
Integrity

A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Published by the Commission for Theological Integrity
of the National Association of Free Will Baptists

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INTEGRITY

A Journal of Christian Thought

PUBLISHED BY THE COMMISSION FOR THEOLOGICAL INTEGRITY
OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF FREE WILL BAPTISTS

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Introduction

On behalf of the Commission for Theological Integrity, of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, I am happy that this, the fourth issue of *Integrity*, is now appearing. In the past, issues have been published at intervals of three years; our hope is that this frequency may be increased, at least to once every other year. Various things will determine whether this is possible, not least the availability of well prepared and helpful articles.

That observation leads to a two-fold question: What is the purpose of this journal and how are its contents determined? For the first part of this, I have spoken with members of the Commission and read again the introductions to the first three issues. The purpose needs to be understood from two angles.

First, from the point of view of the writers and the Commission, *Integrity* exists in order to promote scholarship within the fellowship that sponsors its publication. Perhaps this needs some defense, given that scholarship tends to be mentioned, in some Christian circles, with a sneer. Indeed, unbaptized scholarship is dangerous. But ignorance threatens at least as much harm. Those who take the Bible seriously, as the very Word of God, need to give it careful and serious study and to speak about theology, ministry, and the interaction of truth and culture accurately and deeply. They need to explore such matters thoroughly, evidencing careful research and awareness of what has gone before. Only the kind of scholarship the Church needs must rest on three sturdy legs: an unwavering commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture, a will to support the distinctive beliefs of the particular community of believers of which one is a part, and a practical involvement in the Great Commission of the Church.

Indeed, the publishers intend for this journal to encourage *developing* scholars. We intentionally include articles by young and relatively inexperienced writers—provided they have grappled seriously with their subject matter and researched the topic well, showing acquaintance with the thoughts that have gone before them and making some contribution to the discussion. The editor of the first issue, J. Matthew Pinson, said that the journal stands “somewhere between a popular magazine and a traditional academic journal,” and that “while some of our articles will be more specialized, many of them will be general introductions to various topics in Christian thought.”

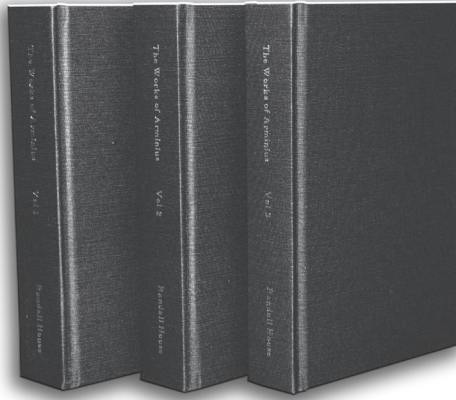
From the point of view of our readers, the purpose of this journal is to provide stimulation and information that will deepen one's commitment to the Scriptures and help equip both the ministry and the laity for Christian ministry at one level or another. Underlying this, we are convinced that the foundation for all ministry is understanding what our God has spoken. And in that light we need to be well informed about the currents of thought that flow in the minds of our contemporaries.

How, then, does one go about getting an article published in *Integrity*? The normal way, as defined by the Commission, is for a writer to present—usually at his or her own initiative—a paper at one of the annual symposiums sponsored by the Commission. At present these symposiums meet, on alternate years, on the campuses of Hillsdale Free Will Baptist College and Free Will Baptist Bible College. During the symposium, a writer reads a paper; then others in attendance ask questions and make observations—always in an irenic spirit. Out of such discussion the writer may well get ideas for further improvement of the paper. Members of the Commission, or the editor of this journal, may ask the writer to submit the paper to be considered for publication. Finally the Commission members and the editors consider whether the paper meets the purposes of the journal and should be published—often after suggesting further improvements.

Occasionally, unsolicited articles may be published. Anyone in our fellowship who has the desire to do so is encouraged to submit an article for consideration. In such a case, the article should be submitted to the editor, preferably as an electronic copy. He will then send copies to all the members of the Commission, who will express themselves on the appropriateness of the article for *Integrity*. When they have communicated their recommendations to the editor, he will advise the person who has submitted the article. Any prospective writer can obtain from the editor, in advance of final submission, a copy of the guidelines for articles that must be followed.

May the cause of our Lord be advanced and the impact of His Word felt in all our being, thinking, and doing.

Robert E. Picirilli



The Works of James Arminius

Introduction by Stephen M. Ashby

10-ISBN: 0892655674

Price: \$174.99, set

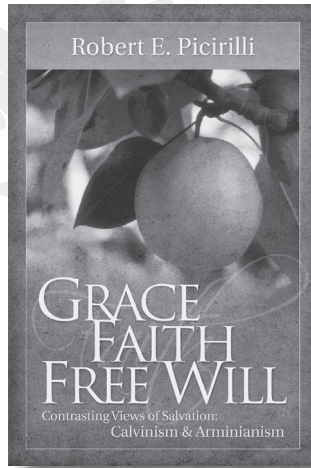
This three-volume set of the writings of James Arminius is a reprinting of the London edition, the English translation by James Nichols (1825, 1828) and William Nichols (1875). *The Works of James Arminius* is an anthology of classic Protestant theology, pertinent to scholars interested in the Calvinist-Arminian debate as well as to students of the history of Christian thought.

The Works of Arminius is a classic collection of benchmark constructive theology. It addresses with clarity and precision the difficult issues of theology, such as election to salvation: unconditionally determined or based upon God's foreknowledge of man's future free acts. Is God's sovereignty overturned by belief in human freedom? Or does mankind after the fall ever possess the natural freedom to do spiritually good things? Does the God of the Bible foreordain sinful acts? These questions and many more await those adventurous enough to delve into the primary writings of James Arminius.



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Grace, Faith, Free Will

By Robert E. Picirilli

ISBN: 0892656484

Price: \$19.99

Robert E. Picirilli, in *Grace, Faith, Free Will*, renews the discussion of issues that have divided Calvinism and Arminianism since the Reformation.

Jacobus Arminius, a Dutch theologian of the 16th century, contested the dominant theological ideas advanced by the well-known Protestant reformer John Calvin and his disciples. Historically, Arminius has been frequently misunderstood and often reinterpreted by friend and foe alike. Even today, one who calls himself "Arminian" does so with considerable risk, as the name means different things to different people and comes in various flavors. Many automatically think of Arminians as liberal, differing little from Universalists, at least holding to salvation by works, and possibly espousing heretical views of the Trinity or the goodness of man. In truth, some "Arminians" have held and even now hold such beliefs. Not so Arminius himself, his original followers, or able contemporary theologians such as Picirilli. Though he presents both classic Calvinism and Arminianism in order to help readers intelligently decide for themselves, Dr. Picirilli unashamedly advocates a very specific form of Arminianism as the best resolution of the tensions between the two doctrinal positions. In what he calls "Reformation Arminianism," Picirilli reclaims the original views of Arminius and his defenders.



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SERMON

I Don't Believe: Salvation Comes through the Unconditional Election of God

Christians agree that salvation comes through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. When an individual, with godly sorrow, repents of his sin and trusts in Jesus as his Savior, his sins are washed away. He is forgiven. The chasm once separating him from God is instantaneously bridged, and he and the Lord of Heaven are at peace. As Paul wrote: "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).¹

Within the Christian family, however, many disagree about the background to salvation. Does God ensure that all people have the ability and opportunity to be saved? Since God knew in advance who would be saved and who would not, did Jesus suffer on the cross for those who He knew would not be saved? Once a person converts to Christianity, is it a possibility that he might later turn away from the faith and be lost?

As Christians have grappled with these issues, two main schools of thought have developed. One is called Calvinism, after the sixteenth-century French reformer, John Calvin. The other is called Arminianism, after a sixteenth-century Dutch theology professor, James Arminius. While the two men and their followers agree on the basics of the Christian faith, several significant points of difference between them stand out.

Let's begin with a summary of Calvinism. Traditionally, Calvin's teachings on salvation have been explained using the acronym TULIP, with each letter standing for a particular belief. We don't have time to describe these fully, but in a nutshell here are the ideas involved.

The T stands for total depravity. Man is spiritually dead in sin so that even when presented with the gospel, he cannot reach out and receive this gift unless God first grants him spiritual life. As Calvin explained: "Such is the blockishness, such is the blindness of men, that in seeing

1. My Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.

they see not, in hearing they hear not, until such time as God doth give them new eyes and new ears."²

The **U** stands for unconditional election. In eternity past, God planned for the creation of mankind and selected from the mass of humanity a people for Himself. God made this election without reference to any foreseen condition fulfilled by those He chose. Therefore, they are unconditionally elected.

The **L** is for limited atonement. In keeping with His plan to save only those whom He elected, God provided atonement for them and them only through Jesus' death on the cross. John Owen, a staunch follower of Calvin, put it this way: "He [Jesus] did not lay down his life, as a shepherd, for the whole herd of mankind, but for that flock of the elect which was given and committed to him by the Father."³

The **I** represents irresistible grace. God showers his goodness and affection on those whom He elected so that their natural opposition to Him is necessarily broken down and replaced with love for Him. Minneapolis pastor John Piper explains: "When a person hears a preacher call for repentance he can resist that call. But if God gives him repentance he cannot resist because the gift is the removal of resistance. Not being willing to repent is the same as resisting the Holy Spirit. So if God gives repentance it is the same as taking away the resistance. This is why we call this work of God 'irresistible grace.'"⁴

Finally, the **P** stands for perseverance of the saints. Those whom God elected and for whom Jesus died, whom He irresistibly called and regenerated so that they placed faith in Christ, these, once having been saved, will certainly persevere in holiness and attain Heaven. Calvin asserted: "There is no danger that they who have been renewed by spiritual grace shall be dried up."⁵ They are eternally secure.

As it relates to salvation, these, then, are the teachings of Calvinism. Now what I want us to do is to focus simply on one of these doctrines. Let's look at the **U** of the TULIP, unconditional election. There are a number of passages that seem to assert the Calvinistic position on election. For

2. John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1:103.

3. John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. W. H. Goold, 7 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [reprint of 1855 ed.]), 7:474-75.

4. John Piper, "What We Believe about the Five Points of Calvinism," at http://www.desiringgod.org/ResourceLibrary/Articles/ByDate/1985/1487_What_We_Believe_About_the_Five_Points_of_Calvinism. Accessed April 10, 2007.

5. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel according to John*, trans. William Pringle, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 1:151.

example, in John 17:9 Jesus prays: "I pray for them [the disciples]. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours." Or hear what Paul says in Romans 9:17-18 about the Pharaoh who opposed Moses and God's people: "For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: 'I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden."

Many have understood these passages and others to teach unconditional election. Careful statements of faith have been drawn up in attempts to capture the Bible's meaning on this matter. For instance, here's how the Westminster Confession of Faith explains it: "By the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death. ... Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to his eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of his will, hath chosen in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of his free grace and love alone, without any foresight of faith or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving him thereunto; and all to the praise of his glorious grace."⁶

Here's a simpler version, this one from Charles Hodge, a nineteenth-century Princeton theology professor and a thoroughgoing Calvinist: "From the mass of fallen men God elected a number innumerable to eternal life, and left the rest of mankind to the just recompense of their sins." He added: "The ground of this election is not the foresight of anything in the one class to distinguish them favourably from the members of the other class, but the good pleasure of God."⁷

What Hodge and those who crafted the Westminster Confession were saying was that God picked out some people to save and that this selection had nothing to do with anything foreseen in these individuals. They were saying that salvation comes through the unconditional election of God.

I want you to know that I don't believe that. I think that Calvin and his followers are wrong on this point. I rather believe that God's election is based upon His foreknowledge of how individuals will respond to Him.

6. James Benjamin Green, *A Harmony of the Westminster Presbyterian Standards, with Explanatory Notes* (Richmond: John Knox, 1951), 29-30.

7. Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 2:333.

I offer two reasons why I reject unconditional election. First, we will see that such an election contradicts the attribute of God's justice as revealed in Scripture and as planted in the human heart. Second, we will note that the Scriptures provide a slender shaft of light, pointing to the conditional nature of election.

First, a selection of some individuals to salvation necessarily involves a passing by or a reprobation of others, and those passed by are left without any hope. The one group enjoys God's gracious election of them. The other suffers from God's reprobation of them. I don't believe such a plan accurately represents the God of the Bible.

Now some want to own unconditional election but not reprobation. It is only true, they say, that God is choosing some to salvation. It is not true that He is selecting others for damnation. I can see why they would want to think this, can't you? But does this distinction make sense? Does not the selection of some from within a group necessarily imply the exclusion of the others? If out of ten drowning people, I pick five to rescue, have I not also picked five not to save? Could it be otherwise? The one necessarily entails the other.

Many Calvinists own this and embrace both election and reprobation as part of the eternal plan of God. You saw this in the quotation from the Westminster Confession of Faith. They included alongside election "that others [were] fore-ordained to everlasting death." Such thinking lines up perfectly with Calvin, for in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion* he stated: "Indeed many, as if they wished to avert a reproach from God, accept election in such terms as to deny that anyone is condemned. But they do this very ignorantly and childishly, since election itself could not stand except as set over against reprobation." He continued: "Therefore, those whom God passes over, he condemns; and this he does for no other reason than that he wills to exclude them from the inheritance which he predestines for his own children."⁸ Calvin recognized clearly that no matter how you slice it, the selection of some for salvation necessarily involves the selection of others for damnation.

Surely you all see why I include this as an argument against unconditional election. We intuitively find this revolting, un-godlike. Reprobation represents God as planning, dare I say desiring, to damn some forever. In passing by some, He actively plans their doom. He sees it. He wills it. He desires it. In the doctrine of reprobation God takes

8. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols., vol. 20 of The Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 2:947.

pleasure in the judgment of sinners. Bear in mind, this planned damnation for so many occurs in the context of there being nothing in the others to commend their election.

It is not hard to see that this teaching conflicts with both Scriptural assertions and our sense of justice. In the Bible we are taught: "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezekiel 33:11). Jesus said: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). Peter wrote: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). John the Baptist said of Jesus: "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). The Apostle John stated: "He [Jesus] is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). He further added: "And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world" (1 John 4:14).

Calvinists often argue that "world" in these passages is referring to the various nations of the world and not the totality of individuals in the world. I don't find their arguments convincing. But even without such Scriptural assertions of God's love for the world, Heaven's attitude toward mankind seems to be the opposite of intentionally embracing some humans while damning others. That a God of justice would do such a thing seems impossible.

This apparent injustice is admitted even by Calvinists. The difficulty inherent in such a plan is so glaring that Calvin himself called predestination *decretum ... horribile*, "the horrible decree."⁹ Luther saw the same problem. In his book *The Bondage of the Will* he admitted: "Let us take it that there are three lights—the light of nature, the light of grace, and the light of glory. ... By the light of nature it is an insoluble problem how it can be just that a good man should suffer and a bad man prosper; but this problem is solved by the light of grace. By the light of grace it is an insoluble problem how God can damn one who is unable by any power of his own to do anything but sin and be guilty. Here both the light of nature and the light of grace tell us that it is not the fault of the unhappy man, but of an unjust God; for they cannot judge otherwise of a God who crowns one ungodly man freely and apart from merits, yet damns another."

9. Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:955.

er who may well be less, or at least not more, ungodly. But the light of glory tells us differently, and it will show us hereafter that the God whose judgment here is one of incomprehensible righteousness is a God of most perfect and manifest righteousness. In the meantime, we can only believe this."¹⁰

Elsewhere in the same work, Luther stated: "Admittedly, it gives the greatest possible offense to common sense or natural reason that God by his own sheer will should abandon, harden, and damn men as if he enjoyed the sins and the vast, eternal torments of his wretched creatures, when he is preached as a God of such great mercy and goodness, etc. It has been regarded as unjust, as cruel, as intolerable, to entertain such an idea about God, and this is what has offended so many great men during so many centuries. And who would not be offended? I myself was offended more than once, and brought to the very depth and abyss of despair, so that I wished I had never been created a man, before I realized how salutary that despair was, and how near to grace."¹¹

Hodge said much the same thing: "It may be admitted that it would appear to us more consistent with the character of God that provision should be made for the salvation of all men, and that sufficient knowledge and grace should be granted to every human being to secure his salvation."¹²

I include several of these statements because I want you to see that anybody looking at the ideas involved in unconditional election with an unprejudiced eye finds them to appear wrong and inhuman. There surely are plenty of theologians who own this doctrine as true, but just as surely they only do so by abandoning their natural sense of justice.

Now let me be transparent with you. It seems to me that if there is any way to draw a different conclusion from the Scriptures than unconditional election, it would be preferable to adopting a belief that makes God seem like a devil. But is there any way to be true to the Bible and at the same time reject this doctrine?

Well, it can't be done by denying election. The Scriptures repeatedly use this language. God has elected some and not others. This much is surely fact. But must this election be understood in such a way as to preclude any conditions on man's part? I don't think so, and this leads me to the second reason I reject unconditional election. While the Bible may not tell us as much as we want to know, it does seem to indicate that a con-

10. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 55 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1957), 33:292.

11. Luther, 33:190.

12. Hodge, 2:331.

dition is somehow attached to God's election. Listen to what Paul says in Romans 8:28-30: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified." Did you catch the connection between foreknowledge and predestination? "Those God *foreknew* he also predestined." Paul is saying that God's predestining of some to salvation is based on his foreknowledge of them.

The apostle Peter makes much the same point. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood" (1 Peter 1:1-2). There it is again in very similar language to Paul's. Peter refers to those "who have been chosen [or elected] *according to the foreknowledge of God.*" The choice God made in selecting some to salvation is grounded in His foreknowledge.

God apparently saw in eternity past how mankind would respond to His dealings with them. But what did He see? The Scriptures plainly teach that man is not saved by being good or performing good works, so we know that's not the answer. But if not that, what? The only conclusion possible seems to be that God foresaw that some would respond in faith to His offers of grace and that His election or choice of mankind was guided accordingly. Those whom He foreknew, He predestined.

Now let me be quick to admit that this explanation does not completely satisfy my mind. I find within myself objections to my own position. There are some passages of Scripture that I can't explain. I don't know how to fit them into my theological position, and I'm yet to read someone else who can explain them so that I am satisfied. Why then, you may ask, do you hold to this position? I do so because the alternative presents me with even more difficulties, difficulties of the first order, difficulties that appear to impugn the character of God. And by the way, I'm yet to find anyone from a Calvinistic perspective who has been able to resolve these issues. Any way we turn on this issue, we seem to be confronted with matters that are beyond our full comprehension.

Now back to the idea that God's election is based on His foreknowledge of our response to him. We don't have time in this sermon to work through all the objections that Calvinists raise against such thinking, but let me deal with one. They feel that if man is credited with making even

the contribution of faith to the process of salvation, even when this faith is only exercised under the wooing influences of God's Spirit, then the glory of God is infringed upon and diminished.

I would suggest that this is faulty thinking. Just because the choice of whether one will or will not accept the gracious invitation of God is left up to the individual does not mean that the person who accepts it has whereof to boast. Perhaps an illustration will help. Picture a miserable, unkempt vagrant on the street. An ugly smell matches the man's ugly appearance. He has no means of support and is famished. No doubt, soon he will die. But then imagine that a kind and wealthy benefactor takes pity on the man and invites him into his house. He gives him a shower and shave. He decks him out in new clothes. He sets a lavish table for him with the best of foods and drink. He invites him to come and dine, to pull out a chair and have a seat at this sumptuous feast. Now can you imagine that this man in pulling out the chair to sit at the table would say: "Look what I did! See the contribution I made to this grand experience. I pulled out the chair and sat down"? Such a thought would be the farthest thing from his mind. The miserable man truly contributes nothing to his blessings. All he does is accept the invitation, and this acceptance in no way detracts from the extravagant grace shown to him. As Arminius put it: "A rich man bestows, on a poor and famishing beggar, alms by which he may be able to maintain himself and his family. Does it cease to be a pure gift, because the beggar extends his hand to receive it?"¹³

I trust you see that this is much like what God did for us. The Almighty King saw us in our sin, wretched and miserable, without hope. From every viewpoint, we were despicable and repulsive. But in great grace and mercy He reached down to us in the person of His dear Son. Jesus, through His death on the cross, washed and cleaned us. Through His sinless life, He dressed us in righteous attire. He brought us into the feast of salvation and provided everything good at our disposal. O what grace! O what love! Who of us would ever boast by saying, "Look at me. I accepted God's invitation"? Grace surely excludes all boasting.

Do you see how you should respond to God's plan of conditional election? You sinners should accept His offer of salvation. You have hope. There is not some settled plan from eternity by which you have been numbered among the damned. God rather calls out to you and invites you to His feast. There are no good reasons to reject such an invitation. So

13. James Arminius, *The Writings of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols (vols. 1-2) and W. R. Bagnall (vol. 3), 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1956), 1:365-66.

in faith, trust Christ today. Repent of your sins and embrace God's gift of salvation.

You who already enjoy God's blessings should rejoice over what the Lord has done for you. Your salvation is not due to some goodness in you. You were fallen in sin just like the rest of humanity, and all you have contributed to your present state of joy is to accept God's proffered mercy. This should humble you, urge you to share the Lord's invitation with others, and fill your mouth with praise. Yes, "give Him the glory, great things He hath done."

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“Knowing God” in Jeremiah: The Ancient Near Eastern Background of an Old Testament Covenantal Concept

“Knowing God”—from Plato to Pope (the poet, not the pontiff), Calvin to Chopra, and Emerson to Harrison (George, the Beatle), an eclectic mix of voices have offered their two cents’ worth on what this expression means and whether such a thing is even possible. My concern, however, is with a single authoritative source: the Bible, as our understanding of it is informed by its setting within Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) culture. To focus our pursuit, we examine one canonical voice in particular: Jeremiah, seventh/sixth-century B.C. prophet who confronted Judah’s spiritual death spiral head-on. As one might expect, he had much to say to his generation about “knowing God.”

So, too, did writers in cultures contiguous to ancient Israel. Several Near Eastern treaty documents from Old Testament times use *know* and *knowledge* in their respective languages to express nuances of covenant loyalty between vassal and suzerain, with many of the latter presuming a status of deity for themselves.¹ Since Jeremiah exhibits decided covenantal overtones, these international treaty contexts help to reveal the significance of what “knowing Yahweh” means in the book and in other Old Testament settings.

COVENANT CONNECTIONS IN JEREMIAH

Not surprisingly, the “covenant” theme pervades the Old Testament because it is the primary figure through which God expresses His relationship with His elect people. Though attempts to trace the etymology

1. *Vassal* refers to the lesser, subordinate party in the relationship, *suzerain* to the superior overlord. These treaties constituted a pledged relationship between the suzerain (in this case the Hittites) and the vassal state to which the Hittites offered protection and support in exchange for the vassal’s loyal obeisance. For a list of specific treaties, see John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 96-100.

of *bērît* (“covenant”) have failed to achieve consensus,² the background and usage of the word lead to understanding “covenant” as a formalized, pledged relationship in which one partner—God in this case—commits Himself in beneficence to the other—humans. Entering into covenant imposes certain obligations on both parties; however, the degree of obligation relative to each party varies according to the nature of the covenant.³ For the last fifty years, many Orientalists have examined links between Biblical covenants and various treaty forms represented in many Ancient Near Eastern texts.⁴ They note that features of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants, for example, parallel those of grant/promissory treaties seen in Assyrian materials⁵ and that the Mosaic covenant,

2. For discussion of the proposals, see G. E. Mendenhall, “Covenant,” *Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 1:715-6; Moshe Weinfeld, בְּרִית, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren; John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:253-5; and G. J. McConville, בְּרִית, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 1:747-55. See also James Barr, “Semantic Notes on the Covenant,” *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Herbert Donner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), 27.

3. Promissory or grant covenants are basically unilateral and unconditional. See Moshe Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the OT and in the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 (1970): 184-5. Suzerainty or vassal treaties are bilateral and involve mutual obligation. See Thomas E. McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 144-61; and John H. Walton, *Covenant: God’s Purpose, God’s Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 15-22.

4. The seminal work by G. E. Mendenhall broke ground in the research on these connections. “Ancient Oriental and Biblical Law,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 17:2 (1954): 26-46. Cf. G. E. Mendenhall, “Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 17:3 (1954): 50-76. For recent discussion of the relevance of the treaty form to Biblical covenants, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The OT Documents* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 143-46; K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 283-307; and Walton, *Israelite Literature*, 95-109. J. G. McConville notes that “the similarity between Deuteronomy and ANE political treaties ... plays some part in all modern analyses of the book.” J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, *Apollos Old Testament Commentary*, vol. 5 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 23. E. W. Nicholson, however, is skeptical of extensive connections between suzerainty treaties and the OT; he sees any parallels as “superficial ... more apparent than real,” though his conclusions flow from his assumption that the “covenant” notion in Israel is late, in accord with Wellhausen’s reconstruction of Deuteronomy’s origin. E. W. Nicholson, “Covenant in a Century of Study since Wellhausen,” *A Song of Power and the Power of Song: Essays on the Book of Deuteronomy*, ed. Duane L. Christensen (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1993), 85-91.

5. Weinfeld, “Covenant of Grant,” 184-203. Compare Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, *Anchor Bible*, vol. 5 (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 7-8.

particularly as expressed in Deuteronomy's literary structure, closely resembles Hittite vassal/suzerainty agreements.⁶

These major Biblical covenants, along with the promised New Covenant, provide texture and information essential to understanding Jeremiah's prophecy. His book is clearly covenantal in its orientation. Jeremiah's early preaching reflects an Abrahamic concern for the promises involving land⁷ and blessing for all nations.⁸ The Mosaic covenant provides source material for many of these oracles in its prohibition of idolatry,⁹ other Decalogue injunctions,¹⁰ and covenant curses for rejecting the legislation.¹¹ Later oracles and historical narratives in Jeremiah also echo these covenant elements: the covenant with Abraham;¹² broken Mosaic commandments,¹³ especially involving idolatry¹⁴ and Sabbath violation;¹⁵ and covenant curses.¹⁶ Further, these passages highlight the wickedness of Davidic rulers¹⁷ as well as forthcoming restoration under Davidic covenant provisions.¹⁸ Another related feature is the covenant formula, "I will be your God and you will be My people," which occurs at significant points in these sections (7:23 and 24:7). Fittingly, Judah appeals to Yahweh, "Do not break your covenant with us" (14:21).

The most significant covenant links in Jeremiah, however, surface in the "book of comfort," chapters 30-33, which serve as the axis of the

6. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms," 30-36; Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 20-24; and Kitchen, 283-4. The point is not that OT writers were dependent upon these treaty forms, but that many of the treaty components provided common literary vehicles for the expression of formal relationships in the Ancient Near East. A modern analogy would be shared formal elements in legal documents among transnational businesses or governments.

7. 2:7; 3:18-19.

8. 4:2.

9. 1:16; 2:5, 8, 11, 23-5; 3:6-9; 5:7.

10. 5:31; 6:13; 8:10; 9:5-6.

11. 3:3; 5:14-17; 6:19; 9:13. Many researchers have noted the influence of Deuteronomy on Jeremiah. The reason for this link seems obvious: the book of the law which Hilkiah found in the temple in 621 B.C. contained all or part of Deuteronomy. This connection is evident because of (1) the nature of the covenant practices reinstated by Josiah and (2) the language and rhetorical style used by Jeremiah to describe those reforms. See more evidence in Raymond B. Dillard, *2 Chronicles*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 15 (Waco: Word, 1987), 280.

12. 7:7; 11:5; 17:15.

13. 7:9; 11:10; 44:23.

14. 11:13; 13:25; 17:18; 19:4-5; 44:7-10.

15. 17:19-27.

16. 11:8; 14:4-5; 17:4; 44:25-8.

17. 21:12; 22:1-5, 30; 29:16.

18. 23:5-6.

larger book both thematically and structurally.¹⁹ Here God promises to bless the land²⁰ on behalf of His covenant “seed”²¹ as He “restores their fortunes” in accord with Abrahamic covenant provisions.²² In keeping with the Davidic covenant, Yahweh will “plant” Israel in the land²³ and restore Zion²⁴ through the reign of a Davidic king.²⁵ Mosaic covenant conditions will then undergo radical transformation as Yahweh implants His *tôrâh* into the hearts of His people who know Him directly and whose sins are forgiven.²⁶ Considering this pronounced covenantal emphasis, no wonder the covenant formula occurs twice in the unit.²⁷

THE *Yāda'* WORD GROUP AND CONTEXTS
INVOLVING KNOWLEDGE OF DEITY IN JEREMIAH

One often overlooked covenant connection in Jeremiah merits closer consideration. This link involves the verb *yāda'*, “to know,” and its related forms which occur around one thousand times throughout the Old Testament in every verbal theme. Cognate terms are common in several other Semitic languages as well.²⁸ In its Old Testament usage, *yāda'* has five primary meanings: (1) to realize or comprehend through sensory awareness, (2) to be aware of or acquainted with an object or circumstances, (3) to distinguish between, to differentiate, (4) to possess skill in an area, and (5) to have intimate relations with a person.²⁹

19. Garnett Reid, “Jeremiah 30-33: Heart of Jeremiah’s Covenantal Message,” *Biblical Viewpoint* 25 (1991): 90-96.

20. 30:3, 18; 31:5-6, 17, 21, 23, 24, 38-40; 32:15, 22; 33:7, 10-13.

21. 30:10; 31:36-7; 33:26.

22. 30:3, 18; 31:23; 32:44; 33:7, 11, 26.

23. Note the significant verb *nāṭa'*, “to plant,” in 31:28; 32:41; and in 2 Samuel 7:10.

24. 30:17; 31:6, 12.

25. 30:9; 33:14-15, 17, 20-6.

26. 31:31-4.

27. 31:33; 32:38.

28. These include Akkadian (*idû/edû*), Ugaritic (*yd'*), Ethiopic (*ayde'a*), OS Arabic (*yd'*), Phoenician (*yd'*), and Aramaic (*yd'*). See G. J. Botterweck, ידע, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 5:448-54. The Septuagint (LXX) most often translates *yd'* with *ginōskō* (490 times) and *eidenai* (185 times). Synonyms for *yd'* in the OT include *bîn* (“understand”), *lāmad* (Hiphil, “learn”), *rā'āh* (“see, perceive”), *šāma'*, (“hear, obey”), and *šāmar*, (“keep”).

29. See the discussion in Botterweck, ידע, 5:461-70; J. P. Lewis, ידע, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. R. L. Harris, Gleason Archer, and B. K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:366-7; R. Bultmann, “γινώσκω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 1:696-701; R. Bultmann, ידע, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, ed. D. J. A. Clines (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 4:99-100; and W. Shottroff, ידע *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 2:509-18.

My concern in this study involves the semantic sense of *yāda'* in Jeremiah when the object of this verb is God: to "know God/Yahweh/Me," and of the noun *da'at* ("knowledge") when its object is deity: "the knowledge of God/Yahweh/Me."³⁰ The book uses *yāda'* a total of seventy-four times and *da'at* three times. Of these seventy-seven occurrences, twelve involve contexts dealing with "knowing God." In seven, the prophet speaks of "knowing" or "not knowing" Yahweh.³¹ Three denote "knowing" or "not knowing" the "way/ordinance of Yahweh."³² Another use of *yāda'* speaks of "not knowing" other gods.³³ These eleven involve the verb (*yāda'*). The final reference is to the "knowledge" (*da'at*) of God.³⁴

In light of the book's covenantal connections, what does Jeremiah mean by "knowing" Yahweh? Is this mere cognizance or realization through sensory receptors in the same way we "know" our PIN number for the ATM, for example, or does "knowing" Him suggest something deeper, more experiential, along the lines of "intimacy" as conveyed by meaning 5 above?³⁵ Contexts in Jeremiah where "knowing God" is in view, as supported by the data from the Near Eastern treaty uses of cognate words, suggest that this and similar phrases denote (1) close identification with and (2) committed obedience to God in a covenantal relationship.

A COVENANTAL SENSE OF "KNOWING GOD" REFLECTED IN ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN TREATY CONTEXTS

The apparent connection between some Old Testament covenants and treaty forms of Near Eastern antiquity may provide insight into what Jeremiah and other Old Testament writers mean when they refer to "knowing God." Vassal treaties sometimes use "know" to denote formal

30. These references use either the names Yahweh or Elohim, or a pronominal form such as *’ōî* to refer to God. I include here references to knowing God's "way" (*derek*) and "ordinance" (*mišpat*). Note examples such as Exod. 33:13; Judg. 2:10; 1 Sam. 2:12; Ps. 36:10 [Heb. v. 11]; Dan. 11:32; and Hos. 6:3. This study does not examine the use of *yāda'* in the recognition formula, "that (*kî*) you may know ...," as in Jer. 16:21. Note: here, and often in this article, notations like "[Heb. v. 11]" refer to differences between the verse numbers in the English and Hebrew texts.

31. 2:8; 4:22; 9:3 [Heb. v. 2], 6 [Heb. v. 5], 24 [Heb. v. 23]; 24:7; 31:34 (twice).

32. 5:4, 5 (*derek*) and 8:7 (*mišpat*).

33. 7:9.

34. 22:16.

35. By "intimacy" here I am referring to personal, experiential commitment, not to a physical relationship as *yāda'* often denotes in the OT.

or legal recognition between a suzerain and a vassal.³⁶ This sense involves either a vassal's identity as a subjugated ruler pledging loyalty to the superior king by acknowledging that he "knows" that ruler or the king's "knowledge" of the vassal as his loyal subject. Three examples illustrate these senses. The first is a Hittite text from King Suppiluliumas to a vassal ruler, Huqqanas, in Asia Minor: "And you, Huqqanas, know only the Sun [Suppiluliumas] regarding lordship; also my son (of) whom I, the Sun, say, 'This everyone should know ... you, Huqqanas, know him ... Moreover, another lord ... do not ... know! The Sun [alone] know!'"³⁷ Another text from Ras Shamra (Ugarit) entails correspondence from Hittite king Suppiluliumas II to the Ugaritic king 'Ammurapi:

No[w, you belong?] to the Sun, your lord; You are [his serva]nt, his Property. Now, [how is it that?] you do not know/acknowledge the Sun, your lord? Why have you not come to me, the Sun, your lord, for one year, for two years?³⁸

A final example comes from the Amarna letters, ca. fourteenth century B.C.³⁹ This letter from 'Abdi-Aīirta, an Amurru king in Palestine, to the Egyptian pharaoh Akhenaten, begins: "May the king, m[y] lord, know me and entrust [m]e to the charge of Pahante, my commissioner."⁴⁰ In these examples a lesser ruler identifies himself as a loyal vassal to the overlord by claiming to "know" that king, or in the last case the suzerain declares a knowing allegiance to the inferior monarch.

A second sense of "knowing" a ruler involves an acceptance of treaty terms as binding. The vassal confirms to the king that he is obliged to comply with the stipulations demanded in the "contract." While the first nuance of "know" in these treaties involves the vassal's covenant identity with the suzerain, this sense suggests his obedience in actions demonstrating compliant loyalty. We note once again a covenantal sense of "to

36. For further discussion of these treaties, see Herbert B. Huffmon, "The Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yāda*," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 181 (1966): 31-3; and Herbert B. Huffmon and Simon B. Parker, "A Further Note on the Treaty Background of Hebrew *Yāda*," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 184 (1966): 36-8.

37. Cited in Huffmon, 31-2.

38. For the inscription itself, see C. F. A. Schaeffer, *Ugaritica IV* (Paris: P. Guethner, 1939), 59; refer to the discussion in Huffmon and Parker, 37.

39. The dates for all of the inscriptions cited here range from ca. the fifteenth century to the eighth century B.C., covering most of the OT period.

40. W. L. Moran, ed./trans., *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), #60.

know." One such text involves a command of the Hittite king Muwattalis to his subject Alaksandus: "Moreover, this tablet which I m[ade] (for) you, Ala[ksandus], [let them re]ad it to you three tim[es] yearly, year after year, and you, Alaksandus, know it."⁴¹ Note also the incumbent treaty demands in this correspondence between the Assyrian king Esarhaddon and the Cimmerian people who, the Assyrian monarch says, are "nomads, they know neither an oath by the god(s) nor a sworn agreement [treaty]."⁴² The superior kings are demanding loyal allegiance from these nations as seen in their observant actions.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONTEXTS INVOLVING *yāda'* IN JEREMIAH

Both of these significations involving *yāda'* help us to understand more accurately what Jeremiah, Yahweh's spokesman, means when he refers to "knowing" the Lord. Jeremiah's early preaching begins with a poetic cycle of oracles against Judah's unfaithfulness (2:1-4:4). In 2:8 Yahweh charges, "The priests did not say, 'Where is the LORD?' And those who handle the law did not know Me." Yahweh's covenant relationship with Judah provides the background for these accusations, as indicated by: (1) the term *hesed* (v. 2);⁴³ (2) Israel's elect character as "holy to the LORD" (v. 3); (3) the promise of land as an inheritance (v. 7); (4) "transgression" (*peša'*) as covenant disloyalty (v. 8); and (5) the mention of *tôrâh* (v. 8). The fact that the leaders entrusted with spiritual oversight did not "know" Yahweh suggests that they denied their covenant identity with Him by changing allegiances to Baal (v. 8) and consequently neglected the stipulations of the covenant by "walking" after empty fetishes (vv. 5, 8). To "know" here is "appropriate in covenant lawsuits. Those who are

41. Cited in Huffmon, 33. In a rejoinder, Albrecht Goetz criticizes Huffmon for suggesting a "dependence of the Hebrew expression on the Hittite one." Albert Goetz, "Hittite *šek-/šak'* (Legally) Recognize' in the Treaties," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 22 (1968): 7. As I noted above, the point Huffmon and other Orientalists are making is not so much "dependence" but the shared semantic value of *yāda'* in a specific transnational literary form.

42. R. F. Harper, ed., *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters*, XII (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1913), #1237. See Huffmon, 33, for comments on the translation.

43. *Hesed* conveys multiple semantic senses, including compassion, grace, love, and loyalty. As Daniel I. Block observes, "*Hesed* is one of those Hebrew words whose meaning cannot be captured in one English word. ... [It] wraps up in itself an entire cluster of concepts ... love, mercy, grace, kindness, goodness, benevolence, loyalty, covenant faithfulness." Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, New American Commentary, vol. 6 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 605-606. On the significance of *hesed* as covenant loyalty, see Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati: KTAV, 1975), 56-66; D. A. Baer and R. P. Gordon, **רַחֲמִים**, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2:211-218; R. D. Bell, "Loyalty," *Biblical Viewpoint* 10 (1976): 133-7.

charged with mediating Yahweh's instructions, then, have broken covenant with him."⁴⁴

Three references to "knowing" the Lord occur in the first oracle announcing judgment at the hand of an enemy "from the north" (4:5-6:26). Yahweh unfolds a litany of sins of which Judah is guilty: wicked thoughts (4:14), wickedness (v. 15), rebellion (v. 17), and evil ways and deeds (v. 18). "My people are foolish," He declares; "they know Me not ... they are shrewd to do evil, but to do good they do not know" (v. 22). As is the case in Old Testament wisdom contexts, the term "foolish" primarily suggests a moral, not an intellectual failing. These issues are lifestyle related and describe Israel's failure to conform to God's covenant demands. As Brueggemann puts it, "Covenantal acknowledgment of Yahweh and covenantal obedience are intimately linked. Israel knows neither ... [and] lacks the covenantal awareness that saves."⁴⁵ The knowledge of God here is not primarily cognitive but relational, "a total commitment to and response to God of one's whole being."⁴⁶

The next two passages in this oracle (5:4, 5) make this claim as well. Both the common people and their leaders "do not know the way of the LORD." One's "way" involves his conduct, a set of habits which mark his lifestyle. This condemnation involves nothing less than covenant disloyalty, as confirmed by the metaphors "breaking the yoke" and "bursting the bonds" (v. 5). "Transgressions" and "apostasies" (v. 6) characterize God's people who now stand guilty of swearing by idols (v. 7), thus renouncing their covenant identity with Him.⁴⁷ In not "knowing" His way, Judah deliberately rejects His demands as their Lord; they "refuse to acknowledge or live by the covenant."⁴⁸

Jeremiah's famous temple sermon provides the next setting for a covenantal sense of *yāda'* (7:1-8:3). During Jehoiakim's reign, Yahweh commissions the prophet to stand in the temple gate and deliver a scathing censure of external ritual void of spiritual worship. In 7:5-6 Jeremiah enjoins true covenant loyalty evidenced by keeping specific Decalogue injunctions.⁴⁹ He follows up the list with the mention of stealing, murder, adultery, and idolatry, referring to this last violation as

44. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 89.

45. Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 58-9.

46. J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 229.

47. Holladay labels their treacherous acts "theological prostitution." Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 180. Verse 11 supports this notion with the use of *bāgad*, "to betray."

48. Brueggemann, 63.

49. Jeremiah links the command to "obey" the covenant with the covenant formula in 7:22-3.

"walking after other gods that you have not known" (v. 9). They supposedly belong to Yahweh; Abraham's seed has never "known" another deity in terms of a formal, pledged relationship.⁵⁰ Their pursuit of idols casts doubt on their position as Yahweh's covenant partners. We also note once more that Judah's lifestyle contradicts Mosaic covenant precepts.

The second major poetic cycle in the book (8:4-10:25) contains four more references to "knowing" God. In the contra-wisdom/peace oracle (8:4-17), Yahweh charges, "My people do not know the ordinance of the LORD" (v. 7). The immediate context for this claim clearly indicates that He is accusing the people of Judah of being unfaithful to their obligations in the Mosaic covenant.⁵¹ They are guilty of "wickedness" (v. 6) and blithely offer the naïve defense that "the law of the LORD is with us" (v. 8) when in fact they have "rejected" His word (v. 9). God's people are non-compliant with His covenant; they "do not know" His ordinance. In contrast to the animal kingdom (vv. 6-7a), "Israel is stupid and does not undertake the behavior that properly belongs to its covenantal character. ... [It] violates its own character as Yahweh's covenant mate."⁵²

We find a pair of these four uses of *yāda'* in Jeremiah's lament over Zion in 8:18-9:22 [Heb. v. 21].⁵³ Here the prophet grieves for the holy city because of her idolatry (8:19), represented by the figures of spiritual adultery and treachery (9:2).⁵⁴ God's people move from "evil to evil," living a lie to the point that "they dwell in the midst of deceit" (9:3-6). No wonder Yahweh concludes that "they do not know Me" (9:3). In fact, the truth is that "they refuse to know [Him]" (9:6),⁵⁵ denying both their association with Him in covenant identity⁵⁶ and their commitment to Him in covenant obedience.

The two short oracles on boasting and circumcision in 9:23-26 [Heb. vv. 22-25] include the fourth mention in the poetic cycle of "knowing God."

50. "Verse 9 is a catalog of Judah's massive disobedience of torah in the conduct of its public life. ... Judah regularly violates the main claims of its covenant with Yahweh." Brueggemann, 79. Holladay points out the use of "know" here: "Since 'know' may carry overtones of the covenant ... the implication here is that these other gods are the ones with whom Israel does not have a valid covenant." Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 245.

51. The repeated use of *šūb*, "to turn," in vv. 4-5 marks the covenant significance of this passage. See William L. Holladay, *The Root Šūbh in the OT* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958); and Thompson, 76-81.

52. Brueggemann, 88.

53. For explanation of the brackets, see note 30.

54. *Mēnā'pim* ("adulterous ones") and *bōg'ēdīm* ("treacherous ones") are the terms here.

55. The construction here has the forceful verb *ma'as* and the infinitive *da'at*.

56. Brueggemann explains, "They do not recognize Yahweh as covenant lord." Brueggemann, 95.

This brief wisdom-like section issues from the preceding lament where the Lord notes that His people have “forsaken” His *tôrâh* and stubbornly “walked” after the Baals, not after His covenant (9:13-14). No wonder Judah is punished along with the “uncircumcised”—those nations not linked to Yahweh in covenant (9:25-26). Her behavior belies her covenant identity with Him. In contrast, the preferred course is to “understand and know” Yahweh—that is, to be linked with Him in covenant identity and to practice covenant stipulations characteristic of Him: “lovingkindness,⁵⁷ justice, and righteousness” (9:24).⁵⁸

A similar implication occurs in 22:16, a remarkable verse set in the context of Jeremiah’s oracles against the kings of Judah (21:1-23:8). Yahweh enjoins the monarchs to covenant obedience (22:3) and then commends Josiah as a model of such loyalty. The young king performed “justice and righteousness,” pleading “the cause of the afflicted and needy” (22:15). The Lord then inquires, “Is not that what it means to know Me?” (22:16).⁵⁹ “Knowing God” is living out the precepts of His covenant—treating people justly, living righteously, and meeting the needs of the oppressed and hurting. What a difference between covenant loyalists such as Josiah and those like Jehoiakim, his son, who “forsook the covenant” and “bowed down to other gods” (22:9, 17).⁶⁰

The final two places where Jeremiah refers to a knowledge of God are also positive in force, both occurring in restoration contexts. In the vision of the figs (24:1-10), Jeremiah portrays as good figs the loyal remnant of Israelites who return to the land after exile. To them Yahweh promises Abrahamic and Davidic blessings in the land and assures them—using the covenant formula again—that “they will be My people and I will be their God” (v. 7). This renewed covenant relationship is tantamount to “knowing” God: “I will give them a heart to know Me,” the Lord also affirms in verse 7. Israel’s covenant identity and obedience are thus in view when He provides them with a “new heart.” As a result, “Israel with a new heart can now live faithfully and joyously in covenant.”⁶¹

57. Hebrew *hesed*.

58. “If God is committed to covenantal life as marked by steadfast love, justice, and righteousness, it follows that the community is to be ordered differently in light of that which delights Yahweh.” Brueggemann, 101.

59. A literal translation would be, “Is not this the knowledge of Me?” (*hālô’-hî’ hada’at ’āî*).

60. Thompson rightly summarizes, “To *know* (*yāda’*) God was to enter into a deep relationship of personal commitment, and this involved a concern to obey the stipulations of the covenant.” Thompson, 479.

61. Brueggemann, 219.

Lundbom rightly concludes that this vision of hope in 24:7 is a preview of the New Covenant⁶² whose inauguration is the central focus of the book of comfort. A major provision of this impending covenant is God's word that "they will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me" (31:34). In this new era in Yahweh's relationship with His people, they embrace Him as their God and will to keep His covenant demands because He has put His law in their hearts (v. 33).⁶³

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LARGER CANONICAL CONTEXT

This understanding of *yāda'* in its Ancient Near Eastern treaty sense of loyal identification and obedience to an overlord also helps to illuminate what it means to "know God" in Biblical texts other than Jeremiah. Consider the following references in light of these conclusions: another generation after Joshua "did not know the LORD" (Judg. 2:10); the sons of Eli "did not know the LORD" (1 Sam. 2:12); "the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day" (Isa. 19:21); "a nation which knows You (Yahweh) not will run to You" (Isa. 55:5); "so that the nations may know Me" (Ezek. 38:16); "the people who know their God will display strength and take action" (Dan. 11:32); "I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness. Then you will know the LORD" (Hos. 2:20); "there is no knowledge of God in the land" (Hos. 4:1); "My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge" (Hos. 4:6); "so let us press on to know the LORD" (Hos. 6:3); "You were not to know any god except Me" (Hos. 13:4).⁶⁴

Since the Old Testament heavily influenced New Testament writers, a careful examination of passages there which speak of "knowing" the

62. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 21-36*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 232.

63. God's promise to write His law on the hearts of His people does not guarantee perfect obedience; rather, the point is that they will be disposed to loyalty. He had announced this transformation previously through the metaphor of heart circumcision in Deut. 30:6.

64. Other pertinent references include Ps. 76:1; Isa. 1:3; 43:10, where to "believe" God parallels to "know" Him; 52:6; Hos. 5:4; 8:2. The Hosea passages stand out because of the marked influence this prophet had on Jeremiah. See William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 45-7; and Thompson, 81-5. John L. McKenzie notes that in Hosea 6:6 a knowledge of God parallels *hesed*, covenant loyalty. A knowledge of God "fulfills 'covenant-love,'" he suggests. John L. McKenzie, "Knowledge of God in Hosea," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 74 (1955): 27-8.

Lord would seem to offer promising results as well.⁶⁵ Such a study might provide more hermeneutical authority for the traditional sermonic distinction between “head” knowledge and “heart” knowledge. It might also help to expose the fallacy of compartmentalizing life into separate arenas, thus separating matters of religion and faith from public and social concerns. “Knowing God” would seem to provide an axis for integrating all of life.

CONCLUSION

Major Old Testament covenants involve a formal, pledged relationship in which two parties assume mutual obligation. The discovery and translation of several Ancient Near Eastern treaties have revealed characteristics common to both these texts and the Biblical covenants. Many of Jeremiah’s prophetic themes grow out of Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenant provisions. One such emphasis is his use of *yāda’*, “to know.” Because these extra-Biblical documents often use the terminology of “knowing” to suggest a vassal’s maintained identity and compliance with a superior king and his treaty stipulations, it seems reasonable to conclude that similar meanings are involved when Jeremiah and other Old Testament writers speak in a covenantal sense of “knowing God.”

To “know God,” therefore, in one sense intended by the Old Testament is to be loyal to Him in a covenant relationship.⁶⁶ D. A. Smith’s observation is on target: “The language of knowing (*yd’*) is often used in the

65. For example, John 8:32; 14:7, 17; 16:3; 17:3; 1 Cor. 1:21; Gal. 4:9; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:8-10; 2 Pet. 2:20; 3:18; 1 John 2:3, 4, 13; 4:7. Further examination of a link between the Hebrew *yāda’/da’at* and the Greek *ginōskō/gnōsis* could provide data relative to the recent revival of interest in Gnosticism and the Gnostic gospels. Did the NT writers’ influence from Hebraic/Judaic circles regarding “knowledge” carry as much weight as the Greek concept of *gnōsis*? Further, we might ask if the NT writers used *ginōskō* with a view toward its Hebraic background *polemically*, even with a touch of irony or sarcasm, to refute incipient Gnosticism threatening the church.

66. R. C. Dentan’s remark applies well: “In ancient Israel, knowledge that did not issue in appropriate action was not true knowledge at all; genuine knowledge involved the whole of a man’s personality—his mind, his feelings, and his deeds.” R. C. Dentan, *The Knowledge of God in Ancient Israel* (New York: Seabury, 1968), 40. A similar conclusion is that of Eric Rust, who observes that knowing God is “shown in loyalty to the covenant, in unflinching love and obedience. ... It implies commitment and involvement and is a synonym for covenant love.” Eric Rust, *Covenant and Hope* (Waco: Word, 1972), 66-67. Similarly, John Calvin concludes that “not only faith, perfect and in every way complete, but all right knowledge of God is born of obedience.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:72.


Hebrew Bible as a technical covenant term."⁶⁷ The person who knows God "comes to realize as he listens that God is actually opening His heart to him, making friends with him, and enlisting him as a colleague—in Barth's phrase, a *covenant partner*."⁶⁸ This connection in Jeremiah makes perfectly good sense in light of the prophet's role as a covenant prosecutor.⁶⁹ As Tozer contends, the "mighty burden" of the one who knows God "is his obligation to God. It includes an instant and lifelong duty to love God with every power of mind and soul, to obey Him perfectly, and to worship Him acceptably."⁷⁰

67. D. A. Smith, "Kinship and Covenant in Hosea 11:1-4," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 16 (1994): 45.

68. J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 32 (italics his).

69. His indictments against Judah no doubt issued from the renewed influence of the Mosaic law during Josiah's reformation.

70. A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1961), 11.



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A Study of the Lifestyle of the Early Church Following the Pouring Out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: Acts 2:41-47

Discussions of church growth produce a wide variety of ideas and conclusions. Nearly all of us, pastors and laity alike, have some ideas about how to promote the church to the unbelieving. The emphasis in such discussion is usually centered on what we humans can do to produce growth, ways to lure people to our churches. Meanwhile, much of what we consider growth is nothing more than shifting sheep from one pastor's fold to another's. In our immaturity, the popularity of a pastor or personal preference for a particular music style has become the catalyst for "growth," and our congregations are in a state of constant flux from congregants' moving memberships. Sadly, a world of unbelievers remains unevangelized.

It seems obvious that the expert on the growth of the church is the Almighty Himself. After all, it is not by individual efforts that great deeds are accomplished for the kingdom; it is by a mighty spiritual work of the Lord (Zech. 4:6). Regrettably, the Bible has been largely ignored for its teaching about true growth in the church. How can we hope to experience true growth, in numbers and in spirituality, when the greatest resource manual at our disposal remains closed?

This burden lies behind this essay on church growth. I believe that God's Word holds the answers to all questions concerning the life and welfare of the church. With that in mind, I have chosen to examine here the birth of the church in Acts 2, confident that the principles demonstrated there will prove effective even in the contemporary church. God is eternal and changeless.

INTRODUCTION: A PERSPECTIVE ON CHURCH GROWTH

By way of background, the reader should understand that there are two types of church growth. The first is *quantitative* growth. For the most part, when discussions of growth arise, people focus on the number of members in a particular assembly of believers. A major problem with this

narrow view of growth has already been briefly identified: the population of those who have not experienced the saving grace of Jesus Christ may not have been affected at all by an increase in a congregation's numbers.

To be sure, a local congregation can grow numerically. But that growth may represent little if anything more than the selfish desires of some who did not like the worship style of another congregation or were offended by someone in another church or were attracted to a given preacher's sermons or personality. As a result the church grows, but the number of unsaved people in the world likewise continues to grow. Moving members from Church A to Church B is not even numerical growth in the body of Christ.

The second type of growth is *qualitative*. Up front, this is an element that cannot be measured by anyone but God, the growth that individual believers experience through the work of the Holy Spirit. This growth comes from being transformed by the renewing of the mind (Rom. 12:2) as believers allow the mind of Christ to become their own (Phil. 2:5).

Growth of this kind changes believers and so changes the nature of the body of believers. But this qualitative growth also promotes quantitative growth by adding to the body. Unsaved individuals are converted, are accepted into the local assemblies, and are themselves caught up in the process of spiritual development. This way, the church that is truly growing need not draw from some other assembly of believers, and true growth of both kinds takes place in the Kingdom of God.

The growth experienced in the early church following the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was both qualitative and quantitative, affecting the spiritual development of the believers and multiplying their numbers. Acts 2:41-47 demonstrates this well. This essay will first identify the historical context of the passage. Then each verse will be analyzed, using the Greek text as much as possible to ascertain the meaning. The practices and results of the early Church are of utmost importance for a proper understanding. Finally, the passage will again be analyzed for its application to the modern church. I believe that here we can find essential principles that will prompt both qualitative and quantitative growth in the church.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ACTS 2:41-47

Although most Bibles mark the beginning of a new section at verse 42, I begin with verse 41, which gives readers the foundation needed to identify the subjects of verses 42-47. Barrett also identifies this as the

beginning of the new narrative.¹ The usage of *men oun* (“then”) would seem to indicate the beginning of a new narrative in Luke’s account. *Men* is identified as a “particle serving to indicate that the term or clause with which it is used stands distinguished from another.”² It is best to view verses 41-47 as a complete section of Biblical text.

In this context three thousand converts were added to the previous number of 120 (1:15) in one day. “Were added” is apparently a theological passive indicating that the Holy Spirit used the message of Peter to prompt this turning of the people.³ It is a work of God brought about with human participation. The catalyst for this conversion was the exhortation of Peter to “save themselves from this crooked generation.”

This represented a major and unprecedented population explosion for the infant church; Jesus Himself never converted so many in His earthly ministry.⁴ Some would argue that this is not as significant a number as once believed; Harrison, for example, argues that as many as 200,000 people could have gathered at the Temple and in the court of the Gentiles.⁵ I am not so quick to diminish the work of the Spirit, who moved these individuals to believe in Christ as the promised Messiah of God. They were subsequently baptized and added to the church.

In the New Testament *baptize* (*baptizō*) literally means “to dip or submerge.” The connotation of the word implies cleanness, or ablution, associated with the immersion of something into ceremonial waters. From this perspective the ordinance symbolizes the washing of the candidate by the purification of the Holy Spirit (Tit. 3:5). It also literally represents

1. C. K. Barrett, *The International Critical Commentary*, eds. J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield, and G. N. Stanton (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 1994), 41.

2. *The New Analytical Greek Lexicon*, ed. Wesley J. Perschbacher (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), s. v. μέν.

3. Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles*, eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman, vol. 31 (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 267.

4. F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: Commentary on the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 79. In this passage Bruce is not speaking to the ineffectiveness of Jesus. Instead he recognizes the different type of missions that Jesus and the apostles had. This remark should not be construed as taking away from the power and importance of Jesus’ earthly ministry.

5. Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 64.

our identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). Immersion was surely the standard mode of the early church, and so it should continue to be today.⁶

Even so, the common bond in the life of the 3,000 converts was their profession of belief in Jesus as their Savior, upon which the Holy Spirit then baptized them into the body of Christ, the fledgling church.⁷ In the book of Acts there is no evidence to suggest controversy about baptism after Pentecost;⁸ the point of the practice was the truth of the candidate's personal conversion and confession of Christ as Savior and Lord. Although today's Christians divide over baptismal practices, we are confronted only by a spirit of unity in the early church. The first expressions of the church were founded upon their new relationship as a spiritual family. The sweet fellowship and overwhelming joy provided a solid foundation for the church's growth. Perhaps today's church could gain from a proper understanding of the significance of baptism.

THE FOUR MAJOR ATTRIBUTES OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Having been baptized into the body of Christ, a new fellowship of believers began its congregational activity. This infant church of Jerusalem—in the model that Mead accurately refers to as the Apostolic Paradigm⁹—engaged in four distinct activities, as identified in verse 42: (1) continuation of the apostles' doctrine, (2) fellowship, (3) the breaking of bread, and (4) prayers.

6. It is beyond the scope of this paper to enter the discussion of interpreters about the mode of baptism at Pentecost and beyond. Many allow the apparent difficulties—in considering that twelve men immersed 3,000 in one day—to raise questions about immersion. But at times the wording appears to require immersion; in Acts 8:26-40, for example, we read that Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch "went down into" (*katebēsan eis*) and "came up out of" (*anebēsan ek*) the water. Apparently one early Christian document, *The Didache*, allowed for an alternative to immersion in extenuating circumstances; see section VII.1-3 of that document in *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1912), I:321.

7. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 114. If when Luke refers to baptism he is primarily focused on the baptism of the Holy Spirit, as Lenski suggests, the problem of baptism is much easier to discuss.

8. G. Edwin Bontrager and Nathan D. Showalter, *It Can Happen Today: Principles of Church Growth from the Book of Acts* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1986), 20.

9. Loren B. Mead, *The Once and Future Church: Reinventing the Congregation for a New Mission Frontier* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1993), 9-13.

The Teaching of the Apostles

The apostles were the messengers of God on the earth (Luke 10:16); "To hear the apostles was to hear Christ, and to hear Christ was to hear God who sent Him."¹⁰ The apostles were engaged in the edification of the church just as they were commanded by Christ in Matthew 28:19-20. The act of teaching (*didachē*) is probably what Luke had in mind in this passage, rather than the actual *content* of their teachings.

Whether that is the case or not, readers are given no insight as to the subject of the teachings. Commentators tend to identify these teachings as those about the death and resurrection of Jesus and their practical implications for believers. What is clear is that the content of the apostles' teaching was embraced fervently by the listeners: "These starving souls were craving the pure milk of the Word."¹¹

It seems very likely that the apostles taught the very things that they would subsequently put into writing in the New Testament. These would at least have included the traditional truths of the gospel itself, such as Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. It is also possible that the formal teachings of the Apostles were gathered into a written document called the *Didache* (also known as "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles"), parts of which were apparently compiled soon after the middle of the first century.¹² It was apparently intended for public use in church activities, perhaps representing a time when the original apostles were no longer present.

Proskartereō ("continued steadfastly in") "stresses the continuous and persistent tenacity of the disciples"¹³ in teaching as well as in the other three practices named. The teachings ultimately separated the believers from others who gathered at the Temple for worship. They became a distinct group from the Jews, separated by their preaching of the crucified and risen Christ. Though distinct, the new believers were not the antithesis of the Jews. In fact, they found the basis for their subjective experiences in the objective teachings of the Old Testament Scriptures.¹⁴

10. H. Leo Boles, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1941), 49.

11. Steven J. Lawson, "The Priority of Biblical Preaching: An Expository Study of Acts 2:42-47," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158 (April-June 2001): 211.

12. See "Introduction to the Didache" in Michael W. Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 246-248. The evidence available makes absolute dating inconclusive.

13. Fitzmyer, 270.

14. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Mastering the New Testament: Acts*, vol. 5 (Dallas: Word, 1983), 74.

The Fellowship of the Believers

The next element of the worship of the believers was fellowship (*koinōnia*). People of like beliefs gravitate towards one another. It makes perfect sense then, in this context, that the believers became close to each other. Their inward beliefs were translated into external behaviors. “[This] common-union was made visible in their attitudes toward one another, in the way they treated one another in daily life and genuinely shared with one another.”¹⁵ Luke reflects the distinctiveness and importance of this fellowship when he refers to it (in the original) as *the* fellowship.

The Christian Church’s relationship with the Jewish community would have had impact upon the idea of community and fellowship. The framework for the gathering of the people of God was already in place in Judaism. Josephus referred to the sacred nature of the Jews’ Sabbath gatherings, even in the eyes of the Romans who allowed free worship on the Sabbath, with the result that

... anyone may hence learn how very great piety we exercise towards God, and the observance of his laws, since the priests were not at all hindered from their sacred ministrations, by their fear during this siege, but did still twice each day, in the morning and about the ninth hour, offer their sacrifices on the altar (*Antiquities* 14.65).¹⁶

The Breaking of the Bread

Thirdly, the believers participated in the breaking of bread (*tē klasē tou artou*) together. The meaning of this phrase is hotly debated among scholars. Most advocate the view that it must refer to the practice of the Lord’s Supper, instituted by Jesus with His disciples on the night of His arrest.

This seems to be the correct understanding. First, the entire content of verse 42 seems to be identifying the worship practices of the early church, which would surely have included the Lord’s Supper. Second, this phrase is constructed in such a way as to make the designation of the breaking of the bread very specific. Third, this phrasing differs substantially from the breaking of bread found in verse 46. In verse 42, both *klasis* (“breaking”) and *artos* (“bread”) have definite articles. In verse 46, the participial form of *klaō* is used, giving the breaking of bread a more active aspect, and there is no definite article. Therefore, verse 42 refers to the practice of

15. Eugene LaVerdiere, *The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 103.

16. *Josephus: The Complete Works*, trans. William Whiston (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 444.

the Lord's Supper, whereas verse 46 identifies common fellowship meals.¹⁷

Other scholars hold a different view, claiming that even in verse 42 the phrase refers to participation in an ordinary meal. They point out that the wine, the element identified by Christ as His blood shed for His followers, is not mentioned. I would counter that this does not pose a serious problem; the "breaking of bread" is a cryptic reference used to identify the Lord's Supper as a whole, perhaps to cloak its practice from its adversaries.¹⁸ It also became the earliest designation used for this celebration.¹⁹

David Peterson also argues against the technical usage of "the breaking of the bread."²⁰ He concludes that this refers to a simple common meal and stresses that the phrase, found in Judaism, only refers to the initial activity of the breaking of the loaf before distributing it to those in attendance. However, the later reference to the practice of daily meals in Luke's account (v. 46) would prove redundant if Peterson's conclusion is true.²¹ Why would Luke refer to eating bread from house to house, in verse 46, if he had already said as much in verse 42? It is therefore most likely that Luke is referring to the formal practice of the Lord's Supper, an activity of prominence in the early church.

The Practice of Prayer

Finally, the believers kept the practice of prayer, a component essential to a healthy relationship between a believer and his God. No one exemplified this more clearly than Jesus Christ Himself. In His moments of need, He prayed to His Father in heaven. Prayer is regularly found on the lips of Jesus in all of the Gospel accounts. So thorough was He in His

17. David Pharr, "A Distinctive View of the Communion," *A Return to Distinctive Christianity: 17th Annual Lectureship of the East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions*, ed. Edwin S. Jones (Knoxville, TN: East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions, 1991), 198.

18. A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 56.

19. Everett Ferguson, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., ed. Everett Ferguson, vol. 1 (New York: Garland Publishers, 1997), s.v. "bread." It is beyond the scope of this paper to treat the various designations used for this ordinance, such as Eucharist (from the Greek for "the giving of thanks") or Communion (rendering *koinōnia*, "having-in-common"); some terms are more likely to be used within church traditions that view the ordinances as sacramental (communicating saving grace).

20. David Peterson, "The Worship of the New Community," *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and David Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 392.

21. August Van Ryn, *Acts of the Apostles: The Unfinished Work of Christ* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1961), 46.

prayer time that His disciples once fell asleep waiting on Him to finish His prayers (Matt. 26:40). Following His example the believers implemented prayer in their midst.

The practice of prayer in the early Church would certainly have included prayers offered in private. The lives of all of the believers had been changed by a new relationship with their Lord. God had provided for them a salvation which they could not provide for themselves. They trusted God for their subsistence in all areas of life. Barclay writes, "These early Christians knew that they could not meet life in their own strength and that they did not need to."²²

Prayers were also a congregational activity. As beautiful as the prayers of the believers must have been, Luke indicates that specific prayers were used in their communal life. Literally Luke writes that the believers continued steadfastly in "*the* prayers"; the definite article indicates, at least, that Luke had specific prayer-times in mind.²³

The apostolic teaching of the early church would have included instructions on this discipline as well. The model for the prayer of the early Church would likely have been the model given by Jesus in Matthew 6 and Luke 11. The assimilation of this prayer as a model, and even as a ritual, is seen as early as the close of the first century. The *Didache*, a handbook for the early Church referenced above, recommended the use of the Lord's Prayer as many as three times daily.²⁴

The prayers Luke refers to might even have included those regular Jewish prayers common to the Temple. Scholars recognize the possibility that the Christians could have engaged in ritualistic Jewish prayers and not have experienced a conflict of interest. The patterns were similar; the difference was the recipient of the prayers. The new believers likely addressed their prayers to "Abba," identifying their relationship with God as their Father—which some Jews might have seen as child-like and immature.²⁵ The prayer of the believers became an intimate conversation with their spiritual Father who had given them true life through the ministry of His crucified Messiah.

With the profession of Jesus as the promised Messiah of God, the Christians would have soon fallen into conflict with those attending the

22. William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Series: The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 30.

23. David J. Williams, *The New International Commentary: Acts*, ed. W. Ward Gasque, vol. 5 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 60.

24. Holmes, 259.

25. Leonhard Goppelt, *Apostolic and Post-Apostolic Times* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1970), 47-48.

Temple services. Still, the use of Jewish prayers would have shown from believers the same reverence for the Temple that Jesus demonstrated.²⁶ The usage of the Jewish Bible and prayers, including the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4-9), might have helped shape the worship of the early church.²⁷

The content of the prayers of the early church included many common words and themes. The expression *maranatha* ("O Lord, come!") was apparently so common that it was not translated from its original Aramaic form in Paul's writings (1 Cor. 16:22).²⁸ The believers lived each day in anticipatory hope of the second coming of Christ.²⁹ "Amen" (*amēn*) is another term common in the early church's prayers, used as an affirmation of the truth of a statement. Its meaning was most likely associated with truth and being, characteristics of both God and Christ.³⁰

THE COMMUNAL LIFE OF THE CHURCH

United in Fear

As a result of the practices of the church, fear came upon every soul (v. 43). There is debate about the identity of those who experienced this fear. Lange claims that the new believers would have experienced this holy dread as the power of almighty God flowed around them.³¹ One can hardly argue with the spirit of this position; Proverbs 1:7 states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." The acceptance of Christ as the Messiah would have been accompanied by a more precise understanding of the nature and character of God. When believers realize the power of God, there can be no other appropriate expression of emotion except reverential awe, one of the elements of the authenticity of the relationship between Christians and their God.³²

26. A. C. Hervey, "The Acts of the Apostles," *The Pulpit Commentary*, eds. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, vol. 18 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 82.

27. *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., ed. Everett Ferguson, vol. 1 (New York: Garland Publishers, 1997), s. v. "prayer."

28. Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, trans. A. Stewart Todd and James B. Torrance (London: SCM Press, 1962), 13.

29. *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. Herbert Lockyer, Sr., (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986), s.v. "maranatha."

30. *Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible*, s.v. "amen."

31. John Peter Lange, *Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Acts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1866), 57. In identifying believers as the recipients of this fear, Lange presents this overpowering of God as the instigator of salvation for the new converts—a good example of Calvinistic doctrine. More likely, the fear is a byproduct of the work of God, not the actual working of fear in them by God as a means of salvation.

32. Bruce L. Shelley, *What is the Church?* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1978), 45.

Others feel that this fear came upon those who stood outside the church. John Calvin, for example, held that it was experienced by unbelievers hostile to the teachings of the church, and that this overwhelming fear served as an avenue of divine protection for believers³³—a principle mentioned in Exodus 23:27. The unbelieving population could not help but notice the Church's special position as the fear of the Lord went before them; the divine presence in their midst filled the observers with a holy terror and reverence.³⁴

The apostles also contributed to this fear with the performance of signs and wonders among the people (v. 43). In addition to the believers, those without the church would have been affected by miraculous works outside the normal limits of human ability. In this way the miracles possessed a sign value for onlookers. Forlines writes that these miracles had theological value: they authenticated the ministry of Christ and His apostles by showing the stamp of approval by God.³⁵

United in Spirit

Luke next identifies the actions brought about by the heart attitudes of the new church. Verse 44 indicates that the believers "were together," which probably means that they remained in the immediate proximity of Jerusalem. No one left Jerusalem, but each opted instead to dwell with some others of like belief. They were "held there by the intimacy and the intensity of the fellowship and the hope of the Lord's return."³⁶

United in Possessions

In addition to the common purpose of the believers, their possessions were also designated as common property (v. 44); they "sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (v. 45).

We should first focus on the plight of the believers that lay behind this. The call of Christ for the believer was too great to be ignored. Jesus met His first disciples as they engaged in their business of fishing. When he called them, they forsook all and followed Him (Luke 5:11). Similarly the believers in Jerusalem were gathered in Jerusalem to observe the Jewish

33. John Calvin, *Commentary upon the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Henry Beveridge, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 128.

34. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Acts 1-12* (Chicago: The Moody Bible Institute, 1994), 86.

35. F. Leroy Forlines, *The Randall House Bible Commentary: Romans* (Nashville: Randall House, 1987), 13.

36. Williams, 61.

Pentecost. Having accepted the cause of Christ as their own, they too forsook all and followed Him. The believers left their livelihoods in their distant locales. As their finances ran out, the disciples had no other avenue to support themselves. They were totally reliant on the provision of God through the hearts of fellow believers. Wall writes that this fellowship was much more than common values and beliefs, "but a profound care for one another's spiritual and physical well-being."³⁷ Dangers (as from robbers, for example) were sometimes associated with inns, and this would have bolstered the desire of Christians to provide hospitality for other believers away from home.³⁸ Whatever material sacrifices needed to be made were made for the benefit of the entire body of believers. The church identified the wholeness of the experience as more important than the individual luxuries of the few, and they gave accordingly.³⁹

Many scholars are quick to identify the similarity between the practices of the early church and those of the Qumran society,⁴⁰ a community organized on the basis of the communal ownership of property. But the Qumran society and the Jerusalem church were not identical. Qumran membership was of a monastic type. When one joined the society, all of that individual's property was taken. Communal property was compulsory, not voluntary as for the Christians in the infant church.

The sacrificial giving over of possessions also need not be identified as Christian Communism. First, as mentioned, all occurrences of this communal lifestyle were voluntary. In Acts 4:36-37, Barnabas is specifically lauded as one who sold a possession to give the money to the apostles for appropriate distribution. He is identified for the uniqueness of his action, and it was of his own volition to do so. Second, there was no attempt to rearrange the social order; nor was violence a byproduct, as in communism.⁴¹ For that matter, the communal living would soon die out as dissension and persecution dispersed the church from the city of David.⁴² These fundamental differences preclude an assumption that Luke

37. Robert W. Wall, "The Acts of the Apostles," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 71-72.

38. Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 89.

39. William R. Yount, *Created to Learn* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 193.

40. Johannes Munck, *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostles*, eds. William F. Albright and C. S. Mann, vol. 31 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 283-284.

41. Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator* (Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, n. d.), 255.

42. F. J. Jackson, *The Beginnings of Christianity, Part 1: The Acts of the Apostles*, eds. F. J. Jackson and Kirsopp Lake, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 141.

encourages either communism or socialism. The issue was Christian fellowship and family, not a new social order.

United in Corporate Worship

The believers continued daily with their worship in the Temple at Jerusalem (v. 46). As discussed above, the believers would have initially experienced a close relationship with the Jewish Temple. They would not have seen their self-identity as contradictory to Torah obedience and Temple observances.⁴³ They participated not only in Temple prayers but also in special occasions at the Temple. This was done in full view of the public, showing their close association with the Temple much the same as John the Baptist and Jesus had shown.⁴⁴ The early Christians continued to be exemplary Jews even as they followed the true Messiah, Jesus Christ. Solomon's Colonnade is identified by Bruce as the place in the Temple complex where the preaching of the apostles and the witnessing of the believers probably took place.⁴⁵

Hans Conzelmann goes so far as to identify the apostles' association with the Temple as their way of representing themselves to the unbelieving Jews as the new Israel of God.⁴⁶ However, it is doubtful that the apostles would have been so reckless; the truth of the Gospel would have been handled with prudence even at this early stage. The separation of the church and the Temple would occur eventually, but the symbiotic relationship at this point proves just how much the first Christians had in common with the Jews.

United in Private Worship

In addition to continual worship at the Temple, the believers engaged in private fellowship from house to house. This activity included a fellowship meal. The sharing of a meal together and engaging in table fellowship have been identified as the ultimate act of identification with one another.⁴⁷ As identified previously, the mention of "breaking of bread" in verse 46 does not specifically refer to the observance of the Lord's Supper (as in verse 42).⁴⁸ Here there are no definite articles with *breaking* and

43. Goppelt, 30.

44. Munck, 23.

45. Bruce, 81.

46. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, eds. Eldon J. Epp and Christopher R. Matthews (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 24.

47. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 139.

48. See the discussion on *tē klasē tou artou* above..

bread. It is best to conclude that Luke is referring here to the *agape* meal of the believers.

The *agape* meal was a "special religious meal celebrated to alleviate the needs of the poor, the widows and the orphans."⁴⁹ It was an ordinary meal taken together with other believers, though somewhere during the meal they probably engaged in the ceremonial observance of the Lord's Supper.⁵⁰ These *agape* meals took on a greater significance in the light of the revelation of the Christ. It is evident that fellowship became a priority for the Christians. The meal was the perfect synergy between a full fellowship meal and a ceremonial observance.⁵¹

United in Purpose

This common identity promoted both the gladness and the singleness of their hearts (v. 46). "Singleness of heart" refers to the common purpose that all believers experienced as followers of Christ. The word translated *singleness* (*aphelotēs*) suggests the humble, simple, common bond that existed between all of the recent converts. "The local congregations could identify themselves with the whole body of believers, and could consider themselves, their resolutions and decisions, as being a manifestation of divine will."⁵² What greater unifying theme could there be for believers in Christ?

The natural byproduct of this outpouring of godly behavior was praise (v. 47). Praise is the spontaneous attribution of honor and dignity to God for His graciousness to His followers. The believers had been saved from this crooked generation and they realized the implications. No matter what this life entailed, their sights were once and for all fixed upon things unseen. They were a new community based on the apostles' teaching and imbued with a new spirit which gave them a new condition.⁵³

In addition to the newness of life, the believers experienced the salvation of souls around them. Their zeal for God and the resulting praise did not go unnoticed within the surrounding community. The attitude of the Jerusalem church was both appealing and infectious, and "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (v. 47). "The

49. Thomas M. Finn, *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, 2nd ed., ed. Everett Ferguson, vol. 1 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), s.v. "agape."

50. Arthur G. Patzia, *The Emergence of the Church* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 226.

51. Donald Farner, "The Lord's Supper Until He Comes," *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (Fall 1985): 395.

52. Munck, 278.

53. Boles, 239.

preaching of the Gospel, the working of miracles in the name of Jesus, and the attractive power of a holy walk in faith and love, were the instruments of progress."⁵⁴ The Jewish community that had gathered around the believers found something unexpected but appealing. Their Temple participation⁵⁵ and their respect for the Jewish heritage enhanced by a zeal for witnessing⁵⁶ promoted favor, and obviously conversion, among those who gathered nearby.

Everett Ferguson insists that the church's ability to bless those who did evil to the church was its most remarkable attribute.⁵⁷ All recognized something unique in this community of believers. Even following their expulsion from the synagogues, the church was protected from Sanhedrin interference for fear of the response of the public (Acts 5:26).⁵⁸ The church found unexpected favor in Jerusalem. The community around them continually found itself under the conviction and drawing of the Holy Spirit.

This survey of the components of the "apostolic paradigm" in the early church demonstrates that the church experienced tremendous growth inside the Jerusalem fellowship. Each was drawn closer to God by the practices listed. The result of their devotion was a united, vibrant church. The Jerusalem community could not help but be impacted by their practices. In summary, their internal qualitative growth effected quantitative growth and their numbers swelled.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONTEMPORARY CHURCH

The infant church of Jerusalem is, no doubt, the ideal expression of the church. Even so, this idyllic state was short-lived. In the fifth chapter of Acts, Luke writes of the deceitfulness of Ananias and Sapphira. The Jewish Temple authorities began to persecute the fledgling church by arresting believers and confiscating their properties. As Tertullian

54. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 3rd Revision, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1889), 247.

55. G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 98.

56. John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 121.

57. Everett Ferguson, *Early Christians Speak* (Austin, TX: Sweet Publishing, 1971), 202.

58. Frank Stagg, *The Book of Acts: The Early Struggle for an Unhindered Gospel* (Nashville: Broadman, 1955), 65.

appropriately observes, "Truth and the hatred of truth come into our world together."⁵⁹

The church has never again experienced the very same type of lifestyle practiced by the Jerusalem Christians. Though that state can never be regained, the actions of that church can and should be a pattern, in principle, for today's church. Through these practices the church can experience both qualitative and quantitative growth.

First, the church needs to be sure that its worship is characterized by holding to the apostolic teachings of the Word of God. If Christians truly believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, they should strive to hide that word in their hearts (Ps. 119:11) and make it the central aspect of all worship services. It is the Word that possesses the ability to convict hearers and transform believers.

The original church was sustained by the teachings of the apostles. Their obedience to those teachings affected every area of life. Ultimately, the Lord used the witness of the obedient church to draw converts to Himself. The Word of God must always be the focal point of the church in order that believers may "grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18). "For there is then one common standard, each counts himself as personally responsible to God; when all do this, all are one."⁶⁰

All too often, however, the church finds itself engulfed in ignorance of the Bible. As the people are deprived of the Word, the character and resilience of the church are negatively impacted. Stott accurately assesses the situation: "Anti-intellectualism and the fullness of the Spirit are mutually incompatible."⁶¹ Dare we assume that true growth will take place if we remain willfully ignorant of that Word which sets us apart? We too must be sustained by the teachings of the apostles and implement them in our lives individually and collectively. Our faith is dependent upon our continual, progressive understanding of our Christian teachings.⁶²

This process begins, by the way, with leadership within the local church. For us who serve as pastors the enormous responsibility to minister God's Word should humble and challenge us every day. We must

59. Tertullian, "Apology," found in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 23.

60. Don DeWelt, *Acts Made Actual* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1958), 52.

61. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts: The Spirit, the Church, & the World* (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 82.

62. Donald Guthrie, *The Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 33.

take our cue from the apostles and devote ourselves to the study and teaching of the Bible.⁶³ The future well-being of the church lies in our hands.

Second, the church needs to develop the implications of fellowship in the truest sense of *koinōnia*. As a general rule, the world has become a dissociated place. "We must get away from an individualistic approach to our faith and revive the biblical emphasis on the corporate nature of the worshiping and ministering community."⁶⁴ Through interaction with one another, believers can find acceptance, advice, and support from those of like profession.

The desire for acceptance and companionship is universal to all of mankind.⁶⁵ As humans, we are preprogrammed to be relational people. Those who forsake the need for fellowship do so to their own detriment. People—believers and unbelievers alike—need fellowship. It is therefore an element vital for true church growth.

Fellowship is closely related to worship. Fogle writes, "It is our experience that the greatest of friendships are born in worship at God's house and in association with God's people."⁶⁶ The deep feeling of true brotherhood among those united with Christ in faith appeals to everyone. The church ought to promote opportunities for Christian fellowship in the house of God.

One practice we might consider is the reinstatement of the *agape* meals of the early church. Jesus showed the effectiveness of table fellowship in His earthly ministry. Though His practice was questioned by the Pharisees, the intimacy was one that drew people to Him. There is a level of acceptance and identification that comes through sharing a meal together, a desire we all possess. If we disallow this fellowship in God's house, where else might we turn for the fulfillment we seek?

Still, the fellowship need not stop there. We are not bound to a specific location in our fellowship. The cause of Christ might be well served if we opened our homes to one another, complementing the church services with "the informality and exuberance of home meetings."⁶⁷ This type of fellowship can be hindered by our natural tendency to judge ourselves

63. James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 56.

64. J. Matthew Pinson, *A Free Will Baptist Handbook* (Nashville: Randall House, 1998), 115.

65. This idea was brought to my attention by Rev. Herbert Waid of Moultrie, GA, during a personal conversation.

66. Maurice W. Fogle, *Christians Together* (St. Louis: Bethany, 1957), 36.

67. Stott, 85.

and others based on material standards; but through the power of the Holy Spirit we can move beyond these barriers to experience blessings beyond our ability to ask for or to understand.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the trend today is towards individualism, a trend that stops our fellowship at the sanctuary doors. The Bible proves that house to house fellowship is effective.

Third, the church must regain a Biblical view of stewardship. When a Christian sees his possessions, he should automatically see them as a gift from God. He should then take the mind of a servant and serve those around him who have a need. This is not a call to socialism or communism; instead it is a call to sacrifice in order that the needs of others might be met. The giving over of time, money, or any other possession is the ultimate manifestation of dedication to the body of Christ. The early church used times of worship to distribute necessities to the indigent, and they were rewarded with favor and support in the community.⁶⁹ How little a price to pay, to see the lives of the lost touched by our generosity!

The measure of our spiritual dedication can be clearly seen in the manner in which we utilize our possessions. Barnabas, the "son of encouragement," was moved to give the whole price of a certain piece of land to the cause of Christ. Others gave a portion of their possessions to minister to the needs of the community. Our willingness to dedicate our possessions to the Lord reveals "the inward and spiritual grace of a thankful heart."⁷⁰

Nor should we underestimate the impact that our sacrifices have upon the lost. They will be touched by our willingness to give because of our love for their souls. True, some may receive our sacrifices with impure motives, but that is not usually the case. In any event, the call to be faithful with what has been entrusted to us is still binding. Let us not withhold this world's goods when we see our brothers and sisters in need (1 John 3:17).

Finally, our churches need to recapture the joy of participating in the ordinances and in prayer. I recently spoke to a member of our church about the Lord's Supper and Feet Washing service. He admitted to having an aversion to the prospect of washing someone's feet—until he participated in it. There is something particularly humiliating, and yet at the same time gratifying, in our practice of the ordinances.

The church has been too quick to jettison the significance of the Lord's Supper. The early church participated in the observance passionately.

68. Karen Burton Mains, *Open Heart, Open Home* (New York: Signet, 1980), 13.

69. C. F. D. Moule, *Worship in the New Testament* (London: Lutterworth, 1964), 19.

70. Peterson, 391.

Significantly, practices like the Lord's Supper only helped to contribute to the sense of *koinōnia* in the body of believers.⁷¹ The death of Christ for them was intimate and real, and their participation in that memorial echoed with religious significance.

The early church can also teach us about our responsibility to pray. Any cursory glance in the book of Acts reveals the believers' devotion to the discipline of prayer. Such communication with the divine was natural to them for it was based on their new relationship with God the Father. Whatever the struggle or circumstance, the believers committed themselves into the hands of the Father through prayer. And so the contemporary church ought to revive the determined prayer life of the early church.

If the church can bring itself to an understanding that the practices of the early church can still work, the church will experience qualitative growth. Believers will experience true joy, true fellowship, and true worship. Beyond this, the consequence of this growth will be the same as experienced by the Jerusalem church: the Lord will add to the church daily. Just as the believers in Acts 2 exemplified a lifestyle that was appealing to the community, so the church today, with the implementation of the same practices, will attract the world to it. The Lord will use our ministry to draw sinners to Himself. Ultimately, people will be converted and the church will experience quantitative growth.

On the one hand, we dare not believe that we can be successful in Kingdom growth if we have not worked out our own salvation "with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). But though the qualitative growth of the body deserves much attention, growth must not stop there. We must never forget that there is a world outside our doors that is destined for eternal condemnation without a touch from Christ. Nor should we concentrate so exclusively on those far beyond our borders that we neglect the needs of those nearby. Jesus' farewell message at the beginning of Acts clearly places the center of operations for the church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:8). In essence Christ says, "Allow me to use you where you are first. Then I will grow my church outwardly."

For our own growth, then, as well as for the sake of those outside the church, close at hand and far away, it is imperative that we implement Biblical principles. Those who observe us are critically interested in both what we *are* and what we *do*. Acts 2:41-47 still applies. Practicing these principles in our churches will contribute to true growth.

71. James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 29.

Congregational Singing: The Mandate Of Colossians 3:16

INTRODUCTION

Growing disciples is part of the Church's responsibility. Jesus' missionary command included "teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20). The New Testament mentions several actions performed by early believers that were intended to help disciples grow. Baptism, observance of the Lord's Supper, meeting for corporate worship, exercising spiritual gifts, prayers, acts of benevolence, giving of tithes and offerings, preaching, and lecturing are some of the ways the early Church obeyed the Lord's command. Another way, the focus of this paper, was singing.¹

Well over one hundred passages in the Old Testament mention singing, singers, songs, or songwriting. One entire book, the Psalms, is a compilation of songs employed by the Hebrews. The New Testament, on the other hand, does not have its own songbook as such, but interwoven throughout the texts are poems that argue for recognition as early Christian hymnody. Contexts show that joyful singing was part of the regular worship meeting of God's people in the early Church.² Just as praise was part of the song services in both Testaments, teaching and doctrinal enforcement and reinforcement were also essential roles of congregational singing in both.

1. "Hymns provide the means through which people express their faith, and when people sing hymns their faith is formed by the experience." Linda J. Clark, "Hymn-Singing: The Congregation Making Faith," *Carriers of Faith: Lessons from Congregational Studies*, eds. Carl S. Dudley, Jackson W. Carroll and James P. Wind (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 49.

2. See Leon Morris, "The Saints and the Synagogue," *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin*, eds. Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield, 1992), 50; Graham N. Stanton, "Aspects of Early Christian and Jewish Worship: Pliny and the *Kerygma Petrou*," *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin*, eds. Michael J. Wilkins and Terence Paige (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield, 1992), 92. That singing continued to be the practice of the Church is evident by Pliny's letter to the Emperor Trajan (around A.D. 112) reporting that some Christians who were accused before him claimed that the "sum total of their guilt" was that "they had met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses ... in honour of Christ as if to a God." Betty Radice, trans., *The Letters of the Younger Pliny* (London: Penguin Books, 1963, 1969), 294 (letter 96).

It is the purpose of this article to examine Colossians 3:16 and its implications for congregational singing. The questions to be considered are these: first, is congregational singing in the Church for the specific purpose of development of disciples in the Christian community, as some argue;³ and second, if it is, are worship leaders to exercise a proactive role in nurturing disciples through congregational singing?

These questions are important not only because of Colossians 3:16 but also because of current worship practices in many congregations, practices that appear to set aside many historic songs of the Church for songs which neglect doctrine⁴ and corrective action. Some writers warn that churches will lose those elements of theology that are omitted from congregational singing.⁵ Since each congregation is now able to download and copy practically any song it wants for congregational use, it seems plausible at least that any "process of doctrinal review" is miniscule at best.⁶

This study presents a thorough exegesis of Colossians 3:16 and a syntactical comparison of this verse with Ephesians 5:18b, 19. Particular attention is paid to syntax (since the Bible is our only rule of faith and practice, and since the Bible can never mean what it did not originally

3. "From the writings of Paul comes further evidence of the significance of Christian song both as an instrument of praise to God and also as a tool for teaching." William Jensen Reynolds, *A Survey of Christian Hymnody* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1963), 6.

4. Some share concerns that unless we get "some more theological, thoughtful words, rich with Bible imagery, ... a generation of worshippers [might] perceive praise as merely 'jingles for Jehovah.'" Mark Edwards and Allen Walworth, "The Teaching Ministry of Congregational Song," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 38.2 (Spring, 1996), 35.

5. Esther Rothenbusch observes, concerning the current situation: "The body of past and worldwide hymns enables us to [sing our theology] in ways that a strict diet of contemporary choruses does not, due to the doctrinal lacunae and imbalanced emphases in the latter repertory. It is only by systematic and rigorous study of our current congregational repertory in light of scriptural principles that we will be able to purge its impurities and fill out its deficiencies with both newly composed hymns and resurrected older gems. ... It is dangerously likely that whatever elements of our theology we do not sing, we will ultimately lose." Reported by R. Albert Mohler, ed., "The SBJT Forum: The Current State of Worship," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, 2.4 (Winter, 1998), 61. Robert D. Hawkins is one voice among many who suggest that current church marketing and church growth strategies carry much of the blame for this weakening of hymn content. He argues that such strategies "would have Christians distance themselves from any hint of suffering, death, the cross, blood, or even the sacraments if they are to be 'successful.' ... Such 'feel good' religion forces individuals and faith communities to suppress or deny aspects of their lives—crises, chaos, conflict, pain, suffering, tragedy, and doubt—common to us all and demanding resolution." Robert D. Hawkins, "Nothing but the Blood," *The Hymn* 51.1 (January, 2000), 24.

6. Richard C. Resch, "Hymnody as Teacher of the Faith," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 57.3 (July, 1993), 161-176.

mean) and to any contribution that word relationships make to the questions involved. Guidelines for congregational singing, discovered in this passage, are then listed and considered for contemporary applications.

EXEGESIS OF COLOSSIANS 3:16 WITH COMMENTS ON EPHESIANS 5:18b, 19

The Context of Colossians 3:16

The Colossian congregation was a young church facing serious doctrinal challenges. In the first two chapters, Paul proclaims the absolute supremacy of Christ and warns against those who would teach otherwise. Chapter three marks the beginning of Paul's discussion of how Christ's followers should live.

Colossians 3:16 is part of the practical section of Colossians where the writer instructs his converted readers to adopt the ways of Christ and forsake the ways of the old man. These Christ-like ways include forbearance, forgiveness, love, and peace (3:13-15). While discussing individual attitudes and actions within the Christian community, Paul includes a short section on corporate worship, introduced with the words "ye are called in one body" (v. 15). Paul's use of plural pronouns and second person plural verb forms in verses 15 and 16 make corporate worship the probable focus of this passage; the reciprocal use of the reflexive pronoun in verse 16 ("one another," Greek *heautous*) makes this especially clear,⁷ for there is no reason suggested in this context for singing to "one another" outside of the assembly. It is in this context that Paul gives certain instructions about the use of songs in congregational worship.

Colossians 3:16

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, by teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom with psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes, and by singing with thankfulness [and] with your hearts to God.

Ephesians 5:18b-20

Be being filled with the Spirit, by speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes, by singing and by singing praises with your heart [and] to the Lord, by giving thanks always for all things in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, to God, even the Father.

7. Contra Curtis Vaughan, who says that these verses focus more on the personal life than the Christian community. He argues that no mention is made of corporate worship. Curtis Vaughan, "Colossians," *Ephesians-Philemon*, Expositor's Bible Commentary, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 216. See also T. K. Abbott, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1905), 291. Though individuals are in view, it is in the context of corporate gatherings that they reciprocally teach, admonish, and sing.

Exegesis of Colossians 3:16

In a day when written texts containing the words about Christ were scarce, apostolic visits were few, and heretical teachings were present, keeping accurate words about Christ before each assembly was a challenge. This verse addresses one way assemblies could enjoy a rich presence of teachings about Christ.

The inflection of the main verb in verse 16 (*enoikeito*, dwell) shows that Paul intended that the verb's action be understood as ongoing (present tense), as the responsibility of the congregation (active voice, i.e., the action is not going to be done to them or for them), and as not optional (imperative). The congregation was responsible to see that "the Word of Christ" continually resided in its people in richness (*plousiēs*).⁸ There was to be no scarcity of teaching about Christ ("of Christ" is an objective genitive).⁹

Syntactically, several questions must be addressed. One of the major issues is the placement of breaks in the text, which in effect links the modifiers to their respective subjects.¹⁰ "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly [minor break], by teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom with psalms, hymns, and spiritual odes [minor break], and by singing with thankfulness [and] with your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16). The breaks included in this translation are commonly accepted, although some expositors would understand them to be in other locations.¹¹ The New International Version,¹² for example, punctuates in such a way as to

8. There is a textual variant in this part of the verse. Second-hand correctors and later copyists preferred *theou* (God) to *Christou* (Christ). The external evidence favors the originality of *Christou*; see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, 3rd edition (London: United Bible Society, 1971), 625.

9. Peter T. O'Brien says "of Christ" is objective, "referring to the message that centers on Christ, the Word of truth or gospel that came to the Colossians and took up a firm place in their lives from the time Epaphras first preached it to them." Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1982), 206, 207; see also Petr Pokorny, *Colossians: A Commentary*, trans. Siegfried S. Schatzmann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991), 174. J. B. Lightfoot, however, views the genitive here as subjective. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Revised Text with Introductions, Notes, and Dissertations* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1875), 290.

10. For a list of possible ways to punctuate this passage, see the punctuation apparatus in Kurt Aland, Matthew Black, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce Metzger and Allen Wikgren, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983).

11. *New American Standard Bible*, hereafter NASB (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1997); *Today's New International Version*, hereafter TNIV (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 2001); and *God's Word: Today's Bible Translation That Says What It Means*, hereafter GW (Grand Rapids: Word, 1995). See also O'Brien, 208, and Pokorny, 174.

12. *The New International Version*, hereafter NIV (International Bible Society, 1984).

separate “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” from “teaching”: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom [minor break], and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs.”¹³ The following discussion will demonstrate that the understanding suggested in this article is the most probable.

Another syntactical issue concerns the modifier “wisdom.” In the Greek text, “in all wisdom” (*en pasē sophia*) immediately follows the first clause (literally, “dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching”). Its position allows it to modify either “dwell” (so KJV, REB, GW) or the two participles that follow (“teaching and admonishing everyone with all wisdom”: so NIV, NASB, RSV). A similar and clear construction in 1:28 (teaching ... with all wisdom) argues for its connection with “teaching and admonishing” in 3:16 as well—assuming that the writer is consistent in his usage. This teaching and admonishing was to be done in such a way that understanding that leads to proper action (wisdom) would be conveyed.¹⁴

Three modal participles follow “in all wisdom,” identical in form to each other, to show how the command of the main verb is to be satisfied,

13. The 1984 edition of the NIV follows the punctuation of NA27. Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, *Nestle-Aland: Novum Testamentum Graece, editione vicesima septima revisa* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993). *The New Living Translation* inserts a major break, thus severing any grammatical relationship between teaching and song: “Let the words of Christ, in all their richness, live in your hearts and make you wise. Use his words to teach and counsel each other. Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God with thankful hearts.” *Holy Bible: New Living Translation*, hereafter NLT (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1996). Such a translation makes the third participle (singing) unrelated to teaching and admonishing, an interpretation that breaks up the natural thought and flow of the text; see also *The Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha*, hereafter REB (Oxford: Cambridge, 1989). A. T. Robertson would apparently approve such a translation for he suggests that the participles in Col. 3:16 are independent of the main verb. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Broadman, 1934), 1132-34. But he adds, “In general it may be said that no participle should be explained in this way that can properly be connected to a finite verb.” If this caution is followed, the position of this article is strengthened.

14. The Louw and Nida lexicon defines *sophia* (wisdom) as “the capacity to understand and, as a result, to act wisely.” Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 1:384.

i.e., how this “rich dwelling” can be accomplished.¹⁵ By “teaching” and “admonishing” one another using words about Christ, and by “singing” to God, the assembly would experience a bountiful presence of the teachings about Christ. This is at the heart of the passage.

To “teach” (*didaskontes*) is to “provide instruction in a formal or informal setting.”¹⁶ “Admonish” (*nouthetountes*) also means to “teach” but has the idea of correcting behavior and belief. It can include rebuke for wrongdoing and warning concerning potential negative consequences of future actions.¹⁷ Paul is telling the believers at Colossae how to combat the heretical teachings about Christ in their midst. They are to teach and admonish using words about Christ.

These instructions were to be carried out by members of the congregation in ministry to “each other” (*heautous*). Paul was not advocating a professional or exclusive ministry team to carry out the responsibilities of this “teaching and admonishing.” Rather he was holding the entire community of believers responsible for this. He wanted the congregation to teach itself the words of Christ through congregational singing.¹⁸

15. These three participles are adverbial participles of means; see David F. Detwiler, “Church Music and Colossians 3:16,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 158.631 (July-September, 2001), 356, 357. Although this is the position taken in this paper, it is readily admitted that the relationships of words in this verse are not easily discernible. Some commentators understand these participles to be participles of attendant circumstance, i.e., they have assumed the imperatival force of the main verb; see Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, trans. Astrid B. Beck (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 427; Lightfoot, 290; F. Blass and A. DeBrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. by Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1961), 245, 246; Kenneth Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament for the English Reader*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 227. Gordon D. Fee’s position is different, yet he writes: “As the parallel passage in Ephesians makes explicit, Paul considers all of this activity to be the result of (emphasis mine) their being filled with the Spirit.” Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 650. However, as will be shown later in this paper, Eph. 5:18, 19, like Col. 3:16, is best understood when the participles are recognized as participles of means, not participles of result.

16. Louw and Nida, 1:413.

17. *Ibid.*, 1:415, 436, 437.

18. Charles Robertson says that it is significant that Paul links the instructing, admonishing, and singing with the psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. He says, “Whatever these three categories of singing precisely comprised, it is evident that they are here given a specific function. Singing is both a proclamation and a witness, an occasion of teaching and instruction, an activity inspired by the Holy Spirit which itself becomes the instrument of further inspiration.” Charles Robertson, “The Word and Music,” *Singing the Faith: Essays by Members of the Joint Liturgical Group on the Use of Hymns in Liturgy*, ed. Charles Robertson (Norwich, CT: Canterbury, 1990), 39.

Teaching and admonishing were to be done through “psalms, hymns, [and] spiritual odes,” words that appear to be almost synonymous.¹⁹ Though the exact meaning of these terms is unclear, scholarship agrees that all three include the two ideas of song and praise. They do not, however, all have to include “singing.” Apparently, “hymns” did not have to be sung.²⁰ All that met Paul’s criteria would, however, consist of teachings about Christ and admonition to Christian living. One difference was this: with “psalms and hymns” words were in a set form already, such as those from the Hebrew Psalms; “spiritual odes,” on the other hand, were probably spontaneous, Spirit-inspired songs, prompted during congregational worship.²¹

To summarize this portion of the verse, the Christian assembly at Colossae was to use words generally set to a fixed liturgical order to instill and remind itself of Christ’s words.²² These psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs would provide a corrective against wrong living as well as instruction for right doctrinal understanding.

The second participial phrase (by singing with thankfulness) is likewise dependent on the main verb “dwell” (*enoikeito*).²³ As mentioned earlier, “singing” (*adontes*), as a participle of means, answers how the command of the main verb is to be satisfied. By definition *adontes* (singing) means “to utter words in a melodic pattern”²⁴ and completes the participial trio (teaching, admonishing, and singing) that tells congregations

19. Ralph P. Martin, *Colossians: The Church’s Lord and the Christian’s Liberty: An Expository Commentary with a Present-Day Application* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1972), 126; Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 159, 160; and O’Brien, 209. See also Ralph P. Martin, *The Worship of God: Some Theological, Pastoral and Practical Reflections* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 51-53; and Detwiler, 359-362, for a discussion of these three words. Francois P. Viljoen recognizes some distinction between them based on his understanding of what each meant to the singing communities of Paul’s day. For an informative article on the background of songs and music in the Roman, Greek, and Hebrew communities and how this affects Paul’s intent in passages where he refers to music in song or by instrumentation, see Francois P. Viljoen, “Song and Music in the Early Christian Communities: Paul’s Utilisation of Jewish, Roman and Greek Musical Traditions to Encourage the Early Christian Communities to Praise God and to Explain His Arguments,” *Zwischen den Reichen: Neues Testament und Romische Herrschaft* (Tubingen, Basel: A. Franck Verlag, 2000), 195-213.

20. Robert E. Picirilli, “Church Music and FWBBC” (unpublished paper), 2.

21. Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 653; Ralph P. Martin, “Some Reflections on New Testament Hymns,” *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. Harold H. Rowdon (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1982), 44.

22. I say “generally” set to a fixed liturgical order to allow for times of spontaneous, inspired singing.

23. Detwiler, 363.

24. Louw and Nida, 1:401.

how they can keep the “word of Christ” present and flowing through their lives individually and corporately. Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, then, not only teach and admonish, they are used to carry thanksgiving to God.²⁵

This understanding of *en tē chariti* (with thankfulness) is however uncertain as a result of the division of manuscript evidence over the inclusion of the definite article “the” (*tē*).²⁶ Without the article “with thankfulness” is almost certainly the proper translation and modifies “singing.” With the article, “grace” would be the proper rendering and singing would be “by [or “with”] grace,” referring to God’s work of grace in the singers’ lives. The context seems to argue for “thankfulness” (compare 3:15, 17), which means that in addition to the aforementioned ingredients of congregational singing (teaching and admonition), gratitude is to be characteristic of assembly singing as well.

Paul next mentions the manner in which the congregational singing is to be done. It is to be done “in your hearts.” This phrase (*en tais kardiais humōi*) also modifies “singing” (*adontes*), not “with thankfulness.”²⁷ The force of this prepositional phrase is modal,²⁸ indicating that the manner in which this singing is to be done is with the “heart.” Paul is stating the obvious: true worship is done with the heart and includes the entire person (Matt. 15:8; for Isa. 28:13).²⁹

Finally, the last phrase shows that this grateful, with-the-heart singing is to be “to God” (*tō theō*). Grammatically, this phrase (Greek dative) is the object of the participle. The word of Christ is to be richly present in this assembly by its singing to God. In this way Paul mentions the last of two directions singing is to go.

Congregational singing, then, is to be directed toward the congregation itself (“to each other”) and to God—or, as some prefer, both horizontally and vertically.³⁰ To each other songs are to be instructive and corrective and toward God acts of worship.

25. Barth and Blanke, 428.

26. Detwiler says the article belongs in the text, but he fails to acknowledge the external support for its absence. Detwiler, 364. Manuscript evidence is evenly divided on the originality of *tē*(the).

27. To show this distinction, I have inserted an “and” in my translation. Most modern translations read as if “in your hearts” modifies “with thankfulness” (or “grace”); see NIV, NASB, NKJV, RSV. One exception is REB: “sing from the heart in gratitude to God.”

28. Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 655. One could argue that singing is to come from the heart, understanding *en tais kardiais* (from the heart) as locative.

29. Detwiler, 364.

30. *Ibid.*, 365; Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 653.

Ephesians 5:18b and 19 compared with Colossians 3:16

The parallel passage in Ephesians 5:18b, 19 supports the understanding of Colossians 3:16 given above. As in Colossians, this portion of Paul's instructions to the church at Ephesus is part of a practical section of the letter dealing with the need for believers to forsake the ways of the old man and put on the ways of Christ. Specifically, in verses 18-21, the old way of being drunk is replaced with being filled with the Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18b, 19 (continuing into verses 20 and 21) follows the same basic syntactical construction as Colossians 3:16, an imperative followed by adverbial participles of means. The command is "be being filled with the Spirit" (*plerousthe en pneumati*)³¹ instead of "let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." The passive imperative (be being filled, *plerousthe*) is modified by three participles translated "speaking," "singing," and "singing praises." And, instead of the participles translated "teaching," "admonishing," and "singing" (Col. 3:16) Paul uses "speaking," "singing," and "singing praise," etc. Hence, the community is to "be filled ... by speaking, ... singing, ... singing praise, ... [and in verses 20 and 21] giving thanks ... [and] submitting."

A comparison of the Colossians and Ephesians passages shows that "being filled with the Spirit" and having "the word of Christ dwell in you richly" are parallel thoughts.³² Their actions are ongoing (present tense), which means that neither is speaking of a single, crisis experience. The indwelling "word of Christ" of Colossians 3:16 is not memorized scripture, but rather Christ's teaching as the controlling influence of our lives. His rich (*plousiōs*) presence and influence are comparable to that of the fullness (*plerousthe*) of the Holy Spirit in Ephesians 5:18 (rather than the fullness and influence of intoxicants).

31. This is a true passive since we cannot fill ourselves with the Spirit. However, since the command can be obeyed or disobeyed, there must be some personal involvement and responsibility. By understanding the participles as explaining how this command is to be accomplished, there are clear means by which congregations can position themselves to be filled with the Spirit. One translation that reflects this understanding is GW: "Instead, be filled with the Spirit by reciting psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for your own good." However, this translation does not treat the participles in Col. 3:16 in the same manner, but rather as independent of the main verb in the sentence: "Let Christ's word with all its wisdom and richness live in you. Use psalms, hymns and spiritual songs to teach and instruct yourselves about God's kindness. Sing to God in your hearts."

32. Fee agrees: "Indeed, according to Colossian 3:16 and Ephesians 5:19, one of the ways the community heeded the command to keep filled with the Spirit was to teach and admonish one another regarding the message of Christ through psalms, hymns, and Spirit songs." Fee, *People of God*, 153. See also Picirilli, "Church Music," 1.

Paul is concerned that these congregations keep themselves under the influence of the Holy Spirit and the word of Christ. In Colossians this is to be done through performing the reciprocal actions of “teaching” and “admonishing” in song, and “singing” with the heart to God. In Ephesians this is to be done as they speak to themselves (*heautois*, indicating their reciprocal action) in “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.”

The parallels are obvious. “Teaching and admonishing” in Colossians probably defines what Paul had in mind when he used “speaking” (*lalountes*) in Ephesians 5:19. In Ephesians he plainly says “speak” to each other with your singing.³³

The syntactical question as to where to place the breaks is also involved in interpreting Ephesians 5:18b, 19. At issue is the relationship between the main verb (be filled) and the following participle (speaking). If the participle is attendant circumstance, then a simple imperative is to be understood: a hard break will separate the two phrases (NIV, REB) and little or no relationship between the two actions need be understood. If, however, the participle is adverbial of means (instrumental), then “speaking to one another in psalms” explains how the assembly can be filled with the Spirit.³⁴

Grammatically, Paul could be telling the believers to “speak” to each other in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (be being filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs) or “sing” to each other these psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (be being filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another; in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs singing).³⁵ It seems best to understand a parallel in thought between “speaking” (*lalountes*) and “psalms” (*psalmois*) in Ephesians 5:19 and “teaching” (*didaskontes*) and “psalms” (*psalmois*) in Colossians 3:16 (where the connection between “teaching” and “psalms” is clearest). Hence, the Ephesians would “speak ... with psalms” even as the Colossians would “teach ... with psalms.”

33. Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 652.

34. GW: “Instead be filled with the Spirit by reciting psalms, hymns and spiritual songs for your own good.” Editors of TNIV (2001) changed the punctuation from that of the original NIV to show a possible connection between being filled with the Spirit and speaking to one another in psalms: “Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another (etc.)” However, both editions, in Col. 3:16, suggest a stronger connection between the indwelling of the word of Christ and the teaching the writer wanted the assembly to practice: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom.”

35. Either is a possibility in Eph. 5:19 according to Robert Picirilli, “Commentary on the Books of Ephesians and Philipppians,” *Galatians through Colossians* (Nashville: Randall House, 1988), 228.

Conclusions from the Exegesis of Colossians 3:16 and Ephesians 5:18b, 19

For Paul, singing was important in the life of the assembly. His instructions to use songs to “teach and admonish one another,” to speak to one another, as well as to praise God “testifies to their influence in his thinking and religious practice.”³⁶ The instructions demonstrate Biblical support for the belief that the Church should sing congregationally and that that singing should be done with at least two purposes: edification (teaching and admonishing) and worship.

Congregational singing in the worship service, then, is at least in part for the specific development of disciples in the Christian community. This being true, worship leaders should exercise a proactive role in nurturing disciples through congregational singing. This can be done by applying the Pauline guidelines for congregational singing found in Colossians 3:16.

PAULINE GUIDELINES AND CONTEMPORARY APPLICATION FOR
CONGREGATIONAL SINGING ACCORDING TO COLOSSIANS 3:16

If the writer’s original intent in Colossians and Ephesians is as suggested above, at least ten guidelines for congregational singing can be gleaned from Colossians 3:16.

First, there is to be singing in the congregation. Worship singing is for the whole church, and everyone should participate and benefit from it (1 Cor. 14:1-33). Though the writer never says, “Thou shalt sing,” he makes it clear that congregational singing has a vital role to play in congregational ministry as the church assembles.

Second, singing is to be done using “fixed liturgical elements”³⁷—psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Songs set to melodic patterns that teach the words of Christ are intended. This does not mean that the same songs must be sung several times in each meeting; indeed, if “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” mean anything, they mean variety.³⁸ It does mean that the same set of words (songs) should be sung often enough to accomplish the apostolic purposes mentioned in this passage.

36. Viljoen, 203.

37. Robert Banks, *Paul’s Idea of Community* (Homebrush West, Australia: Anzea, 1979; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 105.

38. Detwiler, 368.

Third, worship songs are to teach,³⁹ which suggests that worship songs should engage the mind.⁴⁰ Therefore they must first be understandable (1 Cor. 14:15), not in languages unfamiliar to the hearers—i.e., not in tongues—and meaningful.⁴¹ Equally important, there must be a conscious level of awareness on the part of the singers and theologically accurate content.⁴² Since “theology, good, bad, or indifferent, is present in all hymns” it is paramount that worshippers understand what they are supporting in song.⁴³ Songs that are inaccurate theologically should not be sung lest the Church remain immature and fall short of the measure of maturity possible through Christ (Eph. 4:13).

39. In fact, some have claimed that hymns are the chief means by which the Church has formed her people’s theology; see Hawkins, 19; Gabriel Fackre, “Christian Teaching and Inclusive Language Hymnody,” *The Hymn* 50.2 (April, 1999), 32. According to Charlton R. Young, Wesleyan hymns were “seldom written merely to be sung but were usually composed for doctrinal teaching in class-meetings.” Charlton R. Young, *My Great Redeemer’s Praise: An Introduction to Christian Hymns* (Akron, Ohio: OSL Publications, 1995), 23.

40. Lloyd Mims observes: “The music in our services must appeal to both the heart and the mind. While there must be music that helps us feel towards God, there must be music that helps us think about God. So often our congregations only want to feel.” Reported by Mohler, 63.

41. S. Paul Schilling writes, “If we are to sing and pray (often we do both at the same time) with spirit and understanding, we must mean what we say and know what we mean. Unless the hymns we use in worship express our real convictions, we might as well sing the stock market reports, the real estate ads from the daily newspaper, or a list of names from the telephone directory.” S. Paul Schilling, *The Faith We Sing* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 23; also S. Paul Schilling, “Do the Words Matter?” *Hymn* 32 (July, 1981), 134.

42. “The content of every song used should fit a proper theology.” Vic Delamont, *The Ministry of Music in the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 144. S. J. Kimbrough, Jr., agrees that “hymns affirm a theology of the Word, hence, their language is of utmost importance. It is not a vehicle for the theological ego of a particular group or denomination, but a vehicle for God’s praise and human realization of God’s will on earth. Therefore, the theology which shapes the language of hymns is of primary importance and Christians must be concerned with its integrity.” S. J. Kimbrough, Jr., “Hymns Are Theology,” *Theology Today* 42.1 (April, 1985), 60, 67.

43. Schilling, *Faith We Sing*, 25; Schilling, “Do Words Matter?” 135. Kimbrough states that the hymns of the church are “theological statements: the church’s lyrical, theological commentaries on Scripture, liturgy, faith, action, and hosts of other subjects which call the reader and singer to faith, life, and Christian practice.” S. J. Kimbrough, 59. Brian Wren agrees: “Hymns are theology. They should not be consigned to a box labeled ‘church music.’ The hymnal can be a tremendous resource for the theological empowerment of the congregation, for meditation, and for education.” Brian Wren, “Hymnody as Theological Empowerment,” *Chicago Theological Seminary Register* 76.2 (Spring, 1986), 14.

Since “hymns ... express our theological views”⁴⁴ worship songs must be doctrinally sound.⁴⁵ All singers have a responsibility to make sure that only correct doctrine is being taught in song.⁴⁶ More important than accompaniment or style is doctrine. Those who worship God must do so “in truth” (John 4:23, 24).⁴⁷ Singing false doctrine is teaching false doctrine.⁴⁸ According to Jesus’ words to the Samaritan woman, it is possible to practice false worship, but the true God does not receive such worship as worship.

44. Esther Rothenbusch, reported by Mohler, 60. Resch agrees: “The hymn is a teacher of doctrine. This role sets it apart from its common status as a pleasurable but insignificant filler which is inserted on the way to something important.” Resch, 172. Compare also Iris V. Cully: “Hymns are bearers of Christian theology and biblical interpretation.” Iris V. Cully, “Pastors as Teachers,” *Religious Education: The Journal of Religious Education Association* 74.2 (March-April, 1979), 123. For a more thorough treatment of one writer’s deliberate theology in song, see J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley’s Hymns* (London: Epworth, 1941). Also, to see how John Wesley emphasized the doctrine of the Trinity in his hymns, see Seng-Kong Tan, “The Doctrine of the Trinity in John Wesley’s Prose and Poetic Works,” *Journal for Christian Theological Research* 7 (2002), 3-14. For an examination of the theological content of several of Wesley’s hymns, see Teresa Berger, *Theology in Hymns: A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and Theology according to A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780), trans. Timothy E. Kimbrough (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 74-154. Berger suggests that Methodist hymnody is actually what identifies Methodism: “What is true for Methodism, in some similar measure, may be true for all churches and ecclesial communities. In Methodism, a community that has no normative dogmatic theology of its own except by way of the sermons and exegetical notes of John Wesley, Wesleyan hymnody provides one such hidden norm. In many ways one could say that it is these hymns that shape the actual identity of Methodism.” Berger, 24. Charles Wesley’s theology can also be examined in a portion of his hymns in Brian E. Beck, “Rattenbury Revisited: The Theology of Charles Wesley’s Hymns,” *Epworth Review* 26.2 (April, 1999), 71-81.

45. Harry L. Eschew, “Contributions of Hymnody to Christian Spirituality,” *Theological Educator: A Journal of Theology and Ministry* 43 (Spring, 1991), 81-90.

46. Edwards and Walworth, 35.

47. According to Nicholas K. Apostola, some have claimed that orthodox liturgy has been largely responsible for the survival of the Church under certain repressive regimes, e.g., communism. Nicholas K. Apostola, “Theology as Doxology,” *Ministerial Formation* 67 (October, 1994), 38. S. Paul Schilling suggests that the following “quatrain ... aptly [states] an attitude widely prevalent among Christian congregations: ‘Lord, keep us safe this night / beneath the stars and moon. / Pay thou no heed to what we say; / We only like the tune.’” Nathaniel Micklem, quoted in S. Paul Schilling, “Theology in Hymnody,” *Reformed Theology & Music* 21.3 (Summer, 1987), 145.

48. S. Paul Schilling offers four possible solutions for pastors and musicians who find themselves being asked to sing words that convey doctrine or interpretation in ways that are uncomfortable. (1) Avoid questionable hymns. (2) Omit, if connected meaning is not damaged, the offending stanza. (3) If the first two possibilities are not desirable, “use the dubious passage but thoughtfully interpret for worshipers the fundamental meanings behind those apparently conveyed.” (4) “We can exercise our right to determine what we

Accurate theological wording in songs does little, though, without conscious interaction on the part of the worshipper. Concerning mindless worship, Picirilli writes:

I fear that some music tends more to influence the singers or hearers to avoiding thought rather than in disciplining their thoughts. My perception is that some ... tend to find pleasure in ecstasy rather than in the Lord Himself. Good church music ought always to foster conscious, verbal, ascription of praise to God or meaningful instruction to others. The OT Psalms are excellent models for this; there even the "Hallelujah" is a specific statement of praise to Yahweh, not a mindless ecstasy of the praiser. (And even the hallelujahs never stand alone but lead to other expressions of praise and worship, naming the attributes and acts of God.)⁴⁹

mean when we sing certain words, and encourage others to do the same." Thus, while singing along with the congregation, in the back of his mind he is saying, "These are not the words I would prefer to use, but by singing them I mean" S. Paul Schilling, "Jesus and Hymnody," *The Hymn: A Journal of Congregation and Song* 39.3 (July, 1988), 11. Martin suggests that it was the threat of false doctrine (Gnosticism) that "led to the creation of these inspired hymns." Martin, "Reflections," 49. Such a historical context adds weight to the thesis that congregational singing should be doctrinally sound so that it can contribute to the disciplining thrust of the Church.

49. Picirilli, "Church Music," 12. Jonathan Wilson offers a similar warning: "Our worship is often corrupted by our desire to be entertained, to have a heightened experience of reality. We want the singing, the drama, and the preaching to create an 'experience' for us that heightens our experience of reality. But worship is not the enactment of 'hyperreality,' it is the enactment of God's eschatological redemption by the disciple community. This is not a heightened experience of reality but our participation in another reality. We are not an audience being entertained; we are a disciple community, the new humanity, being formed by the power of the Holy Spirit. There is real drama in worship, but it is the drama of our participation in God's act of redemption, not the heightening of our experience of the world. Our hope lies not in intensifying our worldly lives but in intensifying our participation in the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is the redemption of the world." Jonathan Wilson, *Gospel Virtues: Practicing Faith, Hope & Love in Uncertain Times* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1998), 126. Edwards and Walworth argue the same thing from a different perspective, suggesting that the congregation sometimes simply needs help understanding a song so they can thoughtfully express it: "A song may pass one's lips with glorious sound, but will fall short unless it makes an intermediate stop in the mind's thought process." Edwards and Walworth, 33, 34. Writing about today's hymn writers and the challenge of modernizing archaic wording in hymns, J. R. Watson concludes with similar words: "Perhaps the most notable contribution which modern hymnological practice can make to the liturgical movements of our times is to substitute for the bath of feeling a testimony to a living, thinking, sympathizing and imaginative faith, not just for the sake of the Church but for the world." J. R. Watson, "The Language of Hymns," *Language and Worship of the Church*, eds. David Jasper and R. C. D. Jasper (New York: St Martin's, 1990), 194.

Fourth, congregational songs should have an element of admonition, which suggests a close relationship between worship and ethics.⁵⁰ Some songs should be specific about wholesome Christian living. Doctrine is not only to be learned, it is to bring about change in our lives. Congregational singing can be corrective and challenging as well as instructive. Songs that teach and challenge meet the criteria of this verse.

Fifth, singing is to be understandable. By linking teaching, admonishing, and singing, Paul is stressing singing that is not in *glossolalia*.⁵¹ This is in keeping with his own confession that he sang “with the spirit and with the mind also” (1 Cor. 14:15) in order to benefit the entire congregation. Even when songs were inspired on the moment—as apparently this passage in 1 Corinthians suggests and in no way discourages—they were to be communicated in the common language of the assembled body. Prayers and “psalming” (*psallō*) were to be intelligible.⁵²

Sixth, singing is to be to “one another,” thus showing that worship includes a horizontal aspect. This mutual ministry is one way the word of Christ richly dwells among believers, and Christ Himself is present in the gathered group to minister and meet their needs through the Holy Spirit.⁵³ Such ministry addresses the need for dissemination of accurate information about Christ in the assembly in the absence of recognized Christian leadership (as an apostle). Viljoen suggests that this mutual edification probably happened “by means of responsorial, antiphonal and/or solo singing of typical Jewish music.”⁵⁴

50. Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 883.

51. Martin, *Colossians*, 125.

52. Viljoen, 206.

53. David Peterson, “Worship in the New Testament,” *Worship: Adoration and Action*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 80. This is not to say that singing is a sacrament or that God dwells in the singing of His people. Scripture does not make this claim—contra Sally Morgenthaler, who interprets Ps. 22:3 (“God inhabits the praises of His people”) to mean that “when we exalt God in our worship and, most specifically, when we do so in the name of Jesus (Matt 18:20), God is made manifest among us.” Sally Morgenthaler, *Worship Evangelism: Inviting Unbelievers into the Presence of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 101, 159, 256, 270. The Psalmist is struggling with the fact that even though God was being praised (for His past actions on Israel’s behalf, vv. 4, 5) He was *not* manifesting Himself to this lonely Psalmist! In other words, what Morgenthaler is claiming support for in this Psalm was not even true for its author! In reality, this was his complaint: God was being enthroned on the praises of Israel. He was the object, the focal point of the Israelites’ praises. This Israelite and his forefathers carried God about, as it were, on their praises like the living creatures did the throne of the Almighty in Ezekiel 1:24-28, and yet God was not manifesting Himself to this Psalmist. Psalm 22:3 does not support a doctrine of God’s immanent manifestations during His people’s praise and song; Col. 3:16 and Eph. 5:18b, 19 are stronger on the presence of God in singing than Ps. 22.

54. Viljoen, 210.

This requirement addresses solo Christianity; it is impossible to obey this directive to minister to “one another” unless assembly attendance is practiced. It is also impossible to obey this directive unless the body is united: “Worship is a corporate act and not merely the sum of the private devotions of the individuals at the service.”⁵⁵

To accept this mutual ministry aspect of congregational singing forces worshippers to consider their impact on others in the congregation. Is our worship helping others spiritually? Is edification taking place?⁵⁶ Furthermore, it mandates the personal involvement of every attendee. There is no audience language in this verse.⁵⁷ As Webber says, “WORSHIP IS A VERB. It is not something done to us or for us, but by us.”⁵⁸

Seventh, to be included in the community’s worship, songs are to be “spiritual,” which means to reflect the Person and work of the Holy Spirit, to be “prompted by the Spirit.”⁵⁹ Songs of just any type are not appropriate for worship services; only *spiritual* songs qualify, songs that express the Spirit’s presence, for “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is also singing.”⁶⁰

Eighth, songs are also to be “with the heart” (*en tais kardiais*). Teaching, admonishing and worshiping songs are to be sung with the heart. External considerations cannot be excluded since singing is done to “one another” and “to God,” but singing must include the inner person.

Ninth, singing is to be “to God” (*tō theō*),⁶¹ a phrase that completes the Trinitarian presence in this passage.⁶² Adoration of the Triune God for His Person and works is foundational to proper singing by the Church.⁶³

55. David B. Greene, “Hymns: Music, Text, and Meaning,” *Theology Today* 24.4 (January, 1968), 495. Along the same lines, Carl F. H. Henry observes, “The notion that individual believers should gather as a company each of whose participants simultaneously worships in a distinct and different way hardly seems normative. It is Christ Jesus—not our feelings—who comprises the vital center of believers gathered in prayer and praise.” Reported by Mohler, 58.

56. Detwiler, 365.

57. *Ibid.*, 367.

58. Robert E. Webber, *Worship is a Verb: Eight Principles for Transforming Worship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1992), 2.

59. O’Brien, 210.

60. Fee, *People of God*, 159.

61. Marva Dawn says, “The main reason to sing in worship is that God is so singable.” Marva Dawn, *A Royal “Waste” of Time: The Splendor of Worshipping God and Being Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 287.

62. Fee identifies this as one of the Trinitarian passages of the NT. He writes, “But the same Spirit who applied salvation now helps to initiate response through Spirit-inspired songs reflecting the message about Christ, and all to the praise of God.” Fee, *People of God*, 44, 161. See also Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 841, 842.

63. E. Margaret Clarkson, “What Makes a Hymn ‘Good?’” *Christianity Today* 24.12 (June 27, 1980), 722-749.

Tenth, Christian worship is to be mainly Christ centered. This does not take away from what was just said about singing to the triune God, because worship of the Second Person of the Trinity is worship of the Trinity (John 10:30). But Paul is concerned that the word of *Christ* be a rich part of the Church's experience. Songs of worship to the Father or Holy Spirit are not out of order, but our Redeemer, the Son, is to be specifically recognized: "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb. 13:15, NIV). Nothing, according to the Apostle, is more important than an "ever-deepening Christology."⁶⁴ This emphasis can be seen in the Pauline hymns⁶⁵ and in the Johannine hymns found throughout the Revelation.⁶⁶

These ten guidelines chart a plain course for congregational singing. Adherence to these guidelines will insure that congregations harbor a rich understanding of Christ and His saving work.

64. Detwiler, 367. For a recent study dealing with the Christological emphases of seven hymnals, see Fackre, 26-32.

65. Martin, "Reflections," 37. In another article, Martin affirms that "the genius of the Christian hymn on its NT side is ... the worship in song offered to the exalted Lord (as memorably as Rev 5:9-12). ... The throne of Rev 5:13 is occupied by both God and 'the Lamb' (Rev 3:21). Yet as Christ's saving achievement in bringing the world back to God implies that he has done what only God can do, it was a natural step for a 'functional' christology to take on a trinitarian formulation. And that implies too that the first Christians made *in worship* the decisive step of setting the exalted Christ on a par with God as the recipient of their praise. Hymnody and christology thus merged in the worship of the one Lord." Ralph P. Martin, "New Testament Hymns: Background and Development," *Expository Times* 94:9 (Fall, 1983), 136.

66. For the Christological emphases of the hymns found in Revelation, see David R. Carnegie, "Worthy Is the Lamb: The Hymns in Revelation," *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie*, ed. Harold H. Rowdon (Leicester, UK: Inter-Varsity, 1982), 243-256. These hymns, according to Carnegie, were not sung in worship services prior to their placement in Revelation.

CONCLUSION: CONGREGATIONAL SINGING AND GROWING DISCIPLES

Colossians 3:16 shows that planned worship is Biblical and beneficial in the deliberate formation of disciples. It is clear from the discussion above that worship singing encourages the indwelling of the word of Christ—which according to Ephesians 5 is the same as possessing the fullness of the Spirit. Congregational singing can both draw to Christ and help those who respond to grow.⁶⁷

Contemporary writers and research also support the validity of Paul's directives to use songs to teach.⁶⁸ Castle concluded that hymns produced by individual communities not only *reflect* their theology and understanding of faith issues but also *shape* the singers' understanding of these issues.⁶⁹ This being true, worship singing deserves thoughtful and

67. For a good chapter on the type and use of music in evangelism see Morgenthaler, 211-239. History bears out the truth that singing can be an effective evangelistic tool. Schilling, *The Faith We Sing*, 28. For an overview of music as an outreach tool for missionaries, see T. W. Hunt, "Church Music in Southern Baptist Foreign Missions," *Baptist History and Heritage* 21.3 (July, 1986), 31-40. However, Dawn offers stern warnings to the church that tries to "offer choices of worship styles" saying such actions on the Church's part "reinforce the idolatrous way of life that worship is intended to expose, disarm, and conquer." Dawn, 98. She notes that worship is for God while evangelism is for the unbeliever. While "good worship will be evangelistic, ... that is not its primary purpose." *Ibid.*, 122-127. Brad Berglund disagrees with Morgenthaler even more than Dawn: "I believe worship should be offered to God as worship, not as evangelism." Brad Berglund, *Reinventing Sunday: Breakthrough Ideas for Transforming Worship* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2001), xvii.

68. I found only one writer who believes that congregational worship singing is not to be used for educational purposes. Berglund writes, "I believe worship should be offered to God as worship, not ... as Christian education." Berglund, xvii.

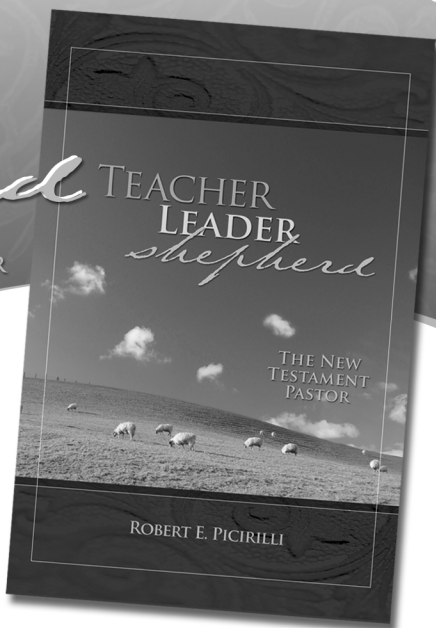
69. Brian Castle, *Hymns: The Making and Shaping of a Theology for the Whole People of God: A Comparison of the Four Last Things in Some English and Zambian Hymns in Intercultural Perspective* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1990), 192. Castle's work reflects an effort to evaluate the influence of hymns in communities where he served as Anglican priest. He writes, here: "When we sing a hymn, we are allowing that hymn to penetrate into our being, and frequent singing has the power to tap emotional well-springs that are not wholly conscious or rational; in this way we acknowledge and accept the theological background and sociological presuppositions and all its implications from which the hymn has emerged and which the hymn enshrines. Thus we are shaped by what we sing." Lionel Adey did a study about the doctrinal reflections present in twentieth-century hymns of the Americas, Asia, and Africa. He concluded that though each has its own distinct doctrinal emphasis, some doctrines are common to all and some are all but absent from all, e.g. life after death. He wonders if this absence of "apocalyptic imagery of white-robed throngs in a celestial city or ever-blooming garden" will negatively impact the survival and spread of Christian love found in God through Christ, a serious weight of responsibility to attribute to congregational singing. Lionel Adey, "What Does Global Hymnody Recall and Teach?" *Hymn* 51.2 (April, 2000), 19.

intentional planning.⁷⁰ Every song considered for congregational use must be evaluated against the ten guidelines found in Colossians 3:16. Adherence to these guidelines will insure that we satisfy our mandate to worship God and nurture disciples through congregational singing.

70. For the impact ministers of music and worship planning have had on Southern Baptists, see Hugh T. McElrath, "The Minister of Music in Southern Baptist Life," *Baptist History and Heritage* 21.3 (July, 1986), 9-20.

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J. Matthew Pinson

Atonement, Justification, and Apostasy in the Thought of John Wesley

INTRODUCTION

Free Will Baptists are indebted to John Wesley for his dedication to Christ and an extension of a Kingdom mentality in the Church and society. We are also heirs to a wonderful tradition of Scriptural exposition that eschews a predestinarian Calvinism that was strong in Wesley's day and is reasserting itself in our own day. Charles Wesley, John's brother, beautifully represents a broadly Arminian theological tradition in his hymns. If it is true that people learn their theology from hymns, we do well to sing Charles Wesley's hymns.¹

Yet, despite the affinities we have with John Wesley, Free Will Baptists differ strongly with Wesley and the Wesleyan tradition on some important points regarding salvation and the Christian life. This is because we are *pre-Wesleyan Arminians*. Our Arminianism goes back to the theology of Thomas Helwys (1550-1616), the first Baptist who was a General or Arminian Baptist, influenced by the Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609).² This pre-Wesleyan stream of Arminianism retains much in Reformed theology and spirituality that the later Wesleyan movement would discard. As I have said elsewhere, while Arminius "veered from Calvinism on the question of how one *comes to be* in a state of grace (predestination, free will, and grace) he retained Reformed categories on the *meaning* of sin and redemption."³ The same can be said of

1. As this paper will note, there is often tension in early Wesleyan thought between a more grace-oriented Arminianism and a semi-Pelagian approach, but John Wesley in the end comes out on the more semi-Pelagian side of things rather than the grace-oriented side that Arminius and Helwys represent. Yet the hymns of Charles Wesley emphasize the grace-oriented side and are usually very amenable to a more classical, Reformational Arminianism.

2. See J. Matthew Pinson, "Sin and Redemption in the Theology of John Smyth and Thomas Helwys" (presented at the Free Will Baptist Theological Symposium, October 2004) and J. Matthew Pinson, "Will the Real Arminius Please Stand Up? A Study of the Theology of Jacobus Arminius in Light of His Interpreters," *Integrity: A Journal of Christian Thought* 2 (2003): 121-39.

3. J. Matthew Pinson, "Introduction," in J. Matthew Pinson, ed., *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 14-15.

his, and Helwys's, views on sanctification and Christian spirituality, although Helwys emphasized the baptism of disciples and the importance of Christian conversion more than Arminius.

In our view of sanctification and Christian spirituality, for example, Free Will Baptists have typically sympathized more with the practical, warm-hearted Puritan piety of a John Bunyan than the crisis-oriented, higher-life spirituality of Wesleyanism. The Wesleyan movement has emphasized a second work of grace and Christian perfection, which non-Wesleyan Arminians have avoided. Yet these views are in harmony with other Wesleyan beliefs about salvation which this essay will explore. In the traditional Wesleyan view, Christ did not pay the penalty for sins but only pardoned sinners as a governor pardons a guilty criminal. Or he paid the penalty only for past sins and not for sin in general. If this is true, and if Christ's righteousness is not "imputed to all believers for their eternal acceptance with God,"⁴ then it makes sense that we have no assurance of salvation until we have reached a state of entire sanctification or perfection, and that we must be "re-justified" every time we sin. Free Will Baptists differ with doctrines such as these.⁵

A thoroughgoing understanding of Wesley's soteriology will help to engender a clearer understanding of Biblical and historic Free Will Baptist understandings of salvation. This essay will do that by examining Wesley's views on atonement, justification, and apostasy, with special attention to the historical context of his thought.

John Wesley's understanding of atonement and justification and the implications of these doctrines for his view of continuance in the Christian life are indicative of the eclectic nature of his theology. Modern scholars have variously attempted to place Wesley firmly within certain streams of the Christian theological tradition. This resulted in such

4. This phrase is from the *1812 Abstract*, which says, "We believe that no man has any warrant before God through his own works, power, or ability which he has in and of himself, only as he by Grace is made able to come to God, through Jesus Christ; believing the righteousness of Jesus Christ to be imputed to all believers for their eternal acceptance before God." The *1812 Abstract* is the earliest Southern Free Will Baptist confession of faith, which was an abstract of the 1660 *Standard Confession* of the English General Baptists, which the early Southern Free Will Baptists brought with them from England. It is reprinted in J. Matthew Pinson, *A Free Will Baptist Handbook: Heritage, Beliefs, and Ministries* (Nashville: Randall House, 1998), 142-47.

5. For contemporary treatments from this perspective, see the following: F. Leroy Forlines, *The Quest for Truth* (Nashville: Randall House, 2000); Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will: Contrasting Views of Salvation: Calvinism and Arminianism* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002); Stephen M. Ashby, "Reformed Arminianism," in J. Matthew Pinson, ed., *Four Views on Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

designations as “the Calvinist Wesley,” “the Anglican Wesley,” and “the Catholic Wesley.” Such classifications, however, fail to grasp the complexity of Wesley’s theology and the diversity of influences brought to bear on Wesley’s intellectual development.

By examining Wesley’s doctrines of atonement and justification and the ramifications of these concepts for Wesley’s view of perseverance in the Christian life, one recognizes that Wesley cannot be forced into a particular mold. On the contrary, Wesley’s theology will be seen as a symbiotic blending of diverse elements in his own background which aided in shaping his theological perspectives. Such a study must begin with a discussion of the perspectives on Wesley’s theology in modern scholarship⁶ and proceed to consider the various people and schools of thought that influenced Wesley’s theology. After this background has been laid, an analysis of Wesley’s views on the nature of atonement, justification, and continuance in the Christian life will be undertaken.

INTERPRETATIONS OF WESLEY’S INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

Twentieth-century Wesley scholarship has produced disparate opinions on Wesley’s place in the Christian tradition. Four main schools of thought have developed in Wesley studies: one highlights the Catholic elements in Wesley’s theology, the second stresses his Calvinist or “Reformation” tone, while the third emphasizes Wesley as Anglican. A fourth school consists of those scholars who have recognized the eclecticism of Wesley’s theology.

The “Calvinist Wesley”

Certain scholars have emphasized Wesley’s indebtedness to Reformation theology and the Reformed tradition as mediated through the Anglican Church. These scholars have characterized Wesley as “the Calvinist Wesley,” emphasizing Wesley’s statement that he was within “a hairsbreadth of Calvinism.” George Croft Cell was the first twentieth-century scholar to advance this interpretation of Wesley. Cell argued that, despite Wesley’s divergence from Calvin on the doctrine of predestination, he was in complete agreement with Calvin on original sin and on justification.⁷ Since Wesley emphasized the priority of God’s grace over

6. This initial historiographical discussion will lay out the general understandings of where Wesley fits in the Christian tradition. Historiographical analysis with specific regard to Wesley’s doctrines of justification and the nature of atonement will be reserved for the section of the essay which explicates these doctrines.

7. George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (New York: University Press of America, 1983. First edition, 1935), 19.

against a Pelagian anthropocentrism, Cell lumps Wesley into the Reformation camp. Thus he highlights Wesley's similarities rather than his differences with Luther, Calvin, and the other Magisterial Reformers.⁸ Many subsequent Wesley scholars, such as William R. Cannon, Martin Schmidt, and Colin W. Williams, have followed Cell in stressing Wesley's dependence on Reformation theology and downplaying his differences with Luther, Calvin, and the English Puritans on atonement and justification.⁹

The "Catholic Wesley"

Ironically, the person who opened Wesley studies to new considerations of Wesley's place in the Christian tradition was the Catholic scholar Maximin Piette, whose influential revisionist work *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism* broke with the older view of Wesley as essentially anti-Catholic. Piette emphasized Wesley's benefit from the Catholic tradition by both his high esteem for patristic theology and his use of the Catholic tradition as mediated through the Anglican church.¹⁰ Piette's basic understanding of "the Catholic Wesley" has been shared by such scholars as Jean Orcibal.¹¹ These scholars tend to deemphasize the importance of Wesley's Aldersgate experience—a theme highlighted by the "Calvinist Wesley" advocates. They also offer a lower estimate of the influence of the Reformers on Wesley's doctrines of grace, justification, and the nature of atonement.¹²

The "Anglican Wesley"

Some scholars have asserted that Wesley's theological orientation owes itself primarily to his Anglican¹³ heritage. Scholars like C. F. Allison,

8. *Ibid.*, 243-45.

9. William R. Cannon, *The Theology of John Wesley, with Special Reference to the Doctrine of Justification* (New York: Abingdon, 1946); Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972-73. First German edition, 1967); Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (New York: Abingdon, 1960).

10. Maximin Piette, *John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1937). Though this work was first published in 1925, it still figures greatly into the discussion, and is referred to by most scholars of Wesley's theology.

11. Jean Orcibal, "The Theological Originality of John Wesley and Continental Spirituality," trans. J. A. Sharp. In *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, vol. 1, eds. Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth, 1965), 102-10.

12. See also U. Lee, *John Wesley and Modern Religion* (New York, 1936).

13. The term "Anglican" in this essay, while anachronistic, is employed for purposes of convenience. It is used here to denote the non-Puritan wing of the Church of England in the seventeenth century.

Richard P. Heitzenrater, John English, and David Eaton have pointed to the influence of seventeenth-century Anglican Arminianism as assimilated through Wesley's parents. These authors have also emphasized his reading of Jeremy Taylor and other representatives of the Anglican "Holy Living School."¹⁴ H. R. McAdoo characterizes Wesley's theology as Anglican in "spirit" or method rather than in content.¹⁵

The Eclectic Wesley

David Hempton is representative of an approach to Wesley's intellectual influences that emphasizes their eclectic nature. He remarks that Wesley was influenced by

a bewildering array of Christian traditions: the church fathers, monastic piety, and ancient liturgies; continental mystics such as Jeanne-Marie Guyon ... ; Byzantine traditions of spirituality approached through Macarius and Gregory of Nyssa; the English and Scottish Puritan divines; the Moravians and other channels of European Pietism; his mother and through her to Pascal; classics of devotional spirituality including Thomas à Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law; and the canon of Anglican writers from Hooker to the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century High Churchmen. Writers on each of these traditions are prone to compete for the preeminent influence over Wesley, but the truth of the matter is that Wesley's eclecticism is itself preeminent.¹⁶

Albert Outler, though sometimes classified within the "Wesley as Calvinist" school, has come closer than most scholars to recognizing the eclectic nature of Wesley's theology. Thus he has emphasized Wesley as a "folk theologian" whose pastoral and homiletic aims, together with his diverse influences, uniquely shaped his theological views. Despite this

14. C. F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (New York: Seabury, 1966); Richard P. Heitzenrater, "John Wesley and the Oxford Methodists, 1725-1735" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1972); John C. English, *The Heart Renewed: John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Initiation* (Macon, GA: Wesleyan College, 1967); David E. Eaton, "Arminianism in the Theology of John Wesley" (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1988).

15. Henry R. McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the Seventeenth Century* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), 1.

16. David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), 714.

characterization, however, Outler tends to place great emphasis on the Reformation tributaries (particularly within the Church of England) which flowed into the Wesleyan stream.¹⁷

The first three approaches to Wesley's theology are unsatisfactory because they overemphasize one current of the diversity of influences on Wesley's thought. These perspectives employ a synchronic method of understanding Wesley's theology that has Wesley choosing between polarities in his theological experience. Only Hempton's and Outler's diachronic or symbiotic approach, which understands Wesley as absorbing and synthesizing several influences from a spectrum of theological expressions in his own intellectual development, is adequate to explain the uniqueness of Wesley's theology. This approach is borne out in an examination of Wesley's doctrines of justification, the nature of atonement, and continuance in the Christian life, as will be demonstrated in the course of this essay.

WESLEY'S INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

Wesley did not selectively choose between Reformation and Anglican Arminian theological expressions of these doctrines. Rather he, seemingly unconsciously, absorbed central motifs from both traditions and amalgamated them into a unique theology which differed substantially from both systems. A comprehension of Wesley's doctrines of justification, atonement, and continuance in the Christian life can be gained only by understanding the variant intellectual influences on Wesley's thought in the context of his intellectual development.

Anglican Arminianism

Of the two most significant and broad influences on Wesley's theology, the Reformation and Anglican Arminianism, the latter is more basic. The most formative of influences was that of Wesley's parents, who were steeped in Anglican Arminianism. Both Samuel and Susanna Wesley had converted to Anglicanism from Nonconformity and had reacted vehemently against their own dissenting backgrounds. Their resistance to the rigid predestinarianism of their upbringings precipitated a vigorous acceptance of seventeenth-century Anglican Arminianism.¹⁸ Samuel

17. Albert C. Outler, "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, ed. Kenneth E. Rowe (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976), 11-38.

18. Adam Clarke, *Memoirs of the Wesley Family Collected Principally from Original Documents*, 2nd ed. (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1848), 89.

Wesley credited William Cave's *Primitive Christianity*, in which Cave sought to demonstrate Anglican Arminianism's consistency with patristic theology, with his own decision to convert to Anglicanism.¹⁹ Wesley's parents immersed him in Anglican Arminianism, as is evidenced in numerous letters and discussions between Wesley and his parents. His father had recommended Hugo Grotius as the best Biblical commentator he knew of, and Susanna Wesley had encouraged Wesley's reading of Jeremy Taylor.²⁰ Wesley's Anglican Arminian rearing was confirmed as he came into contact with the works of the most distinguished Arminian writers. Wesley began reading Jeremy Taylor in 1725, and he spoke of Taylor's inestimable influence on him. Indeed, Taylor can be said to have been the vehicle through which Wesley was introduced to the Anglican Arminianism of the seventeenth century.²¹ In addition to Taylor, Wesley was greatly influenced by William Law's *Christian Perfection* and *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* as well as by the works of Thomas à Kempis.²² Wesley's circle at Oxford was saturated in both Dutch and English Arminian sources.²³ For example, Wesley's close friend at Oxford, Benjamin Ingham, recorded eleven separate readings of Hugo Grotius in his diary in the year 1733.²⁴

Prior to his connection with the Moravians, Wesley's primary influences were from Anglican Arminianism. As C. F. Allison has persuasively argued, seventeenth-century Anglican Arminianism was thoroughly imbued with moralism, diverging from the *sola fide* emphasis of the Reformation. This perspective stressed the ethical example of Christ's atonement. It neglected the atonement's juridical aspects and tended toward semi-Pelagianism in its doctrine of justification and the relation of faith and works, and the resultant doctrines of sanctification and the Christian life.²⁵

19. Schmidt, vol. 1, part 1, 44.

20. Richard P. Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), vol. 2, 23.

21. John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols. (London: Wesley Methodist Book Room, 1872; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), XI, 366; John Deschner, *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960, 1985), 197.

22. Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 7.

23. Eaton, 255-70.

24. See Richard P. Heitzenrater, ed., *Diary of an Oxford Methodist: Benjamin Ingham, 1733-34* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1985).

25. See Allison, 65-70.

Reformation Theology

The Anglican Arminians of the seventeenth century were exceedingly influential on Wesley's theology. However, Reformation theology as mediated through the Moravians, the Reformation Anglicanism of thinkers like Thomas Cranmer, and Wesley's reading of the continental Reformers themselves, was also influential. There has been scholarly disagreement on the nature and extent of the influence of Reformation thought on Wesley. G. C. Cell, Colin Williams, and others have painted Wesley as an heir of the continental reformers. Yet Outler has stated that it is "misleading" to speak of Wesley as the "conscious debtor" of Luther and Calvin, and that Wesley would have been "astonished" at Cell and Williams's assessment of him.²⁶ Part of this debate arises from the problem of identifying Wesley's influences, since he rarely documented his sources.

Though it is difficult to assess the extent of Wesley's indebtedness to the continental Reformers, his absorption of certain aspects of Reformation theology through the Moravians, the doctrinal standards of the Church of England, and Thomas Cranmer is indubitable.²⁷ Outler states that Wesley's investigation of the Homilies of the Church of England during his controversy with the Moravians "marked the final stage of Wesley's maturation as a theologian Now at last—with his 'Moravian' conversion at Aldersgate, followed by his disenchantments with Moravianism in Germany and Fetter Lane, his encounter with Edwards and his vital reappropriation of his Anglican heritage—the frame of Wesley's theology was finally set, and would so remain thereafter."²⁸

John Goodwin and Richard Baxter

In addition to the Anglican Arminianism of the seventeenth century and Reformation thought, Wesley was enormously influenced by two non-Anglican theologians, the Independents John Goodwin and Richard Baxter. Affirmative quotations of Goodwin and Baxter abound in Wesley's writings. In 1745 he reprinted an extract of Baxter's *Aphorisms of Justification*, which had originally been published in 1649. Wesley's *Predestination Calmly Considered* bears striking resemblance to numbers XIX-XLV of Baxter's *Aphorisms*, and Wesley's doctrine of justification reveals Baxter's influence.²⁹ Despite the numerous positive references to

26. Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, 119-20.

27. *Ibid.*, 121-33.

28. *Ibid.*, 16.

29. *Ibid.*, 148-49.

Goodwin in Wesley's works and Wesley's 1765 republication of Goodwin's *Imputatio Fidei, or A Treatise of Justification* (1642), scholars have largely ignored Goodwin's influence on Wesley. However, Goodwin had perhaps more influence on Wesley's doctrine of justification in the last thirty years of his life than any other single thinker, as is evidenced by his preface to Goodwin's treatise.

This short summary of Wesley's intellectual influences argues that Wesley's early theological development was shaped primarily by the Anglican Arminianism of the seventeenth century. It was offset, however, by the Reformation theology he imbibed from the Moravians, his reading of the continental Reformers, and more directly from Thomas Cranmer and the doctrinal standards of the Church of England. This amalgamation was in turn augmented by the influence of two seventeenth-century Nonconformists, Richard Baxter and John Goodwin.

INTERPRETATIONS OF WESLEY'S THEOLOGY

The scholarship on Wesley's view of atonement, justification, and continuance in the Christian life has been diverse. Of these three doctrines, Wesley's understanding of justification has been studied the most, but it has not been analyzed in the context of his doctrines of the nature of atonement and perseverance in the Christian life. The difficulty with many of the studies of Wesley's doctrine of justification, however, is the gross lack of theological competence that often accompanies them.

While much has been written on Wesley's view of the *extent* of atonement, precious little has been done on his understanding of the *nature* of atonement. The three principal scholars who have deliberated it are Williams, Renshaw, and Deschner. In his brief treatment on the nature of atonement, Williams fails to see the strong juridical overtones in Wesley's doctrine of atonement. He mistakenly asserts that "Wesley does not put the penal substitutionary element of his teaching inside a legal framework in which God is made subject to an eternal unchangeable order of justice."³⁰ Renshaw, while understanding Wesley's emphasis on God as judge, is simplistic in characterizing Wesley's view of atonement as a mix between Reformational and Grotian categories.³¹ Deschner is more sophisticated in his view of Wesley's doctrine of atonement, seeing it essentially as a modified penal satisfaction theory. He fails, however, to

30. Colin W. Williams, *John Wesley's Theology Today* (New York: Abingdon, 1960), 84.

31. John Rutherford Renshaw, "The Atonement in the Theology of John and Charles Wesley" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1965), 126.

ground Wesley's doctrine of the nature of atonement in its historical or theological contexts.³²

Scholars have deliberated Wesley's doctrine of justification considerably. While some scholars have noted Catholic overtones in Wesley (Piette, Orbical, Lee), most (Cannon, Cell, Schmidt, Skevington Wood, Williams) have seen Wesley's doctrine of justification as basically similar to that of the continental reformers. The latter, however, have failed to unveil the complex distinctions between the Catholic and Reformation influences with regard to the imputation of Christ's righteousness. Furthermore, they missed the significance of Baxter's and Goodwin's influence on Wesley. A few scholars (Clifford, Lindstrom, Outler) correctly interpret Wesley's doctrine of justification but fail to tie it in any significant way to his doctrine of the nature of atonement. Only Deschner succeeds in this regard, but his study of these doctrines, limited to Wesley's Christology, is brief and fails to understand how these doctrines shaped Wesley's view of continuance in the Christian life.³³

WESLEY'S VIEW OF THE NATURE OF ATONEMENT

In his doctrine of the nature of atonement, Wesley betrays the clear influence of the Reformers and Reformation Anglicanism in his retention of a basic, though modified, penal satisfaction theory of atonement. The Reformers' view of atonement had been rejected by the seventeenth-century Anglican Arminians such as Jeremy Taylor as well as by Richard Baxter and John Goodwin. Despite Wesley's acknowledged debt to these thinkers, he diverged from them in his doctrine of atonement. Though he failed to reveal the sources for his penal satisfaction doctrine of atonement, it is safe to assume that Cranmer, the Homilies of the Church of England, and the Reformers themselves influenced Wesley to maintain central elements of the Reformation doctrine of the nature of atonement.³⁴

Wesley maintained the Reformation understanding of God as judge and humanity as the violator of divine justice. The sins of humanity have

32. Deschner, 152-57.

33. Few scholars have sought to extend their studies to encompass an understanding of Wesley's view of continuance in the Christian life. The closest most writers come to this is to study Wesley's doctrine of entire sanctification, which is logically and theologically distinct from his understanding of continuance in the Christian life. Some scholars make reference to Wesley's view of "backsliding," but fail to understand how crucial his view of atonement and justification is to his larger understanding of Christian perseverance.

34. I am indebted to John Deschner's *Wesley's Christology: An Interpretation* for his insights on Wesley's doctrine of atonement, which have been helpful to me.

accrued the penalty of the wrath of God which is eternal death.³⁵ The only way for individuals to escape the wrath of God is for Christ to bear the penalty for sin, which He does on the cross. In explaining this concept, Wesley retained the Reformation language of passive obedience. In His passive obedience, Christ voluntarily submitted to the wrath of God and took humanity's punishment for sin, thus averting the wrath of God. Christ's death is a "propitiation—to appease an offended God. But if, as some teach, God was never offended, there was no need of this propitiation."³⁶ Thus the divine penalty for sin, meted out by God, is satisfied by Christ's passive obedience on the cross.

Wesley here aligned himself with the satisfaction tradition of Anselm of Canterbury, which found its fullest expression in Luther, Calvin, and Cranmer. Despite his basic reliance on the seventeenth-century Anglican Arminians, and on Baxter and Goodwin, his doctrine of atonement was radically distinct from theirs. These thinkers relied on Hugo Grotius's governmental theory of atonement, which held that God could freely pardon or forgive sinners without any satisfaction for the violation of divine justice. In the governmental view, the death of Christ is accepted by God as governor or ruler rather than as judge. Christ's death is a symbol of the punishment of sin rather than punishment itself. The penalty for sin, rather than being fulfilled or satisfied, is set aside, and the believing sinner is pardoned as a governor would pardon a guilty criminal. Goodwin's statement of this theory in his *Imputatio Fidei* (1642) is especially relevant in view of the fact that Wesley republished this work in 1765: "The sentence or curse of the Law, was not properly executed upon Christ in his death, but this death of Christ was a ground or consideration unto God, whereupon to dispence with his Law, and to let fall or suspend the execution of the penalty or curse therein threatened."³⁷ Goodwin's statement contrasts sharply with Wesley's comment on Romans 3:26, where he speaks of God "showing justice on his own Son" so that God "might evidence himself to be strictly and inviolably righteous in the administration of his government, even while he is the merciful justifier of the sinner that believeth in Jesus. The attribute of justice must be preserved inviolate; and inviolate it is preserved, *if there was a real infliction of punishment on our Saviour.*"³⁸ Thus Wesley was at great pains to affirm a retributive or penal satisfaction view of atonement over against

35. *Works*, IX, 481-82; "Of Hell," *Works*, VI, intro, 4; II, 2.

36. John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), Romans 3:25.

37. John Goodwin, *Imputatio Fidei. Or A Treatise of Justification* (London, 1642), Part II, 13.

38. *Notes*, Romans 3:26. Italics added.

a governmental view. In this view, Wesley was in complete agreement with article thirty-one of the Thirty-nine Articles, which says that Christ made “perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction” for sin and that “there is none other satisfaction for sin, but that alone.” Unlike the governmentalists in his Anglican Arminian background, Wesley believed, with the Reformers, that the penalty for sin must be paid and that it has been satisfied by Christ in His passive obedience on the cross.

However, before one thinks the case is tied up for Wesley’s absolute reliance on Reformation categories, it must be emphasized that, while Wesley stressed the penal satisfaction nature of Christ’s atonement, he modified it. Yet his modification of this theory was unique in that it avoided the governmentalist overtones of much of early English Arminianism. In much Reformation theology, the atonement of Christ included not only passive obedience but also active obedience.³⁹ Active obedience consisted of Christ’s perfect righteousness and his complete obedience to and fulfillment of divine law. The Reformers held that both aspects of Christ’s obedience go together in satisfying the just demands of the divine law. Divine justice requires absolute righteousness on the part of human beings for their acceptance before God, and human beings cannot themselves provide such absolute righteousness. Hence, Christ’s absolute righteousness must be imputed or credited to them for their justification. Here Wesley diverged from the penal satisfaction theory of atonement, insisting that the efficacy of Christ’s atonement subsists primarily in his passive obedience, or his bearing the divine penalty for sin, rather than in his positive fulfillment of the law. In his preface to John Goodwin’s *Imputatio Fidei*, which he retitled “A Treatise on Justification,” Wesley stated that Christ’s death is “certainly the chief part, if not the whole” of the atonement.⁴⁰ “Although I believe Christ fulfilled God’s law, yet I do not affirm he did this to purchase redemption for us. This was done by his dying in our stead.”⁴¹ Christ’s active obedience, for Wesley, was coincidental, not formally essential, to the atonement. Thus, though Wesley affirmed the reality of Christ’s active obedience, he denied its salvific efficacy.

39. Some Reformed thinkers, such as John Owen, did not insist that one affirm the active obedience of Christ to hold a satisfaction view of atonement. Wesley’s view, while different from most Protestant satisfaction theories, still meets the rigorous demands of a more general penal substitutionary understanding of atonement.

40. *Works*, X, 331.

41. *Works*, X, 386.

Wesley further modified the penal satisfaction view of atonement with his distinction between past and future sins. Whereas Reformation Anglicanism insisted that Christ's oblation for the sins of humanity was for all sins, original and actual (Thirty-nine Articles, article thirty-one), Wesley asserted that Christ atoned only for the believer's past sins. Christ's atonement was not for the *condition* of sin, nor was it to remove the curse of original sin, but it was a "propitiation" for "the remission of past sins."⁴² Neither sin in general nor the sinner, but only past sins are forgiven, for God cannot forgive sins before they happen. This concept is borne out in "A Dialogue between an Antinomian and His Friend," in which the Antinomian says Christ "did then 'heal, take away, put an end to, and utterly destroy, all our sins.'" Then his friend replies, "Did he then heal the wound before it was made, and put an end to our sins before they had a beginning? This is so glaring, palpable an absurdity, that I cannot conceive how you can swallow it."⁴³ Wesley's conception that Christ atoned only for past sins, rather than for sin generally, exerted great influence on his view of justification and continuance in the Christian life.

It has been argued here that Wesley's doctrine of the nature of atonement was firmly based on the penal satisfaction categories of Reformation theology and was theologically distinct from the governmental theory of Grotius which was employed by the Anglican Arminians as well as Baxter and Goodwin. Yet Wesley modified this penal satisfactionism in his disavowal of Christ's active obedience in the atonement as well as his notion that Christ atoned only for past sins. This theory of atonement relies on the logic of penal satisfaction but on the spirit of governmentalism. It is an unambiguous example of the creative amalgamation that makes Wesley's theology truly unique among theologians.⁴⁴

WESLEY'S VIEW OF JUSTIFICATION

Wesley's doctrine of justification betrays his reliance on his Anglican Arminian heritage and his appreciation for John Goodwin and Richard Baxter as well as a total divergence from Reformation categories. "The plain scriptural notion of justification," asserted Wesley, "is pardon, the forgiveness of sins. It is the act of God the father, whereby, for the sake of

42. *Notes*, Romans 3:25. Wesley defines "past sins" here as "all the sins antecedent to their believing."

43. *Works*, X, 267.

44. It may be stated as a sidelight (though it is beyond the scope of this paper) that Wesleyan theologians after the first generation jettisoned Wesley's eclectic view of atonement for the more logically consistent Grotian theory.

the propitiation made by the blood of his Son, he 'showeth forth his righteousness (or mercy) by the remission of sins that are past.'"⁴⁵ The above statement reveals Wesley's notion that justification is "the atonement of Christ actually applied to the soul of the sinner now believing on him."⁴⁶ Wesley's theory of atonement is brought directly to bear on his view of justification. As was seen above, the principal aspect of atonement is Christ's passive obedience. The believing sinner is justified because of or *for the sake of* the "propitiation made by the blood" of Christ, that is, the punishment of Christ for the sake of sinful humanity. This propitiation is applied to the sinner, the result of which is remission of sins, that is, pardon or forgiveness.

Wesley believed that Christ's passive obedience only and not his active obedience is applied to the sinner in justification. Therefore, Christ has borne the believer's punishment and deflected the wrath of God from him or her, but has not provided a positive righteousness for the believing sinner. Wesley veered from the Reformation doctrine of justification which insisted on a forensic justification—a divinely provided righteousness which is imputed to the believer for his or her eternal acceptance with God. The English General Baptist Thomas Grantham was exemplary of this forensic view of justification:

That God imputes Righeousness to Men without Works, is so plain, that it can never be denied. What is thus imputed, is not acted by us, but expressly reckoned as a matter of free Gift, or Grace; and this can be the Righteousness of none but Christ ... because no other way can the Righteousness of God be made ours ... there is none righteous, no not one. Except therefore the Righteousness of Christ be laid hold on, there is no Righteousness to be imputed to Sinners.⁴⁷

Wesley differed strongly from such a view. Far from believing that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to believers so that they are (forensically) accounted righteous in God's sight, Wesley asserted that justification

45. "Justification by Faith," *Works*, V, II, 5.

46. "Salvation by Faith," *Works*, V, II, 7.

47. Thomas Grantham, *Christianismus Primitivus, or The Ancient Christian Religion* (London, 1678), book II, chapter 3, 67.

does by no means imply that God judges concerning us contrary to the real nature of things, that he esteems us better than we really are, or believes us righteous when we are unrighteous. Surely no. The judgment of the all-wise God is always according to truth. Neither can it ever consist with his unerring wisdom to think that I am innocent, to judge that I am righteous or holy, because another is so. He can no more, in this manner, confound me with Christ than with David or Abraham.⁴⁸

Wesley has no use for forensic justification or the imputed righteousness of Christ. Such language, warned Wesley, is too often used as “a cover for unrighteousness.”⁴⁹ He found it difficult to conceive of a gospel that would allow a believer to commit sin with impunity because he has been imputed with the righteousness of Christ:

A man has been reprov'd, suppose for drunkenness: “O,” said he, “I pretend to no righteousness of my own; Christ is my righteousness.” Another has been told, that “the extortioner, the unjust, shall not inherit the kingdom of God:” He replies, with all assurance, “I am unjust in myself, but I have a spotless righteousness in Christ.” And thus, though a man be as far from the practice as from the tempers of a Christian; though he neither has the mind which was in Christ, nor in any respect walks as he walked; yet he has armour of proof against all conviction, in what he calls “the righteousness of Christ.”⁵⁰

Wesley’s view of forensic justification has been debated because of his use of the word “imputed” in speaking of righteousness in the believer. Yet his dismissal of the idea of the active obedience of Christ as an efficacious component of the atonement demonstrates his rejection of any forensic conception of justification. However, to clear up any lingering misconceptions, Wesley stated in his 1773 writing entitled, “Remarks on Mr. Hill’s Farrago Double-Distilled,” that “that phrase, *the imputed righteousness of Christ*, I never did use,” and he advised everyone “to lay aside that ambiguous, unscriptural phrase.”⁵¹

48. “Justification by Faith,” *Works*, V, II, 4.

49. “The Lord Our Righteousness,” *Works*, V, II, 19.

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Works*, X, 430.

Wesley's notion that Christ's death atoned only for sins committed prior to conversion applies to his idea of justification. If atonement is only for past sins, then justification is only for past sins. Thus Wesley can equate justification merely with pardon or forgiveness—remission of past sins—without any recourse to a doctrine of imputation. This formulation of the doctrine of justification deviated from Reformation theology and aligned with Goodwin, Baxter, and the seventeenth-century Anglican Arminians, with their reliance on Grotius's governmentalism. Wesley, however, arrived at the same position in a different way. He did not assert, like the governmentalists, that Christ's righteousness is not imputed to the believer because the penalty for sin has been set aside and God has freely forgiven the sinner. Rather, Wesley averred that the penalty for sin has been satisfied in Christ's death and that this satisfaction is appropriated to the believer, but that this justifies the believer only from past sins. Thus the governmentalists worked from the perspective of God's free pardon of the sinner based on the sweeping aside of the law, whereas Wesley held that the believer's past sins are remitted because of Christ's oblation. But with regard to the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the end result is identical: righteousness in the believer is purely practical; it is inherent and not forensic.

WESLEY'S VIEW OF PERSEVERANCE

Wesley's doctrine of justification is enormously crucial for his doctrine of perseverance in the Christian life. Wesley agreed with his Arminian forebears that it is possible for a believer to fall from grace, to apostatize from the Christian life. For Wesley, this possibility manifests itself in two ways: the first is through irremediable apostasy; the second is through willful sin.

Irremediable Apostasy

Wesley found examples of irremediable apostasy in such Scriptural passages as 1 Timothy 1:19-20 and Hebrews 6:4-6. In 1 Timothy 1, Paul states that some have "made shipwreck of their faith." Wesley viewed this condition as irremediable, "for ships once wrecked cannot be afterwards saved."⁵² His exegesis of Hebrews 6:4-6 fell in line with the standard Arminian exposition: "The apostle here describes the case of those who have cast away both the power and the form of godliness Of these wilful total apostates he declares, *it is impossible to renew them again*

52. Notes, 1 Timothy 1:20.

to repentance (though they were renewed once).⁵³ This “total” or “final” apostasy, Wesley contended, is a result of defection from faith—the renunciation of the atonement of Christ—and hence cannot be remedied.⁵⁴

However, while Wesley affirms repeatedly in a number of writings that shipwreck of faith constitutes final, irremediable apostasy, in a few instances he struggles with the concept. For example, in his sermon, “A Call to Backsliders,” he indicates that even those guilty of the kind of apostasy described in 1 Timothy 1:19-20 and Hebrews 6:4-6 can still be restored:

If it be asked, “Do any real apostates find mercy from God? Do any that have ‘made shipwreck of faith and a good conscience,’ recover what they have lost? Do you know, have you seen, any instance of persons who found redemption in the blood of Jesus, and afterwards fell away, and yet were restored,—‘renewed again unto repentance?’” yea, verily and not one or an hundred only, but, I am persuaded several thousands Indeed, it is so far from being an uncommon thing for a believer to fall and be restored, that it is rather uncommon to find any believers who are not conscious of having been backsliders from God, in a higher or lower degree, and perhaps more than once, before they were established in faith.⁵⁵

Apostasy through Willful Sin

The second avenue of apostasy, Wesley taught, is willful sin. Whereas the first type of apostasy, total apostasy, logically follows from Wesley’s doctrine of the resistibility of divine salvific grace, the second ensues from his view of justification. Because only past sins are atoned for and forgiven in justification, future sins must likewise be forgiven. One must remember Wesley’s assertion that it is absurd to say that God can forgive sins that have not yet occurred. Just as God pardoned the believer for past sins, so the believer’s future sins must be pardoned.⁵⁶ Failure to receive pardon for post-conversion sins results in apostasy.

53. *Notes*, Hebrews 6:6.

54. “Serious Thoughts on the Perseverance of the Saints,” *Works*, X, 284-298.

55. “A Call to Backsliders,” *Works*, VI, 525.

56. *Notes*, 1 John 1:9.

Wesley believed that sin in itself brings about apostasy, thereby breaking one's relationship with God. Wesley uses King David as an example of the pattern of apostasy through willful sin:

To explain this by a particular instance: David was born of God, and saw God by faith. He loved God in sincerity. He could truly say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth," neither person nor thing, "that I desire in comparison of thee." But still there remained in his heart that corruption of nature, which is the seed of all evil.

"He was walking upon the roof of his house," (2 Sam. 11:2) probably praising the God whom his soul loved, when he looked down, and saw Bathsheba. He felt a temptation; a thought which tended to evil. The Spirit of God did not fail to convince him of this. He doubtless heard and knew the warning voice; but he yielded in some measure to the thought, and the temptation began to prevail over him. Hereby his spirit was sullied; he saw God still; but it was more dimly than before. He loved God still; but not in the same degree; not with the same strength and ardour of affection. Yet God checked him again, though his spirit was grieved; and his voice, though fainter and fainter, still whispered, "Sin lieth at the door; look unto me, and be thou saved." But he would not hear: He looked again, not unto God, but unto the forbidden object, till nature was superior to grace, and kindled lust in his soul.

The eye of his mind was now closed again, and God vanished out of his sight. Faith, the divine, supernatural intercourse with God, and the love of God, ceased together: He then rushed on as a horse into the battle, and knowingly committed the outward sin.⁵⁷

Unlike total apostasy, this second type of apostasy is remediable. Wesley termed this kind of apostasy "backsliding." In his *Journals*, he offered several examples of people he believed had apostatized and been restored to salvation.⁵⁸ In his sermon "A Call to Backsliders," Wesley

57. "The Great Privilege of Those Who Are Born of God," *Works*, V, 230.

58. *Works*, II, 33, 278, 337, 361; III, 21.

described believers who think they can never fall from grace, but nonetheless “have utterly lost the life of God, and sin hath regained dominion over them.”⁵⁹ “It is remarkable,” declared Wesley, “that many who had fallen either from justifying or sanctifying grace ... have been restored ... and that very frequently in an instant, to all that they had lost In one moment they received anew both remission of sins, and a lot among them that were sanctified.”⁶⁰

This semi-Pelagian view of continuance in the Christian life emanates naturally from Wesley’s doctrine of justification. If only past sins are remitted, then the believer is “left on his own” with regard to future sins:

Wilt thou say, “But I have again committed sin, since I had redemption through his blood?” It is meet that thou shouldst abhor thyself But, dost thou now believe? At whatsoever time thou truly believest in the name of the Son of God, all thy sins antecedent to that hour vanish away And think not to say, “I was justified once; my sins were once forgiven me:” ... “He that committeth sin is of the devil.” Therefore, thou art of thy father the devil. It cannot be denied: For the works of thy father thou doest Beware thou suffer thy soul to take no rest, till his pardoning love be again revealed; till he “heal thy backslidings,” and fill thee again with the “faith that worketh by love.”⁶¹

Thus Wesley emphasized the necessity of personal holiness and continual penitence for continuance in the Christian life, insisting that the believer must continue to be pardoned to remain a Christian. It is important to note the striking similarity between Wesley and John Goodwin. In his 1651 work, *Redemption Redeemed*, Goodwin offered the same two-fold analysis of apostasy that Wesley later proposed.⁶² Wesley revealed his appreciation for *Redemption Redeemed* in a July, 1768, letter to Walter Sellon, who was embarking on a reprinting of the work: “I am glad you have undertaken the ‘Redemption Redeemed.’ But you must nowise forget Dr. Owen’s answer to it: Otherwise you will leave a loophole for all the Calvinists to creep out. The Doctor’s evasions you must needs cut in

59. *Works*, VI, 526.

60. *Ibid.*

61. “The First Fruits of the Spirit,” *Works*, V, 95-96.

62. John Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed* (London, 1651), 345-48.

pieces, either interweaving your answers with the body of the work, under each head, or adding them in marginal notes."⁶³

CONCLUSION

Wesley's understanding of the nature of atonement, justification, and continuance in the Christian life are unique in Christian theology. His modified penal satisfaction theory of atonement, which entails that Christ atoned only for the believer's past sins, is his own peculiar contribution to Western Christian thought. His view results in a notion of justification and the Christian life which has the inherent holiness of the individual believer at its core. These doctrines in turn lay the foundation for an understanding of sanctification—Christian perfection—which is also unique.

Wesley's theological originality makes him difficult to assess. Those who attempt, however, to pigeonhole Wesley by forcing him into a pre-conceived theological mold, whether Anglican, Arminian, Calvinist, or Catholic, fail to comprehend the complexity of his symbiotic absorption and amalgamation of the sources of his own intellectual history.

63. *Works*, VIII, 44.

Kevin L. Hester

Church History and Modern Myth in *The Da Vinci Code*: Historical and Theological Perspectives for Pastors

I. INTRODUCTION

Popular culture has always been a mixture of truth and story, of history and myth. The two, easily confused, often intermingle to form new and sometimes dangerous combinations. While many are happy to live in such a mottled world, others sense a need to speak out for the preservation of truth. This latter perspective has always been the position of the Church. Christianity is an historical religion and one that makes the validity of its claims central to its very viability.¹ This Christian tradition has continued in our own day as the Church has been confronted with new stories and myths. The popularity of such works and the willingness of our culture to believe them should lead us to a new appreciation for the truth of the gospel and the true history that lies behind it.

One of these new stories, *The Da Vinci Code*, written by fiction author Dan Brown, has piqued the interest of popular culture.² (Its plot will be outlined below.) It was on the best-seller lists for more than two years and *The Da Vinci Code* film, produced by Ron Howard and starring Tom Hanks, garnered \$77 million in sales on its opening weekend. The phenomenon has furthered the popular dissemination and discussion of Brown's unique ideas regarding Jesus and early Christianity.

Shortly after the book began to gain widescale popularity, readers began to notice that some of the claims of this work were at odds with generally accepted Christian beliefs. Some non-Christians said "Aha, I knew all along there must have been a cover-up," while Christians responded, "That can't be right." What resulted was a cacophony of confusion with many different voices speaking from many perspectives. Sales of Brown's work continued to increase as did Christian works

1. 1 Corinthians 15:17: "But if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins."

2. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code: A Novel* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

countering his claims. Blogs and television documentaries joined the fray—some supporting, others discounting the views presented in the book and movie.

So what should we make of *The Da Vinci Code*? I want to discuss this question but I also want to point out some other issues that seem to have been missed. First, the acceptance of these ideas is an indication of the polarization of our postmodern culture and the loss of objective truth. Truth was traditionally understood to be an issue of correspondence to reality. The correspondence theory of truth states that a statement is true if and only if it corresponds to a given state of affairs. Postmodernity argues that the state of affairs is open to various perspectives and that each perspective has merit as long as it has particular meaning for the individual. This explains why some people are so willing to embrace theories about the history of Jesus and Mary Magdalene that have no basis in reality. Whether they can be corroborated by history or not, they have meaning to individuals and are therefore considered personally true. Yet it is impossible to live in this world without a sense of objective truth. It is vitally important to me whether the traffic light is red or green. My life may very well depend on it, so there must be something else at work.

It still strikes me as odd that there are so many people so ready to believe a lie rather than the truth. I think that Albert Mohler, president of Southern Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky, has hit upon why this is the case. He says,

If the true storyline concerning Jesus Christ was that He was merely a mortal prophet who came to establish an earthly dynasty and to help us all celebrate the divine feminine and be a part of His circle of knowledge and enlightenment, then the fact is that we do not have to think about the fact that we are sinners. If that is what the life of Jesus is all about, then it is not about how we must be redeemed from our sin, but rather about how we can simply be enlightened and informed. The truth is, the human heart would much rather be told it is uninformed than that it is sinful.³

Paul himself discussed this tendency of fallen humanity in Romans 1: “When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart

3. Albert Mohler, http://www.albertmohler.com/commentary_read.php?cdate=2006-05-22. Accessed May 30, 2006.

was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools ... who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" (vv. 21-22, 25a). The fallenness of our human natures gives us itching ears to hear that we are the masters of our own fate and that God has no claim on our lives.⁴ The willingness of modern culture to believe a lie is not peculiar to our society. It is the age-old problem of pride and idolatry. After all, did not Eve believe the serpent when it said, "Ye shall not surely die?" (Gen. 3:4). Postmodernity may analyze truth claims differently, but the problem is as old as sin—which leads me to my second observation.

Interest in this book and the spiritual questions with which it deals should be viewed as an opportunity for Christians to educate and evangelize, thus fulfilling the command of Peter who reminds us to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Too often, conservative Christianity has sought to disengage itself from culture, decrying, often rightly, the sin that it finds around it but failing to offer intelligent grounds for such dismissal. If we are really called "to give an answer to every man" this implies that we know something about the persons with whom we are conversing. It is vitally important for us to be aware of other worldviews so as to engage them on their own ground. After all, when Paul spoke to the Athenians in Acts 17 he began not with quotations from Scripture but from the pagan poets whose ideas had helped to form their worldview. Instead of pagan poets, modern society has political pundits, best-selling authors, and mass media producers. For this reason, *The Da Vinci Code* provides a wonderful chance to educate others about Christianity and to serve as a beginning point for evangelism. Such action requires the Christian to engage our culture "with meekness and fear" by asking and answering difficult questions.

Unfortunately, too many Christians do not themselves know the answers to the kinds of questions posed by *The Da Vinci Code*. Often Christians were as flummoxed by the book as those who knew nothing about Christianity. The questions raised by Christians and the often inadequate nature of their response demonstrate the Church's failure to

4. Research by the Barna Group has demonstrated that even though *The Da Vinci Code* has raised several questions for readers, most (whether Christian or not) do not change their views. Barna said, "Few people changed their pre-existing beliefs because of what they read in the novel. And even fewer people approached the book with a truly open mind regarding the controversial matters in question, and emerged with a new theological perspective." <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdateNarrowPreview&BarnaUpdateID=238>. Accessed May 30, 2006.

educate its members about its own history and theological development. If there is one thing that we can learn from the whole *Da Vinci* debacle it is this: Church history is important. Christianity did not develop in a vacuum. The Church is a living organism always growing and changing in the midst of a world of conflicting ideas, and in that history the Holy Spirit is active. The history of the Church and the development of theology (the two can hardly be separated) is therefore, in one sense, the ongoing revelation of God to us. To know our theology is to know our history and vice versa. The educational programs of our churches have too often shied away from theology and history, instead focusing upon reader responses to devotional or self-help texts. *The Da Vinci Code* has deciphered a glaring deficiency in Christian education, and I hope that we will be able to see the need and strive to meet that need through our Sunday Schools, small groups, and even our pulpits.

I ask the reader to bear these issues in mind as we work through this material together. These larger questions may prove to be longer lasting and indeed more important than one novel, but perhaps the best way to approach them is through the work at hand.

The Da Vinci Code begins as Robert Langdon is awakened in his Paris hotel room and escorted to the scene of the grisly death of the curator of the Louvre. For the next 450 pages the reader is taken on a whirlwind ride across Paris and through history seeking to unravel the mysterious messages left in the wake of the murder. Page by page the mystery of a worldwide conspiracy is uncovered as the protagonist finds himself in the middle of the search for the holy grail.

Many of Dan Brown's novels revolve around conspiracy theories, and this one is no different. As it turns out the holy grail is not the cup Christ used at the last supper but a symbol of his living legacy, Mary Magdalene. Brown argues that Jesus was a charismatic prophet with political designs based on his royal lineage from David. But he also sought to strengthen his claims to the throne by marrying into the family line of Saul and taking Mary Magdalene as his wife. After his crucifixion a pregnant Mary Magdalene and some other followers fled Palestine and ended up in France where her children eventually founded the Merovingian line of kings.

In the meantime, the male followers of Christ, who were never really happy with Mary's place among them, had sanitized Jesus' religious ideas and won many converts throughout the Roman world. As Jesus' thoughts became a new religion his status continued to increase. Although there were many who knew and maintained the true teachings of Christ that God included both masculine and feminine aspects, the

Church, as it came to exist, suppressed this version. The Church won its ultimate victory in its alliance with Constantine and in the fourth century declared Jesus to be fully divine and worked out the canon of the New Testament, accepting only four of the myriads of gospels written about Jesus. The Church worked throughout the centuries to destroy all other references to Jesus and His true teachings. To counteract this movement of the Church, the descendants of Jesus established a cadre of protectors known as the Knights Templar, governed by a secret society (the Priory of Sion). In this small, antagonized group the truth about Jesus lay nascent until such a time as the truth could be revealed.

Though it certainly will not be up for a Pulitzer, the book as a novel is a fairly entertaining piece of modern fiction. Its Grishamlike short chapters grab the reader and hurl him into a dizzying world of murder and conspiracy. There are corrupt police officials, murderous albino monks, and car chases galore. It is a pretty good ride, with enough plot twists and revelations to keep the modern reader awake or at least to fill up the time needed for that long layover at the airport.

The narrative structure is however quite different. Personally, I have never been one to take the plots or events of fictional works very seriously. I had always assumed that most persons understood that a work of fiction was set in an imaginary world. Consequently I am amazed that so many people have accepted the narrative structure of the work as a serious response to Christianity. I simply cannot understand why anyone would take such a conspiracy theory seriously. A brief perusal of a few chat rooms and blogs highlighted this question for me. As I read through the comments I came to understand something about our culture and our churches.

From our secular culture's perspective the issue of whether the conspiracy theory is true or not is irrelevant. In a postmodern world the issue is whether it is meaningful for someone as an individual. Non-Christians love the way the book is critical of the Church and the power structures behind it. The way the Church has argued, and in many places continues to argue, for theological truth cuts against the grain of a postmodern world which seeks above all things to be respectful of others and to recognize validity in all persons and all personal ideas.

I also noticed the way Christians were responding. Most of them knew that much of this story was a collection of twisted and distorted half truths. They certainly knew that this was not what the Bible taught. But when they were confronted with a position that said the Bible was put together in the fourth century by a political machine that sought to suppress women the questions that were being asked could not simply

be answered through Biblical proof-texting. They wanted to respond but were rendered helpless by such a move. I was amazed at how little even long-time Christians knew about heresy and orthodoxy in the early Church or about how the New Testament books were accepted into the canon.

Church leaders can learn from this experience. I still do not think that most reasonable persons, whether Christian or not, will embrace the historical and theological narrative structure of Brown's work. But the work continues to raise questions and offers us an opportunity to educate Christians and non-Christians alike on what the Church believes and why. We should embrace this opportunity and use it to confirm Christians in the reliability of the Church's Scripture and theological tradition and to demonstrate to non-Christians universal aspects of salvation in Jesus Christ. But we can only do this if we know the answers ourselves. I hope to offer some talking points that will allow us to reflect meaningfully on the role of theology, history, and faith.

I have divided my presentation into three areas. We will look first of all at the concept of orthodoxy and what it means. We will see that even though there is a great deal of variety in the early Church there was also a great sense of theological unity in the central *kerygma*, the gospel message. We will also look at the documents found in the Nag Hammadi codices.⁵ Though a thorough description will be impossible, I will offer some general characteristics that can be weighed against the traditional teachings of the Church. Through this we will be able to see some of the cultural environment in which the Church was formed and the development of the Church's understanding of orthodoxy. This will lead us to an examination of the way the canon was developed and how we as Christians can have faith that what we have in the Bible is the complete and authoritative revelation of God.

II. ORTHODOXY VS. HERESY

Christianity today is a multifaceted phenomenon. We have many different kinds of churches from Baptists to Lutherans, from Greek Orthodox to Roman Catholic. When viewed from outside other traditions broadly called "Christian" would be included, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon) and the Unification Church of Sun Yung Moon. Although we on the inside rightly reject these groups as in any way reflective of Christianity as a whole, others perceive

5. A *codex* (plural *codices*) is a volume formed from handwritten pages.

them in the same light as they would us. We need to realize that the terms *heresy* and *orthodoxy* only have meaning within an established community. Certainly there are gradations of difference between these communities. All different denominations exist because there are particular nuances. Nevertheless, Free Will Baptists do not believe that we are the only Christian community. We may be different from conservative Methodists and Presbyterians, but we affirm many of the same doctrinal beliefs regarding the person of the Father and the Son and the nature of salvation by grace.

The situation in the early Church was quite similar. When we look back today at the theological variety of the period we are sometimes amazed at the array of different ideas then present. Most persons today, scholars included, refuse to use the categories erected by the Church itself for the purpose of self-definition and identification, categories that served to define true Christianity and distinguish it from movements that did not deserve recognition as Christian. They prefer instead to speak broadly and inclusively of the varieties of theological expression as "Christian." This is the equivalent of arguing today that it is an acceptable Christian belief that Jesus was a created being, not so much unlike us, because that is what the Mormons believe. We would certainly object, but this is exactly what is happening in *The Da Vinci Code*, and it is also the methodology that is creeping into some studies of the early Church.

Elaine Pagels and Bart Ehrman are two modern writers who in several works have sought to demonstrate the width of Christian belief in the early centuries.⁶ Such scholars are building upon a tradition begun by

6. Bart Ehrman and Elaine Pagels have been chosen among several authors because they have both penned numerous works dealing with this issue and have been interviewed for various television programs in relation to *The Da Vinci Code*. Ehrman has published his work in both scholarly and popular forms. See his *Peter, Paul and Mary Magdalene: The Followers of Jesus Christ in History and Legend* (London: Oxford University Press, 2006); *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005); *The Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004). Elaine Pagels displays this sentiment throughout the following works: *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975); *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973); *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House, 1979); *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Vintage, 1989); *Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas* (New York: Random House, 2003); "Visions, Appearances and Apostolic Authority: Gnostic and Orthodox Traditions," in *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas*, ed. B. Aland (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 415-430; "The Demiurge and his Archons: A Gnostic View of the Bishop and Presbyters?" *Harvard Theological Review* 69:3-4 (1976), 301-324; "Gnostic and Orthodox Views of Christ's Passion: Paradigms for the Christian's Response to Persecution?" in *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, ed. B. Layton (Leiden: Brill Academic, 1979), 1:262-83.

Walter Bauer, who in 1934 argued that “certain manifestations of Christian life and thought that the authors of the church renounce as ‘heresies’ originally had not been such at all, but, at least here and there, were the only forms of the new religion; that is, for those regions, they were simply ‘Christianity.’”⁷ Pagels is a wonderful scholar and has done a great deal to help us gain an understanding of early Christian heresies such as Gnosticism. Her problem is not in her scholarly work but in the application of it. She like Bauer before her is seeking to widen the scope of Christianity to include those individuals the Church so desperately sought to keep out.

The Church did not embrace difference or celebrate diversity, especially when it came to theology. Instead, it vigorously fought against those who it felt were misstating the message of salvation. They understood the issue not as a sideline debate but as a matter of eternal significance. From its earliest days the Church, even though there was not an established statement of belief, clearly held to a common agreement in theology regarding God, Jesus, and the Church’s role in the world. They expressed this through the terms they used: *orthodoxy*, meaning ‘straight teaching,’ and *heresy*, meaning ‘other.’

Relatively unstructured forms of de facto creedal teaching may even be found in Scripture. The Church had always been a believing, confessing, and preaching community. As such it emphasized the message of salvation that was proclaimed and understood by Christians: that faith in Christ was faith in the *kerygma*, the gospel preached by the community. Jude refers to the “faith delivered to the saints.” 2 Timothy uses the terms “model of sound words” and “healthy doctrine.” 1 Timothy refers to “the deposit” and Hebrews to “the confession.” Throughout his epistles we see especially Paul’s reference to “the gospel” as that which was taught

7. Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), xxii. Bauer argues in this work that many theological concepts referred to early in Church history as “heresy” were originally widely held in the earliest forms of Christianity. His primary thesis is that what would later be called “orthodoxy” and “heresy” originally co-existed together until the church at Rome came to have the capacity to enforce its perspective. Bauer argues that some examples of original, alternate Christianities would have lacked belief in the Trinity and would have taught salvation by the works of the Jewish law. This appears to be the basic argument followed by Brown in his novel. Although many modern New Testament scholars have followed Bauer (some of whom are mentioned in this paper), his view is not without strong opposition. For a well-reasoned response from an Evangelical scholar see I. H. Marshall, “Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earlier Christianity,” *Themelios* 2.1 (September, 1976): 5-14. For a more thorough discussion of the impact and analysis of Bauer’s views see the appendix of Bauer’s abovementioned work written by G. Strecker and R. A. Kraft, 286-316.

and must be believed. In preaching the apostles emphasized not the act but the substance of what was preached. We see examples which emphasize the theological nature of such preaching in Peter's sermon in Acts 3:11-26, Stephen's sermon in Acts 7:1-60, and Paul's description of his preaching in 1 Corinthians 15:3-11.

By the second century the apostolic tradition had come under fire by those viewed as outside the community, and therefore a host of writings developed against heretical ideas. The authors of the second century known as the apologists argued for Christianity on two fronts: against the Roman worldview and against aberrant Christian teaching. In doing so they came to refer to the teaching of the Church as the "canon of truth" or the "rule of faith."⁸ The early Church understood itself to be bound by faith in the story of salvation in Jesus the Christ. By the end of the second century Irenaeus, in arguing against the heretics, could say that

the Church, although scattered throughout the whole world as far as the limits of the earth, has received from the Apostles and their disciples, handed down, its faith in one God the Father almighty, who made the heaven and the earth and the seas and all the things in them; and in one Christ Jesus the Son of God, who was made flesh for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who through the prophets proclaimed the saving dispensations, and the coming, and the birth from the Virgin, and the suffering, and the rising again from the dead, and the incarnate taking up into the heavens of the beloved Christ Jesus our Lord, and his second coming from the heavens in the glory of the Father to sum up all things and to raise up all flesh of all humanity, so that ... he may make a just judgment among all men, sending into everlasting fire the spiritual powers of evil and the angels who transgressed and fell into rebellion, and the impious ... among men, but upon the just ... bestowing life and immortality and securing to them everlasting glory.⁹

8. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.10.1-2. For comment on this usage see R.P.C. Hansen, *Tradition in the Early Church* (London: S C M, 1962), chapter 3. Irenaeus also uses the word tradition to identify the universal character of theological belief. Tertullian follows Irenaeus in this regard and speaks often of the "rule" or "rule of faith"; see his *The Prescription Against Heretics*, 13.1 and 13.36.

9. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.10.1.

Owing to the development of such concepts and the desire for the Church to preserve the tradition of the Apostle's teaching we have an eventual movement during the third century to teach the faithful such theological ideas in preparation for baptism. This leads to the eventual development of full-fledged local creeds in the third century and finally to creeds generally accepted by all at Nicea in the early fourth century.¹⁰

Brown's assertion that Jesus was declared to be fully divine at the Council of Nicea in 325 is patently absurd.¹¹ Although the Council of Nicea did occur in 325 and was specifically called by Constantine, its purpose was to defend the traditional belief that Jesus was fully God against a group of people called Arians who were saying that Jesus was a being created by God like an angel. The Church was simply responding to a dangerous new teaching by affirming what it had always believed about Jesus. The earliest writings of the Christian Church (the letters of the apostle Paul) clearly refer to Jesus as divine and equal to God. The Church prayed to Jesus and baptized in the name of Jesus, and the earliest Christian confession was "Jesus is LORD." This confession is important because the term "LORD," as the Septuagint's translation of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton,¹² was seen as a title that only God could hold.

Even though there were many different ideas about Christ current at the time of the Church's development, the community of faith was always quick to assert that there was a true tradition that was preserved in its preaching of the gospel. We can see then that although the image of diversity found in Brown's book is not necessarily incorrect, the idea that contrary ideas were accepted by the Church is not. They were convinced that the heretics were something essentially different and taught something "other" than what was generally accepted. We would do better to take their word over that of modern historians and novelists.

III. THE NAG HAMMADI CODICES

Brown's novel implies that many of his ideas, especially those related to Mary Magdalene and the worship of the sacred feminine, are taken

10. For a good discussion of creedal development and its relationship to catechesis in preparation for baptism see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay, 1972), 30-52.

11. Even if there were any truth to the idea that bishops were voting on Jesus' divinity at Nicea, the statement that it was a "relatively close vote, at that" (Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 233) is laughable since of the 318 bishops reported to have been present at Nicea we know of only 2 persons who sided with Arius in his heretical teaching.

12. The four-consonant, sacred name for God in Hebrew.

from the Dead Sea Scrolls. This is an error. In fact, the majority of texts found in the Dead Sea Scrolls predate Christ; and, although they are important for our understanding of intertestamental Judaism, they say nothing at all about Jesus. Instead the ideas which Brown refers to may be found in a collection of documents discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945. In that year an Arab peasant named Muhammad Ali al-Samman found a large earthen pot while digging for fertilizer. He broke the pot hoping that it contained treasure but found only a collection of old documents and papyri. He took these home and deposited them by the fire for his mother to use as kindling. Through a story of murder and chance worthy of a Dan Brown novel, the documents eventually made their way to the black market and became the source of scholarly argument. It turns out that the peasant had actually discovered a treasure, a collection of manuscripts and documents long thought lost to the world. What he unearthed was a trove of fifty-two texts, Coptic translations of Greek originals written between the second and fourth centuries. The cache of pseudepigraphal gospels and spiritual writings seems to have been buried sometime during the early part of the fourth or fifth century.

This discovery was considered an important find because of the nature of what was found. Many of the names of the writings were known to historians and theologians through the writings of the apologists who argued against them, but little more was known about how they understood the person and work of Christ. The texts belonged to a group of people known as Gnostics, from the Greek word *gnosis* meaning "knowledge." Gnosticism as a movement came to fruition during the second century. Although there were many varieties, including Jewish and Platonic Gnosticism, these groups taught that salvation could be attained only through coming to understand the true spiritual nature of what it is to be human. The Gnostic worldview was rigidly dualist, teaching that spirit was good and matter was evil. Humans were originally spirits that descended from the original being of spirit and had "fallen," becoming trapped in matter. Judaism was the worship of a false god who was identified with the evil creator god who had conceived the evil matter.

In the "Christian" form of Gnosticism Jesus was the divine being who was sent to redeem humanity from matter. He sought to show us God by showing us ourselves. The texts point to the need of knowing one's self in order to receive salvation.¹³ As a consequence of this, Gnosticism seems to be the source of one particular early heresy known

13. Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 119-141.

as Docetism which taught that Jesus did not have a true human body.¹⁴ He was merely a spirit, and it only seemed as if He died on the cross. The crucifixion is not highlighted in Gnostic documents since it was Christ's *teaching* that laid out the manner of salvation. This is most clearly demonstrated in the *Gospel of Thomas* which is merely a collection of Jesus' sayings without any passion narrative.

Some of these Gnostic documents from Nag Hammadi serve as a source for some of the ideas of the sacred feminine that are developed in Brown's work.¹⁵ The issue of gender in the documents should be faced in two ways: first, by looking at the way some of the texts speak of a feminine aspect of God, and second, by looking at the role of Mary Magdelene in some of the documents.

The Feminine Aspect of God in Nag Hammadi Texts

Pagels has pushed a feminine reading of these documents, and of others from early Christianity, to argue that the early Church was not always patriarchal in its structure or in its thought about God. Jewish and later Christian traditions prefer to speak of God in monistic and masculine terminology but many of the Gnostic texts instead argue that God is a dyad who embraces both masculine and feminine elements.¹⁶ Other Gnostic texts speak of the Holy Spirit as feminine in form, praising "the Father, the Mother and the Son."¹⁷ We see in these cases the importation of the dualist cosmogonies of Persian ideas as well as some rather graphic images that seem more in line with stories of the Greco-Roman pantheon of gods.

14. For Docetic documents in the Gnostic tradition see *The Apocalypse of Peter* and *Acts of John* in J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in English Translation*, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1994); and *Second Treatise of the Great Seth* in J. M. Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*, 4th rev. ed. (Leiden: Brill Academic, 1997). They may also be found online at <http://www.gnosis.org>.

15. It should be noted that Gnosticism was far from homogeneous in its beliefs and that much of the material in the documents found at Nag Hammadi is contradictory, indicating a shifting, amorphous type of religious expression even in the texts used by the Gnostics themselves.

16. Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 49.

17. Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*, 50-56, citing *Great Announcement*, *Apocryphon of John*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Thunder, Perfect Mind*, and the *Gospel of Philip*. All of these except *Great Announcement* are available in J. M. Robinson, ed., *Nag Hammadi Library in English*. *Great Announcement* is a fragment, preserved only in Greek and Latin by Hippolytus, *Philosophoumena* (Paris: no publisher, 1860), Book VII:243-67.

Yet through all of these discussions there is nothing even in these heretical texts that would point toward Brown's concept of actual worship of a sacred feminine, whether sexually conceived or not. The language is philosophical and not liturgical. In addition, most Gnostics were radically ascetic and would have looked down upon the physicality of any worship that would have included the sexual activities Brown hints at in his work.

It should also be noted that even in orthodox Christian communities there has been at times a willingness to associate feminine aspects with God. Early Syrian Christianity notably imagined the Holy Spirit as feminine, but this seems to have had more to do with the fact that the Syriac term for the spirit, *ruah*, is grammatically feminine.¹⁸ Yet even in the Old Testament mothering images are used to describe God's relationship to Israel.¹⁹ The orthodox Church always seems to have held God to be spirit and therefore above any human attributes of sexuality, while generally preferring a masculine gender owing to the overwhelming majority of masculine images and terms found in Scripture.

The Role of Mary Magdalene in Nag Hammadi Texts

Mary Magdalene does come up often in the texts found at Nag Hammadi. Since she plays such a central role in Brown's hypothesis it will serve us to look briefly at what can be found. Most of the texts that mention her specifically identify her as a disciple of Christ that had a special relationship with Him and received knowledge that was not communicated to the other disciples. It is not clear why Mary Magdalene was chosen by the Gnostic community to be viewed as the recipient of this special teaching of their community. Perhaps like other persons who figure prominently in the accounts (James and Thomas) little is known about their Christian exploits outside the Bible and therefore it would be more difficult to counter such claims, while at the same time claiming some semblance of authority through the use of their names.

So what do we know about Mary Magdalene? She was a follower of Jesus out of whom Jesus had cast seven demons.²⁰ We know that she and other women traveled often with Jesus and His disciples and provided

18. Susan Ashbrook-Harvey, "Women in the Syrian Tradition: Holy Images," *St. Nina Quarterly* 2 (Summer, 1998): 69-80.

19. For example see God imaged as a midwife in Psalm 22:9-10; God as mother (giving birth) in Deuteronomy 32:18-19 and (caring) in Isaiah 66:13. One should note that these passages are not ontological but relational in nature.

20. Luke 8:2.

for financial and other needs of Jesus and the twelve.²¹ She was present at the crucifixion,²² heard the announcement of His resurrection by the angels²³ and was the first to see the risen Lord.²⁴ Because of her announcement of the Lord's resurrection she was sometimes called the "apostle to the apostles." She evidently died in the area of Ephesus in Asia Minor.²⁵ The confusion of Mary Magdelene with Mary of Bethany, contra Brown, was not a deliberate attempt to discredit her by the Church but a mistake made by Gregory I, Pope at Rome in the last part of the sixth century.²⁶ Mary Magdelene's connection to Jesus was that of a follower and not a partner. She was a true believer who was devoted to Jesus as her Lord and Savior.

The basis for Brown's argument that there was a sexual relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdelene is found in a section of the *Gospel of Phillip* which reads,

The companion of the (Savior is) Mary Magdelene. (But Christ loved) her more than (all) the disciples and used to kiss her (often) on the (mouth). The rest of (the disciples were offended by it. ...) They said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?' The Savior answered and said to them, "Why do I not love you as (I love) her?"²⁷

Notice that in the text the phrase "used to kiss her (often) on the (mouth)" is damaged and the words "often" and "mouth" are missing from the text and have been supplied by the editors. Although these words may be the best reading, they are not required. Second, the passage occurs in a context of debate over who is the guardian of the true revelation of God. In this text and in others like it the imagery used is to be interpreted spiritually and not physically, as Karen King argues.²⁸

21. Luke 8:1-3.

22. John 19:25

23. Luke 24:10.

24. John 20:14-8.

25. The first reference to Mary as "apostle to the apostles" seems to have occurred in the second-century Church father Hippolytus (*Commentary on the Song of Songs*, 24-26). This title is repeated by Ambrose (*Exposition of the Christian Faith*, 2.14) and Augustine (Tractate 121.1-4; *Exposition on the Book of Psalms* 69.23), who see her as a new "Eve." In this way the idea entered into the Western theological tradition.

26. Gregory the Great, *Homily 33*, PL LXXVI, col. 1239, in J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia cursus completus*, Series Latina (London: Chadwyck & Healey, 1944-55).

27. *Gospel of Philip* 63.32-64.5, in J. M. Robinson, ed., *Nag Hammadi Library in English*.

28. Karen King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2003).

Mary in the text is serving as a type for the community of Gnostics and Peter as a type of the orthodox Church. In this way the text is not making claims about a sexual relationship between Mary and Jesus but saying that the revelation given to Mary was superior to that which was given to Peter.²⁹ Finally, the *Gospel of Philip* uses the imagery of kissing to indicate the receipt of special knowledge, and another passage implies that the symbolic referent of the kiss is spiritual understanding. "For it is by a kiss that the perfect conceive and give birth. For this reason we also kiss one another. We receive conception from the grace which is in one another."³⁰ It is also worth noting that the passage just quoted implies not only Jesus' kissing of the male disciples but the Christians' kissing of one another.³¹

Another reason given by Brown for the likelihood that Jesus and Mary shared a sexual relationship was the Jewish emphasis upon marriage and child rearing.³² The problem with this view is that there is no evidence anywhere, even in these heterodox writings, that Jesus was ever married. First, these communities held to a Gnostic cosmogony that saw matter as evil, and they often lived very ascetic lifestyles that included celibacy. It would be an odd thing for them to have Jesus physically connected to Mary in any way, especially since many of them did not even believe that Jesus had an actual body.³³ Second, although the necessity for rabbis to be married is debated for the period of time in which Jesus lived, Jesus was not a rabbi and "did not portray himself as one."³⁴ There was also clear precedent from His time period for Jewish men living a celibate lifestyle: the Qumran community encouraged celibacy among its members and neither does John the Baptist appear to have been married.

As Bock has also noted, Jesus' call to a celibate life of singleness for the sake of the kingdom in Matthew 19:10-12 seems to be drawn from His

29. Darrell Bock, *Breaking the Da Vinci Code* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 147.

30. *Gospel of Philip*, 58:30-59:6.

31. Although this is clearly different from the biblical commands to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16, 1 Cor. 16:20, 2 Cor. 13:12, 1 Thess. 5:26) I cannot help but wonder if the cultural aspects of the kiss play into the spiritual character of the act as envisioned by the author of the *Gospel of Philip* and other Gnostic documents.

32. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 245.

33. The view that Jesus did not have a human body is called Docetism and was a heretical view particularly associated with Gnostic communities. It was a very early heresy as indicated by 1 John 4:2 and 2 John 7. It was also vehemently opposed by the early Church fathers. See Ignatius, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans*, 3-5; and, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I.XII; II.IV.

34. Bock, 37.

own personal situation.³⁵ Jesus Himself encourages His followers to consider if they have been gifted with the ability to live unmarried (Matt. 19:11-12). It would have been very strange for Jesus to have said this if He Himself had been married.³⁶ The fact that Paul followed in the tradition of Jesus also encourages celibacy (1 Cor. 7:7-9).

What we find in the Nag Hammadi codices is a tradition clearly viewed by the early Church as outside the bounds of orthodoxy. The Gnostic community itself felt the tension and sought to demonstrate the superiority of their understanding against that of the Church through the use of Mary Magdalene and others like her. Far from lending credence to Brown's theory, the writings themselves demonstrate not a sexual relationship but a quest for the recognition of an alternate tradition that had been rejected by the Church as heretical. What we see in the Nag Hammadi writings is similar to what Dan Brown has done in his novel. Just like him, the Gnostics were seeking to create an alternate history that was not there in order to bolster their own position in society.

IV. CANON

The question of who held the true revelation of God was answered by the orthodox Church through the establishment and codification of the canon of New Testament writings.

Dan Brown seeks to throw out Scripture by arguing that it was

the product of man, my dear. Not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book. ... More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John among them.

35. *Ibid.*, 38.

36. At the same time, Jesus affirms marriage between a man and a woman as a wonderful gift of God that has as its origin the creation of the original parents (Matt. 19:4-6). His celebration and miraculous intervention at Cana (John 2:1-11) suggest that, as the *Book of Common Prayer* puts it, He "adorned and beautified with His presence" the "holy estate of matrimony." By extension Jesus' blessing of the children also validates marriage and the home (Matt. 19: 13-15). For this reason, I do not believe that there is any theological reason why Jesus had to remain unmarried. Nevertheless, all indications are that He was single His entire life.

... The fundamental irony of Christianity! The Bible, as we know it today, was collated by the pagan Roman emperor Constantine the Great.³⁷

Dan Brown's assertions are of course baseless when seen from the light of history, but they are informed by several pseudo-historical investigations of Christ and Scripture by authors, like Richard Rubenstein, who clearly have an axe to grind.³⁸

Contra Brown, scholars of canonical studies like MacDonald, Metzger, and Abraham all point to the fact that even though there was some discussion, the large majority of New Testament writings that appear in the canon were accepted without question.³⁹ The works referred to by Brown were never broadly accepted in the Church even when one includes various groups later deemed heretical. Robert Grant counters Brown's assertions well by arguing that the New Testament canon was

not the product of official assemblies or even of the studies of a few theologians. It reflects and expresses the ideal self-understanding of a whole religious movement which, in spite of temporal, geographical, and even ideological differences, could finally be united in accepting these 27 diverse documents as expressing the meaning of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and to his church.⁴⁰

The early Christians sensed that God had spoken anew to His people in the person of Christ. This seems to have sharpened the focus on His words and actions. From the beginning, oral traditions of the teachings of Jesus and accounts of His passion and resurrection circulated in communities. Some seem to have been written down very early, but the tradition remained primarily oral for several years. Papias, speaking

37. Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, 231.

38. Richard E. Rubenstein, *When Jesus Became God: The Epic Fight over Christ's Divinity in the Last Days of Rome* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999).

39. Lee MacDonald, *The Formation of the Christian New Testament Canon* (New York: Hendrickson, 1995); William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Bruce Metzger, *Canon of the New Testament: Its Origin, Development and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987). Metzger argues that twenty of the twenty-seven books found in our current New Testament canon were accepted without serious discussion.

40. Robert M. Grant, *A Historical Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), 10.

between A.D. 120 and 140 said that he still preferred the oral traditions to the written Gospels of Matthew and Mark.⁴¹

Once the Gospels came to be written down they were able to be used more readily. We see many of the New Testament writings already being used as Scripture in the early second century. Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 clearly equates the words of Jesus with Scripture, and Peter apparently classes Paul's letters with "the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16). This tendency continued with the early fathers. As certain New Testament writings came to function as Scripture in the liturgical and catechetical function of the Church we see a clear assertion that the writings thus used are authoritative and placed on the level with the Old Testament even if there is still no discussion of a concept of canon.⁴²

The impetus for the development of a canon was found in the heresies that developed in the second century. Marcion and his Gnostic movement in Rome used a New Testament canon that consisted of an edited Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline epistles. The Montanists, who developed in Phrygia, sought to expand the concept of revelation by asserting that the Holy Spirit's activity in their community superseded the New Testament writings. Faced with both of these groups the Church was forced to make explicit what had heretofore been an implicit agreement.⁴³ Up until this time there had been a general agreement that the four Gospels and the Pauline epistles were canonical. Some of the other books were debated, but the movement of the Gnostics to restrict the canon and that of the Montanists to expand it forced the Church to begin to deal with this issue.

Origen (184-235) seems to have established certain precedents for this discussion. In his writings he argues that the books which we traditionally accept as canonical (with the exception of James, Jude, 2 Peter and 2, 3 John) were accepted without question. Of course he also includes 1 and 2 Clement. He notes that 2 Peter and 2, 3 John were accepted with

41. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39.17.

42. 2 *Clement* (A.D. 120-140) refers to the books and the apostles as Scripture. The *Epistle of Barnabas* (A.D. 90-130) quotes the sayings of Jesus from the Gospels as equivalent to the Old Testament through its use of "it is written." Justin argues that the Gospels were the memoirs of the apostles and were used to establish doctrine (*Dialogue with Trypho*). The *Letter of Ptolemy to Flora* (A.D. 160) seeks to show the words of the Savior as Scripture which correctly interprets or in this case reinterprets the Old Testament.

43. The concept of development in the early Church, whether regarding theology or canon, can raise questions (and eyebrows) in the minds of evangelical Christians. For an examination of the scholarly opinions regarding such development see D. Jeffrey Bingham, "Development and Diversity in Early Christianity," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 49:1 (March, 2006): 45-66.

some question by the Church and that James and Jude were used as Scripture even though not all churches had copies of their letters. Origen also refers to *Barnabas*, *Hermas*, and *Didache* as considered by some, but he does not refer to them as Scripture.

Eusebius, at the end of the third century, categorized and really finalized the collection of the canon in his *Ecclesiastical History*. He made use of Origen's work and established four principles which he argued the Church had used to determine whether a writing should be considered canonical. These four qualifications were apostolicity, orthodoxy, use, and geographical spread. The criterion of apostolicity meant that in order for a text to be canonical it had to come from an apostle or a close associate of an apostle.⁴⁴ This line of descent, if it could be corroborated, would raise the value of the content of the document and mean that it was more likely to be authoritatively binding on the community of the faithful. Any book which was considered part of the canon also had to present orthodox teaching. The assumption was that if a document was legitimate its teaching would be in accord with the accepted teachings of the apostles as held by the Church. The way in which a document was used was also important: there had to be a tradition of reading and preaching from the document in the local congregations. Only books used in this way in churches were considered. There were notable, orthodox works like the *Didache* and *The Shepherd of Hermas* which were widely read by Christians in the early Church but were not seen as canonical because they were not used broadly in churches in this way. Finally, the early Christians expected that if God wished for a certain document to be included in the canon of the New Testament that He would insure that most of the churches from different parts of the world would be aware of the document and make use of it in their services. All these criteria—apostolicity, orthodoxy, use and geographical spread—had contributed to determining what books had formed the New Testament canon.

Eusebius then developed three categories for his discussion of the writings that might be considered Scripture by some. These he classified as the undisputed, the disputed, and the spurious. He listed the undisputed texts as the four Gospels, Acts, fourteen epistles of Paul (he included Hebrews), 1 Peter, 1 John, and Revelation.⁴⁵ In the disputed category

44. For example, even though the Gospels of Mark and Luke were not written by apostles, Mark was associated with the ministry of Peter and Luke with Paul. Therefore their Gospels were viewed as the gospel preached by Peter and Paul respectively. Paul, though not one of the twelve apostles called by Jesus, was widely recognized as an apostle and his writings were accorded the same respect.

45. There is some question as to his use of Revelation at this point.

he included James, Jude, 2 Peter, 2, 3 John. He argued that these were known and used by most but not universally. In the spurious category, Eusebius placed the *Acts of Paul*, *Hermas*, the *Apocalypse of Peter* and the *Didache*. Eusebius claimed that his list was one that corresponded to the usage of the Christian Church across the world. Some notable, spurious works were left out because they were never accepted by the orthodox. Of these, Eusebius noted a special category of books that he claimed did not even deserve to be called spurious because they were unorthodox and were by nature impious forgeries of the heretics. Most likely, the works thus referenced would include documents like those found at Nag Hammadi and used by Dan Brown in his work.

By the time of Eusebius, even though there was some variety, there was a great deal of common agreement as to the books that had provisionally been established as the New Testament canon. Certainly by the time of Athanasius, before the end of the fourth century, the contents of the canon were clear to all; he included in his festal letter a list of the authoritative books which he referred to as "canon"; the list is identical to the books we have today in our New Testament.⁴⁶

Contrary to Brown, the Council of Nicea did nothing to officially determine the canon of the New Testament. The documents from that council do not mention the books of the New Testament in this way at all. Instead, the development of the canon had been a grass-roots acceptance of books and collections of books that were used in the churches. The movement in developing a canon was from the ground up rather than a decree from the top down. The first non-local council to make a complete list of the canon would not be held until the Council of Trent in 1546, and this was in large part to highlight the Roman Catholic acceptance of the deutero-canonical books (the Apocrypha) over against the Protestant rejection of them.

Once again the history of the Church can serve as a corrective to the "history" of the modern period which, with its desire to be as inclusive as possible, only muddies the waters in order to posit a revisionist history of conspiracy and power that was largely absent from the process of canonical development.

V. CONCLUSION

In the end Dan Brown and his work will most likely be relegated to yard sales and the dusty shelves of used book stores. What is more

46. Athanasius, *Festal Letter* (A.D. 367).

troubling about this phenomenon is the perception of history that has been demonstrated by the reception of this work in popular culture. Under such influences history and the record it leaves are no longer studied on their own merits in their own voices. Instead, historical evidence is interpreted and meaning is assigned by the modern reader. The only control is the imagination of the interpreter. This might be excusable for a novelist, but we see historians of the Church and theologians making use of the same or similar interpretive methods. We must return in our methodology to letting the records speak for themselves. After all, the historical record preserves the story of real people and real events. They were the first to see and evaluate these texts from within their own tradition, and they saw far more clearly than we could hope to see. We should not be indifferent to their voices, which were never lost but were preserved so that history might not repeat itself. As noted New Testament commentator Ray Brown once commented in a review of one of Pagel's early books, Gnosticism is "the rubbish of the second century"; he added that it is "still rubbish."⁴⁷

Our churches today are also faced with a sense of alienation in the world and disassociation from the rich heritage and traditions of the past. The history of the Church is our history, and it is shameful that we do not draw more heavily upon it. The Spirit at work in us is the same Spirit that invigorated the earliest propounders and defenders of the gospel message. It is my hope that we can respond as they did with one united voice of belief.

Once again the Church is faced with a battle. Not with Dan Brown but with the worldview that sees works like his as persuasive as the historical documents themselves. If Brown is right in his assertion that history belongs to the victors, then this is a battle we can ill afford to lose.⁴⁸

47. Raymond E. Brown, "The Gnostic Gospels," *The New York Times Book Review*, January 20, 1980, 3.

48. Most of the writings of the Church Fathers living and working before A.D. 325, referred to in this paper, may be found in A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., American reprint edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971-75); and of those after 325 in P. Schaff, ed., *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 28 vols., American reprint edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971-76). They may also be found online at <http://www.ccel.org>.

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Clint Morgan

Islam 101: Fundamentals of the Islamic Faith

Within days after “9/11” the two words *Islam* and *terrorists* were forcefully introduced into our day-to-day conversations. They were so intertwined that to many they became interchangeable, though many Muslim leaders were adamant that Islam is a belief system that calls for peace. To many observers, however, “9/11” showed an angry, vengeful side of the religion. That apocalyptic day in history brought the non-Muslim world to sense that this was a religion to be reckoned with.

Consequently, we find ourselves asking many soul-stirring questions, such as: What exactly is this Islamic religion all about? Who are these people we know as Muslims? How can this “religion of peace” bring some of its faithful to take their own lives, willfully and joyfully, in order to destroy the “infidels,” meaning those who do not embrace Islam? Do they worship the same God as Christians? Do they believe in Jesus the same way Christians do? These questions and many more need to be explored if we are to face the challenge of effectively sharing our faith with those who embrace Islam.

It is impossible, in this article, to respond to every issue that might be raised in such a discussion. Within the framework of the limitations imposed, the purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to heighten the awareness of the reader to some of the fundamentals of the Islamic faith; and (2) to help prepare the reader to engage in meaningful and productive discussions with Muslims.

With these objectives before us we move on to explore this religion that is awakening the fascination of some and the consternation of others.

Islam and Christianity: Are They One and The Same?

The sum and substance of Islam is revealed in an Arabic phrase repeated by millions of people every day: *La ilaha illa Allah, Muhammad rasul Allah*—“There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is Allah’s Apostle.” The Quran, the Muslim holy book, has stated this truth and for a Muslim that means it is settled.¹ The Quran is the final word from Allah

1. The Holy Book of Islam may alternately be spelled *Koran*, *Qur’an*, or *Quran*.

and supersedes any and all previous revelation. It was written to all mankind and protected from all error by Allah himself.

From a different perspective, the essence and purpose of Christianity are grounded in the belief that there is one true and living God and that Jesus Christ, His Son, came to earth to bring salvation to all who will trust in Him as their personal Savior. These truths are presented in the Bible, which evangelical Christians hold to be the inspired word of God and without error. It is obvious, then, that Muslims and Christians, although they share a number of beliefs in common, are not building on the same theological underpinnings.

I. A BRIEF HISTORY OF ISLAM

Muslims, like Jews and Christians, trace their roots back to Adam as humans and to Abraham as people of faith. Their recorded history takes them to Abraham through Ishmael. Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn son through Hagar, who was herself a servant of Egyptian parentage.

Islam, Christianity, and Judaism all chronicle this story in much the same way up to the point where Sarah, Abraham's wife, sent her servant Hagar away with the son that had become a point of contention between the two women. From this juncture Islam diverges from Judaism and Christianity and offers an extended description of miracles of survival and of Allah's direction for the mother and her son. The two would follow a course charted by Allah that would lead them to the city of Mecca in the Arabian Peninsula. This city would eventually occupy center stage for the Islamic movement and become one of the most important sites to the Muslim people.²

Islam is a world religion; its theology and ethics were shaped by a man named Muhammad. He was born in Mecca, a city in modern-day Saudi Arabia, around A.D. 569. His grandfather gave him the name Muhammad, which means "the praised one." Some of the tradition states that a host of angels were there at his birth and that he was born ceremonially clean, circumcised, and with his umbilical cord already clipped.³ He was orphaned at the age of six and in due time would be entrusted to the care of his paternal uncle.

Muhammad grew up in humble surroundings, having to work very hard. In his youth he served his neighbors as a trustworthy shepherd. He

2. John L. Esposito, *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.

3. Tor Andrae, *Mohammad, the Man and His Faith*, trans. Theophil Minzil (NY: Harper and Row, 1955), 35.

would eventually become a merchant and developed a reputation as a man of integrity and honesty. Such facts as these are very important to Muslims.

His business dealings brought him into contact with a woman named Khadija. Although she was fifteen years older than Muhammad he married her, and they had six children, two sons who died at birth and four daughters. Khadija died after twenty-five years of marriage to the prophet. After her death he would go on to marry thirteen women and have two concubines.

He was known to go to the mountains to spend time in solitude and meditation. During one of his times of isolation he reported that the angel Gabriel appeared to him and demanded that he read from the book that was offered him. However, Muhammad could not do so, for he was illiterate,⁴ and he informed Gabriel of his limitations. At this time he received his first revelation from Allah; this became the Quran. According to Muhammad's account of this event he miraculously received the ability to read and was able to understand the pronouncements given.

Following this revelation Muhammad told Khadija what had occurred; she assured him that he was a good man and that Allah would not lead him astray. It is also said that he went to his cousin Waraqa, who was a Christian, to share the experience. Waraqa reportedly confirmed Muhammad's call from Allah.⁵ He also predicted that Muhammad would suffer persecution for preaching this new revelation.

This prophecy had also been given once when Muhammad was a young man traveling with a caravan in Syria. A monk named Buhaira foresaw Muhammad as the "final prophet about whom all the previous Scriptures had prophesied." The man warned Muhammad's uncle to safeguard the young man from the Jews, who if they had known who he was would have certainly sought to do him harm.⁶

After the first revelation there was a period of silence of about three years. Muhammad thought that God had abandoned him, and this caused him to fall into great depression; some say he even contemplated suicide.⁷ Then the messages began again and would continue for a period of about twenty-three years.

4. This point is debated by some Islamic scholars.

5. Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah (The Life of Muhammad)*, trans. A. Guillaume (NY: Oxford University Press, 1980), 106.

6. *Ibid.*, 81.

7. Norman L. Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002),

Muhammad recognized both Christianity and Judaism as religions based on truth. However, he contended that they were both guilty of falsifying the revelation they had received. Therefore Allah in his great wisdom gave the truth to Muhammad by way of the angel Gabriel. This truth is the final revelation of Allah and must be received by all men.

The Prophet Muhammad began sharing his message with his family and friends. Growth was very slow in the beginning but would eventually increase and spread beyond Mecca, whose citizens were for the most part animists. They believed in a plurality of gods with one named 'Allah' who was considered to be the supreme spiritual being. Muhammad's monotheism and doctrine of a final judgment presented a message they were not prepared to receive.

As a result of this rejection a significant persecution broke out against Muslims living in Mecca. This forced Muhammad to take his band of followers about two hundred miles away to the city of Medina. There the reception was different: the people were predisposed towards monotheism because of the influence of Judaism in that area.

Muhammad called this new faith "Islam," which means "submission." The followers would be known as Muslims, literally "those who submit" to Allah and follow Muhammad. According to James Garlow the etymology of the word *Islam* leads us back to an Arabic word that referred to "the strength, courage, and tenacity of a desert warrior willing to fight to the death for the sake of his tribe." Over time, the term came to mean "submission." There is no substantial proof that it means "peace," as some contemporary Muslims like to claim.⁸

Muhammad set up his first *masjid* (mosque: place for ritual prostration) in the city of Medina. It became a place of worship, meditation, and learning, with social and intellectual significance for those who followed the Prophet.⁹ The center room of a mosque was an open space with no chairs or benches. The faithful were called to gather there with small prayer rugs on which they would kneel to say their prayers. The mosque also served as a base camp from which Muhammad would act as judge, ruler, sage, military strategist, and prophet.

Even more important, the mosque became the central gathering site for the *umma* (community of believers). The *umma* is an essential element of the Muslim worldview, implying the relationships and responsibilities that Muslims have to all those of the faith. This is the community of the brotherhood of Islam whose morality, manners, and institutions find

8. James Garlow, *A Christian's Response to Islam* (Tulsa: River Oak Publishing, 1984), 50.

9. Esposito, 36.

their legitimacy in the Quran and the Hadith (a collection of Islamic traditions to be described below).¹⁰

In the early years of the movement the Islamic doctrines were passed on in small groups led by tutors. Over time *madrasas* (schools, educational centers) were established to inculcate the beliefs and practices in the minds of young Muslims. Today there are thousands of these *madrasas* throughout the world. In a number of cases they have become centers promoting fundamental teachings about the Islamic faith—including, in some cases, terrorism.¹¹

For a short time the Jews and Muslims lived in peace. Muhammad even made some concessions, in the early days in Medina, in order to appease the Jewish leaders. He allowed the Muslims to turn in the direction of Jerusalem for their daily prayers. He introduced a midday prayer much like the practice of the Jews and also adopted some of the Jewish holy days. However, these attempts at peaceful co-existence were not strong enough to cover the blatant differences between the Quran and the Torah. The one aspect that the Jews simply would not tolerate was Muhammad's claim to be a prophet.

These blades of contention soon severed the assumed chords of unity between the two religions. Muhammad struck out at the Jews by calling all Muslims to face Mecca for their prayers instead of Jerusalem. Clear lines of disparity were ultimately drawn between Islam and the other two monotheistic religions, Christianity and Judaism, as well as between Islam and all pagans following animism. These changes were backed by the Quran and were therefore not debatable.¹²

The division was furthered by the instructions given in the Quran endorsing armed conflict against those who rejected Islam. Some of the new followers were reluctant to fight but were drawn into the battles by the promise of special rewards.¹³ Muhammad felt secure in pressing forward to spread Islam, even if it meant annihilating those who would not convert. He led his followers in battle against all who rejected his way, and against the Jews in particular. In one battle the Jewish people surrendered, knowing that they were outnumbered. Nevertheless, Muhammad ordered his soldiers to kill all the Jewish men. They obeyed

10. George W. Braswell, Jr., *Islam, Its Prophets, Peoples, Politics and Power* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 113.

11. A Muslim can be a fundamentalist without being militant.

12. *The Koran*, trans. N. J. Dawood (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 2:142; 4:125; 9:29; 98:6.

13. *Ibid.*, 3:157-58; 3:194-95; 4:95-96; 9:5.

this command thoroughly and systematically beheaded masses of men; the slaughter took almost twenty-four hours.

A series of battles ensued, culminating in the conquest of Mecca in 630 by an army of ten thousand men led by Muhammad. The strength of the army was so overwhelming that the animistic Meccans did not resist and not one person was killed or injured. Upon entering Mecca, Muhammad's men marched seven times around the Kaba, a sacred building believed to have been built by Abraham, and then destroyed the 360 idols found there. Having conquered Mecca, the Muslims became more and more aggressive and "fanned out to nearby communities, killing entire tribes that resisted worshipping Allah."¹⁴

Braswell provides a concise and helpful summary of the influence of this new religion and its leader:

By the end of his life, Muhammad had emerged as a religious and political leader without equal in the Arabian peninsula. He had founded a monotheistic and prophetic religion that included a basic and straight-forward confessional statement, a worldview of God who sent angels to prophets with a message embedded in perfect scripture. Islam provided a specific and orderly lifestyle of prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage in the context of the mosque and under the guidance of religious and political authorities. A Muslim was taught to walk the straight path of Allah and thereby attain heaven and avoid hell.¹⁵

On June 8, 632, Muhammad succumbed to a lingering illness brought about when one of his wives attempted to poison him. His tomb would become the second most revered holy place in the Islamic tradition, surpassed only by the grand mosque in Mecca. The veneration of the Prophet has reached such a point that some have stated, "You can deny Allah, but you cannot deny the prophet."¹⁶

Shortly after the Prophet's death there arose a division among the *khalifā* (trustees of Allah in the world). The question who would succeed the Prophet as leader was the first real issue before them. They agreed

14. Garlow, 35.

15. Braswell, 19.

16. Anne-Marie Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 239.

that no one could absolutely replace Muhammad and that someone had to be chosen to lead this new religion, but they could not agree on the process. As a result Islam found itself split into two major groups: the *Shiites* and the *Sunnis*. The *Shiites* (fifteen percent of Muslims today), known as the *Shi'at Ali* ("Faction of Ali") believed that Ali, the first cousin of Muhammad, was the rightful leader of Islam. They held resolutely to the position that the leadership should be passed along family lines.¹⁷ The *Sunnis* (eighty-five percent of Muslims), on the other hand, felt that the best man for the job should be selected and that it was not obligatory to follow a kinship-based protocol. They refused to recognize Ali as their leader and thus was begun a split that has lived on through the ages and is a major factor in the tensions found in the Muslim world at this time.

A third segment, called the *Sufis*, is a mystical group that seeks to develop a personal relationship with Allah. A *Shiite* or a *Sunni* can be a part of this group while maintaining attachment to his own sect.¹⁸ Since Islamic theology does not establish grounds for an intimate relationship between Allah and man, this is not a large group and does not play a major role in Islam.

Wahhabism, another sect of Islam and a radical wing of the *Sunnis*, was developed in the mid-eighteenth century under the influence of an Arab Muslim, Muhammad ibn al Wahhab, who was an extreme legalist. His ties with an influential clan of Saudi Arabia would bring his form of legalism to the forefront, and eventually *Wahhabism* would become the recognized official religion of that kingdom. The oil rich nation would use its power and prestige to make this sect one of the best financed, most aggressively proselytizing, and intolerant religious bodies in the world.

Today there are over 1.2 billion Muslims, and they are found on every continent. It is the fastest growing religion in the world. However, it should be noted that this growth is not necessarily by conversion but rather biological in light of the fact that all children born in a Muslim family are automatically considered members of the faith.

The evidence is solid, and we must accept it: Islam has found its place on the world stage.

17. See Esposito, 39.

18. Paul Marshall, Roberta Green, and Lela Gilbert, *Islam at the Crossroads: Understanding its Beliefs, History, and Conflicts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 28.

II. FUNDAMENTALS OF THE ISLAMIC FAITH

It is impossible to present here every teaching of Islam. However, we can present the fundamentals of the Islamic faith as clearly, concisely, and correctly as possible.

A. Allah—the Divinity / the God

Allah is the name by which Muslims refer to God. It comes from the Arabic words, *al lah*, which essentially means ‘the Divinity’ or ‘the God.’ There is some dispute in the secular realm as to the etymology of this word, but most Islamic scholars fear even to raise the issue.

The cornerstone of any religion is its god-structure, or the hierarchy it has established for beings existing in the spiritual realm. Islam, like Christianity, is strictly monotheistic. It too accepts that there are angels and demons who are spirits of a much lower status than God.

The theological backbone of Islam is found in the affirmation that there exists no other God but Allah. The statement that “God is He, besides whom there is no other god” is repeated throughout the Quran.¹⁹ Islam has many rituals and is heavy on ethical decrees, but these are subject to some interpretation and alterations. However, the monotheistic foundation must never be challenged, denied, or destroyed.

For the Muslim, Allah is absolutely sovereign, the Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Islam teaches that Allah created all beings, but the thought that man was created in the “image of God” is inconceivable. Muslims firmly believe that Allah is self-sustained and unique in every way. The Muslim is rigid in his belief in the “sovereign free will of God.”²⁰

Many Muslims will contend that Allah does give man a certain latitude in his daily activities. Even so, he has defined the parameters, and man can finally do only his will within these limitations. The word *Islam*, as already indicated, calls the followers of Allah to live a life of submission, obedience, and capitulation to his will. Even after the worst of tragedies one can hear the faithful Muslim affirm, “It is the will of Allah.” Orthodox Islamic theology makes it exceedingly clear that every thought, word, and deed, whether good or evil, is absolutely predestined. One Islamic scholar put this succinctly: “Not only can He [Allah] do anything, He actually is the only One Who does anything.”²¹

Muslim theology presents ninety-nine names for God. These names, though not enumerated in the Quran, were gathered and listed by Islamic scholars. They are not meant to describe his essence but rather to

19. *The Koran*, 59:22-24; 64:3; 95:4.

20. Geisler and Saleeb, 33.

21. *Ibid.*, 32.

reveal his will and law to mankind. A good Muslim will memorize these names and repeat them while holding the prayer necklace (*tasbeih*) and touching the ninety-nine beads, one by one. This act within itself demonstrates one's total "submission" to Allah and thereby guarantees his place in Paradise.

According to Islamic theology, Allah is not essentially good but only good because he does good. This would lead one to conclude that Allah has acted according to his will but that these actions are not a reflection of a divine nature.

Muslims explicitly deny the existence of the Trinity. There are many Quranic verses that give grounds for this denial. For example, 112:1-4 states, "Say: God is one, the Eternal God. He begot none, nor was He begotten. None is equal to Him."²² The one unpardonable sin is the sin of *shirk*, which is "assigning partners" to Allah.²³

In the world of the Muslim Allah is not necessarily perceived as a loving God. In the passages that speak of Allah's love for people, all indications are that this love is conditioned upon their obedience to him and that their love for him precedes his love for them.²⁴ It appears that the relationship between the Creator and man is more that of a master to his slave rather than as a compassionate God reaching out to his beloved, but fallen, creatures, although the Quran often speaks of his being merciful.

B. The Spirit World

In the Muslim world there exist basically three categories of spiritual beings other than Allah himself. There are none like Allah, but those in each category have their role in carrying out his will. The three categories are as follows.

1. *Angels* are beings created from light; they cannot commit sin. They are called upon to execute the will of Allah. Angels are never to be seen as sons and daughters of Allah but are his messengers and continuously worship and serve him. The Quran makes clear that it is considered a very serious offence not to believe in angels or to reject their work. "Whoever is an enemy to God and His angels and apostles, to Gabriel and Michael—Lo! God is an enemy to those who reject Faith."²⁵

22. *The Koran*, 112:1-2.

23. *Ibid.*, 4:116.

24. Chawkat Moucarray, *The Prophet & The Messiah, An Arab Christian's Perspective on Islam & Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 90.

25. *The Koran*, 2:97-98.

2. *Jiin* are spirit beings²⁶ described in the Quran, which teaches that Allah created the *jiin* and mankind to worship him; that is all he really demands of them. The nature of the *jiin* is not fully understood. Most are agreed that they are powerful and intelligent, yet capricious beings who are given the right to make choices. Nearly all Muslims would agree that the *jiin* stand somewhere between men and angels and plainly have a propensity to commit evil and to make stupid decisions.²⁷ It is believed that they will spend eternity in Hell. Amazingly Muslims think that these spirits have the potential to be converted to Islam.

3. *Iblis* is Satan, a created spiritual being who fights against the will of Allah. The Quran states, "We created man from dry clay, from black molded loam, and before him, Satan, from smokeless fire."²⁸

There is a great deal of controversy among Islamic scholars as to the nature of Satan. Some see him as an angel and others simply as one of the *jiin*. The problem, if he is an angel, is how he could possibly disobey Allah. On the other hand, if he is one of the *jiin* how could he lead people away from the true religion? Discussion of this issue continues today.

At any rate, *Iblis* is seen as a fallen creature whose rebellion against Allah was almost simultaneous with the creation of man.²⁹ All of the angels were called to prostrate themselves before Allah, and he was the only one that refused to do so. At that moment Allah stated that there would be a reckoning for this action on the Day of Resurrection or the Day of Judgment. Satan asked Allah to give him a reprieve until the "Appointed Day," and it was granted. This was followed by Satan's declaration: "I swear by your glory ... that I will seduce them all except your faithful servants."³⁰

Although Allah granted Satan the right to tempt man he added, "Be gone! A despicable outcast you shall henceforth be. As for those who follow you, I shall fill Hell with you all."³¹

The Quran tells us that Satan tempted man; the story is very similar to the one found in the Old Testament. The exception is that the "falling into temptation"—Muslims would not likely use the word *sin*—of Adam and Eve was not passed on to the human race. Once they were confront-

26. Some sources treat *jiin* as singular (plural *jiins*), some as plural; this paper treats the word as plural.

27. Geisler and Saleeb, 38, citing Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 122.

28. *The Koran*, 18:50.

29. Geisler and Saleeb, 39.

30. *The Koran*, 38:71-77.

31. *Ibid.*, 7:18.

ed with their error or mistake they repented and were forgiven.³² From that time on each person must repent of his or her sins. There is no atonement that Allah will accept on behalf of someone else.³³

C. *The Sacred Writings of Islam*

Islam has seven sources that are considered sacred:

1. The *Suhuf-i-Ibrahim* (The Scrolls), ten Holy Scriptures revealed to the Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham);
2. The *Taurat* (The Torah), the books revealed to the Prophet Musa (Moses);
3. The *Zabur* (The Psalms), the revelation received by the Prophet Daud (David);
4. The *Injil* (The Gospels), the words given to the Prophet Isa (Jesus);
5. The *Quran* (The Koran), the “final message” delivered to the Prophet Muhammad;
6. The *Hadith*, the collection of the traditions of Islam based on all that the Prophet Muhammad “did or said, or enjoined, forbade or did not forbid, approved or disapproved.”³⁴ It has been said that the Quran “provides the text,” the Hadith “the context.”³⁵
7. The *Sharia*, the “Law” governing the daily life of the Muslim.

A closer look at the last three of these sources will help one comprehend better the ideals that influence the Muslim as he formulates his theology, philosophy, and practices.

The *Quran*, the revelation of Allah to Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel, is seen by Muslims as the “earliest and by far the finest work of Classical Arabic prose.” For the followers of Muhammad “it is the infallible Word of God, a transcript of a tablet preserved in heaven, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel.”³⁶

The word *Qur’an* is Arabic, meaning “to read or recite.” The stories and teachings found in the Quran are very clearly shared with the Torah and the New Testament. But the Muslim believes that the latter two doc-

32. *Ibid.*, 7:18-38.

33. *Ibid.*, 17:15.

34. Ram Swarup, *Understanding the Hadith, the Sacred Traditions of Islam* (NY: Prometheus, 2001), 3.

35. *Ibid.*, 7.

36. *The Koran*, 1.

uments were corrupted; this necessitated a “final revelation” which is found in the Quran.³⁷

Richard Martin summarizes the essence of the Quran: “Whereas the divine presence for the Jew is in the Law and for the Christian is in the person of Christ, it is in the Qu’ran for the Muslim as a direct encounter with God.”³⁸ For the Muslim, the Quran is an integral part of the nature of Allah himself, a thought developed even further in the belief that just as Allah was not created, neither was the Quran: in other words, the text is also preexistent.

The words of the Quran are holy and serve as a “roadmap for this life and the life to come. It provides guidance for worship, marriage and family, economics, politics, community affairs, hygiene, and all other affairs of humanity.”³⁹ Faithful Muslims consult the Quran on most of life’s difficult questions.

Muslims show their reverence for the Quran in various ways. When a Muslim reads the Quran, for example, he never allows it to go below his waist. It always occupies the highest shelf in the house. A Muslim soldier will carry it to battle often suspended from his neck as a means of protection. The holy text, they believe, provides a mystical power and guardianship for the followers of Allah, a power that is beyond our capacity to understand.

The text of the Quran is divided into 114 chapters, called *suras*, which do not follow a chronological or subject-related order. It does not contain information, ideas, or arguments about specific themes arranged in a literary or serial order. Yet to those who first received the revelation there was no incoherence because it was relevant to their particular situation.⁴⁰

The Quran was not compiled until several years after the death of Muhammad. The revelations given to the Prophet were preserved on bits of parchment, leaves, shoulder blades of camels, bones, and—most of all—in the memory of his followers. Many Islamic scholars are agreed that the text we see today was completed between 650 and 656. However, there is major controversy as to the authenticity of certain scripts because there were so many collections of them. Eventually all were destroyed

37. This is curious in light of the Muslims’ insistence that the Quran cannot be corrupted!

38. Richard C. Martin, ed., *Approaches to Islam in Religious Studies* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press), 29.

39. Braswell, 52.

40. Badru D. Kateregga and David W. Shenk, *A Muslim and a Christian Dialogue* (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald, 1997), 57.

except one and it was taken as the guideline for the final text of the Quran used today.

A believer who is able to memorize and repeat the whole Quran by heart is called a *hafiz* (protector) and his or her place in Paradise is sealed. Interestingly enough, it is not necessary to understand what one is reciting; the value is in the repetition with correct pronunciation and not in the comprehension.⁴¹

Muslims are adamant that the Quran cannot be correctly translated into any other language since it was revealed in Arabic, which is considered the “pure” language of Allah. Some speculate that this reluctance by Muslims to translate the sacred writings has perhaps hindered the spread of Islam.⁴² On the other hand many would contend that the mystical attachment of the writings to the Arabic language is one of its great strengths.

The *Hadith*, an authenticated collection of the *hadis* (sayings) and *sunnah* (actions) of the Prophet, are to most Muslims interchangeable with the Quran. Some refer to the Hadith as the “unread revelation,” meaning that it was not read to the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel. However, this does not imply in any way that the Hadith is not inspired.

Throughout Muhammad’s life, when his followers saw him doing something—whether praying, eating, or other daily routines—they would write down how he went about it or simply report it to a fellow Muslim and thereby seek to emulate the Prophet in his actions and perpetuate his truths.

Only the *sahib*, traditions that had a flawless line directly back to the Prophet, were considered authentic. The *hadis* and *sunnaahs* were passed on from person to person and recorded in the following form:

Humaid b. Mas’ada has informed us, on the authority of Bishr, from Dawud b. Abid Hind, from Abu’z-Zubair, from Jabir, that the Apostle of Allah—upon whom be Allah’s blessing and peace—said: “It is incumbent on every man who is a Muslim to take a bath one day in seven, and that day is Friday.”⁴³

41. Anis A. Shorrosh, *Islam Revealed: A Christian Arab’s View of Islam* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 21-22.

42. The Quran has been translated into English, but if this is done by a Muslim the work will be presented as the *meaning* of the Quran and not the Quran itself.

43. James P. Dretke, *A Christian Approach to Muslims: Reflections from West Africa* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1979), 47.

As time passed the hero-worshippers of Muhammad added many miracles to the already amazingly interesting life of the Prophet. Eventually there would be a collection of over 600,000 *hadis* and *sunnah*. Islamic scholars were called in to scrutinize these writings and attempt to discern which ones were authentic and which were simply spurious legends. When the work of the more accepted scholars was terminated there were only 7,190 traditions which had passed the litmus test of authenticity, collected into 1,243 chapters.⁴⁴ Within three hundred years after the death of the Prophet his words and deeds were thus recorded in the *Hadith*, which remains basically unchanged to this day.

It is fascinating to note some of the mundane issues that made the final cut, as in the following examples.

The Prophet commanded the killing of a “snake having stripes over it, for it affects eyesight and miscarries pregnancy.”⁴⁵

It is forbidden to kill a cat.⁴⁶

It is meritorious to supply water to thirsty animals.⁴⁷

Playing chess is forbidden: “He who plays chess is like one who dyed his hand with the flesh and blood of a swine.”⁴⁸

“When any one of you awakes from sleep ... he must clean his nose three times, for the devil spends the night in the interior of one’s nose.”⁴⁹

One of the followers of Muhammad refused to eat watermelon because, although he knew that the Prophet had done so, he had left no instructions on how to eat a watermelon.⁵⁰

The most important traditions addressed in the *Hadith* are those relating to what have come to be known as the “five pillars of Islam” (some say “six pillars”) which are as follows.

1. The *shahada* (the profession of faith): The Muslim must affirm that Allah is the one true God and Muhammad is his Prophet. Simply mak-

44. Swarup, 10.

45. The *Hadith*, 5542, cited in Swarup, 155.

46. The *Hadith*, 5570-5576, cited in Swarup, 155.

47. The *Hadith*, 5577-5579, cited in Swarup, 155.

48. The *Hadith*, 5612, cited in Swarup, 157.

49. The *Hadith*, 462, cited in Swarup, 26.

50. Swarup, 4.

ing this declaration as a true statement of one's faith in Allah makes him a Muslim.

2. The *salaat* (the daily prayers): The faithful will pray five times each day. The congregational prayers in the mosque are led by an *imam* (meaning "leader" or "in front of") who stands before those present and recites the verses and words of their prayers; they repeat after him.

3. The *zakat* (poor tax or alms): Each Muslim is required to give a fixed percentage, usually 2.5%, of his or her income to help those who are truly in need.

4. The *sawn* (fasting): During the holy month of Ramadan Muslims are to refrain from drinking alcoholic beverages, eating, and certain sensual pleasures during the daylight hours.

5. The *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca): All Muslims who are physically and financially able must make at least one journey to this holy site. Their tradition establishes that Abraham set the pattern for the pilgrimages to Mecca. A person who has completed this journey can bear the title of *hajji*.

There is a "holy black stone" in the *Kaba*, the cubical building in the center of the grand Mosque in Mecca (supposedly built by Abraham). Each pilgrim must march counterclockwise around the *Kaba* and then kiss this black stone in order to follow the example of Muhammad who kissed the stone when he conquered Mecca.

6. The *jihad* (holy struggle or war): This is considered by many to be the "sixth pillar" of Islam. Basically the word *jihad* refers to struggling or surviving against sin as well as in battle. Muslims consider the "greater *jihad*" to be one's struggle against sin and the "lesser *jihad*" to be the fight against—and the destruction of—the enemies of Allah.

The Quran gives very clear instructions relating to physical action that can be taken against those who do not embrace Islam. For example in *sura* (chapter) 8:12 Allah states, "I will instill terror into the hearts of the infidels, strike off their heads, and stroke off from them every fingertip." In 9:5 the Muslim faithful are instructed to "slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them. If they repent and take to prayer and render the alms levy, allow them to go their way. God is forgiving and merciful." Although there is mercy available to those who repent and become Muslims, one may honorably kill those who do not.

The incentive to go to war is very clear in the promise of Paradise and great reward to those who die by the sword.⁵¹ The call to martyrdom is appealing: rewards are one hundred times greater for those who sacri-

51. The Hadith, 4314, 4651, cited in Swarup, 131.

ficially die to destroy the infidels or spread Islam.⁵² Muslims believe that of all those who go to Paradise the martyr “will desire to return to this world and be killed ten times for the sake of the great honor that has been bestowed upon him.”⁵³

The *Sharia* refers to the entire legal system governing followers of Allah. Although there are a great many issues addressed in the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, over time it became obvious that they did not respond to each and every question men face. After Muhammad’s death people could no longer go to him for instructions, correction, and illumination. When this reality struck the Muslim leadership they were pressed to develop additional means for controlling the behavior of the people. As a result of their efforts, two more means for settling doctrinal and ethical issues emerged. First of all there is the *ijma*, which means the consensus or agreement of the community. When a problem arose within the community the *umma* (the community, as defined above) would be called together to discuss it. If they could not come to a unified decision they would go one step further and consult the *Ulama* (religious leaders). The latter sought to determine how the Prophet would have acted in a similar situation and thereby to establish the *ijma* for that particular situation. Their decision was proclaimed as *ijma* for the whole community and passed on for other Muslims to benefit from.

A collection of all *ijma* makes up this third source of authority, the *Sharia*. These laws govern the day-to-day activities and lives of Muslims. According to Fazlur Rahman, former Director of the Islamic Research Institute in Karachi, Pakistan, “the word ‘shari’ or ‘shar’ originally means the path or the road leading to water, i.e., a way to the very source of life.’ In its religious usage, from the earliest period, it has meant, ‘the highway of good life,’ i.e., religious values, expressed functionally and in concrete terms to direct man’s life.”⁵⁴

The strict application of the *Sharia* brings about a harsh, legalistic governing style much like that of the Taliban who ruled in Afghanistan before the recent United States’ invasion. Many Islamic leaders desire to see the *Sharia* set up in every nation on the earth. This kind of rule calls for a rigid application of every *ijma* with clearly defined, and often public, punishment for each violation. The following examples give us a glimpse of the means for correcting the wrongdoer.

52. The Hadith, 4645, cited in Swarup, 132.

53. The Hadith, 4635, cited in Swarup, 132. The “rewards” of suicide bombers are hotly debated; some Muslims do not see them as martyrs.

54. Dretke, 48.

“Let there be the curse of Allah upon the thief who steals an egg and his hand is cut off, and steals a rope and his hand is cut off.”⁵⁵

“In case of a married male committing adultery with a married female, they shall receive one hundred lashes and be stoned to death.”⁵⁶

A woman who committed fornication was “put in a ditch up to her chest and he [Muhammad] commanded people and they stoned her.”⁵⁷

The punishment for drinking alcohol is “forty stripes with two lashes.”⁵⁸

In all systems of law there are loopholes and crimes that are not covered. It appears that this is true even with the *Sharia*. There are certain “crimes” that Muslims can commit without suffering the extreme punishment of the law, simply because they are not covered in the *Sharia*. These include the theft of many articles such as books, birds, and bread; this leads people to conclude that many articles can be stolen with impunity, including such intriguing articles as fresh vegetables, fruit, firewood, meat, musical instruments, bricks, cement, marble, glass, mats, carpets from mosques, and loaded camels.⁵⁹

There exists also considerable regional variation in the “forbidden behaviors” of the *Sharia*. We should not neglect to point out the obvious here: the same challenge of diversity in interpretation and application is found in Islam as in most religions.

In spite of the apparent inconsistencies, these sources of guidance are accepted by all Muslims in order for them to be holy and perfect. They understand it from the perspective that morality did not determine the Prophet’s actions, but rather his actions determine and define morality. They are confident in their belief that the acts of Muhammad were the acts of Allah.⁶⁰

With these sources serving as his “north star” the Muslim enters each day knowing that his one and only obligation is to be “submissive” to the will of Allah; through this submission he hopes to gain his place in Paradise.

55. The Hadith, 4185, cited in Swarup, 98.

56. The Hadith, 4191, cited in Swarup, 99.

57. The Hadith, 4206, cited in Swarup, 100.

58. The Hadith, 4226, cited in Swarup, 102.

59. Swarup, 104.

60. Swarup, 11.

D. *Salvation*

The very mention of the word *salvation* in relation to man implies that he is “lost” or in a fallen state as it relates to his spiritual condition. This idea is foreign to Muslims; their theology does not acknowledge that man has a depraved, fallen nature. It holds that the fundamental problem is not that man is rebellious but rather simply weak and not always able to discern what is right or wrong. Kateregga states the Islamic position: “Sin is not original, hereditary or inevitable. It is not from God. It is acquirable through choice, but also avoidable through knowledge and true guidance from God. Muslims believe that man is fundamentally a good and dignified creature.”⁶¹

One realizes immediately, then, that the Christian view of salvation and that of the Muslim are radically different. The Islamic doctrine of salvation does not include an act of regeneration.

Salvation, from the perspective of a follower of Allah, is not based on faith in a Savior. For the Muslim salvation is achieved by *amal* (actions) and *iman* (faith). The Muslim’s *amal* consists of practicing the five (or six) pillars (above), and his *iman* is embracing six foundational beliefs. He must wholeheartedly believe in:

1. Allah and his attributes,
2. The prophets and their virtues,
3. The angels,
4. The sacred books,
5. The Day of Resurrection, and
6. *Qadar* (predestination): namely, that God decrees everything that happens in this world.

Failure to perform the proper acts will result in failure to enter Paradise. Geisler and Saleeb sum it up well: “In a very real sense, Islam teaches that heaven can be earned by the good works of the believer as long as he is careful to fulfill his religious obligations and makes up for his shortcomings by performing other favorable duties.”⁶²

One of the troubling factors in Islam is that it offers no assurance of salvation. Islamic belief is explicit on this matter and leaves one certain that faith is not the basis for “salvation” (reaching Paradise). For Muslims it is sufficiently clear that “works and deeds constitute justification in God’s eyes.”⁶³ Many Muslims do not see this as a matter for concern; they

61. Kateregga and Schenk, 141.

62. Geisler and Saleeb, 127.

63. Isma’il R. Al Faruqi, *Islam* (Niles, IL: Argus Communications, 1984), 5, cited in Geisler and Saleeb, 128.

simply take the lack of assurance as a clarion call to strict obedience to the laws of Allah.

A person will not know until the judgment day if he merits Paradise or not. The Quran uses balances or scales to illustrate the process of judgment. At the time of judgment one's good works will be weighed against the evil he has done and if the good outweighs the bad at that point then he will be more or less assured of Paradise. We must say "more or less assured" since it is possible—although not probable—that Allah will by his own volition decide to send a person to Hell even if his good deeds outweigh the bad. But Hell is certain for those whose "balance is light," and Hell is a place of "scorching fire."⁶⁴

E. Judgment Day

"Judgment Day" is coming; Islamic tradition indicates that there are at least four signs that will alert us that the "final day" is near.

1. Religious knowledge will decrease, directly affected by the death of learned religious men.

2. Religious ignorance will prevail.

3. There will be open and illegal sexual activity.

4. Women will increase in number and men will decrease so much so that there will be fifty women to look after one man.

The final destiny of man rests firmly in the hands of Allah; he and he alone will determine one's eternal dwelling. There are two possible destinations, Paradise and Hell.

Paradise is a place where all the desires of the heart will be fulfilled. Those who go there will "drink from a clear-flowing fountain, crystal-white, of taste delicious to those who drink. ... beside them will be chaste women, restraining their glances ... they will recline on thrones arranged in ranks."⁶⁵ The bottom line is that Allah will determine who can enjoy these "Gardens of Felicity" where everything is perfect.

Hell, on the other hand, is described as a horrible place with boiling water, pus, screaming, fire, and other forms of suffering. In the *Hadith* there are images of boiling brains, molten lead being poured into the ears of the wicked, and hypocrites walking around with their intestines protruding outward as they tell others of their duplicity.⁶⁶ This is a destiny to be avoided at all costs.

There is some debate as to whether Hell is eternal in Islamic doctrine, though Paradise assuredly is. What is clear is that there are seven regions

64. *The Koran*, 23:102-103; 7:8,9; 101:6-8.

65. *Ibid.*, 37:48; 44:54; 52:20; 55:72; 56:22.

66. Braswell, 57.

in Hell, with each reserved for a certain class of sinners: infidels, unbelievers, polytheists, hypocrites, and "People of the Book" (Jews and Christians). Islamic doctrine guarantees that the latter will not be permitted into Paradise and that the hottest fires of hell are reserved for them.

The Hadith 6668 tells that on the "Day of Judgment" there will be Muslims who are worthy of eternal fire because their sins are as "heavy as the mountains." Nonetheless, in response to the Prophet's plea Allah will grant that many of these condemned Muslims will make it into Paradise for eternity because Christians and Jews will be chosen to take their places in Hell.

In spite of all the previous information given concerning the value of good works it is essential to realize that Allah is not bound by the obedience or disobedience of his creatures. The Quran very clearly states, "He forgives whom He pleases, and punishes whom He pleases."⁶⁷

E. A Mediator

Islam teaches that Muslims will seek for a mediator when they pass before Allah to be judged. They will first turn to the prophets of the Old Testament but these holy men will refuse on the grounds of their inadequacy. The people will then turn toward Jesus, who will say that He is not worthy to do this and will point the people toward Muhammad. He alone is worthy to be the mediator because Allah has already forgiven his sins. It is Muhammad's role to plead on the behalf of all Muslims, even those who have already died and were cast into Hell.⁶⁸

Muslims do not deny the existence of *Isa* (Jesus) the Messiah. They are taught to love and respect Him as one of the great Prophets, like Adam, Abraham, Moses, and David. Although He is not on the same level as Muhammad, who was the "Seal of the Prophets" or the final one and therefore the most important, Jesus has more distinctives than all the other prophets; He was the only one born of a virgin and the only sinless prophet.

Islamic teaching holds firm the thought that man must pay for his own sins or have them forgiven by Allah. But in no case can one person take on the sins of another. This doctrine, along with others, confirms in Muslims' minds that it is inconceivable that Christ could be the Son of God or the Savior of the world.

67. *The Koran*, 2:284, 3:129; 5:18.

68. Moucarray, 103.

CONCLUSION

The preceding information has presented some of the foundational beliefs and practices of the Islamic faith. It is not presented as, nor intended to be perceived as, a definitive statement on these matters. In reality there are many issues that were not treated in view of the limitations of a single article and the fact that a number of matters are still up for debate.

However, the facts and observations presented in this document should give those who read it a better understanding of the fundamentals of the Islamic faith. As a result of this information, the reader should be better prepared to engage in a meaningful and productive discussion with a Muslim. We must always remember that our objective is to win souls, not to win arguments for arguments' sake.

We can, with confidence, declare that not all Muslims are terrorists. But, based on this study and the truths revealed in God's Word, we can also state that they are not true believers in God or in His Son Jesus Christ. There are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world, forty-one countries where they make up the majority of the population. These, like the rest of the five billion lost souls on planet Earth, are calling out for us to bring them the Good News that a Savior has come and that He is for all people!

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home, 3rd edition. By Jack O. Balswick and Judith K. Balswick. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. 398 pp. \$24.99 paperback.

This book by Jack and Judith Balswick regarding the home is the third edition of a work first published in 1989. The authors have been married for over forty-five years and have two adult children. Both have served in marriage and family research and counseling for over thirty years. Jack Balswick (Ph.D.) is director of marriage and family research as well as professor of sociology and family development at Fuller Theological Seminary. Judith Balswick (Ed.D.) is director of clinical training as well as senior professor of marital and family therapy at Fuller Theological Seminary. The Balswicks are well qualified in experience and education to write such a book.

Especially significant is the theological and Biblical basis for marriage and family presented in the beginning of the book. The authors hold that their material and conclusions have such a basis: "We believe it is important to consider relevant biblical references and a theology that offer deeper meaning and concrete principles of living in our complex, post-modern world" (p.18).

The book is divided into seven parts, each one containing extensive research and analysis of the dynamics that affect marriage and the family. The authors discuss in considerable detail various social systems, comparing those that are traditional and cultural with those that are developing in our world today. Significant research data is shown that reveals the varying influences and their impact on the family.

Chapter five presents the authors' model for the contemporary Christian marriage. While there are principles that all would agree with, not everyone will agree on the assessment given about the issue of authority in marriage and the Biblical interpretation. The authors present the view that there is no male headship in the Biblical model, but that this is mostly a cultural tradition (p. 93). They view this as a "faulty authoritarian persuasion" that "fails to take into account the great news of the New Testament promotion of mutual love ... and reciprocal submission" (p. 94). Based upon Ephesians 5:21, the authors believe that there is no real basis for male headship, but see that "mutual submissiveness" is the central and overriding message of this text (p. 94). Interestingly, in a book

that claims thorough Biblical exegesis as one of its central approaches, there is no discussion of either Eph. 5:23-24, which states that "the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church," or 1 Corinthians 11:3, which states the same. Since the comparison of headship is with the ongoing Headship of Christ over His church, it is clear that this was no mere cultural structure and thus only related to the New Testament era. However, this does not find discussion and evaluation in the book.

The authors address the issue of gender in modern society in chapter eleven, entitled "Changing Gender Roles." While there are some Biblical references that are presented to show clear gender differences as God's created purpose and order, this chapter appears to be strong on social research and weak on Biblical principles. Social science and psychological research may indeed measure what is happening in society, but such approaches do not necessarily address the ethical, moral, and spiritual reasons for the developments. The authors address this reasoning somewhat but are weak on their presentation of the Biblical models of men and women, especially the maleness of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the book tends to re-evaluate traditional gender roles of male and female, husband and wife, in light of psychological and social science research rather than by Biblical principles.

Key issues of family and marriage such as anger, intimacy, and conflict resolution are addressed with relevant structures and principles offered. However, no easy solutions are presented in formula fashion as is often found in many books on marriage.

Of significance is the chapter discussing the erosion of Biblical truth in a postmodern world. A number of key concerns are addressed. However, some would argue that the removal of male headship from the family, with the weak establishment of clear gender roles upon which marriage is to be built, is in itself a postmodern adaptation of Biblical truth.

In a chapter entitled "Creating a Family-Friendly Society" the book concludes with something of a model that families in contemporary America are urged to adopt. The authors address various issues that they believe would enable marriages and families to be more viable and stable. The ideas presented are appealing, but not much is said about how to implement them.

This is not your everyday, easy-read, feel-good book on the family that involves ten steps for improving relationships. It is more suited for analysis in the college classroom. It is well worth the effort and investment, but will demand time and considerable analysis. Not everyone will agree

with all of the bases of the book. Many terms will not be immediately familiar but are appropriate for the purpose of the book.

In summary, the book is heavy on research from the social and psychological sciences but light on Biblical exegesis and interpretation. One gets the impression that the research from these areas is almost as authoritative as Biblical truth. A better balance could have been achieved. One can argue that the only Biblical models presented are selective and not representative of most Evangelical, Biblical scholarship. However, the book is thought provoking and representative of many modern, Evangelical approaches to issues such as this.

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The Outrageous Idea of Academic Faithfulness: A Guide for Students. By Donald Opitz and Derek Melleby. Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2007. 144 pp. \$13.99 paperback.

Donald Opitz (Ph.D., Boston University) is associate professor of sociology and higher education at Geneva College. He is the author of numerous articles and has served as a pastor and a campus minister. Derek Melleby (M.A., Geneva College) is the director of the College Transition Initiative for the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding through a unique partnership with the Coalition for Christian Outreach.

Opitz and Melleby issue an invitation to all Christian students to commit themselves to uniquely Christian and culturally relevant learning. Their book is intended for college students and those soon to graduate from high school. Motivated by a strong sense of duty, the authors believe that "American evangelicals have been mesmerized by an anti-intellectual spirit for nearly a century now." Recognizing that today's college student can be caught between this sentiment and secularists' attempts to remove faith from learning, they publish a clarion call for students to step out of hiding, fully commit themselves to honoring God and His Word, and embrace the concept of scholarship as an honorable act of worship. This is a primer work, an easy read of eight short chapters with thought-provoking questions and recommended readings at the end of each chapter. Additionally, Opitz and Melleby maintain a website to aid those who choose to engage in the "outrageous." While in its infant stages, the site

promises to be an excellent means of accessing resources and linking serious Christian scholars with helpful seminars held around the country.

As Opitz and Melleby explain, their book title is not altogether original. In fact, it is an attempt to expand the appeal of Dr. George Marsden for Christian professors to practice excellence in both faith and work (*The Outrageous Idea of Christian Scholarship*, 1997; and *The Soul of the American University*, 1994). The “outrageous” idea these two writers describe is that there are Christian students out there who would dare to defy many in both secular and Christian cultures by embracing the fact that all of life is spiritual: “Academics matters greatly to God.”

The book begins by clueing in many unsuspecting high school graduates that the current American campus culture is characterized by a “pervasive disengagement with learning.” Equally concerning to the faithful are those who break free of this trap only to become obsessed with grades and success by idolizing it as an end in itself. These must be pursued with right motives and a worthwhile purpose. Students are warned here that some well-meaning Christians believe the distorted idea that a “single minded devotion to Jesus leaves little room for academic dedication.” To battle these worthless notions, Opitz and Melleby urge a broader view for committed Christians; to serve God faithfully, the student must be faithful of all places in the classroom.

This kind of journey is not without dangers. Students are warned of deceptive philosophies and traditions woven into the fabric of almost every institution of higher learning. The authors cite the Babylonians’ practice of assimilation. Through it, conquered cultures lost their identity and their will to resist. A similar danger exists in most college settings, they warn: “To the degree that your mind is not renewed by the gospel and your life is not transformed by the power of Christ, you will conform to the dominant culture.” They also add that in general, in our current culture, “to one degree or another, every one of us has been Babylonized Education has played an important role in shaping us [to live in] this dominant culture.”

Opitz and Melleby explain the existence and impact of competing worldviews. Students are urged to understand how the foundation of modern education was built on modernity and is now shaped by post-modernity. Practical suggestions are made to enable students to strengthen their minds and discern truth. Among these, readers are encouraged to gather once a week with other believers to “tell the stories and sing the songs that make us distinct people, the people of God. If we are not nourished by these stories, chances are we will begin to live according to some other story.”

Opitz and Melleby define their idea of academic faithfulness as having two components. First, a committed scholar must pursue personal holiness: "The Christian mind is connected to Christian character and Christian action." Students should develop corporate, God-honoring relationships with others, develop disciplined routines that support godly living, practice meaningful prayer, participate in edifying conversations with believers, and seek out mentors who are "deep thinkers in your discipline." Second, a committed scholar must pursue academic excellence: "Knowing and the Christian mind are not divorced from other aspects of Christian faithfulness." To this end, the authors state that students should be "double listeners." This requires diligent parallel study of the subject matter of the class as well as the Scriptures and the works of other informed Christian scholars who have explored the subject matter being studied. Readers are further challenged to "honor the Lord of learning" by "working harder and reading more than your non-Christian counterparts." The book pursues the idea that our investment in the classroom reflects the quality of our relationship with God. After all, it is an offering made before God and one that others will witness.

The Outrageous Idea of Academic Faithfulness would be appropriate for students, parents, those who minister to the "y" generation, and college Bible study groups. Readers should know that one of the authors briefly tells of his struggles coming to terms with the six days of creation. However, he states that this has been a journey for him and he accepts the Word as God breathed. *The Outrageous Idea of Academic Faithfulness* is an encouraging, uplifting, practical, and inspirational read.

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Pastoral Ministry According to Paul. By James W. Thompson. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. 174 pp. \$17.99 paperback.

James Thompson received his Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University and serves as Distinguished Professor of Biblical Studies at Abilene Christian University, where he is associate dean of the Graduate School of Theology.

The primary intended audience for this book is the college or seminary classroom, a conclusion suggested by the fact that Baker's academic branch published it. Indeed, the whole method and approach of the

writing almost dictates that it is designed for academia, and perhaps for those brave readers willing to search the literary haystack for a needle or two with which to be challenged and, if they accept his thesis, to stitch together a very different approach to ministry.

The thrust of Thompson's argument is repudiation of the widely-held view that Paul's letters present a theology centered on justification by faith. Thompson, rather, sees Paul's theology focused on transformation and that this transformation takes place in the interlude between baptism (I do not believe he once used the word *conversion*) and being presented "blameless" to God. The means of this transformation is seen as the "community of believers" (the church, although he never speaks of the local church), with the pastor as the facilitator. His major emphasis is on sanctification, an emphasis so strong that he skates to the brink of declaring that the standing of people with God is dependent upon the success of the sanctification process, and that progress in sanctification is the means of salvation. He says, "Those who are justified enter a new creation with the new *possibility* that they may become the righteousness of God" (p. 97).

Another Thompson tendency is to emphasize the corporate body (community of believers) and virtually ignore individual accountability. For instance, "Paul speaks to the entire community calling for the corporate self-sacrifice modeled on the selflessness of Christ." He goes on: "Just as the exaltation of Christ followed his self-emptying, the church's corporate self-sacrifice results in its salvation." He defines salvation thus: "the salvation which the community aspires to is the completion of God's work on the day of Christ" (p. 48).

Many of us will be uneasy with this corporate emphasis and even more uneasy with his tendency to deemphasize individual responsibility. He envisions a church transformed by the cross through its corporate efforts of sanctification. Unfortunately, such a vision is never realized in Paul's letters or in any other Scripture. While his emphasis on transformation is welcome and the book challenging, Thompson's treatment of this condition—as though it should be considered more a goal of pastoral work than for individual realization—will be a source of great frustration on the part of the pastor; or else it will be the pathway to self-deception framed by the mistaken idea that "*we have apprehended*" (my emphasis).

Many who hold my view of Scripture will be uneasy because of his references to "Duetero-Isaiah" and to some of Paul's letters as "the undisputed letters of Paul."

In the end, Thompson reveals how his approach would work. Commenting on the application of his findings to present-day

congregations, he observes, "With the resources of our affluent congregations, we have the potential to demonstrate our selfless concern for others in a variety of ways. The use of our time and resources in support of such organizations as Habitat for Humanity, The International Justice Mission, and efforts in our local communities to improve the quality of life for the disadvantaged is evidence of Christian transformation."

The redeeming qualities of the book are a strong call for the church to take sanctification seriously and its emphasis on the importance of the interworking of the church, the community of believers.

As for me, I prefer to spend at least half of my \$17.99 (the price of the book) for some evangelistic effort and the rest to "improve the quality of life for the disadvantaged."

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The Randall House Bible Commentary: The Book of Hebrews. By W. Stanley Outlaw. Nashville: Randall House, 2005. 389 pp. \$30 hardcover.

Any attempt to do a fair, critical review of this volume must take into account the guidelines for the series found in the General Editor's Preface to the commentary on Romans, the first volume to be published (1987). A brief summation is given here: (1) Everyone involved in the writing and publication of the Randall House Commentaries shares the conviction that the Bible is God's inspired, inerrant Word, to be honored by diligent study and faithful obedience. (2) The commentaries are intended to be neither highly technical nor merely devotional, but to "seriously expound the text" as practical for life and ministry. (3) As the Word of God, the Bible is to be studied, believed, and obeyed. (4) The interpretation of the Biblical text by the writers is to be rooted in a careful exegesis of the Greek text but presented in such a way that knowledge of Greek is not essential. (5) The application of the text to faith and life is to be clear. (6) The theological perspective of the writers is what is referred to as "Reformed Arminian" in contrast to the later Wesleyan/Holiness teachings.

Stanley Outlaw is well prepared by education and experience to write this commentary. His B.A. degree is from Free Will Baptist Bible College and his M.A. and Ph.D. in New Testament are from Bob Jones University. Dr. Outlaw taught New Testament Greek and Bible courses at Free Will

Baptist Bible College from 1966 until his retirement in 1997; he still teaches from time to time as an adjunct professor. In addition to this volume, Outlaw is also the author of the commentary in this series on 1, 2 Timothy and Titus (1990). He has ministered in local churches as pastor and evangelist and continues to have an active pulpit ministry. He is a skilled interpreter and teacher of the Word, and wise use of his knowledge and experience is obvious in this commentary.

Dr. Outlaw also brings to the task of writing this commentary a pastoral perspective and concern for God's people. He carefully guides his readers through the text as he presents not only what the text says but also what he believes the text means and why it should be understood in the way he explains it. The reader will be led to think as he reads through this commentary. Most of the commentary focuses on exegesis and interpretation, what the Biblical text says and what it means. By his example, Outlaw encourages the reader to apply logical thinking to the task of interpretation and application.

A commentary on the epistle to the Hebrews is of special interest and concern to Free Will Baptists, not only because it warns of the possibility of apostasy, but also because of its teachings about Jesus Christ as the exclusive provision for salvation. Even so, Hebrews is often neglected. That is unfortunate in light of its rich contents relating to Christ and the Christian life. It is uniquely a letter of warning and encouragement for believers in a hostile world. Hebrew Christians faced pressure from two sides, the pagan world and Jewish friends and relatives who resisted the claims of the gospel. The church always faces the peril of adapting to the theories and doctrines of the age, especially when pressures are applied. The temptation to try to "improve" on God's plan is an ever-present reality. It is hard to imagine that the people to whom Hebrews was addressed sought a "better" way of salvation than what God provided in Jesus Christ, but people still do so.

From a reader's perspective, there are several things one looks for in a good commentary, regardless of one's personal preferences and expectations.

(1) Respect for the authority of the Scriptures is at the top of the list. Outlaw earns high marks here.

(2) Clarity and readability are also high on the list. There are relatively few authors, outside the Biblical writers themselves, that people will take the time to struggle to understand. Readers have little patience with writers who are more difficult to understand than the Biblical text they are supposedly explaining. Outlaw is an effective communicator as well as a serious student of the Scriptures.

(3) One should look for evidence of genuine scholarship and careful study of the Biblical text, wedded to a high regard and love for the Scriptures and a concern for readers. This commentary more than meets such expectations.

(4) In terms of content, one looks for adequate background materials on the book, information on the question of authorship, discussion about the people to whom the book was first written, and the circumstances which may have prompted the writing of the book. Not all of these questions can be fully answered for every book of the Bible. Hebrews is a case in point, especially when the identity of its human author is at issue. Nevertheless, one should expect to see such issues discussed and possible ways of interpreting the evidence examined. Outlaw's introduction explores these issues helpfully.

(5) We want to know what the problems of interpretation are and what the possibilities are so that we can wrestle with the text for ourselves. Strictly devotional commentaries can feed a hunger in the soul, but the best commentaries are those that inform the mind and feed the heart at the same time. Outlaw's commentary on Hebrews does that. The Biblical text is interpreted carefully, drawing on the Greek text and other writers where helpful.

Preachers and Bible teachers have a tendency to check commentaries on some isolated or difficult texts when help is needed. That is fine in its place, but I would urge the reader of this commentary to become generally familiar with the entire work. Begin by carefully reading the Introduction. Much work has gone into the preparation of the Introduction; it is well researched and carefully written to provide the information needed to help the reader understand why the epistle was written and what it meant to its original readers. One is in no position to interpret any text without some knowledge of the context in which it was written and those to whom it was first written. Dr. Outlaw has provided an excellent, though condensed, introduction to the epistle to the Hebrews.

In our eagerness to get help on a difficult passage, many tend to overlook the detailed outlines of Biblical books found in commentaries. The outline of Hebrews provided in this commentary will be of great help to the reader who wants to understand the teaching of the epistle to the Hebrews. One must avoid trying to interpret Biblical texts in isolation. A good outline is like a set of architect's drawings: if you study it a few minutes and refer to it from time to time, it will help you gain a grasp of the book that is invaluable for serious Bible study. I consider both the

Introduction and Outline of Hebrews to be important strengths of this commentary.

Apparently some of the Hebrew Christians addressed in this epistle might have been willing, perhaps even eager, to alter their beliefs about the exclusiveness of Jesus Christ in order to avoid rejection and persecution. It also appears that some even thought it would be better to return to Judaism. The Bible writer makes it clear that Jesus Christ is "the same yesterday, today, and forever." Our salvation is totally in His hands. Going back to pre-Christian beliefs and habits to avoid persecution or social rejection may be tempting, but there is no salvation in that strategy.

Dr. Outlaw has made this point clear. However, I would have liked to see some direct discussion, in the light of the text, of the contemporary Evangelical scene where Christianity is often marketed as if the Gospel were a product to sell and any compromise is acceptable. The pressures of persecution and threat of death facing the original recipients of this epistle are not experienced in this country, today, by believers; but there is a growing desire in the contemporary Church to find broader acceptance and to avoid offending anyone with the truth. There are signs that the church of the twenty-first century may be willing to alter its message, and in turn its doctrinal beliefs, in order to be more acceptable to contemporary society.

For those who cherish the theological heritage of Free Will Baptists, this commentary will be highly treasured for a long time to come. It is well written and the author's conviction as to the teaching of the epistle is clear. I believe it will help many who have been confused, both inside and outside the denomination, to have a clearer understanding of the Free Will Baptist teaching on apostasy: Jesus is the only Savior; God's only method of salvation is through faith in Christ; when someone who has been a believer renounces faith in Christ, there is no other place to turn to for salvation.

Dr. Outlaw has done an excellent job in handling the passages dealing with apostasy and answering questions people often raise. One helpful point concerns backsliding and apostasy: he notes that backsliding is not apostasy, but it is the road to apostasy when pursued to its end.

The most encouraging, uplifting part of the commentary deals with those texts that focus on Jesus Christ. He is greater than any and all of the prophets. He is more than a prophet or teacher, He is the Savior. Salvation is by faith in Him alone. He is the same yesterday, today, and for eternity. Dr. Outlaw's treatment of the texts that focus on the Lord is especially thorough, comforting, and encouraging.

The Randall House Commentary series was intended for preachers and laity alike. Dr. Outlaw has successfully dealt with profound truths and discussed them in a manner that can be understood by both. He has been faithful to the Biblical text and its purpose. He has also offered valuable instruction on the application of the truths to everyday Christian living.

The tone of the commentary is often devotional and inspirational. The reader can often sense the passion of the author. Some may consider that to be a weakness in a scholarly work; I do not agree. Scholarship without passion is numbing and dead. Passion without scholarship is dangerous. This is a commentary every serious reader of the Bible, not just teachers or preachers, should buy and read carefully, thoughtfully, and often.

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Through the Eyes of God: Understanding God's Perspective of the World. By John Marshall. Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 2005. 136 pp. \$9.99 paperback.

John Marshall, the man, can claim many credits. He was called to preach at age fifteen, is a sixth generation preacher, earned a degree in mathematics, and graduated (with the M. Div. and D. Min. degrees) from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. He has pastored a total of thirty years and is married with two children.

In *Through the Eyes of God* Marshall confesses that after thirty years of ministry, he felt he had only "been dabbling in missions." He successfully pastored a growing congregation, giving attention to "supportive offerings and causes" without a real heartbeat for giving priority to missions and evangelism.

He recalls seminary days (1972-75) with vigorous discussions about whether worship or evangelism should be primary in the church. He concluded: "Perhaps the church has only one overriding purpose—to help fulfill the mission of the Kingdom of God." This being true, he declares, "We would be more precise to discuss functions (plural), not purposes needing to be done by the church."

Marshall offers Matthew 16:18, 19 as verses that forever wed the Kingdom and the church, with the Kingdom being the overarching entity. He admits to practicing, for years, missions and evangelism as

priority functions of the church but at the neglect of effective missions, thus allowing evangelism to have number one priority. (This reviewer would suggest that Marshall's experience was shared by many during the period, and that his earlier approach was typical of the great Sunday school movement during the decades of the 1960s through the 1980s. When the great bus ministries fell apart, the Sunday schools declined and evangelism diminished. A strong missionary emphasis among many denominations ensued.)

Marshall further states: "When missions/evangelism is held high, lifted to its rightful place as the kingdom mission, it does not get lost in the middle of a muddle." He argues, "For our churches to understand their role aright, missions/evangelism must become not what we do, but who we are."

The world is depicted as the kingdom of Satan, and the purpose of God's Kingdom is to invade, penetrate, and overpower the realm of darkness. Reasoning that the purposes of the church are missions/evangelism, worship, fellowship, ministry, and discipleship, he argues that each of the last four mentioned can have its own reason for being and thus be separate from the most important, missions/evangelism. As a corrective, he argues that missions/evangelism should be elevated to its rightful role as *the* mission of the Kingdom.

Marshall quotes the Apostle Paul: "I went about preaching the kingdom" (Acts 20:25b NAS). In this he sees Paul as "having given himself to spreading the Kingdom above all other public activities."

Paul's Macedonian vision brought the Kingdom message to Europe and to our own shores. Many futurists, he says, "are speculating that the third millennium of Christianity will belong to Asia."

Prominent men like William Carey, the Moravian Brethren, Hudson Taylor, Cameron Townsend, Donald McGavran, and the Wycliffe Bible Translators have furthered the cause of extending the Kingdom of God to distant lands and people. Marshall claims that some of his generation are decreasing their efforts to save America and realizing that if she is to be saved, God must intervene with an awakening. He goes on to say,

This realization was what began happening to me a few years ago. I had given myself to thirty years of reading and learning all I could about local church growth and evangelism. I would have been offended if anyone had accused me of not being vitally interested in missions, but I was devoting precious little time and energy to the mission enterprise. I was not preaching many sermons on it, not spending much time in prayer about it, not going on

mission trips, and not encouraging my people to personalize their own mission involvement. Thus, when God began to put a missions burden on my heart, I truly felt I was in the bleachers, watching the Great Commission being played out on a field far, far away.

Marshall explains: "The Kingdom of God encompasses the church, parachurch groups, seminaries, missions agencies, etc. Since these are all subsets of the kingdom, the overarching entity, each by its very nature has as its purpose to help fulfill the mission of the kingdom." Thus "the primary mission of the kingdom is to grow, expand, and advance while attacking and diminishing the kingdom of evil."

Chapters three and four speak of togetherness, selflessness, and the power God supplies as in Acts 1:8. Continuing his analysis of Acts 1:8 segmentally in chapter five, Marshall briefly describes the work done in the four areas: Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the earth. Later in this chapter, Marshall describes how he organized a group of one hundred men from his local church in Springfield, Missouri, asking them to read Acts chapters one through thirteen repeatedly while they were meeting for several months on Wednesday evenings.

From these meetings four separate groups were formed: the Jerusalem Group (the city), the Judaea Group (the state), the Samaria Group (the country), and the Uttermost Group (international mission possibilities). In combined meetings of these groups goals and objectives were adopted in regard to area, time, people, finances, etc.

The Southern Baptist Convention's International Mission Board asked Marshall's church to adopt an unreached people group to reach with the gospel. While waiting for the mission board to respond to their request, they became aware of an organization called Global Focus. This group had a five-year contract with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board to help churches turn from a church growth mind-set to a worldwide kingdom outreach mind-set. The founder and president, Harry Reesor, was contacted and spoke to Marshall's people. His message resonated with the congregation, and they began to sense that God was in the work.

During the summer of 1997, the Second Baptist Church leadership campaigned heavily to impact the hearts of the members. The response, initially, was slow and skeptical. Marshall writes, "My years of pastoral praying had never prepared me for this. I felt I was a dwarf among giants." While praying, he was made to realize that it was his pastoral ministry that had shaped his people. Just as it took time for him to see the

“Kingdom vision,” there must be a processing time for his people to come around.

Come around they did! At summer’s end his people adopted a World View Document which set forth phenomenal goals, in all four areas of Acts 1:8, with set dates for completion. (The entire document appears in an appendix.)

The target people group was chosen. Marshall traveled to a foreign country accompanied by a Baptist pastor and a guide, both previously unknown to him. The harrowing first visit to this forbidding area was followed by a second, calmer one, with his wife and other members of the congregation accompanying. The church, with its pastor and leaders, was changed. They were energized, invigorated, and ultimately activated. Their strategy was not only to invade these new areas of challenge, but also to penetrate and finally to occupy.

The spiritual journey of John Marshall and his church to visualize and actualize the mission/evangelism concept is an incredible story. The book is enjoyable to read, challenging, and invigorating, especially for pastors, lay leaders, missionary candidates, and mission board members. Penetrating, probing questions cry out for response at the end of each chapter.

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The Baptist River, Essays on Many Tributaries of a Diverse Tradition. Edited by W. Glenn Jonas, Jr. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2006. 288 pp. \$35.00 hardback.

For the student of Baptist history this compilation is a valuable asset to research and understand the multi-faceted Baptist origins and influence in America. Indeed the Baptist story can be described as a mighty river with many tributaries. This volume represents extensive research and is indeed a worthwhile source of documented information regarding the similarities and distinctives of the various Baptist entities investigated.

The editor of this Baptist history textbook is Howard Professor of Religion and Chairman of the Department of Religion and Philosophy at Campbell University. He has other credentials in the field of Baptist history. Dr. Jonas presents the lead chapter entitled “Defining a Tradition:

A River Runs Through It," which is a survey of Baptist history in general as to its roots and developments.

The following groups of Baptists are examined in separate chapters to follow: American Baptists, Southern Baptists, National Baptists, Independent Baptists, National Association of Free Will Baptists, Primitive or Old School Baptists, North American Baptist Conference, Baptists in Canada, Seventh-Day Baptists, and the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship. Each of these studies is presented by a professor whose field of training and instruction lends acquaintance with the particular group of Baptists about which he writes. The final chapter is an attempt at summation of the areas of dispute that exist among the various Baptist tributaries.

This book is best considered as a text on the undergraduate level. Viewed from a strictly conservative vantage point it would be characterized as a moderate but fair interpretation of the subject. The value of the text is the broad amount of research and documentation contained therein. Some readers will find unappealing the sections of the material that recount organizational structuring and restructuring, but these actions are, nonetheless, part of the flow of the Baptist river. One assumes that the book will be most appealing to those affiliated with a particular branch of Baptists that is treated in it; but it is helpful to be acquainted with the other groups described.

For example, it was interesting to read the chapter on the Southern Baptist Convention written from the viewpoint of an observer, rather than an instigator, of the conservative "takeover" of the influential offices of the Convention structure—which resulted in what is termed the "resurgence" of conservatism in the Convention. The author of the analysis, Professor Weaver of Baylor University, makes this statement: "Conservatives were actually intolerant fundamentalists because they demanded doctrinal conformity—as they defined it." This expressed perspective illustrates the prejudicial leaning of the author toward the "moderate" school of thinking as opposed to a strictly conservative position.

Another example of this commenting from an external rather than internal observation is the chapter done on the Independent Baptists by Professor Jerry Fraught, who teaches at Oklahoma Baptist University. It will be noted that Dr. Fraught, though assumed not to be an independent Baptist, has researched the movement fairly and accurately. This reviewer found this chapter to be perhaps the most captivating to read, having seen come and go some of the stronger Independent Baptist influences in my personal experience and in the lives of my children. The writer gives what must be considered an accurate assessment of the movement.

One of the most important segments of the book, for most readers of this journal, is undoubtedly the chapter written by William Davidson on the National Association of Free Will Baptists. Students who read this treatise should come to a better understanding of the particular teaching of conditional security as held by the leading theologian of the movement, Professor Leroy Forlines, and as taught by the younger, rising leadership of the denomination. This discussion is found on page 149 and following under the heading "Free Will Baptist Distinctives."

The Baptist River is a beneficial work and should be a part of any serious study of Baptist history, to be read at least once and referred to again as a point of reference.

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The Baptist Way: Distinctives of a Baptist Church. By R. Stanton Norman. Nashville: Broadman and Holdman, 2005. 212 pp. \$16.99 paperback.

R. Stanton Norman, director of the Baptist Center for Theology and Ministry, is also the Cooperative Program Chair for SBC Studies and serves as Associate Professor of Theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Norman writes from his Southern Baptist roots and specifically aims this volume at his Southern Baptist constituency. He makes it plain that he believes a healthy church is a Baptist church, and his intent for this book is to address the theological tenets that are distinctive of the Reformation tradition of Baptists. Not intended to be a full-fledged ecclesiology, the book is an easy read, targeted at the pastor and the church, not the professor and the seminary.

In chapter one Norman addresses "Biblical Authority," arguing that Baptists seek to build churches on the foundation of the authority of the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular, not church tradition or human experience or reason. Inexplicably, however, Norman does not provide a single Scriptural reference in chapter one (not even in the endnotes). Every other chapter is appropriately substantiated from the Word, but not the chapter on Biblical Authority! Even though he rightly defends inspiration and inerrancy, he provides no Biblical references for support. Any future editions of this work should correct this glaring weakness. Otherwise, the author almost sounds presumptuously arrogant, when I know that is certainly not his intent.

Chapter two deals with "The Lordship of Jesus Christ" and Norman does not evade the "lordship controversy," contending that any separation of Jesus' saviorhood from His lordship is contrary to the New Testament. He further contends that the church exists under a Christocracy and that if a believer is not rightly related to a local body of believers he is not properly submitted to the lordship of Christ.

Chapters three and four are worth the price of the book, dealing with the necessity of a regenerate church membership and church discipline, which are vitally linked together. In an age of "cheap, easy believism" and mega-church ministries, these two chapters should be reviewed by any pastor and church wanting to be in accord with the Bible regarding its membership roll. In arguing for a regenerate church membership the author contends that infant baptism is not Biblical, presupposing that infants are either truly regenerated and therefore eligible for membership, or if not actually regenerate are nonetheless granted membership in the church. While I agree with Norman's overall position on infant baptism, he should clarify what happens to infants, baptized or not, if they die before "the age of accountability." In his fervency to "correct a wrong" he fails to shed enough light regarding the destiny of children who die in infancy.

When dealing with church discipline, Norman claims that a church which refuses to exercise church discipline has no genuine claim to being a New Testament church. He provides a succinct exegesis of Matthew 18:15-20 and offers suggestions for determining when and what kind of sin should be disciplined. Obviously, no church should seek to police its flock and discipline every single episode of "missing the mark." Therefore the author, without trying to be too simplistic, writes that "fidelity to orthodox doctrine, purity and holiness of life, and unity of the fellowship" must be maintained at the cost of church discipline for anyone who sins in these areas and refuses to repent.

Norman's section on "Congregational Polity" effectively argues that congregationalism, rather than episcopal and presbyterian forms of church polity, is most closely aligned with the New Testament and best adheres to the lordship of Jesus Christ. He further helps the reader understand the "qualified democracy" that exists in a Baptist church. While each believer has equal standing in Christ and equal potential to be involved in the decision-making process, Christ is the absolute Head and source of authority in the church. Much of Norman's presentation on congregational polity would serve well as training material for deacons and other church leaders in any Baptist church.

Chapter six is the least beneficial part of the book, focusing on "Related Church Concerns" (the marks, offices, and mission of the church) and specifically addressing the Southern Baptist Convention and *The Baptist Faith and Message* (2000). Not surprisingly, Norman's seventh chapter on "The Ordinances of a Baptist Church" deals with only two: believer's baptism and the Lord's Supper. In arguing for quickly baptizing new professing believers, he inadequately addresses the potentiality of "pseudo-disciples" and the possibility of giving someone false assurance through baptism when there has not been an opportunity to see the fruit of a changed life (and/or the comprehension of repentance and salvation on the part of a young child). While admitting there are strong adherents on both sides, Norman contends that the rituals of baptism and communion are "*church* ordinances" (and therefore fall under the administration of a local body of believers), not "*Christian* ordinances" (observable anytime, anywhere at the discretion of any believer).

Norman's final chapter focuses on liberty of conscience ("soul competency") and religious freedom. The term "soul competency" will probably be unfamiliar to many readers and after reading Norman's treatment of the subject, they may still lack clarity on its meaning. For example, he states that "soul competency stipulates that an individual must be afforded a free, uncoerced opportunity to interact with God in order to realize one's 'religious destiny.' When a person is quickened by the divine grace of God, he is fully 'competent' or capable of responding directly to God" (p. 160). Interestingly, he also states that soul competency asserts that an individual has the capability of rejecting God's offer of forgiveness (in opposition to "irresistible grace").

In addition to the weaknesses noted above, one mildly frustrating feature of the book is its use of endnotes rather than footnotes. Consequently, the reader has to constantly flip to the back to check references. On a positive note, however, the endnotes do run sequentially throughout the book rather than starting over with each new chapter, making them easier to locate. Occasionally the author quotes someone (up to two or three full sentences) and never mentions who is being quoted; one must turn to the back of the book and look up the endnote.

All in all, *The Baptist Way* would make a beneficial contribution to any Baptist preacher's library. It could serve as an excellent source of material for someone wanting to develop a church membership curriculum (with occasional editing to fit a non-Southern Baptist Church environment). The book also has a subtle way of making a Baptist proud (in the

right kind of way, one hopes) to be a Baptist, which just might do Baptists some good!

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Interpreting the New Testament Text: Introduction to the Art and Science of Exegesis. Ed. Darrell L. Bock and Buist M. Fanning. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2006. 480 pp. \$29.99 hardback.

A casual perusal of this book's endorsements on its flyleaf identifies the genre of literature the reader holds in his hands. Numerous Evangelical New Testament scholars variously praise this "*handbook on New Testament exegesis*" as a "first rate *text book*," a "helpful and practical *manual* ... suitable for the first-year seminarian" and "an excellent *guide to exegetical method*" (flyleaf). Hopefully, few will be frightened away by references to a seminary-level text book. Instead, the reader should be challenged to dig into a thoroughly edifying volume that could serve as a reminder of, or an introduction to, the necessity of Biblical preaching based upon sound exegetical principles.

This book is a distinctively fashioned two-part *festschrift*, that is, a collection of essays honoring a distinguished scholar written by his colleagues and former students. In this case the person honored is Harold Hoehner, a veteran professor of New Testament exegesis at Dallas Theological Seminary for almost 40 years.

Part one of this work could stand alone as an excellent introductory text to the methods and procedures of New Testament exegesis. Each article is composed by one of Dr. Hoehner's colleagues, each of whom has logged more than twenty years of experience in teaching New Testament exegesis at the seminary level. The topics treated are those one would expect for a text of this nature: textual criticism, grammatical analysis, sentence diagramming and outlining, etc. There is even a review of the major lexical tools available to the student of the New Testament. Additional chapters study the various literary genres found in the New Testament: that is, narrative, epistolary, and apocalyptic. Finally, to emphasize the practical nature of Dr. Hoehner's scholarship through the years, part one concludes with a chapter entitled "Showing the Relevance: *Application, Ethics and Preaching*." This concern for proper

application of the adequately exegeted text serves as an excellent bridge to the second section.

Part Two, written by Dr. Hoehner's former students, is a compilation of textual studies illustrating the exegetical methods taught in part one. Each mini-commentary, using one or more of the methods outlined in part one, such as sentence diagramming or background studies, turns theory into practice. For instance, in chapter sixteen Joel Williams uses insights regarding the narrative literary genre to solve an exegetical problem in Mark 7:27. In chapter twenty-one Helge Stadelmann uses background material regarding Jewish ritual baths as well as an analysis of the syntax of the text to exegete Ephesians 5:26.

This two-part division proves to be an excellent way to tackle the cumbersome challenge of uniting theory with practical application in a readable volume for the non-academic as well as "the first year seminarian." One very agreeable feature in part two is the presence of subtitles for each chapter that indicate the exegetical methods at play in that particular example. For example, in chapter 25, an exposition of 1 Peter 2:2a by W. Edward Glenny, we read that the essay to follow is "*a detailed exegetical discussion of a key phrase, illustrating the value of careful lexical work*" (p. 441). It would have been equally helpful if each article in part one had identified the essays in part two that feature examples of the methods being discussed, but this is a minor criticism. Footnotes and bibliography abound, nonetheless, and provide a wealth of information to "go further" in any direction the reader desires to go.

Editor Darrell Bock underscores the nature of the "art and science" (pp. 23-24) of exegesis as both the product and method of "leading or reading out" the meaning of a text (p. 23). From the beginning he does an admirable job setting the tone for what could be a purely academic volume by drawing the reader into the methods of New Testament exegesis. He pleads for less reliance on the numerous English translations of Scripture available today and a return to a firsthand exegetical encounter with the New Testament text because "working with a text firsthand is the best way to get to know it" (p. 17). He insists that knowing the text is paramount because the ultimate concern of the Bible preacher or teacher is to articulate the text's message and make application that is "rooted in that biblical message" (p. 27). Bock also warns us not to skip the hard work of exegesis through spiritualizing the work of Biblical interpretation by relying totally on the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit as our Teacher. He reminds us that "God used language to give us access to meaning, [and] the Spirit's work has less to do with understanding words and what language means than with appreciating, discerning and

accepting what is coming from God." "Exegesis," he continues, "is simply another way of saying we will carefully study and engage God's word" (p. 31). The exegete should not fail to pray, however, for the Spirit to come "alongside to impress [the Bible's] content on our mind, heart, soul and spirit" (p. 31). Finally, Bock—in his ever clear and transparent style—concludes, "Exegesis serves as the hub of pastoral reflection, standing at the base of sermons and spiritual development by shaping our thoughts and minds in directions God has given" (p. 31).

One gets the impression from the very beginning that, if the remainder of this work's authors address the "art and science" of exegesis with the same passion and clarity as Bock, this will indeed be worth the read. Though each succeeding essayist does approach his subject with unusual vigor and expertise, some chapters are just more difficult to handle than others. To cite an example, Daniel Wallace superbly leads his readers through a basic introduction of textual criticism but finally must delve deep into a discussion of its methods that is anything but simple and clear. These and other pages require serious concentration on the part of the reader. But the treasure at the end makes the digging worthwhile.

The reader should be cautioned that a working knowledge of Greek is helpful, but not essential, to mine the wealth from some chapters. Chapter four, for example, "Sentence Diagramming, Clausal Layouts, and Exegetical Outlining: *Tracing the Argument*" by Jay Smith, uses large portions of the Greek text to illustrate different outlining procedures. This fact, however, does nothing to interfere with the excellent way Smith educates the reader regarding the lost art of even the most simple sentence diagramming methods.

Smith reminds the reader that in an age of "sound bites, bullet points, television commercials that fire a barrage of images ... [i]t might be nice if the New Testament epistles had been written in a similar style. Unfortunately, they were not. Rather, the epistles and in particular Paul's letters consist of or at least contain sustained, logical arguments" (p. 73). He adds that Paul's letters are more to be likened to a suspense thriller than an automobile commercial. As such they require sustained attention and "connecting the dots" between facts, hints, and clues separated by distance in the course of the argument. Understanding the development of an argument then, in much of New Testament epistolary literature, demands the ability to construct an outline that reveals "the various levels of subordination that exist among the major points/ideas and sub-points/ideas of a passage" (p. 100). It is the outline, arising from the text, that permits the Bible teacher to faithfully exegete the passage and reveal to his listeners "the relationships that exist between these points or ideas"

(p. 100). Smith contends that, because of a failure to do the tedious work of diagramming in order to understand clausal relationships, many preachers and teachers of the New Testament resort to treating its contents as a “collection of proverbs or a set of one-liners” (p. 74).

Perhaps one of the most helpful chapters in the book is Bock’s treatment of Lexical Studies (chapter five). Particularly helpful are his examination and explanation of different lexical tools available to the New Testament exegete. For instance, he discusses how the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (TDNT) is different from the *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (NIDNTT) and the value of each (pp. 142, 149). Bock even makes suggestions regarding computer software for Windows operating systems *and* the Mac (p. 141)!

At various times in the course of reading this work this reviewer was reminded that those with a high view of Scripture will certainly appreciate its contents more than those with a low view of inspiration. In addition, if one rates one’s personal spiritual experience higher than Biblical revelation, reading this tome will probably seem a boring waste of time. Neither will this book be valuable to those Bible preachers or teachers who see little value in going beyond the current and trendy interpretations of Scripture, ready-made for twenty-first century American pop culture. For the most part, this volume will likely be beyond the interest of the lay Bible teacher who is unconcerned to educate himself in Biblical exegesis. Nonetheless, students of Scripture at various levels of experience, interested in advancing their understanding of one or more of the subject areas, can satisfy that curiosity through a selective reading of its chapters.

Those who stand to benefit from this valuable tool will include third- or fourth-year undergraduate pastoral studies majors, Bible teachers and preachers several years out of school in need of a refresher course on exegetical method, and the first-year seminarian with no Bible College background. However, those who may profit most from this resource are not the students in the classroom but rather men like this reviewer, experienced pastors in need of a reminder that their *first* calling is to exegete the New Testament text with a view toward practical application of Scripture’s unchanging truth. In an age of busyness and ready-made, online sermons, the temptation to skimp on sermon preparation is great. *Interpreting the New Testament Text* may be just the encouragement some need to do the difficult work of exegesis. We are grateful to Harold Hoehner whose legacy continues to inspire hardworking exegetes to

discover what the authors of the Biblical text intended to say and what that should mean to us today.

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The New American Commentary, An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Exodus. By Douglas K. Stuart. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006. 826 pp. \$32.99 hardback.

The author of this exegetical commentary on Exodus is Douglas K. Stuart, a professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. His Ph.D. is from Harvard University. He is widely known as a scholar in ancient languages, including Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, Latin, Egyptian, Ugaritic, Akkadian, Syriac, and Arabic. He is considered an expert in the cultures of the ancient Middle East. He has published commentaries on Ezekiel and most of the Minor Prophets and has written several books on exegesis, including *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* (with G. D. Fee). On the more practical side, Stuart is also a pastor and a father of eight.

This commentary series, *The New American Commentary*, claims to honor the Scriptures, assuming the inerrancy of the Bible, to present the finest in contemporary Evangelical scholarship, and to enhance the practical work of preaching and teaching. It derives its name from, and purports to be a continuation of, the nineteenth-century series called *An American Commentary*, edited by Alvah Hovey. (This reviewer came to appreciate highly the commentary on Matthew by John A. Broadus from that earlier series.) The present series uses the *New International Version* of the Bible throughout.

This particular volume aims to exegete faithfully the Biblical text, point out difficult problems and suggest reasonable solutions, and emphasize the culture of the times along with the grammar and theology of the text. The author indicates that his first desire is to meet the needs of pastors, missionaries, evangelists, and other workers; at the same time, he will not neglect attention to more scholarly interests. He gives credit to his students in advanced Hebrew for helping him to delve more deeply into the original text as well as to the interest of his church in a prolonged study of Exodus.

Stuart points to five things that strongly influence his approach to Exodus.

(1) The *structure* of Exodus involves two main parts: first is Israel's deliverance from Egypt and arrival at Sinai (1-19); second is God's covenant with Israel, developed and explained at Sinai (20-40). Other Old Testament books with this two-part approach include Joshua, Isaiah, and Ezekiel.

(2) With regard to *historicity*, there is uncertainty about the dates of much of the history in Exodus, including the date of the exodus itself as well as the route followed and the precise location of Sinai. The writer accepts the conservative approach, pointing to a date in the fifteenth century B.C., but the primary reason for this date is based more on the statement in 1 Kings 6:1 than on certainty about events in Exodus itself. He accepts the location of Sinai as the modern Jebel-Musa. He points out that the Divine activity should not be viewed as a result of a volcanic mountain, as less conservative commentators often maintain. He thinks that the Pharaoh of the exodus was likely a native Egyptian some time after the overthrow of the Hyksos rulers under whom Joseph had come to power. Emphasis is placed more on the reasonableness of the accounts in Exodus, not so much on detailed arguments to prove certain dates.

(3) The Hebrew *text* of Exodus has been well preserved in modern copies of the Masoretic Text (MT), drawn largely by modern scholars from the Leningrad Codex of 1008 A.D. The Septuagint (LXX) and the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) largely corroborate the Masoretic readings. This commentary discusses only those textual problems and solutions that are considered to have significant implications for interpretation.

(4) In relation to the *authorship* of Exodus, Stuart unapologetically maintains that Moses wrote the entire Pentateuch, including the book of Exodus. The contents of Exodus cover the time from Moses' birth to the setting up of the tabernacle, when Moses was about 81 years of age; but the writing might not have been completed until Israel (the next generation) was about to enter the Promised Land, just prior to Moses' death. He rejects the arguments of the proponents of the Documentary Hypothesis (J, E, P in Exodus) as untenable in that they are primarily based on variations in vocabulary and grammatical forms, variations which he maintains were intentional on the part of the writer.

(5) As to the *theology* of Exodus, Stuart sees it summed up in Exodus 6:6-8 under four main themes: (a) salvation, (b) knowledge of God, (c) covenant relationship, and (d) a promised land. His view of Israel's *salvation*, in the context of Exodus, includes their deliverance from the bondage of Egypt's Pharaoh in order to more completely serve the living God (Exod. 6:6). God's desire for His people to have a *real knowledge of Himself* is emphasized in His repeated declaration, "I am the Lord" (see

Exod. 6:7, 8). God frequently expresses His desire for Israel to be *His covenant people* throughout the book (see Exod. 6:7; 19:4-6). The idea of covenant implies a family relationship. The fact that they were headed for *a promised land* (see Exod. 6:8), as God had promised Abraham four generations earlier, was clearly reflected in the construction of the tabernacle as a building that could be broken down and moved along in their progress toward the land “flowing with milk and honey.”

To these four primary themes our author adds several other sub-themes, including (a) the limited presence of God (Exod. 3:5; 19:12; 28:43), (b) the prohibition against representing an invisible God by visible symbols (Exod. 25:21, 22), (c) the necessity of law (Exod. 19:5; 20:20), (d) the necessity of following God (Exod. 40:36-38), and (e) the power of the only true God (Ex. 12:12).

Stuart has an excellent and detailed outline of Exodus. His repetition of the division outline at the head of each section of the commentary is helpful in giving the reader a quick glimpse of what is coming in that section. His use of a very detailed system of footnotes, both to point to other sources for further research and to bring out more technical information which might not be appropriate for the text, adds greatly to the value of the commentary. The writer uses the form of an *excursus* to discuss more technical or more controversial subjects which need further attention than can be dealt with in a footnote. Some of these discussions are rather lengthy.

This commentary is very thorough, as can be seen by the fact that the writer has given nearly 800 pages to his exposition. Some readers may feel that the writer is too verbose when the same points might be communicated in a more direct manner. He is apparently committed to an amillennial position on eschatology in that he feels that the nation of Israel has been completely replaced by the Church in God's plan. He says, “In the New Testament, Israel becomes all who will place faith in Jesus Christ—not an ethnic or political entity at all but now a spiritual entity, a family of God” (p. 38). Regardless how the reader may feel about this, whether pro or con, Stuart's eschatology has little effect on the interpretation of Exodus as a whole. The writer does not hesitate to face the most controversial subjects head on, and his conclusions always honor the inspiration and authority of the word of God.

Stuart gives an excellent exegesis of the ten commandments, or ten words, in Exodus 20. The writer's footnote comment in connection with his discussion of the commandment about keeping the Sabbath in Exodus 20:11, however, is a bit disconcerting. He states, “The wording of the commandment, however, does not necessarily endorse a literal

six-day creation any more than the wording of Genesis 1 itself does" (p. 460). What he is implying by this is not explained any further. Though his comments throughout are based on the text of the NIV, he does not hesitate to criticize its translations when he feels that they are not on the mark.

This reviewer recommends this commentary as a whole. It goes into great depth in discussing the meaning and application of the text of Exodus, and carefully relates these meanings and applications to other relevant parts of Scripture. Though the exegesis may at times be somewhat tedious, the time one spends with it will be well rewarded.

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The Letters of 2 Peter and Jude (in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*). By Peter H. Davids. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006. 348 + xxxii pages. \$34 hardback.

According to the dust jacket, Peter Davids is professor of Biblical theology at St. Stephen's University, St. Stephen, New Brunswick, Canada. Among numerous publications he has written other commentaries on the General Epistles: *The Epistle of James* (in the *New International Greek Testament Commentary*) and *The First Epistle of Peter* (in the *New International Commentary on the New Testament*). This volume was written for the *Pillar New Testament Commentary* series, which is designed (according to its General Editor, Donald A. Carson) for serious pastors and teachers of the Bible. Carson explains that this means interacting with important contemporary debate but avoiding undue technical detail, blending rigorous exegesis and exposition, and staying alert to both Biblical theology and contemporary relevance without confusing the role of a commentary with that of a sermon. It strikes me that Davids has succeeded in achieving these aims.

Most of us use a commentary as a reference tool when studying a given passage; it was different, then, to read through one from start to finish. In doing so, I found it much easier to appreciate the big picture and to understand a given part of the book in light of the whole. Davids has effectively communicated the message of Jude and 2 Peter, I believe, and enabled the reader to share the perspective of the original readers; that is certainly a good thing.

Among the general characteristics of the whole volume are these. (1) Most striking is its extensive interaction with the literature of the period when these letters were written, including the Old Testament (the Greek LXX in particular) and especially a number of writings that we might otherwise call “intertestamental” or pseudepigraphal. Anyone interested in knowing what writings Jude or Peter might have been familiar with and influenced by will find this rewarding. (2) Closely connected, Davids regularly tells the reader exactly what other works, canonical and non-canonical, a given (Greek) word or phrase appears in—at times for a period of five hundred years! (3) There is healthy interaction with contemporary interpreters of Jude and 2 Peter on many points, letting the reader know what the issues are and providing both fair treatment of other views and a measured judgment. (4) The mechanics of Greek vocabulary and grammar are treated judiciously, with the Greek words themselves appearing sparingly (and transliterated when given); a reader without knowledge of Greek can make out fairly well, I think. I did note that Davids seems to be well aware of contemporary Greek aspect theory. (5) Here and there it is apparent that the writer has adopted some contemporary sociological theory in interpretation: for example, he frequently speaks about the role of honor and shame in the Greco-Roman world of New Testament times. But I did not find any of this to be misguided. (6) When differences of opinion are discussed, Davids comes down on the side of careful reasoning and is reluctant to speak dogmatically when good evidence does not justify it. (7) Speaking generally, the author appears to be conservative; I could usually appreciate his conclusions in this light, even if I did not always agree. (8) The version chosen as a basis for the commentary series is the New International Version; but Davids often criticizes that translation. (9) In discussing the introductory material for both letters, he does more than answer the traditional questions as to when, where, and by whom they were written; he effectively paints a picture of the letters and their circumstances that serve as context for the commentaries to follow. He sees the problem behind Jude as the presence, in the midst of the believing community, of false teachers who practice and teach immorality, “people who teach by word and deed an alternative version of Christian belief” (p. 43). Behind 2 Peter are false teachers who deny the truth of the Parousia and of final judgment and thereby justify their immoral living.

A commentary can be evaluated in more than one way, depending on who its users will be. In my view this volume will be most usable within the academic community—as in the seminary, for example. From that perspective, Davids has succeeded admirably and I can recommend the

work without hesitation. For the pastors or lay teachers that I am most familiar with, however, the book will still be useful but will not provide some of the kinds of help that such users seek. One reviewer's blurb on the dust jacket speaks of Davids's "deep pastoral concerns"; I must say that, with some exceptions here and there, I was not impressed in the same way. Perhaps the writer has too effectively avoided confusing a commentary with a sermon. There is simply not enough practical application throughout, and I missed helpful summaries of material after lengthy discussion of issues. The kind of summary I refer to can be illustrated by what Davids says at the end of his discussion of 2 Peter 3:5-6 (p. 271):

So the "scoffers" have forgotten something. Yes, there was an original creation, and, yes, the world appears to be running quite well now along the lines laid down in the creation, but, no, there is not a full continuity. We are in the second age of the world, an age that is demarcated from the first age by God's judgment in the flood, just as our age will be demarcated from the next by God's judgment with fire ... Forgetting this discontinuity is quite serious, for it has allowed the "scoffers" to forget that there is a precedent for the coming judgment. Their first assumption has proved false.

This is indeed an excellent summary; more of these would have greatly improved the reader's ability to follow the flow of the text. (Davids's treatment of 2 Peter 3 seemed much more practical and pastoral than the rest; perhaps I was reading with a different eye at that point?)

In one area, at least, Davids sounds an important pastoral concern. Numerous times he emphasizes that God's saving grace cannot justify careless living, and a number of his observations along these lines are eminently quotable. I cannot include many of them here, but this sampling commends itself: "The fact is that as soon as one says that God forgives sins ... the temptation is to presume upon such grace. What this attitude ignores is that it is upon repentance and commitment to God (i.e., faith, which means commitment ...) that forgiveness takes place" (p. 44). Jude "knows that not everyone who calls Jesus Lord, or has had a conversion experience, or has prayed the 'sinner's prayer,' or has had spiritual experiences is in fact a true follower of Jesus. One recognizes the true followers by their obedience to their Lord" (p. 91). "Not to submit to [Jesus'] directions is to deny him" (p. 153). Often "in the church today ... what is implied is that if you have 'asked Jesus into your heart' ... it no

longer matters how you live, although lifestyle may affect the reward that you get in heaven. This is a teaching with which our author would have had no patience" (p. 246).

At this point, however, the "pastoral concern" needed explanation. To the sentence just quoted, he adds, "just as he would have had little patience with those Christian leaders who ... indicate that living according to the values of the culture around us is fine." If this is a problem—and surely he is right—he ought to teach us more carefully what this implies. Perhaps he means a later observation to give help along these lines: "When the Day [of the Lord] comes, one's retirement fund will not be important, but rather what one has invested in the kingdom of our Sovereign Lord" (p. 189); yes, but what then should I do about retirement, if anything?

Dauids deals with Jude first, and on its own terms, at least in part because he believes it was written first and that 2 Peter used Jude. While I do not necessarily agree—or disagree—with Dauids on this point (it seems highly likely that one of them made use of the other), he might have given more attention to reasons for asserting the priority of Jude as opposed to the other way around. As for authorship, he seems confident that Jude, the brother of James and of Jesus, was the author, and he interacts ably with those who would date the letter far too late for that to be the case. As for 2 Peter, he answers well those who are sure that the apostle Peter did not write it, emphasizing that their case cannot be proved "in the absence of a biography of Simon Peter" or without "knowledge of his education and his activities after A.D. 44," but he concludes that "the salutation claims that this letter was written by Simon Peter" and "that we by the nature of the case cannot know *from historical investigation* whether this is in some sense actual or is a pseudepigraphical attribution" (p. 149, emphasis his). Yes, but then can the person of faith know on some other grounds? One winds up uncertain whether Dauids thinks Simon Peter was the writer, and this is a little disappointing even though he treats the letter entirely as inspired Scripture.

Both Jude and 2 Peter present some interpretive problems. Notable among those in Jude is its use of sources that wound up outside the Old and New Testament canon. In particular, these occur in verse 9, with its description of the contention between Michael and the devil over the body of Moses, and in verse 14, with its reference to the prophecy of Enoch. In my view, Dauids deals with these judiciously, acknowledging that Jude made use of extra-canonical sources and explaining these references in the terms of that body of literature in its Jewish context. There is not really a contradiction of divine inspiration here, so long as the

inspired writer was supernaturally “borne along” (2 Pet. 1:21) by the Holy Spirit in his selection of material. Making use of something true found in a non-Biblical source does not put a stamp of approval on everything in that source. But Davids probably speaks too carelessly when he suggests that both Jude and the writer of 2 Peter may have regarded some non-canonical writings—*1 Enoch* and *Testament of Moses*, for examples—as among the inspired Old Testament prophets (pp. 157, 260, 307). He represents Jude as citing, in verse 14, *1 Enoch* “as prophecy” (p. 75); but what Jude does is cite Enoch as a prophet, which is not quite the same as citing *1 Enoch* as prophecy.

Another thorny issue in Jude, and in 2 Peter, is the matter of “the angels which kept not their first estate” (Jude 6) and “the angels that sinned” (2 Pet. 2:4). Davids sides with those who take these to refer to the “sons of God” who intermarried with the “daughters of men” in Genesis 6, and so he accepts the notion that angels intermarried with humans and produced unusually heroic offspring. He makes his case bravely, and there have been many good interpreters with that view; but I remain unconvinced. One of Davids’s reasons for accepting this is that he thinks Jude is colored by his use of *1 Enoch* (and so 2 Peter by its use of Jude) not only in verses 14-15 but elsewhere, including in verse 6 which closely parallels “the account in *1 Enoch* 6-19” (p. 49). Davids may sometimes have relied too heavily on *1 Enoch* (and other non-canonical writings) to explain Jude. In general, however, I think he avoids fatal errors in doing so; the Biblical writers, after all, reflected their literary and cultural milieu. The errors of that milieu, however, were corrected by their Christian worldview and the superintending influence of the Holy Spirit on them.

One of the potential, interpretive pitfalls of 2 Peter is the treatment of 2:18-22 and the possibility of apostasy. I found myself appreciating both Davids’s approach to exegesis of the passage and the results. He observes, in reference to this passage, that “the picture ... is a graphic one, that of a person venturing back to the area of a giant spider’s web that he or she has escaped (perhaps believing that they can handle the situation now) only to get entangled and be mastered by the huge spider” (p. 249). If Davids does not believe that personal apostasy from a regenerate state is possible (and I am not sure whether he does), he has at least avoided the path of those interpreters who hasten to assure their readers that such warnings are merely hypothetical!

Another of 2 Peter’s exegetical thorns is his treatment of the eschatological holocaust in 3:7-13. Here Davids is at his best. Almost word by word and phrase by phrase his conclusions about the meaning are

convincing and appropriate. I say “almost” because I was not quite convinced that “the elements” in v. 12 are the sun, moon, and stars; I still prefer what I said in my own (Randall House) commentary. But I freely admit that when reading the commentary on chapter three I said to myself (more often than before) that I wish I had known that or said that!

Can I recommend this commentary on Jude and 2 Peter, then? Most certainly, and especially for those in academic circles and for pastors and teachers who have a more scholarly bent. Some will find the interaction with material from non-canonical literature to be heavy and distracting. Davids’s style of writing is tightly-packed; I often found myself getting lost in long sentences that cite sources and supporting material in parentheses and bracketed material within the parentheses. But in the end I found that I had an improved grasp of Jude and 2 Peter and of their coherence as individual letters. I think any knowledgeable reader will have the same experience, even though homiletic emphases and illustrations must for the most part be found elsewhere.

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Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities. By Roger E. Olson. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2006, 250 pp. \$25.00 paperback.

Rare indeed is the book that discusses traditional theological issues in a way that respects tradition yet brings fresh, constructive insight to the contemporary theological scene. Roger E. Olson’s pathbreaking *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* is such a book. One reason that Olson is able to bring such freshness to the Arminian-Calvinist debate is that Arminius, the progenitor of the theological system that bears his name, has been so neglected. In his revival of the theology of Arminius, Olson joins recent thinkers such as Leroy Forlines (*The Quest for Truth*) and Robert Picirilli (*Grace, Faith, Free Will*) in a “return to the sources,” in which Arminius is rescued from obscurity and Arminianism is rescued from some of its later historical developments.

Free Will Baptists interested in Arminianism need to read this work. Yet readers from across the theological spectrum, Calvinists and Arminians alike, will greatly benefit from it. Reading this book will help Calvinists to move beyond the caricatures of Arminianism in Calvinistic theological literature. Arminians and other non-Calvinists will be

introduced—most for the first time—to a more grace-oriented stream of Arminianism with which they were formerly unfamiliar.

In his exposition of what he calls “classical Arminianism” (Leroy Forlines uses the same phrase in *The Quest for Truth* more narrowly, excluding much of Wesleyan Arminianism), Olson argues that there are some issues on which Arminians and Calvinists cannot compromise (as in “Calminianism”) and maintain the coherence of either of their systems. Yet Arminianism has much more in common with Reformed Christianity than most Calvinists realize. Indeed, Arminianism is more a development of Reformed theology than a departure from it.

Some of Olson’s best passages are those in which he quotes contemporary Calvinists caricaturing Arminians and then shows how real Arminian theologians do not fit those caricatures. He is correct in criticizing, for example, the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals for excluding Arminians (though many confessional Arminians wholeheartedly agree with the Alliance’s approach except for their Calvinism). If advocates of infant baptism and adherents of believer’s baptism can work together for the mutual progress of the kingdom, Olson asks, then why cannot Calvinists and Arminians? This gets back to the irresponsible ways that many well-known Calvinists characterize their Arminian brothers and sisters—associating Arminianism with heresy and liberalism and suggesting that it is closer to Roman Catholic than to Protestant theology. Olson provides numerous examples of Arminians past and present who defy such categories.

Olson contends that it is a mistake to think that free will is the guiding principle for Arminianism, when in reality free will for most Arminian theologians results necessarily from the goodness—for Arminius, the “justice”—of God. That is, they do not want to make God the author of sin; and they see divine determinism as logically doing this when God is conceived as foreordaining every event, thus precluding human freedom.

Olson also dispels the notion that Arminianism does not believe in the sovereignty of God. It is not judicious, he argues, for Calvinists to define divine sovereignty in their own deterministic terms, and then suggest that Arminians do not believe in divine sovereignty just because the latter do not define it deterministically. Most sovereigns in this world have maintained rule over their realms without controlling every detail of them, he argues. Why must God’s sovereignty be interpreted as control of every detail of reality? More importantly, the Bible does not present God’s sovereignty and providence in this deterministic manner. However, it will surprise many Calvinist readers when they see how serious a doctrine of divine sovereignty these traditional Arminians held.

Calvinists often describe Arminianism as a human-centered theology with an optimistic doctrine of man and his natural spiritual abilities. However, as Olson shows, Arminius's doctrines of original sin, total depravity, human inability, the bondage of the will, and the absolute necessity of divine grace for salvation cannot be described as human-centered. That caricature is more the result of what Olson calls "vulgarized" American Arminianism which Jonathan Edwards encountered and Finney later popularized. Popular Calvinists also argue that Arminians cannot "give God the glory" for their salvation but take the glory themselves because their act of faith is a work. Olson shows how classical Arminian theologians argue that faith is a gift. Furthermore, a beggar simply receiving a gift from a rich man does not detract from the rich man's glory nor ascribe merit to the beggar.

Another common myth is that predestination is a Calvinistic doctrine and that Arminians do not believe in it. Olson gives an excellent exposition of the Arminian account of election and reprobation conditioned on exhaustive divine foreknowledge of free human acts. He shows how Arminians have defended their viewpoint exegetically and how the classical Arminian approach is different from Calvinism as well as from open theism.

The last two chapters of the book, in my judgment, contain the most important argument of the book. In them, Olson dispels the commonly held notion that all Arminians hold views of justification and atonement that are inconsistent with those of the Protestant Reformers. He shows that it is a myth to believe that all Arminians deny the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer in justification and hold the governmental view of atonement. On the contrary, many Arminians, like Arminius himself, subscribe to the penal-satisfaction theory of atonement and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to the believer as the only meritorious cause of the believer's justification before God.

The strengths of this book are many. It is the first book ever published to survey the field of historical Arminian theology so exhaustively. Yet it does so in a way that is accessible not only to scholars but also to college and seminary students, pastors, and interested laypeople. Those looking for an exegetical-theological defense of Arminianism will not be satisfied with this book. This is not the book's purpose. Olson's work is historical theology at its best. He paints a picture of the theology of classical Arminians past and present. This sets certain limits for his work. He insists that he is not defending any particular Arminian viewpoint, though his views do shine through at certain points. His aim is simply to present accurately Arminian soteriology so as to correct current

misunderstandings and encourage more fruitful dialogue between Calvinists and Arminians.

In compelling and readable prose, Olson ranges over a great deal of territory. He discusses Arminius, the Remonstrants Simon Episcopius and Philip Limborch, John Wesley, nineteenth-century Wesleyan theologians such as Richard Watson, William Burton Pope, Thomas Summers, and John Miley, as well as twentieth-century and contemporary Arminians such as H. Orton Wiley, Thomas Oden, F. Leroy Forlines, Jack C. Cottrell, and H. Ray Dunning. He also makes frequent use of two fine dissertations recently written by John Mark Hicks and William G. Witt.

Olson cogently makes several important points that will add significantly to the discussion of Arminianism and that recent works in Arminian theology have not adequately discussed. For example, he clears up the misunderstanding of Arminianism as semi-Pelagianism by discussing Arminius's disavowal of the label and his theological reasons for vigorously distancing himself from semi-Pelagianism. Olson's terminology—that the act of faith is the free “non-resistance” to the drawing power of the Holy Spirit—is valuable.

He correctly speaks of individual election as the classical Arminian view. According to this perspective, the New Testament speaks of a personal election of individuals to salvation based on divine foreknowledge of them in their believing status. His emphasis that, for Arminius and other classical Arminians, this is individual election as opposed to corporate election is a welcome change to the view of “corporate election” held by many contemporary Arminians. In this way, Olson echoes recent grace-oriented Arminians such as Thomas Oden, Leroy Forlines, and Robert Picirilli. Corporate election, according to classical Arminians, is the unconditional election of the church as the people of God. Individual election is the personal election of believers to salvation.

Olson accurately describes Arminius as a covenant theologian. This should gain the attention of traditional Reformed thinkers, who tend to be friendlier with Calvinist Dispensationalists than with non-Calvinists who share approaches to the covenants and eschatology that are closer to Reformed views.

He states clearly that classical Arminianism is completely different from open theism (or limited omniscience), because the former demands absolute divine foreknowledge of future free actions for its entire system of predestination to cohere. He is also to be commended for discerning that Arminius did not accept middle knowledge. Olson cogently argues that the idea of middle knowledge results in just another kind of divine determinism. Thus it does not help the Arminian cause but in essence is

incompatible with libertarian free will. He correctly says that the classical Arminian contends that middle knowledge is illogical because the concept of counterfactuals of freedom is illogical.

Because this is such an excellent book, I will keep my criticisms to a minimum. However, there are a few. These are mostly internecine Arminian issues but are extremely important to the core argument that Olson is making. Olson is vague on certain details that seem to mitigate the points he is trying to make in getting Calvinists to reconsider Arminianism. Perhaps this is because he is attempting to present a united front for Evangelical Arminians. In some places, Olson seems to minimize the distinctions between Arminius and later types of Arminianism, particularly Wesleyanism.

Wesleyan Arminian theologians tend to take the view that either Christ's atonement or the drawing power of the Holy Spirit (or both—the reader is left confused over which it is) reverses inherited guilt (p. 33) or even releases all people from the condemnation for Adam's sin (p. 34). Olson seems to disagree with this, but he leaves too many loose ends for those Arminians who want to follow Arminius more stringently.

Arminius simply believed that original sin, total depravity, and inherited guilt were the lot of all those born into the human race, and the Holy Spirit draws them individually by his grace. Thus he would have disagreed with what Stephen M. Ashby has called the "scattergun" Wesleyan approach to grace. This view seems to aver that Christ's atonement automatically renders the will free, rather than the Holy Spirit's convicting power applied to individual sinners' hearts and minds in their own time. Olson would no doubt agree, but he would have done well to have made this clearer. Calvinist authors like Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams, whose book *Why I Am Not an Arminian* Olson cites, are right to think that this view would mean that "in Arminian theology nobody is actually depraved! Depravity and bondage of the will is [*sic*] only hypothetical and not actual" (p. 154). Furthermore, one might wish that Olson had spent more time talking about how most Arminians after Arminius have differed with him on the imputation of Adam's sin to the race, a Reformed view that Arminius vigorously upheld.

Another place where one might wish for more clarity is Olson's discussion of prevenient grace as partially regenerative. He argues that classical Arminians see those under the sway of prevenient grace as partially but not completely regenerated. Thus, there is an "intermediate stage" between being completely unregenerate and fully regenerated, when the will is "freed to respond to the good news of redemption in Christ" (p. 164). Most Arminian theologians will be ill at ease with this concept,

preferring to say that saving faith logically precedes regeneration in the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). An obvious, related question is why prevenient grace is necessary if Christ's atonement reverses inherited guilt and releases people from the condemnation for Adam's sin. Would this not mitigate total depravity, rendering prevenient grace unnecessary?

Many Arminians will, with Calvinists, be uncomfortable with Olson's view that divine love is the "guiding vision" of Arminian theology (pp. 72-73). They, along with Arminius, would say that God's justice or holiness is the guiding vision in Arminianism as much as in Calvinism. This is the view of recent Arminians such as Forlines, Oden, and Picirilli.

Olson is quite clear that classical Arminianism is incompatible with open theism and that he disagrees with the latter. Still, traditional Arminians will be concerned about Olson's footnote regarding open theism: "I consider open theism a legitimate evangelical and Arminian option even though I have not yet adopted it as my own perspective" (p. 198, n. 65).

A few comments are in order regarding Olson's treatment of justification and atonement in Arminianism. Olson correctly notes that Wesleyans in the nineteenth century and afterward have disagreed with the imputation of the righteousness of Christ as the sole meritorious cause of the believer's justification, as well as with the penal-satisfaction doctrine of atonement that accompanies it. He states clearly that he regrets this development and prefers the contemporary Wesleyan theologian Thomas Oden's approach, which defends both these doctrines. The difficulty is that Olson seems to hope fondly that these doctrines are not at the core of Wesleyan Arminianism and that Wesleyans can choose between the mainstream Wesleyan view and Oden's view. This hope seems to root itself in one of the few profound misunderstandings in Olson's entire book: Wesley's doctrines of atonement and justification.¹

While Wesley uses imputational language in his discussion of justification, he falls far short of a Reformed understanding of the imputation of Christ's righteousness as the meritorious cause of the believer's justification before God. Furthermore, Wesley melds satisfaction and governmental motifs in his doctrine of atonement, arguing that Christ's death atones only for the believer's past sins. Thus Olson's interpretation of Wesley's views on atonement and justification is flawed. This may account for what seems to be his hope that Wesleyans can recover from these theological views by going back to Wesley himself.

1. See Dr. Pinson's article, "Atonement, Justification, and Apostasy in the Thought of John Wesley" in this issue of *Integrity*—editor.

One historically rooted criticism may account for why Olson misunderstands Wesley: the only period of Arminian theology of which Olson does not take account is seventeenth-century English Arminianism. Yet this is the most crucial period for the development of subsequent (largely Wesleyan) Arminian thought. In other words, seventeenth-century English Arminianism, from the Arminian Puritan John Goodwin to thinkers such as Jeremy Taylor and Henry Hammond of the Anglican “Holy Living” school, provided the context for Wesley’s development of his Arminianism. These are the people he read and studied and re-published, not Arminius. Understanding the historical context of Wesley’s soteriological development would have helped Olson’s treatment. Yet it makes clearer the divide that really does exist between Reformed theology (as well as Arminius) and Wesleyan theology on such issues as the actual total depravity (in the here-and-now) of sinners, the satisfaction view of atonement, and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

Finally, Olson fails to deal with sanctification and perseverance. Perhaps this is because he wants to bring together all non-Calvinists in a united voice against the determinism, unconditional predestination, and limited atonement of classical Calvinism (a noble aim, to be sure). Dealing with these issues would have shown the consequences of many Arminians’ not believing in the imputation of Christ’s righteousness and the satisfaction view of atonement: that is, a belief in the possibility of entire sanctification or sinless perfection, which dovetails with the notion that only past sins are forgiven and hence one can lose salvation by committing acts of sin and regain it by repenting. Olson failed to deal with these crucial doctrines, repeating the mistaken view that Arminius is not really sure if once-regenerate people can lose their salvation. On the contrary, Arminius believed that one can “decline from salvation,” but only by “declining from belief.” Arminius reinforced this view again and again when he made statements that not all believers are elect—that the elect are only those regenerate individuals who *persevere* in belief until the end of life. Those who do not continue in belief have, by that unbelief, committed the sin against the Holy Spirit and cannot be renewed to salvation.

Despite these criticisms, if Olson’s purpose is to provide a united front for all non-Calvinists, help Calvinists get past their unfair caricatures of Arminian theology, and help breathe new life into the Calvinist-Arminian debate, then he has fulfilled his purpose grandly. Olson says that, while Calvinists and Arminians, like advocates of infant baptism and adherents of believer’s baptism, will have a difficult time being members of the same congregations, they can do great things together for

Evangelical theology and the kingdom of God. One hopes that this view can be reflected in reality, and I believe that *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities* can play a significant role in making it so.

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Charts on the Book of Revelation: Literary, Historical, and Theological Perspectives. By Mark Wilson. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007. 134 pp. \$21.99 paperback.

Mark Wilson (Ph.D., University of South Africa, 1996) is director of the Asia Minor Research Center of Ismir, Turkey. Most of the material in *Charts* was developed as part of his thesis. Among other publications he has written the commentary on Revelation in the Zondervan Illustrated Backgrounds Commentary.

The Book of Revelation is filled with images and visions so otherworldly that they often strain human diction to its limits in attempting to explain the maze of messages, chronologies, catastrophisms, characters, themes, and images. John's narration sometimes moves forward smoothly but at other times recapitulates the same events or telescopes into the future, or at other times becomes a sort of *parenthetical aside* suspending the normal sequence.

For the most part, Revelation flows in a neatly chronological or sequential order. Its various literary forms—letters, doxologies, apocalyptic genres, Old Testament allusions, prophecies, and visions—shift gears from one to another like a well-tuned transmission. Symbols may be spiritual or ideal, historical or literal, past, present, or future—if not sometimes a combination of all of these. The scenes alternate frequently between Heaven and earth or time and eternity.

It is logical then that students of Revelation have used various means, beyond exegesis of the words alone, to capture or convey its contents. Even then, much of Revelation remains stubbornly enigmatic and mysterious. With the computerization and graphics capabilities of twenty-first century technology in the modern publishing world, and the image-driven, visionary content of Revelation, one might expect *Charts* to be something that would appeal to the visual inclinations of a contemporary audience. Remarkably, there are no such decorations! Wilson's book by design is ostensibly, even starkly, more limited in ambition. It is not an

exposition of the text of Revelation. Nor does it claim to be a commentary or interpretation with any sort of theological or eschatological bias. (I am not convinced that Wilson's bias is hidden entirely.) There is no dialogue or narrative guiding the user from one chart to another. No explanation is offered within the charts themselves. Each chart is a collection of comparisons either inviting agreement or prompting additional personal investigation. In form it is designed somewhat like other "chart" collections produced in recent years. Only here the charts are related to all things Revelation.

Beginning with charts on traditional themes such as authorship, date, and canonicity, the sequence thereafter is largely unintuitive. The abundant amount of raw material referenced in the charts forces readers to synthesize and contextualize the material in a meaningful way. This is so whether one tries to discern some connection between the charts or within the body of each individual chart. A basic orientation with scholarly presuppositions and literature on Revelation, as well as the Bible itself, is requisite to be confident at all about the material. Indeed, perspective is clearly one of the keys in determining the value of a given chart. Those charts comparing Scripture with Scripture are probably more useful than those which reflect or suggest earthly sources for the material in Revelation.

Simply put, *Charts* may be described as a *workbook of charts* on the Book of Revelation and eschatology in general. There are seventy-nine (!) charts, all straight-lined in neat rectangles or squares, with their headings providing the only hint toward instructive direction. Novice students of the Book of Revelation or eschatology will likely find this a bit frustrating. As a whole, the workbook covers a broad panorama of subject matter: the Bible, extra-Biblical literature, two thousand years of literature and interpretation. Most of Wilson's charts require a working knowledge of each subject to be even minimally useful. For this reason some readers will be significantly restricted; the work is beyond the reach of a casual reading.

As seen by their headings (subjects), the charts appear to be ordered randomly and may or may not be related to the ones before or after. Granted, one can see how some are related; some may even be self-explanatory. But the connections must be made by the reader, who must supply his or her own knowledge of background, connections, corrections, relevance, and application. Still, this independence may be viewed positively and is potentially what makes Wilson's book a fresh offering. Whether interpretive bias is avoided or not, *Charts* is a tool enabling (or leaving) the student to do his own work.

In addition to minor reservations about the plain format of Wilson's charts is an alert that a fair amount of presumption—if not faith—is required to accept a chart's contents as accurate or unbiased. For example, in regard to authorship and dating, preterists typically argue for the earlier date (before A.D. 70) because it fits their perspective, whereas futurists rally around the time of Domitian (circa A.D. 96) because it fits theirs.

Wilson's caveat in his introduction may reveal his discomfort with futuristic or dispensational viewpoints; he views this work as a filter, of sorts, against any one school of popular interpretation. Even so, bias may not be altogether absent from his selection and arrangement of the material. For the most part he makes a good effort to be as fair as possible, such as with the charts on dating the Book of Revelation, the rapture, classic millennial views, and theories of interpretation, including plenty of rectangles for each major viewpoint. But the selection or omission of certain categories within a chart, including the amount of comment under them, is a matter subject to the foibles of personal opinion. Bias, if it exists, may be apparent even in *chart* form.

The sparse content of some charts does one of two things. It may bring their legitimacy into question and hints that they might well have been omitted. Or the empty sections in a chart may show that a comparison on a given point is weak or does not exist at all. For example, the chart comparing the four horsemen in Revelation 6 with those in Zechariah should lead one to conclude that they are *not* the same. Again, each reader is left to weigh whether this is meaningful.

The chart of words used only in Revelation is impressive but seems somewhat limited in practical value, especially when comparing the charts on "Throne-Room" visions in Revelation and Daniel. The apparent value of other charts is, however, immediately obvious. Those that tend to condense numerous items into convenient listings have potential promise.

If Wilson's purpose has been to target academic readers, in the main he has succeeded. Still, every reader must make his own determination about the reliability or usefulness of each chart, whether in respect to the accuracy of the information included or as to how the material may be used for further study, teaching, and preaching. Unfortunately, the casual or novice reader is somewhat abandoned to his own expertise; but those who are familiar with the literature and polemics of eschatology, and the Book of Revelation in particular, should benefit from Wilson's material. At minimum it will prove useful if it serves as nothing more than a benchmark for additional reflection. At best it becomes a

motivation to further inquiry about a given subject. In these matters, Wilson's effort probably suffers from the same limitations as that of all chart-makers who attempt to reduce the Book of Revelation, and millenniums of extra-Biblical material, to diagrams or boxes. We may all be grateful for the overviews because they provide basic orientation for further investigation, and even the unfamiliar references breed a positive sense of curiosity.

Aside from these caveats there are a number of Wilson's charts that may be helpful to some. With some hesitation, I provide here a listing of some of these, which will also serve to give the reader of this review a better idea of the contents. (3) The Roman Empire in the Late First Century A.D. (4) Time Line of the First-Century Church in Asia. (6) Literary Genres of Revelation. (9) Allusions and Verbal Parallels in the Old Testament and Extrabiblical Literature. (12) Divine Names in Revelation. (14) Apocalyptic Themes in Revelation, the Synoptic Gospels, and Pauline Epistles. (15) Thematic Parallels Between Revelation and John. (19) Theories of Interpretation. (21) Minerals, Gems, and Other Commodities in Revelation. (22) Symbols Interpreted in Revelation. (23) Use of Numbers in Revelation. (32) Structure of Seven Letters. (38) Theories of Rapture from Revelation. (39) Heavenly Throne-Room Vision with Parallels in Daniel. (40) Four Living Creatures with Background in Ezekiel and Isaiah. (43) Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse with Background in Zechariah. (44) Seven Seals and the Apocalypses in the Synoptic Gospels. (45) Possible Interrelationships among the Seals, Trumpets, and Bowls. (47) Trumpet and Bowl Judgments Compared to the Egyptian Plagues. (52) Calculating the Number of the Beast (Gematria). (60) Historical Identification of the Seven Emperors in Revelation (17:9-11) in Relationship to the Twelve Caesars. (64) Interpretations of the 1,000 Years from Revelation 20:1-6. (75) Map of Roman Province of Asia. (76) Map of Imperial Cult Temples of Asia Minor.

I am not sure that Clarence Larkin (circa 1900), or famous artists of medieval times such as Albrecht Durer (circa 1500), who is famous for depicting apocalyptic scenes from the Book of Revelation (*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, for example), would be impressed with Mark Wilson's effort to capture the awe-inspiring material of the Book of Revelation in such plain fashion. Larkin used many artful illustrations and charts in his commentary on Revelation in 1919. And Durer's medieval masterpieces are quite busy, to say the least (and may best be viewed when on dry land!). Admittedly, this depends on whether one's interest is academic or artistic. Perhaps many feel more comfortable

blending the two when representing and communicating the messages of Revelation.

A generation of Bible students, reared in a twenty-first century generation that is often video-, audio-, and image-driven to a fault, must guard against rejecting something because it is visually unimpressive. There is not much to stir the senses about Wilson's volume. But this book of charts is not about sensationalism; it is a collection of charts that is for the most part academic. It has the potential of being a very useful aid for Bible study. Obviously, what is helpful within *Charts* will be different for various students of the Book of Revelation and eschatology. On balance, any reader will find a wealth of material to sort through that should complement and further encourage study.

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New Testament Commentary Survey. by D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. 160 pp. \$13.99 paperback.

Currently the Research Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, D. A. Carson holds a Ph.D. in New Testament studies from the University of Cambridge. He has authored more than forty-five books including major commentaries on Matthew and John. With such a background, his advice about commentary selection requires serious consideration.

Offering advice is exactly what he does in *New Testament Commentary Survey*. Though short, this book is a tsunami of practical information. The layout is straightforward: a review of New Testament introductions and other supplements is followed by recommendations of New Testament commentary series. Finally, individual commentaries for each book of the New Testament are reviewed. Canonically arranged, each section discusses an exhaustive list of individual commentaries, moving from those considered best and most academically advanced to those less favored and more cursory or devotional. The layout, including an author index for cross reference, makes it fairly easy for one to look up Carson's opinion of individual commentaries on a particular book.

A quick internet search revealed a few books of this genre which are currently available. Additionally, some seminaries and seminary professors have compiled their own lists of recommended texts.¹ However, Carson's work is indispensable for at least a couple of reasons; for one thing, he is theologically conservative. He is well versed in the various trends of the theological academy, and he does not shy away from recommending commentaries that discuss ideas with which many conservatives would disagree. However, he notes in his recommendation the particular bent of the author so that the student can read with discernment. For another thing, Carson's work is important because it is current: with the sixth edition published in 2007, the information is up-to-date.

That up-do-date information is handled engagingly. Even though this could be a book sculpted in shades of dull grey, Carson's writing style enlivens the landscape. For instance, when commenting on William Barclay's commentary on Galatians, he writes: "Somewhat irritating is Barclay's tendency on occasion to be so kind to Paul's opponents that he makes Paul sound like a twit" (p. 107).

While the style of his writing is interesting, the content of his writing is practical. For instance, he comments on how much knowledge of Greek a reader needs in order to comprehend a particular commentary, and he provides an idea of the homiletical usefulness of many texts—features which can be extremely helpful to pastors. He also tells the price of each volume reviewed and then comments on whether, at that price, the commentary is worth the investment. On several occasions he suggests that one check a particular volume out of the library rather than purchase the book. Finally, on pages 153-154, he lists the "best buys" for each book of the New Testament.

Though its strengths definitely make this book a "best buy," it does have some weaknesses. One of those is its prose. While the writing engages the reader, the running prose, which moves quickly from the consideration of one commentary to another, can bury him under an avalanche of information. One often finds himself scratching his head and re-reading the same material over and over again to retrieve Carson's recommendation. The Old Testament companion volume, authored by Tremper Longman,² is much friendlier to the reader. It uses a shorthand

1. For instance (by the president of Southeastern Seminary): Daniel L. Akin, *Building a Theological Library* (Wake Forest, NC: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2006).

2. See Tremper Longman III, *Old Testament Commentary Survey*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

rating system by each work considered so that one may more quickly peruse the information and make a selection.

In addition, the uninitiated may find some of Carson's comments cryptic if they are not familiar with current hermeneutical or philosophical debates. For instance, when critiquing Margaret Davies's commentary on the book of Matthew, he says that it "offers a rather slender reader-response" approach. Those not familiar with the technical terminology of contemporary hermeneutical debates may have trouble deciphering such comments.

Some will find Carson's assessments harsh and pejorative. For example, many Free Will Baptists will not appreciate Carson's assessment of the *Randall House Bible Commentary*. His review states: "The Free Will Baptist Commentary includes one or two volumes worth a quick skim ... but is so elementary and self-defensive on "free will" that it can safely be overlooked" (pp. 19-20).

Nuance is not Carson's strong suit, and that is somewhat understandable, since he critiques literally hundreds of commentaries in a very limited space. Recognizing this himself, he writes in his preface, "One reviewer thought some of my comments too trenchant. I have tried to be careful, but in a survey this condensed I prefer to be a shade too trenchant than a good deal too bland" (p. 10). For this reason, the reader must realize that, though Carson may be an authority worth consulting, his opinions should be balanced against those of other scholars. That being said, however, no one offers a better guide to building a New Testament Commentary library. Though its coverage is necessarily abbreviated, this survey of New Testament study resources is a must read for those who want to use the best commentaries as they study, preach, and teach the New Testament.

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What Are the Dead Sea Scrolls and Why Do They Matter? By David Noel Freedman and Pam Fox Kuhlken. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007. x + 131 pp. \$10.00 paperback.

Freedman and Kuhlken have attempted to provide answers to almost any question that one would have about the Dead Sea Scrolls. The authors are very qualified to provide the answers. Dr. David Noel

Freedman is an internationally-renowned expert on the Hebrew Bible and holds the Endowed Chair of Hebrew Biblical Studies at the University of California in San Diego. He has studied the Dead Sea Scrolls for more than fifty years; in fact, in March of 1948, when he was a student at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Professor W. F. Albright received the first photographs of the Isaiah Scroll from John Trever. Dr. Albright called in two students to see the photographs, one of whom was David Noel Freedman. Now, almost sixty years later, Dr. Freedman is still deeply interested in and writing about the Dead Sea Scrolls. The co-author is Dr. Pam Fox Kuhlken. She has graduate degrees in comparative literature, theology, and poetry. She studied at the Hebrew University and even explored many of the caves where the Scrolls were found. She is assistant professor of English at Arizona Western College and teaches in the graduate Creative Writing Program at Perelandra College.

In the introduction, Dr. Freedman, who has studied the Scrolls all his adult life and has published over 340 books, makes this humorous statement about his purpose: "I think I know a little something and I'd like to pass it along to the public, even to all those people not fortunate enough to enroll in my seminars!" (p. ix).

The fourteen chapters (after the brief introduction) are in question and answer form. The chapters are set up around themes that would concern and interest anyone who really wanted to know about the Dead Sea Scrolls. Especially important is the final chapter, "A Dead Sea Scrolls Glossary," which includes brief definitions and explanations of many key subjects covered in the book. Equally valuable is "David Noel Freedman's Select Bibliography on the Dead Sea Scrolls." Many of the subjects covered in this book are written about more extensively by the various authors in the books listed. All of these books are presently available.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were first discovered in 1947, in a cave of Qumrân located near the northwestern shore of the Dead Sea. Two young Bedouin men, while seeking a lost sheep or goat that had strayed into a cave, heard the sound of pottery breaking when one of the men threw a rock into the cave. They ran away, but one returned later and found the first batch of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This cave later became known as "Cave 1." It yielded seven scrolls, which Muhammed ed-Dhib sold to an antiquities dealer in Jerusalem. Word of this find spread and scores, if not hundreds, of caves were searched for more scrolls. There were scrolls or parchments found in eleven different Qumrân caves. Cave 1 and Cave 11 had large terracotta jars and had been relatively sheltered. Cave 4

yielded approximately 15,000 fragments which were seriously damaged and strewn about under three feet of debris.

Presently, eight of the Scrolls are housed in Israel at a museum called the Shrine of the Book. This is a most unusual building with two-thirds of it submerged in water to keep the inside temperature cool. The roof is shaped like a clay pot from the Qumrân area. Most of the rest of the Scrolls are at the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) State Collections. A few Scrolls are in Jordan and Europe. The IAA has allowed the Scrolls to tour various museums around the world and these exhibitions last from three to six months.

Every book in the Hebrew Bible except Esther is represented in the Scrolls. There are complete copies of the books of Samuel and Isaiah; the others are only partial. In fact, there were twelve copies of Isaiah and fourteen copies of Deuteronomy, ten copies of the book of Psalms, and eight copies of the Minor Prophets.

There was also a Commentary on the first two chapters of Habakkuk. There was an entire Manual of Discipline, or rules for the Qumrân community. The so-called Genesis Apocryphon, written in Aramaic, seems to be nearly complete. There is a War Scroll and a sectarian book of Thanksgiving Psalms. The Leviticus Scroll is written in paleo-Hebrew script but is not complete.

When many people refer to the Dead Sea Scrolls, they are referring to the sectarian documents. These are the Manual of Discipline, the Damascus Document, the War Scroll, the Thanksgiving Psalms, the *pesharim*, the Genesis Apocryphon, the Temple Scroll, and the Copper Scroll. This last is a copper plaque listing sixty-four locations around the Dead Sea region where treasure was buried.

The authors give much background information about the Essenes, who inhabited the area where the Scrolls were found. They were a Jewish sect that existed between the second century B.C. and the second century A.D. The name Essene probably means "pious ones" or "holy ones." Their aim, as given in the first part of their rule book, was: "To seek God with all one's heart and all one's soul, to do what is good and right before him, as he commanded through Moses and all his servants the prophets, to love all that he has chosen and to hate all that he has rejected" (pp. 1-2). The Essenes are not spoken of in the New Testament. Our principal sources are Josephus and Philo. They lived simply, sharing everything in common, and practiced strict rules of conduct. They did not participate in the temple worship but had their own religious rites. They were avid students of the Jewish Scriptures. They carefully observed the Sabbath day and followed Moses' law very strictly. New members had to go

through a long probationary period. A large number of the Essenes were unmarried.

The Essenes were very *apocalyptic* in their views. All of the *Royal Psalms* were interpreted messianically, because they believed that God would restore the kingly line of David, who would be pointed out by God through a prophet, and confirmed by the high priest, who must be a descendant of Zadok.

The greatest single value of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the great reaffirmation they give that our present Bible is the Word of God. We have no autographs of the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament. The oldest Hebrew text in existence before the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered was the "Masoretic text," so called from the *Masoretes*, later scribes who added vowel sounds, accents, and marginal notes to the original Hebrew text by A.D. 950. This was done to help preserve the accurate transmission, reading and copying of the text. Our authors say, "The Masoretic Text became the standard Hebrew language text of the Bible" (p. 11). The Dead Sea Scrolls have provided us with manuscripts that are a thousand years older than the Masoretic text!

Professor William Foxwell Albright (1891-1971) said that the Dead Sea Scrolls are "the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times" (p. 4). He was the famous Scrolls expert at The Johns Hopkins University. He considered that this discovery "makes the Scrolls a vital matter for everyone" (p. 4). In the present book, our authors say that the Scrolls "changed the course of biblical scholarship" because they prove that the Hebrew text that we possess is "more reliable than previously thought," containing fewer errors or editorial changes over the centuries than scholars had imagined! (p. 4). Thank God, God's Word has come down to us in good form. It is truthful and reliable!

This book should be read by every serious Bible student, especially by every minister and Bible teacher. We all need to be reminded of the integrity and total reliability of God's Holy Word. Our authors refer to the Dead Sea Scrolls in this manner: "Here at your fingertips is an introduction to what has been called the greatest archeological discovery of the twentieth century" (p. x).

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SIMPLE: The Christian Life Doesn't Have to Be Complicated. By Robert J. Morgan. Nashville: Randall House, 2006. 95 pp. \$7.99 paperback

The art of effective communication, some say, is found in the ability to take a complex idea and present it in such a way that it can be easily understood. Anyone who has heard Rob Morgan preach knows what that means. Fortunately for the reader, Morgan's skill transcends the pulpit and fills the pages of this, his first book with Randall House Publications. Morgan serves the Donelson Free Will Baptist Church as pastor and has had several books published by Thomas Nelson.

Upon first glance, the book and its ABC style may appear juvenile; in reality the content is anything but. While it does present the necessary theology of a disciple's walk in a simple form, there is no hint of "dumbing-down" the message. On the contrary, the reader is challenged to commit to growth beyond the milk of the Word and to build continuously upon the foundation given. Morgan establishes this in the introduction by noting that Christians are not "simple-minded" but are dealing "with the greatest truths under heaven" (p. ix).

His approach is to explain the five most important basics for a Christian—especially a new one—using the first five letters of the alphabet: A – Assurance; B – Baptism; C – Church; D – Devotions; E – Evangelism. The explanation of each is then prompted by a set of the most relevant questions a new believer may ask about each. The first two subjects, assurance and baptism, being vital to the foundation, warrant a follow-up chapter each in order to further expand, explain, and fully establish these basic truths.

Morgan does not get bogged down in detailed exegesis but rather maintains a lively pace through the short, compact chapters. His writing is clear and succinct. One senses that he has taken great pains to condense his knowledge of the Word into these easily digestible packets of information. He writes for the laity and covers issues that are basic yet imperative to all.

Chapter one, "Assurance," presents the cornerstone of the whole book: salvation. Morgan gives examples of why people struggle with the assurance that they are children of God. With each question comes relevant Scriptural proof and ample explanation of the truths contained there. Never wavering from the person and work of Christ as the only means of salvation, Morgan supplies the necessary truths for one to place full faith in Him or become assured that he already has done so. He states that salvation is "centered in Christ, conveyed by Scripture and claimed by faith alone" (p.15).

The second chapter, entitled “How can I know for sure?” takes the paramount issue of assurance and gives three proofs that will be evident in a genuine Christian life. The first proof is the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the second is the testimony of the Scripture, and the third is the transformation that occurs as a Christian becomes more like Christ. All three of the reassurances are proven with Scripture and include creative ways to connect the dots.

The third chapter is “Baptism.” A brief history of baptism from the Old Testament to the New Testament church is given and provides a strong background for the Scriptures used. Morgan explains the meaning of Christ’s reference to “the only real baptism” which sets the stage for the symbolic baptism to come (p. 31). More detailed attention is given to the symbolic nature of baptism in the fourth chapter, “Why Should I Get Wet?” This chapter is made up of nine of the most frequently asked questions about water baptism. Each answer is doctrinally accurate and personally reassuring. A new Christian who has not been baptized will end this section prompted to arrange for it without delay.

The fifth chapter is “Church.” Morgan provides enough historical background of the Church and its establishment to prove its modern-day value against those who question this. Placing the modern Church squarely upon the foundation of the work of Christ and the Acts 2 church, he proves that casual church attendance is unacceptable for a true disciple of Christ. A distinction is made between “Big Church” as a large group assembled to worship, preach, etc. and “Small Church” as a small group developing meaningful relationships and love for one another.

Chapter six, “Devotions,” is the richest chapter in the book. It begins with a lengthy personal testimony regarding the path to personal devotions that Morgan himself has traveled. Admiring him as a great student of the Word, I was fascinated with this inside look at how he has built this vital habit through the years. The examples of great men and women of God—laymen, missionaries, and pastors—are especially inspirational when their visible history is compared to the devotional life that fueled it. After giving the Biblical mandate, Morgan concludes with a very practical “how to” guide to begin a devotional life. His suggestions come from a pastor’s heart concerned with the growth of his flock.

The final chapter is “Evangelism.” Understanding that this is where most Christians fail, Morgan approaches the subject by explaining the real meaning of evangelism and providing varied examples from the ministry of Christ as a successful evangelist. The chapter concludes with the advice that Christians are to be evangelists who share the gospel through attitude, action, and assertiveness. There is no “guilt trip” here,

just the simple understanding that the responsibility rests upon each child of God.

The positive features of this book are many. Morgan provides excellent summary of the core issues surrounding each pillar of the Christian walk by injecting massive amounts of Scripture and great historical illustrations from saints of the past. There are supporting quotations that range from hymns to inspirational poems. The most helpful aspect for the new Christian will be the Scripture memory work and the suggestions for practical application found near the end of each chapter.

Overall, Morgan's book is well written, with plenty of support from his research and references, and is simple enough for all to read, even for those who are unfamiliar with the subject at hand. His exposition of the various ideas and the history behind them is handled with all the skill of a natural-born teacher.

I have found this book to be highly readable and extremely helpful in my ministry. It is an excellent resource: for new Christians, perhaps as a curriculum for a new convert class; for new students of theology, a perfect starting-point for anyone interested in learning more about these subjects; and finally for any Christian who needs to be reminded to go back and do the "first works." My only criticism of the book is that it needs a conclusion, a summary to tie all five basics together.

With all the paradoxes, theological difficulties, and hard sayings of Scripture, it is refreshing to be reminded that at the heart of the Christian walk are five SIMPLE basics. As hard as the Christian walk can be, thank God it does not have to be complicated.

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The Truth War: Fighting for Certainty in an Age of Deception. By John MacArthur. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007. 224 pp. \$22.99 hardback.

Most Evangelicals will recognize the name John MacArthur. He has authored over 150 books, many of them bestsellers, is pastor of the Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, is president of The Master's College and Seminary, and is speaker on the internationally syndicated radio program, "Grace to You." It would be difficult to encounter a person who has been involved in ministry or Christian higher

education very long that has not read a book by MacArthur, heard his voice over the radio, or seen him on Larry King Live.

It is appropriate that Dr. MacArthur author a book entitled *The Truth War* since Evangelicals of many stripes, and even the secular media, often dub him as the warrior for truth in Christianity. His firm stance on a variety of social and moral issues in the public square has been well noted.

In introducing his literary and theological motif for “the truth war” MacArthur raises and answers the question whether truth is really worth fighting for. He gives a brief overview of the theological and ethical value of truth as it relates the believer to God, then follows by describing growing trends that are contrary to this understanding of truth. After setting the stage for the reader by speaking of the wartime mentality we ought to have, he lets us know that Jude 3-4 will be the Biblical framework that shapes the book from beginning to end.

In chapter one MacArthur gives his definition of truth: “Truth is that which is consistent with the mind, will, character, glory, and being of God. Even more to the point: truth is the self-expression of God” (p. 2). Though this definition is Biblically consistent, it may sound abstract. MacArthur will later highlight that this includes propositional truth instead of mere personal truth. By this he hopes to answer the question whether truth can survive in a postmodern culture. He provides a brief but helpful sketch of the development of the definition of truth and how philosophers have sought to determine how one knows truth. For one who is not well read on the subjects of epistemology, modernism, and postmodernism, this brief exposition may prove to be the most helpful part of the book. If nothing else, it serves nicely to set up the following survey of the various ways in which truth is under assault and how it must be defended by Christians.

MacArthur also remarks on the “emerging church” movement and key figures associated with it, though to be fair he mainly focuses on its more extreme proponents. He points to key developments in the fields of theology and philosophy, with special attention to the changing understanding of truth. Faithful Christians are then challenged to engage in the war for the sake of the gospel.

“The Truth War is not a carnal war. It is not about territory and nations. It is not a battle for lands and cities. It is not a clan war or a personality conflict between individuals. It is not a fight for clout between religious denominations. It is not a skirmish over material possessions. It is a battle for the truth” (p. 32). These words describe the essence of chapter two, which uses the first two verses of Jude as its starting point.

MacArthur rightly points out that the battlefield for this war is the mind, a concept that many Evangelicals are guilty of neglecting. He focuses on the dangerous dichotomy between doctrine and practice, relegating doctrine as a side issue once a few key doctrines can be agreed upon. (Some, like Brian Maclaren, indicate that even those key doctrines are really not as important as previously thought.) MacArthur emphasizes the Biblical warnings regarding the reality of false teachers and teachings, with special attention given to the Nicolaitans.

When the issue of apostasy surfaces, MacArthur reveals his Calvinistic understanding of perseverance. He boldly observes that no genuine Christian can ever become apostate, yet he affirms the possibility of apostasy, which he defines as an abdication of the truth within the context of a church, particularly as it relates to leaders who essentially become false teachers. Though this understanding of apostasy is something less than a fully Biblical view, the chapter is still redeemed since it gives attention to the reality of the presence of false teachers within the contemporary Church. After commending traditional Evangelical adherence to orthodox Christian doctrine, he sadly comments, "but the Evangelical movement isn't really very evangelical anymore" (p. 47).

In chapter three MacArthur emphasizes that widespread "apostasy" (as he has defined it) is the reason we must fight the truth war. Jude, though his original literary intentions were to write about their "common salvation," was led in this direction. MacArthur surveys apostasy from Genesis to Revelation; the underlying point is to impress upon the believer more clearly that we are called to defend the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

In chapters four and five MacArthur turns his focus to the subtle nature of false teachers and the way they infiltrate the Church. While chapter four deals with more of the glaring heresies and false teachings of the first and second centuries, including Judaizers and Gnostics, chapter five moves towards later and more subtle examples like Sabellianism and Arianism. His historical sketch of the impact and near victory of the Arian heresy is very helpful for one who may be unfamiliar with this period of Church history. His primary intention for both of these chapters is to show that the problem of false teachers has always been present throughout Church history. He uses contemporary examples, such as the *Gospel of Judas* controversy, to appeal for the urgency of a sound defense of the faith among believers. He emphasizes that the main problems that Evangelicals face are not the obvious, glaring atheism and agnosticism of the secularists; instead, we are beset by those who claim to be followers of Christ but are "wolves in sheep's clothing" in our churches.

In chapter six MacArthur focuses on parts of Jude 4, reminding us that the thing that makes false teaching so evil is that it turns grace into licentiousness. The most helpful thing about this chapter is that he provides some insightful instructions on how to spot an apostate by evaluating the person's character, conduct, and creed. But then he turns his attention to the part of the verse that says these false teachers were long ago "marked out for this condemnation," and that leads into a somewhat confusing discussion of election and reprobation in which MacArthur reveals yet another aspect of his committed Calvinism.

In summary, MacArthur seeks to alleviate the fears the reader might have because of the threat of false teachers by essentially saying that God decreed their actions and subsequent demise a long time ago—though this "in no way absolves them of their own guilt" (p. 125). Having warned us so pointedly in chapter three about false teachers who as apostates have forsaken the truth, he now appears to reassure us that we need not worry about this since God decreed it. His survey of various Old Testament passages that warn false teachers of impending judgment raises the question whether those warned were really apostates, since then they would have no legitimate ability to repent. MacArthur explains by saying that these are some "who might be sitting on the fence" (p. 131). On the one hand, then, he appears to write off all false teachers as apostates who have forsaken the truth; but when they are warned to repent he explains that these warnings are for the few who have not completely forsaken the truth. This leaves the reader somewhat confused.

Chapter seven is intriguing in that it deals with various Evangelical trends that fit the model of "certain men" who creep in and deny Christ His proper place. MacArthur highlights several problems, including churches driven by public relations concerns, runaway pragmatism, and Evangelical "fad surfing." He further examines how the lordship of Christ has been undermined in Evangelicalism by pointing to examples such as the rejection of lordship, women's holding teaching positions in the church, the denial of the perspicuity of the Scriptures, translation philosophies that eliminate gender-specific material, open theism, and others. MacArthur uses the contemporary Evangelical misunderstanding of male headship as a sign of a bigger problem: the denial of Christ's headship. He cites several specific Evangelical fads and trends that seek to dethrone Christ or at least diminish or make ambiguous His true authority.

Chapter eight seeks to add a nice bookend by providing "survival strategies" for this age of apostasy based on examples from history. MacArthur echoes the grave concerns of many other Evangelical leaders

that the definition or identity of an Evangelical is becoming more and more vague. He alludes to the perilous path many mainline denominations have traveled by yielding more and more and forfeiting key doctrinal convictions; he notes the immediate impact their poor decisions have had on their membership. He gives several prescriptions from the latter verses of Jude, which include holding firm to the truth, opposing false teachers, and demonstrating great mercy to those who have been deceived in order to snatch them from the grasp of lies and give them the true gospel. He reminds us again that this is not a physical battle with weapons and armor but a battle of ideas. We must engage all of our faculties, including our minds, to know, preach, and live the truth.

The appendix adapts a chapter of MacArthur's 1994 book *Reckless Faith*, providing more of MacArthur's commentary on some of the trends and issues addressed in *The Truth War*. He describes the religious confusion of the day as the result of the laziness and lack of true Biblical fidelity from pastors and church leaders. He deals with the desire to conform the church to the world, the failure of sound Scriptural interpretation, neglect of church discipline, and an overall lack of spiritual maturity.

One helpful feature of the book is the way it is littered with allusions to current trends in the Evangelical Church, including methods, philosophies, popular writers, and theological systems. MacArthur both interacts with the rich but neglected truth of Jude and surveys contemporary Christianity and culture, providing ample warning, instruction, and exhortation for Christians to join the truth war for the sake of Christ. The book is a brief but worthwhile read. I recommend it for ministers and teachers in the local church; it will help them understand the seriousness of our task and what is happening in the Church and in our culture.

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Teacher, Leader, Shepherd: The New Testament Pastor. By Robert E. Picirilli. Nashville: Randall House, 2007. 129 pp. \$12.99 paperback.

Those who know Robert Picirilli will agree that he is well equipped to write this book. With an earned Ph.D. degree in New Testament text, plus more than four decades of teaching Greek and New Testament studies at the college level, he has proven himself as a gifted exegete of the New Testament Scriptures. Besides this volume, Picirilli has written numerous

books and articles for publication and most notably serves as General Editor of the *Randall House Bible Commentary*, for which he has authored several of the commentaries.

Teacher, Leader, Shepherd is a welcome and refreshing addition to the ever-growing mass of *pastoral* literature, due especially to its unique, Biblical orientation. The author's concern is to engage the reader in an exegetical study of eight selected passages from the New Testament which are uniquely *pastoral* in nature. Hence, this is *not* a book for superficial readers; nor is it a book for those who are interested in the "how tos" of pastoral ministry. Rather, it is for those who would truly like to know "what the Bible has to say to or about the pastor and his ministry" (p. vii).

Chapters one through four are foundational in that they focus on the nature of, call to, and qualifications for pastoral ministry. Chapter one is devoted to a careful analysis of three key pastoral terms—*elder*, *bishop*, and *pastor*—"which give insight into the *nature* of the pastor's work" (p. 2). Since *elder* denotes "a person of maturity and experience," Picirilli argues, no person who has not proved himself in this area should be given the responsibility to pastor (p.11). Likewise, since "the primary focus of the other titles (*bishop* and *pastor*) is on the pastor's responsibility to exercise a shepherd-like watch-care over the congregation to which he ministers, ... no man is qualified to pastor who lacks a shepherd's heart" (p. 11).

Chapter two is devoted to a discussion of the pastor's call from two different "sides" or perspectives—first, from that of the pastoral candidate (the subjective side) and, second, from that of the church (the objective side). Not wanting to downplay the importance of the subjective or inner call, Picirilli provides a careful exegesis of two different Greek words for "desire" (1 Tim. 3:1). Additionally, he seeks to clarify the Biblical meaning—both negatively and positively—of "ordination," followed by a discussion of the pastor's *motives* (based in 1 Pet. 5:3-4), which help to determine whether a man is truly called to be a pastor.

Picirilli is to be commended for his insistence on the church's responsibility for seeking to determine a person's "call" into the ministry, based on Biblical qualifications:

A man may well stand and say, 'God has called me to preach,' and seem ever so sincere and well-meaning. But that is not enough on which to build the ministry of a pastor. Ordaining councils must take heed: it is not their job merely to judge the candidate's sincerity, but to measure the man in light of the biblical qualifications. Local

churches must likewise take heed: it is not enough that a man have a good personality or an entertaining delivery, or be a good administrator; it is certainly not enough that an ordaining council decided to ordain him. The church must evaluate how well the man demonstrates not just the desire, but, even more important, the character, ability, and reputation that are represented in various New Testament passages. (pp. 26-27)

Chapters three and four provide a sobering, detailed analysis of the pastor's qualifications for ministry as set forth in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9. In chapter three, fourteen *positive* qualifications are discussed, whereas the focus of chapter four is on eight additional *negative* qualifications (or *disqualifications*, as Picirilli calls them). The *positive* qualifications tell what a pastor *must* be; the *negative* ones tell what he must *not* be. Most of these are required of all Christians in general; however, all of these are required of pastors in particular. Together, they tell us what the Bible requires "of one who aspires to the pastorate" (p. 30). It should be noted that these do not constitute a job description, but rather a divinely inspired description of the kind of person who is qualified to be a pastor.

Regarding the *negative* qualifications, Picirilli suggests "that Paul selected these ... for the very reason that spiritual leaders are especially vulnerable to such disqualifying indulgences. Many a pastor has been brought down by failures on these very points" (p. 60). To reinforce this notion, Picirilli cites (without giving names, of course) several examples of pastors he has known who became disqualified and lost their ministries due to such things as: uncontrolled temper, mishandling of church funds, drug addiction, and displays of physical violence. Actually, he adds: "The only failing I know of that dooms more preachers than these is sexual immorality; I have known many whose ministry was lost to an illicit affair" (p. 61).

Chapters five through seven especially reflect the key emphases suggested by the book's main title: *Teacher, Leader, Shepherd*. In chapter five, Picirilli exegetes seven selected New Testament passages which have to do with the pastor's *teaching* responsibility, even though "nearly every passage that speaks to the pastor refers to his responsibility to teach the church the Word of God" (p. 63). Interestingly, "able to teach" is the only pastoral ability included in the list of qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-7. Indeed, *teaching* is a skill more than a qualification, since "the ability to teach is one that can be developed and improved" (p. 64). Interesting, too, is the fact that the only place in the New Testament where the word

“pastor” occurs (Eph. 4:11), we find it linked with the pastor’s *teaching* ministry. Thus, every true pastor is a “pastor-teacher.”

To be sure, a pastor has many tasks to perform, but none more basic or important than *teaching*. “That is his first duty, and one that cannot be taken for granted” (p. 63). “Day in and day out ... he must give himself to the teaching of the Word to those entrusted to his pastoral care,” both to individuals and to the congregation as a whole (pp. 75-76). To do this, and do it well, a pastor must first master the Word, for “no one teaches well who has not first studied well,” and he must learn ways to help his people know how to apply the teachings of God’s Word to their own lives (pp. 76-77).

The focus in chapter six shifts to the pastor’s role as *shepherd*, a topic introduced but not fully developed in chapter one. In discussing the pastor’s *shepherding* role, Picirilli’s particular interest is to consider “the implications of the word *bishop* or *overseer* and the verb translated ‘shepherd’ (KJV, “feed”) the flock” (p. 80). He obviously sees a correlation or connectedness between the two, which, for him, explains the true meaning of *shepherding*. Certainly, to *shepherd* means to “feed” the flock (by *teaching*, especially), yet entails much more than that. Perhaps “tend” would be a better translation than “feed” in 1 Peter 5:2, since this “sums up the pastor’s duties as a whole” and “includes all the shepherd’s responsibilities to the flock” (p. 86).

But how does this fit with the pastor being a *bishop* or *overseer*? Picirilli responds by saying that “serving as overseers” (1 Pet. 5:2) is intended, “apparently, to further clarify or define the shepherding ministry stated in ‘shepherd the flock.’ The shepherding *is*, in fact, carried out by exercising the oversight” (p. 87).

Finally, in chapter seven, the pastor’s role as *leader* is aptly considered. Much of the discussion revolves around the meaning of two key verbs—“rule” and “rule over” (occurring in several New Testament passages)—“that are essentially synonyms and especially important” (p. 95) for clarifying the pastor’s role as a *leader*, not only in the church but also in the home. The pastor is truly a *leader*, an “up front” person who stands before his people to guide, direct, lead, and, especially, care for them (pp. 101-04). However, he must be a *servant-leader*, not a dictatorial or domineering type of leader, since “in any management position, a leader who has to depend on exerting his authority to get his way will ultimately fail, usually sooner than later” (p. 112).

In the last section of the book, appropriately titled “Afterword: Moving Forward,” Picirilli both acknowledges and responds to what the passages do *not* say—i.e., they have nothing to say about the pastor’s

need to be filled with the Spirit, to be a man of prayer, to be a witness for Christ, and to be properly educated. Then, he offers seven very helpful suggestions as to “how the pastor can aim toward being the man described in the passages chosen for exegesis in this book” (p. 115). Quite frankly, this one section alone is worth half the price of the book.

I would be hard pressed to find much wrong with Picirilli’s book. It is well researched, well documented, and well written. I could wish, however, that a bit more thought had been given to the “exegetical outlines” (on pp. xi-xxv), making them more consistently *exegetical* as well as more complete in terms of sub-points and verse support. Too, in the “Implications for Application” section at the end of each chapter, I could wish for a bit more focus on actual *application*, with less on summarization and/or recapitulation. Finally, I could wish that Picirilli had felt inclined to include treatment of a few other key *pastoral* passages in the New Testament, like 2 Timothy 4:1-5 and 1 Corinthians 2:1-4, which focus on a pastor’s *preaching* ministry. Yet, I realize he had to draw the line somewhere.

One must not be fooled by the size of *Teacher, Leader, Shepherd*, for its value far outweighs its size. I highly recommend it. It is a must read for all who are seriously interested in pastoral work. Specifically, it should be required reading for *every* pastoral candidate out on the field, as well as for *every* pastoral student in *every* Free Will Baptist college. Even older, more experienced pastors, who for whatever reason have never engaged themselves in a serious study of what the Bible has to say about pastors and pastoral ministry, would derive great benefit from reading this book. God grant that this be so.

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