person must begin any rational understanding of truth by presupposing the truth of Christianity. This system claims that unless God is understood as the Triune God revealed in Scripture, then it is not feasible to go any further with any epistemological concerns.

It is noteworthy to mention the differentiation that Van Til makes between evidences and apologetics. He asserts that evidences deal, for the most part, with historical matters, while apologetics tackles the philosophical aspects. Although he makes this distinction, he sees the two areas as complete only when handled together. Thus, to explain Christianity both techniques need to be utilized.

In the same way, Van Til shows the necessity of God's revelation in nature and Scripture as supplementing one another. Nature, in every aspect, points to the incomprehensible power and work of God. Van Til adds that Scripture and nature work in conjunction. Scripture obviously points to God, while nature, if interpreted correctly, reveals the same God and his mighty revelatory acts upon the earth and to mankind. Van Til calls God's revelation in nature "the playground," both for those who would accept him and those who would not. It is at this point that his Calvinism becomes evident: he urges that the sinner cannot come to this revelatory knowledge unless the Holy Spirit gives him a new heart.

Also in line with his Calvinistic mindset is Van Til's idea of the point of contact. Throughout the third chapter he attempts to thwart the Roman Catholic and the Arminian views of the state of an unbeliever. Van Til is unyielding in his militant stand on behalf of Calvinism. He does not

believe there is common ground between believer and nonbeliever. Because all truth is God's truth and nothing makes sense apart from him, there is no common intellectual, epistemological foundation to share with unbelievers. Van Til asserts that all men are at some level aware of God and that they are responsible to him, yet if they are unwilling to accept the presupposition of God as he is, then it is useless to argue.

The Westminster theologian consistently argues that Christians must not seek to reason with unbelievers from a nonChristian vantage point. Indeed, he declares that unbelievers cannot grasp what is being conveyed, unless the unbeliever is reasoning with the understanding of the message of the Bible. If the unbeliever does not reason with an accurate understanding of God, which Van Til says is instilled in everyone but has been suppressed, then reasoning will not be fruitful with that person. If a Christian argues from a neutral perspective, then the message will be compromised and the unbeliever will be more convinced that Christianity is wrong. Instead, Van Til proposes that Christian apologists must not revert to natural reasoning with unbelievers. The Christian apologist needs only "to tear off the iron mask" (as he calls it), that is, he must help the unbeliever to see his true role by understanding that he is a creature in submission to the one God of the Bible.

Surely the unbeliever needs to recognize his status under God. However, Van Til's total rejection of the notion of natural reasoning with man goes too far. It would be ideal for all people to come with a correct understanding of God. However, to limit apologetics to this one starting point would immensely shrink the evangelical parameters of who will be open to hearing the message. The value of reasoning should not be minimized. While it cannot coercively bring someone to Christ, it can reveal that Christianity is not irrational, as the unbeliever might have once thought. Natural reasoning, when used properly and without compromising the message of the gospel, provides a positive influence for advancing the gospel to the world.

Van Til goes on to contest the apologetics of the Roman Catholic and the Arminian. Throughout his writing he reveals his distaste for the idea of Christians trying to reason objectively with nonChristians. He is equally opposed to the principle that man has a free will to accept or reject the gospel.

Those who have the desire to learn the art and practice of apologetics will find the writing and theology of Cornelius Van Til fascinating and helpful. This volume, as well as the rest of Van Til's writings, is not intended for the layperson. However, this should in no wise diminish the importance of understanding what he taught. It would no doubt be

helpful for the beginner to read articles on his thought before tackling this work. One might begin with readings that give a basic understanding of what presuppositionalism is, such as *Five Views on Apologetics* (Zondervan), particularly the chapter called "The Presuppositional Method" by John Frame. The fervor that Van Til displays in his works helps the reader acquire the sense of urgency needed in correctly vindicating the Word of God. Although many will find points of disagreement, no one can deny his desire to defend the Word and relay that message to the lost world.

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The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (Revised ed.). Ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979-1995. 4 vols. 4446 pp. \$120.00 hardback.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE) is the second and most recent revision of the original 1915 edition. This particular revision was a long time in compilation due to the circumstances and deaths of some of the initial editors. Originally, the revision was not slated to be so extensive. However, as work progressed, changes and advancements in numerous areas precipitated new or additional commentary from various contributors. Nevertheless, because of the significance of some original *ISBE* articles and the unique time in which they were released (rise of modern theological liberalism), several articles are included with little or no revision. The original contributors of either the 1915 or the 1929 edition are marked with asterisks in the list of contributors at the beginning of each volume.

While the *ISBE* claims to be evangelical and reasonably conservative, some Free Will Baptists will discover several areas of uneasiness and difference. For example, the editors use the Revised Standard Version of the Bible. Many will not agree with contributors who espouse the old earth theory. Yet, these and other areas of divergence can prove profitable by offering a more informed awareness of contrary positions. To that end, these volumes fulfill their purpose.

This review focuses on three articles as representative of the whole. The article entitled "Kingdom of God," written by G. E. Ladd, late

professor of New Testament Exegesis and Theology at Fuller Seminary, is meticulous in dealing with the subject without letting his eschatological position, premillennialism, dominate his writing. In the subsection on eschatology and history, one finds a brief yet technical discussion of the liberal, ethical interpretive slant concerning the subject. This article gives an excellent overview of the sometimes overlooked use and meaning of the term in the Old Testament, providing a logical delineation of progressive revelatory considerations.

Overall, the article is informative, being full of significant biblical references with some commentary. Of significant help are the many Scripture passages that contain various transliterations of the Hebrew or Greek originals.

While *ISBE* is not strictly a theological tool, some articles deal with terms that are deeply theological. The article "repent" is comprehensive, with the nuances of the term's meaning carefully outlined and referenced. There is ample discussion of the Hebrew and Greek words that are translated "repent." Particularly informative is the unique emphasis on nonreligious meanings of the concept in the Bible. For example, one Hebrew word for repent is a common verb which simply means return. A New Testament era example of a nonreligious meaning was the broad use of repent in secular Greek where knowledge acquired later precipitates a changing of the mind. The use of the word is also referenced in the Septuagint, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha.

The preeminent section of the article discusses the psychological elements of repentance. This discussion would complement a theological work's discussion of the personality. The contributor writes of the term's use in reference to the intellect, emotions, and will of man as laid out in biblical references.

The concluding section deals briefly with how repentance relates to salvation. Again, the author organizes a thoroughly biblical but brief statement of the concept.

An article on the city of Babylon, though somewhat technical and lengthy, offers a chronological format particularly helpful in wading through the early and later history of the city. If a person has a moderate working knowledge of biblical history, he will be able to find a reference point through well-placed time references. Particularly impressive are the physical descriptions of the city proper and its buildings based upon sound archeological evidences. Historical sources, archeological discoveries, biblical references, and even ancient kingly exaggerations are contrasted in order to form an accurate description of the city and its architecture.

It is worth noting that the next article deals with Babylon in the New Testament, providing a concise explanation of the literal and symbolic references to the city. Most of the discussion centers on references to Rome. A separate, lengthier article on Babylonia complements the ones on the city.

While the format of the articles is logical and consistent, the font size is small. Another negative is the omission of indexes. The volumes are replete with pertinent, interesting photographs, informative illustrations, and instructive maps. Also, at the end of each article is a helpful bibliography.

ISBE is a valuable reference tool for anyone who is serious about studying the Bible. If the word or concept is referenced in Scripture, it will be discussed in these volumes. The content is elevated enough for the scholar but clear enough for the student. While there is no index, the subjects are easily navigated and adequately cross-referenced. The set is a worthy purchase.

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Beginning at Moses: A Guide to Finding Christ in the Old Testament. By Michael P. V. Barrett. Greenville, S.C.: Ambassador-Emerald International, 1999. 327 pp. \$14.99 paperback.

“And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). What a wonderful experience that must have been as the two on the road to Emmaus heard the Lord Jesus complete an exposition of the Old Testament Scriptures concerning himself, the Messiah. Jesus probably brought out from the text not only those things that were obvious but also those not so prominent; yet, with each passage a fuller clarification of Messiah was presented.

Of the same genre, Michael P. V. Barrett’s book, *Beginning at Moses*, introduces the reader to an approach and method for fulfilling the book’s subtitle: *A Guide to Finding Christ in the Old Testament*. Barrett forthrightly states his purpose, “It is my desire through this vehicle of teaching to create an excited expectancy in you, as you read the Old Testament, that Genesis to Malachi is a Living Word that cannot ultimately be understood

apart from its central message: the Messiah, our Christ and Savior" (p. 106). Although the book is not exhaustive in its treatment, yet through its 327 pages, Barrett indeed whets the appetite for more discoveries, more disclosures, and more detail about the greatest Old Testament treasure: Jesus Christ.

Well enabled to undertake such a worthy project of Old Testament study, Barrett has served as a professor of Ancient Languages and Old Testament Theology and Interpretation at Bob Jones University. He now serves as president of Geneva Reformed Seminary in Greenville, S.C. He has also authored other books on Old Testament and Hebrew subjects. Barrett brings interesting insight to Old Testament passages that intrigue and challenge for more in-depth study.

His background in Hebrew brings insight to various passages and interpretations. For example, Barrett confronts Genesis 9:27 and the twofold problem of identifying who will actually dwell in the tents of Shem and whose servant Canaan will be. He provides an "interpretative translation" of this passage which reads, "May God provide ample space for Japheth; may God take up residence in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan become God's servant." Afterwards, he goes on to reveal the messianic connection to this interpretative understanding (p. 131). Though he certainly has the background to be more technical, he has balanced his explanations in the languages and in theology with easy-to-understand terminology.

Throughout the writing, Barrett refers to the Westminster Standards for doctrinal positions and statements. As would be true of any author, he states his doctrinal preferences several places, such as his view on eternal security. "None who have been saved by the blood can ever be the object of God's wrath. . . . The intercessory work is our guarantee of the irrevocable application of the blood of Christ to save us and keep us saved forever" (p. 97). Additionally, he takes a strong stand on the impeccability of Christ (p. 74) and intersperses throughout the book his belief in and support for premillennialism.

The first three chapters set out the three major identifying characteristics of Jesus so that those glimpses will become more recognizable through the veiled images presented throughout the Old Testament. These glimpses specifically concern his Messiahship, his Person, and his work. "Seeing Christ is the key to unlocking the message of Scripture, including the Old Testament. To miss seeing Christ either in the overall scheme of the Old Testament or in the individual books is to miss the central message and to jeopardize the proper understanding of the rest of the message" (p. 14).

The second section of the book focuses on “where to look” for Jesus in the Old Testament, such as in covenants, names, prophecies, word pictures, and songs. The initial reading in this section evokes a desire for the author to make the messianic connection more quickly; however, these explanations appear to be informational only until Barrett draws it all together. Once the connection to and vision of Christ are presented, the detailed explanations readily become obvious and, therefore, needful. This work does not merely list verses that pertain to the Messiah, but it digs below the surface to reveal him, a treasure present all along but not always immediately visible.

In his section concerning the names of Christ, Barrett consistently portrays the Old Testament writers as presenting and preaching the same Christ as the New Testament (p. 190). In this same section, he uses analogies as insights to identifying the Messiah in many texts. The imagery is rich and immediately evokes the reader’s desire to study each name and image of Christ more. Further attracting the reader’s curiosity for continued research, the author provides a list of names, their meanings, and passages where they can be found (p. 207).

Concerning what Barrett calls “Christ in Word Prophecy,” the reader will not want to miss the strong defense made for the virgin birth of Christ, along with a sound endorsement of Isaiah’s choice of words indicating “virgin” in the Hebrew text (p. 229). Barrett expounds other Old Testament word prophecies concerning Christ, such as his birthplace, ministry, triumphal entry, death, burial, and resurrection. Through “picture prophecy,” he provides good explanations about typology and the danger of reading into the Old Testament what was never intended (pp. 246f.).

Barrett’s defining of the pictures of Christ in the tabernacle thrills the heart and prompts a deeper walk (pp. 274f.). He brings out the messianic “lessons” of the tabernacle through its names (pp. 277-78), its structure (p. 279), especially its furniture (pp. 279-83), and its rituals (pp. 284-93). He concludes this section by stating that the high priest could not have died behind the veil because the typology of a messianic high priest atoning for man’s sin would be put in jeopardy. The picture of the high priest failing behind the veil would be contrary to the truth it is supposed to represent: a victorious high priest atoning for the sins of the people (pp. 292-93).

Barrett, in various places throughout the book, relates the importance of the reader being on “Christ-alert,” looking for Messiah everywhere in the Old Testament. This volume is one in which the believer in and seeker of Christ can be blessed with revealing images of the precious Lord

and Savior. If one enjoys seeing Christ, then the trip through this work will be very fulfilling.

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The Old Testament Documents: Are They Reliable & Relevant? By Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001. 239 pp. \$13.00 paperback.

This book, the fruit of eight years of labor (p. 11), is one of several books by Kaiser on the Old Testament. His credentials and experience as both author and teacher support his suitability for this area of biblical studies. He writes as an evangelical conservative, noting that "the great divide in biblical studies is not over our differing systems of interpretation, but whether one believes that God is the ultimate author of Scripture" (p. 11).

He voices concerns early in the book about the evident lack of interest in and concern about the Old Testament. He says two questions beg to be answered in our modern and postmodern minds: "Are the claims, events, persons and teachings of the Old Testament reliable?" and, if they are, "so what? What is the relevancy of the Old Testament for contemporary readers?" If the Old Testament is not written to us, why try to search for contemporary applications (p. 10)? These are the questions this book seeks to answer.

Kaiser has divided his answers into four parts. Part One: Are the Old Testament canon and text reliable? Part Two: Is the history of the Old Testament reliable? Part Three: Is the message of the Old Testament reliable? And, Part Four: Is the message of the Old Testament relevant for today?

In Part One, he discusses the origin of the Old Testament, which books actually belong in it, and how well its texts have been preserved. Concerning its origin, Kaiser notes that we do not know who the authors were for much of the Old Testament, nor what the first thing was that God ever revealed to mankind. However, Scripture clearly claims divine origin for itself and Kaiser accepts that.

He claims that unlike the early church councils that discussed New Testament books, there were no meetings of leaders to decide which Old Testament writings were inspired. Instead, these writings progressively came to be recognized as authoritative by the community of God's peo-

ple so that by the beginning of the second century B.C. the Old Testament was organized as the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings.

The preservation of the Old Testament texts is no small concern. Texts that claim to be over three thousand years old should be questioned as to their accuracy in transmission, among other things, since all copying was done by hand until the invention of the printing press (c. A.D. 1400; the first Hebrew Old Testament was printed in 1488). Kaiser argues that great care was taken to insure that earlier and later copyists maintained the integrity of the ancient autographs. One example of protection against scribal errors by later copyists was the Masoretes' placement of a colophon at the end of each biblical book that contained "the total number of consonants, the middle letter of the book by location and other mathematical devices that were used by the copiers to check and recheck their work" (p. 43). The Masoretes, a group of Hebrew scribes, did their work around A.D. 1000.

This is not to say that textual questions do not exist (such as the long and short forms of Jeremiah). It is to say that even with the variations that do exist, the text is in remarkably good shape. Bible scholars today have three main sources for checking the accuracy of Old Testament texts: the Masoretic text, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and the Dead Sea Scrolls, in that order.

Part Two examines the reliability of Genesis and the patriarchal records, Exodus and the conquest accounts, and the chronologies of the Old Testament kings. Kaiser is conservative with his dating of biblical events back to the time of Abraham. However, since he asserts the probability of gaps in the genealogies of Genesis 1-11, he does not accept the most conservative dates for the flood or creation. He does believe the long life records of the pre-flood era are accurate but suggests that record-keeping then and now differs in methodology. Understanding these differences provides the possibility of more time between creation and Abraham and less time than the cumulative totals of reigns between King Saul and the fall of Jerusalem. He also argues that Genesis 1-11 records actual historical events.

Part Three examines the reliability of the Torah, the Wisdom Writings, and the Prophets. Kaiser correctly states that our acceptance of the Pentateuch as reliable is essential since it "often contains in seed form the idea of what will later be developed in the organic wholeness of the message of the Bible" (pp. 131-32). He concludes that the Abrahamic Covenant and the Passover demonstrate that God is faithfully working out his promised plan.

Kaiser calls the Wisdom books the “orphan books” of the Bible. However, they are inspired and show the limitations of human wisdom and the need for divine wisdom and direction for life.

The reliability of the Prophets is demonstrated with archaeological finds and extrabiblical historical records. Kaiser shows that even minute details of the prophets are in many instances verifiable. One example is Ezekiel’s prophecy that the stones, timber, and rubble of Tyre will be thrown into the sea (p. 168; Ezekiel 26:12), a prophecy that Alexander the Great fulfilled.

Part Four deals with the relevancy of the Old Testament for today. If the message is so old, can it really say anything to us today? Kaiser argues that it can. He says that our world is not “a closed system” (p. 178) but that God has entered this world of history for his own purposes.

The Torah teaches that salvation is not by works, but by faith. It is still “good” for us who use it properly (1 Timothy 1:8). The social sins denounced by the Prophets are still part of our contemporary society. The Prophets still need to be heard. And the Writings (e.g., the Psalms) teach us how to worship, be it praying, singing, giving thanks, or “longing for the success of God’s kingdom” (p. 215).

Kaiser is right to challenge us to renew our love for the Old Testament. Paul’s challenge to Timothy to preach “the whole counsel,” to continue in the (Old Testament) Scriptures that made him wise for salvation, and to “preach the Word,” which surely includes the Old Testament, is also our challenge today.

This book provides a good point of entry for someone who has never given serious thought to the Old Testament and a good place to reenter the discussion for someone who has allowed earlier interests in these Scriptures to slip. Kaiser has offered a work that is both conservative and substantive—a good combination for any Bible student’s library.

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The Gospel of Mark. By Robert E. Picirilli. *The Randall House Bible Commentary*. Nashville: Randall House Publications, 2003. 446 pp. \$29.99 hardback.

Robert E. Picirilli has had a long and distinguished career in higher education. His many contributions to scholarship within Free Will Baptist ranks and the church at large can hardly be overlooked. He is Professor Emeritus at Free Will Baptist Bible College, Nashville, Tennessee, where he taught beginning in 1955. Picirilli serves as the General Editor of the *Randall House Bible Commentary* series in which he also authored the commentaries on 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Peter, and *The Gospel of Mark*. Some of his other book titles include: *Paul the Apostle* and *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism*.

According to the author, this commentary is intended to be neither highly technical nor merely devotional. The stated target audience for the commentary is the general Christian public. In keeping with the stated aim, Picirilli writes an easy to understand, introductory level commentary, giving the reader a general overview of major themes, purposes, language, historical background, and problems in the second Gospel. For further investigation into the "specifics," readers are directed to other more detailed works. He also includes a helpful discussion on the questions concerning textual variations surrounding the ending of Mark. Picirilli states, "Manuscript differences are highly technical matters dealt with by specialists. In most cases they do not need to concern the average interpreter of Scripture because they do not significantly affect our understanding of the Scripture. . . . *Regardless what manuscript you read, no item of Christian belief or practice will be different.* Most differences are very minor. Only a few involve any passages of significant length" (p. 21).

This volume, as well as the others in the series, consists of four parts. The introduction covers the topics of the synoptic problem, authorship, date, place of writing, purpose, distinctive features, and the ending of Mark. On the problem of Mark's ending, Picirilli skillfully interacts with the modern critic but builds a case for the longer ending to the Gospel. His discussions on debated topics are not overly technical or lengthy, yet he helps the reader come to a clear understanding of the main issues and proposed solutions.

Second is a grammatico-historical exposition of the biblical text. Picirilli proves himself a capable exegete, elucidating the text and the major themes. This is, of course, a central part of the work and quite helpful to the reader.

Third is a summary of the exposition, giving a quick overview of the comments. The summaries prove to be one of the greatest strengths of the commentary. They allow the reader to ascertain quickly the main thrust of each section.

Last is a section entitled Application: Teaching and Preaching the Passage. This serves as a great resource for the busy pastor or teacher. A general exegetical outline of the text that can easily be transformed into a lesson or sermon makes the application section very user friendly.

Mark is presented as an invaluable gospel account that should be read as a whole. Picirilli declares, "It should be read for its own sake and not only for the purpose of harmonization with the other Gospels" (p. 17). It is the good news of redemption as revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus (p. 20).

Picirilli reflects a broad knowledge of competing views when commenting on controversial topics within the scope of the conservative Christian tradition. The strengths and weaknesses of varying interpretations are accurately presented without giving undue weight to any particular interpretation. For example, in commenting on the abomination of desolation (Mark 13:14-16) in the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:5-37), Picirilli states: "For the most part, opinion is divided between two major possibilities" (p. 356). He then outlines the two possibilities and presents strengths for each.

The very heart of the gospel is the crucifixion and resurrection story. Picirilli's comments here draw one into a living relationship with the word of God through this pivotal account of the core of the Christian faith. Explanation of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem and of the significance of Jesus riding a donkey (p. 305) provides the reader an opportunity to experience the height of Jesus' popularity. The reader is then invited to experience the sense of pain that the disciples must have felt at Jesus' announcement regarding his betrayal by one of the Twelve. Picirilli fleshes out the understanding of "sorrowful" (Greek *lupeo*) in Mark 14:19, saying, "The disciples were emotionally pained by what Jesus had said. None of them—except Judas of course—could believe that such a thing was possible" (p. 381). His comments on the Gethsemane prayer are especially poignant, expressing the great stress and pain Jesus endured as he looked into the "cup of human sin and its just punishment under the wrath of God" (p. 391). On the cross Jesus cried out "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" Picirilli states that it is here that "Jesus was given up by His Father to suffer the penalty for the sins of the world, to experience broken fellowship with His God" (p. 420). The reader is

encouraged to share in the victory of the resurrection as Picirilli expounds upon the historical validity of the empty tomb (p. 430).

This commentary presents the validity of a renewed focus on the traditional interpretations of the text by building its case based on modern scholarship, church tradition, and a thorough understanding of the major issues of the Markan debate. It is a significant addition to the body of literature on modern Markan studies.

Picirilli reliably presents Mark's Gospel in an understandable yet challenging manner. The skillful but functional exegesis will be able to stand the test of time. This work definitely falls well within the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy. More specifically, the exposition maintains and supports Free Will Baptist doctrinal tradition and distinctives within the framework of faith, reason, and scholarship. It is worth emphasizing that this work is a valuable resource for both the theologically trained minister and the lay Sunday school teacher. It is scholarly enough to deal with "deep" issues, while still remaining functional for the one who has not had the opportunity to pursue formal theological training. Every pastor and layman will be greatly encouraged and challenged by this thorough yet readable commentary.

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The Death of Culture: Moral Education in an Age without Good or Evil. By James Davison Hunter. New York: Basic Books, 2000. 320 pp. \$17.00 paperback.

James Davison Hunter delves deeply into the history, tenets, and effectiveness of moral or character education in this book. His approach is exceedingly thorough, examining social, religious, and educational approaches to building character in young people throughout the history of the United States.

In the infancy of the country, "the central institution for the moral education of children was the family" (p. 36). Schools of the era sought to promote "Christian virtue in and through the provision of academic skills" (p. 37). The development of Sunday schools, fueled by the Second Great Awakening, aimed to educate those who could not afford the advantages of day schools; they centered on academics, not religious knowledge, but were strongly evangelistic. It was not until after the turn

of the nineteenth century that denominational schools and curriculum replaced the original Sunday schools. This change was forced by the availability of common school education for children of all classes and ethnic backgrounds (p. 40). Still, common schools "were permeated with religious, and specifically nondenominational, Protestant content" (p. 40), and "it was widely accepted . . . that religion was essential to the educational task" (p. 40).

Along with common schools, industrialization and "less strident" literature also brought about a change from the Puritanistic colonial days. Unitarian Horace Mann powerfully influenced American education away from "sectarian elements" of the protestant faith. Progressive era reformers like John Dewey further removed religion from the public schools. In due time, psychology became more authoritative than religion as a basis for moral education.

The values clarification movement of the 1960s recognized the importance of ideals but promoted a democratic selection of values. Psychologists have assumed the mantle of moral educators in the later half of the twentieth century. They have moved from rationality to empathy, from theology to inclusivism. The center point of moral education shifted to the self and self-image.

In backlash responses to this approach to moral education, two movements are notable. The "neoclassical movement" emphasized literature and mentoring to explain, exemplify, and affirm certain moral ends. "Communitarianism" encouraged volunteerism and role-playing to emphasize values based on the good of the community rather than the individual. These approaches, along with a continued dominance of educational psychology, gave rise to a plethora of religious and secular curricula to promote moral education. DARE, Community of Caring, Character Education Institute, Teel Institute, Heartwood Institute, Character Education Partnership, Teen Aid, Learning for Life, and denominational curricula, along with the writings of James Dobson and other Christian psychologists, are analyzed in chapters six and seven.

Though Hunter posits that "character does not require religious faith" (p. 19), his evidence substantiates the fact that "the moral culture children were living within was the most important determinant of their behavioral predisposition" (p. 169). Children from families that were theistic or conventionalistic (his term for those who hold to social precedents and conventions) were much more likely to choose actions that conformed to "longstanding moral norms." The intensity of religious faith (no matter what religion) had more influence on children's moral compass than gender, race, social status, or educational level. The restraining

influence of growing up in a home with both father and mother was also noted (p. 172).

Hunter also deals with the effects of inclusivism on morals. In the quest for diversity and pluralism, values are often undermined and emptied of significance. The "why" questions cannot be answered if no moral authority or moral absolutes exist.

In his examination of the changes in moral education, Hunter iterates that the content of moral instruction has changed; the sources of moral authority have changed (from divine authority to social conventions to subjective opinions); the sanctions of moral validity have changed; the institutional location through which moral education is taught has changed; indeed, the premise and purpose of moral education have changed (pp. 146-47). Our moral culture has become "profoundly therapeutic," not validating self-denial or self-restraint.

Hunter also asks for proof. Are the efforts of the moral education and values clarification programs working? His sad conclusions raise alarming questions about the influence of television and popular culture and the shifting tide of moral cultures. In twenty-first-century America, Hunter says, moral education occurs against a backdrop of fragmented, individualized, bureaucratic consumerism and has little result but to salve the conscience of those who promote it (p. 155). Hunter concludes, "In sum, the subtext of an inclusive moral education is not the absence of morality, but rather the emptying of meaning and significance and authority from the morality that is advocated . . . severed from the social, historical, and cultural encumbrances that make it concrete and ultimately compelling" (p. 213).

A helpful index, almost 50 pages of notes, and a bibliography of more than 200 items complete the work. The 8-point type may require a magnifying glass for reading, but the effort is worthwhile for educators, parents, pastors, and all those concerned about the moral future of society and the development of youth.

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Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity. By Nancy R. Pearcey. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2004. 479 pp. \$25.00 hardback.

Total Truth is a clarion call for Christianity to see and eradicate the division between the sacred and the secular spheres of life. Pearcey exhorts Christians to develop a holistic worldview that embraces all aspects of our persons and our lives. She asks the reader to move beyond a privatized faith in order to come to grips with what it means to take the whole person captive to Jesus Christ.

The Introduction sets out her thesis that society has developed a bifurcated vision of the world that has hamstrung Christianity and the gospel message. She argues that knowledge or truth has been redefined as to whether it references the natural world or the spiritual world. Whereas public or natural knowledge is known by scientific observation and is observable by all, religious or values knowledge is considered relative and is individualized. These two spheres of knowledge are sometimes presented as head-knowledge and heart-knowledge. Pearcey points out the dangers of such a division for Christians and our society.

To argue her thesis, Pearcey breaks up her work into four sections. In the first section, "What's in a Worldview?" she strives to define a worldview and to offer tools for developing one in keeping with divine revelation. She argues that all worldviews are essentially answering the same questions and that by looking at these answers we are given inroads to analyze other worldviews and opportunities for sharing the gospel. But first she puts forth the necessity of having a worldview grounded in the divine drama of creation, fall, and redemption. This schema helps us to understand and answer the inescapable questions of a worldview by telling us where we came from, why things are the way they are, and where we are going.

Part Two, "Starting at the Beginning," is a sound argument regarding the way Darwinism has affected society on all levels. Adept at scientific writing, Pearcey flexes her muscles by critiquing Naturalism and pointing out the scientific merits of the argument for intelligent design. She then moves on to point out how society, and the church along with it, has adopted naturalistic theories in the social and legal spheres.

Part Three, "How We Lost Our Minds," traces the history of Evangelicalism in the United States and its adoption of the sacred/secular split. She points out two branches of Evangelicalism whose reactions contributed to this divide. First, she discusses the anti-intellectualism of the revivalists, who, in concentrating so much on conversion, lost sight of the need for reason and social critique, focusing instead upon the

emotions of the individual. Second, she takes to task the “enlightened evangelicals,” who, in seeking to engage their society, swallowed non-biblical philosophies and followed naturalistic explanations of cosmogony without realizing the import of these concessions. Both these streams have terminated in a modern slough of despondency in worldview thinking among evangelicals today.

Part Four, “What Next? Living It Out,” calls for Evangelicals to practice their worldview. She points out the damage that inauthenticity among Christians has caused and will cause in a postmodern world. Only by rejecting trends, theories, and methodologies born out of naturalistic philosophies and by embracing biblical principles and mores can the church of today speak legitimately and authoritatively to the society around it.

Pearcey was a student of Francis Schaeffer at L’Abri, and this is clearly evidenced in her work. Thus the strengths and weaknesses of her work are similar to those of Schaeffer. She has a keen ability to develop sweeping metanarratives of philosophical history in order to show the influence of ideas on people and events. This kind of writing has the capacity of making difficult subjects hang together as a synthetic whole in a way that is most understandable to the general public. The problem with this type of schema is that it often seeks to understand a movement or thinker in reference to something or someone else rather than looking at the integrity of the subject itself. Points of agreement are streamlined and minor differences are heightened. The image produced therefore has the tendency to lack nuance and the potential of being somewhat deceptive. This is not a major problem in Pearcey’s work, but it does crop up in places in her more historical areas. To cite just two examples, Thomas Aquinas is viewed through a post-Vatican II Roman Catholic lens rather than in his own medieval milieu, and she casts process theology in light of Eastern panentheism, a stretch even though there are some conceptual parallels. Her dependence on Schaeffer also manifests itself in her overall apologetic method, which falls somewhere between evidentialism and presuppositionalism. She advocates the strengths of both systems and tends toward an essentially pragmatic position between the two, which is probably the most realistic position to take. She would not, however, make a strong advocate of either system completely happy. Nevertheless, her echoing of Schaeffer’s statement that the ultimate test of a worldview is in the living needs to be heard over and over again by both sides.

Pearcey is at her strongest when critiquing Darwinism. A seasoned writer on science from a Christian perspective, she introduces the reader to hoaxes and problems with evolutionary thinking. Her analysis does

the reader a great service by bringing both the practical and the theoretical aspects of Darwinism under the scrutiny of reason and revelation to demonstrate that it is at heart a position of faith or antifaith, as the case may be. Another helpful aspect of this section is the introduction to new thought and research produced by proponents of the intelligent design movement, which opens up new vistas for apologetics.

Pearcey's analysis of how evangelicalism came to embrace dualism is generally true although there are a few historical problems. Once again her presentation is too simple and too synthetic. The images she uses for the revivalists, even though she seeks to be careful, will rattle some readers, whereas her rebuke of the more educated evangelical response is perhaps not as strong as it should have been. Nevertheless, her overall picture of the evangelical mind can be corroborated by scholars such as Nathan Hatch and Mark Noll, and she goes a long way toward helping the reader understand the modern evangelical mindset.

High praise should be given to Pearcey for her presentation in the final part of her book of the importance of consistency in a Christian worldview. She mentions that perhaps this should have been the first chapter, and I think it might have served better in this position. Nevertheless, it charges Christian leaders to take a strong look at the gospel they are seeking to share and how they are seeking to share it. She raises the importance of pursuing biblical goals in biblical ways, a message the church needs to hear today more than ever. This chapter should be required reading for all Christian leaders in evangelical circles.

Pearcey's work is generally well written, and she does a good job of making difficult material accessible to the reader. The sections hang together somewhat loosely, and it is only at the conclusion of the work that one can see why she approached the topics the way she did. The appendices, although enlightening, are for the most part superfluous and do little to contribute to the work. Especially helpful, however, are the suggested reading list, which may serve as a springboard to more in-depth reading on a particular topic, and a copious index that makes it easy to return to interesting topics.

Total Truth serves as an update to Schaeffer's *Escape from Reason* and follows up on Pearcey's own earlier work with Charles Colson, *How Now Shall We Live?* If you liked those works, you will like this one too. Any book which seeks to remind Christians that Christianity is a unified and

comprehensive truth calling for an intellectual, physical, and emotional response is to be commended.

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Surprising Insights from the Unchurched. By Thom S. Rainer. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001. 281 pp. \$13.59 hardback.

“What if we asked new Christians and new church members what led them to the Savior and the church they chose?” Thus the journey began for Thom Rainer and his research team which resulted in the writing of this fine volume. Rainer is Dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary at Louisville, Kentucky. In this work, he concentrated on people who had actually started attending church. He defined the “formerly unchurched” as “one who had not been to church except sporadically, for at least 10 years (most for a lifetime) but had recently become active in church.” All of these had recently become Christians as well.

Rainer’s findings are in stark contrast with research done in the past two decades in the mainstream of the church growth movement which concentrated on trying to define what attracts unchurched people. What he learned from the “formerly unchurched” was not only surprising but, to many, shocking. To others, it was reassuring. Rainer lists a series of “myths” concerning prospective church members. These are ideas that have come to have rather wide acceptance in many circles today but which he believes are based on untrue assumptions.

These are vital issues that we should be aware of. They include such pivotal ideas as the following:

1. The unchurched are turned off by denominational names and affiliation.
2. The unchurched cannot be reached by direct evangelism.
3. We must avoid doctrine and all complex biblical issues lest we confuse the unchurched.
4. The Sunday school is ineffective in seeking to minister to people today.

Rainer's research effectively exposes the error of these and other commonly held twenty-first-century myths. He then turns to a riveting and powerful application of his findings designed to help the church and its leaders implement changes built on approaches that have actually proven to assist in reaching and *keeping* the unchurched. He emphasizes that pastors, preaching, doctrine, relationships, and first impressions really do make a difference with the unchurched.

Today is certainly a time of confusion for many in the church world and this includes Free Will Baptists. Clearly, we need to do something differently, but what?

The approach of the market-driven research model resulted in massive alterations of the style, services, indeed the whole approach to ministry that many have taken in the past twenty years. It appeared (and still does to many) that the seeker sensitive approach was a genuine success as many large, aggressive, evangelical churches sprang up.

Rainer was wise enough to see what even some of those who were party to the market-driven approach began to see by the mid-nineties: that many of those populating these congregations were simply sheep looking for greener pastures and not the result of conversion.

We should be thankful for the down to earth, common sense approach that Rainer espouses. *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched* is easy reading, thought provoking, and stimulating. It is a must read for pastors.

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Secrets of the Koran: Revealing Insight into Islam's Holy Book. By Don Richardson. Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 2003. 260 pp. \$14.25 hardback.

At this time in history few subjects can seize our attention like Islam or issues arising from its presence and expansion in today's world. Don Richardson, missiologist, apologist, and author, clearly demonstrates a heart that pursues truth, declares it, and defends it as he takes on the Koran, the sacred revelation of Islam. He does so with courage, forthrightness, and intellectual integrity seldom found when speaking of the holy writings of a world religion. His documentation is sound, and his commentary is fair, though to some it may appear at times to be insensi-

tive, abrasive, or totally biased. However, it is clearly evident that the potential for criticism does not alter him from his course of revealing the "Secrets of the Koran."

Chapters one through three bring us face to face with the question that stirs in the minds of many people, "Is Islam a religion of peace?" The Koran within itself can hardly be seen as a "book of peace." Virtually all those who are carrying out violent acts in the name of Islam claim unwavering loyalty to the Koran. There are over one hundred verses in the Koran that are identified as *war verses* that give authorization to Muslims to oppose and even annihilate all who do not accept Mohammed as a prophet, the Koran as the revealed word of Allah, and Islam as the only true religion.

For a Muslim, to give one's life for the spread of Islam and ridding the world of other religions is the most honorable sacrifice. The bountiful rewards promised to all who become martyrs in this holy *jihad* are enticing and inciting. If we have any doubt about the application of these instructions, we simply have to do a study of the life of Mohammed or the history of Islam or listen to the evening news.

An eye-opening examination of the Koran is given in chapters four through seven. Although deified by many, it is seen by others as incoherent thoughts presented in poor grammatical form by a self-proclaimed prophet who indulged human desires (e.g., polygamy, slavery, sexual immorality) and demanded unwavering submission by all who would embrace Islam. There are over forty million young people being taught the Koran every day. They will embrace its teachings and execute its orders. This is a threat that we cannot ignore.

Chapters eight and nine effectively present the theistic moral compass that guides the immutable teachings of the Old and New Testament as contrasted to the disjointed ramblings of the Prophet. Islamic scholars declare that Christians and Jews corrupted the sacred writings (i.e., the Old and New Testaments) entrusted to them, and, therefore, the Koran was necessary to replace them. However, when we as Christians talk to Muslims, we should not fear laying the Bible down beside the Koran and doing a comparative analysis. Although we do not accept the Koran as inspired by God, we can show them that the Koran itself states that "We have sent down the Koran to you with truth confirmatory of previous scriptures [i.e., the Old and New Testament] and as their safeguard." Anyone who does a hermeneutically sound study of the Koran should easily see its inconsistencies and be pulled toward the truly inspired Word of God, the Bible.

In spite of its weaknesses Islam is still a world religion that is experiencing phenomenal growth. This expansion is the result of a well defined strategy that combines religious zeal, political cunning, and seemingly unlimited resources to bring about Islamic global domination. Chapters ten through sixteen paint a haunting picture of what is happening today to contribute to a world dominated by Islam. These chapters alone make this book a must read for all people, Christian or non-Christian.

The closing chapter, the epilogue, and appendix present us with some practical lines of action that we as believers must take. There are theological issues that the evangelical world must work through as we consider the fate of those who follow other religions or who never hear the Word. But as it relates to Islam, we must be spiritually and mentally prepared to stand for truth and unveil the "Secrets of the Koran" to a world in desperate need of knowing the true and living God.

Would I recommend this book? Absolutely! Although I do not embrace every word written here or every argument presented, I find this work to be an excellent presentation of the fundamental issues that separate Christianity and Islam. Christians should come to grips with the reality of the challenge before us and properly prepare themselves to reveal to others in a clear and concise manner the dangers that are hidden in the Koran.

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