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# *Integrity*

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A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

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of the National Association of Free Will Baptists

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I N T E G R I T Y  
*A Journal of Christian Thought*

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

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*Editor*

J. Matthew Pinson  
President, Welch College

*Assistant Editor*

Kevin L. Hester  
Dean of the School of Theology and  
Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness, Welch College

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# Contents

Introduction .....	5
J. MATTHEW PINSON	

Articles .....	9–110
----------------	-------

Biblical Inerrancy in a “Post-Truth” World .....	9
KEVIN L. HESTER	

The N. T. Wright Effect: A Free Will Baptist Assessment through the Theology of F. Leroy Forlines .....	25
MATTHEW J. MCAFFEE	

The Truth about Transgenderism .....	51
W. JACKSON WATTS	

Cultivating a Culture of Wisdom in the Local Church .....	81
JEFFRY A. BLAIR, JR.	

Book Reviews .....	111–143
--------------------	---------

<i>Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible</i> Mark Ward .....	Robert E. Picirilli
--	---------------------

<i>The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions</i> Mark J. Boda .....	Zachary A. Vickery
---	--------------------

<i>Luke in the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible</i> David Lyle Jeffrey .....	Thomas L. Marberry
---	--------------------

<i>The Promise of Arminian Theology: Essays in Honor of F. Leroy Forlines</i> Edited by Matthew Steven Bracey and W. Jackson Watts .....	Emily Vickery
---	---------------

<i>No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It is, and Why It’s Harmful</i> Andrew David Naselli .....	José L. Rodríguez
---	-------------------



*Reasons We Believe: 50 Lines of Evidence that Confirm the Christian Faith*

Nathan Busenitz ..... Christopher Talbot

*Thomas Aquinas*

K. Scott Oliphint ..... J. Matthew Pinson

*Sexuality, Gender, and the Church: A Christian Response in  
the New Cultural Landscape*

J. Matthew Pinson, Matthew Steven Bracey, ..... Josh Butler  
Matthew McAfee, and Michael A. Oliver

*Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*

James K. A. Smith ..... Matthew Steven Bracey

*The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation*

Rod Dreher ..... Charles Cook

*The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal*

Charles Swindoll ..... Daniel Webster

## Contributors

JEFFRY A. BLAIR, JR.

Senior Pastor, Locust Grove Free Will Baptist Church, Locust Grove, Oklahoma

KEVIN L. HESTER

Dean of the School of Theology, Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness,  
and Professor of Historical Theology, Welch College, Gallatin, Tennessee

MATTHEW J. MCAFFEE

Provost and Professor of Old Testament, Welch College, Gallatin, Tennessee

W. JACKSON WATTS

Senior Pastor, Grace Free Will Baptist Church, Arnold, Missouri, Adjunct  
Instructor, Welch College

# Introduction

We live in a time of swift cultural change, and often the church faces two temptations. The first one is to do theology without reference to the changing cultural and intellectual landscape. The second one is to allow the cultural and intellectual milieu to move theology away from its historic biblical commitments.

The Commission for Theological Integrity, by its very mission and purpose, has long been dedicated to avoiding these two extremes. The Commission has always attempted to stay abreast of cultural and intellectual trends that affect the way the church bears witness to biblical truth. Yet it has always striven to maintain faithfulness to Holy Scripture, historic Christian orthodoxy, and the Free Will Baptist tradition.

This issue of *Integrity* continues those aims. Commission member Dr. Kevin Hester, Dean of the School of Theology, Vice President for Institutional Effectiveness, and Professor of Historical Theology at Welch College, explains a topic of perennial concern to Christian theology: the inerrancy of the Bible. His fresh discussion of this vital Christian doctrine is one of the best introductions available on this subject.

Dr. Matthew McAfee, Provost and Professor of Biblical Studies at Welch College, delves into the theology of N. T. Wright, which is growing in popularity in some evangelical circles. Dr. McAfee provides an incisive critique of Wright's theology from a Free Will Baptist vantage point, particularly that of long-time Commission chairman F. Leroy Forlines.

Commission member Dr. Jackson Watts, senior pastor of Grace Free Will Baptist Church in Arnold, Missouri, and adjunct instructor at Welch College, provides clarity and Christian wisdom on the looming issue of transgenderism. Dr. Watts models the balance of truth and grace that must characterize the church as it navigates the changing sexual landscape.

Finally, Dr. Jeffry Blair, senior pastor of Locust Grove Free Will Baptist Church in Locust Grove, Oklahoma, melds exegetical and practical theology as he shows Christian ministers how to structure their ministries to foster the biblical culture of Wisdom in their churches. His essay is a display of careful exegesis brought into the service of pastoral theology and is a must-read for every Free Will Baptist minister. A number of insightful reviews of recent books appear at the end of this issue across the theological disciplines.

Everything you read in this issue strives to maintain the balance described above. The authors are not pretending as though they are not

in the cultural matrix of the early twenty-first century. Nor are they allowing the current moment to set the pace for their theological reflection. Instead, they are doing what Leroy Forlines said over and over again that the church and its theology need to be doing: “transforming the secular culture rather than [being] transformed by it.”

These authors are abreast of the cultural and intellectual developments of recent times. They are engaging twenty-first-century culture. Yet they are informed and steadied by the transcendent norms of Holy Scripture as it has been interpreted by the orthodox Christian consensus and their Free Will Baptist forebears. I hope you will read each of these informative articles and reviews and allow them to influence your own life and ministry.

J. Matthew Pinson



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## Biblical Inerrancy in a “Post-Truth” World

Fake news and alternative facts did not arise with the modern era, but the use of these terms seems inextricable from the contemporary political scene. Following President Trump’s inauguration, disagreement over the size of the crowd published by the White House press secretary led one presidential advisor, in an interview with CNN, to assert that the administration was countering false news reports with their own “alternative facts.”<sup>1</sup> CNN pundits later claimed that a new phrase had been added to the lexicon, but there is really nothing new about this concept.

On the one hand, the phrase “alternative facts” appears to be a novel oxymoron. It claims that “facts” are disputable and open to interpretation. One cannot separate the term *fact* from the concept of objective truth and the correspondence theory of truth.<sup>2</sup> And yet our culture has done just that. On the other hand, the term does recognize that there is a perspectival and contextual aspect to the way that truth is understood. Context is just as important as the facts.

Justin McBrayer in his article “Why Christians Must Reject Alternative Facts” says it this way: “It makes sense to say that you have alternative evidence that makes it difficult to decipher the facts, but it makes no sense to say that you have alternative facts. The evidence can vary between two people. The facts cannot.”<sup>3</sup> McBrayer’s comment is true, but he fails to grasp the fact that the world in which we live has abandoned a basic epistemology of foundationalism for something else. Forlines has argued for years that the death of truth is the trajectory of a postmodern culture.<sup>4</sup> This realization, long part of philosophical and

1. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/22/politics/kellyanne-conway-alternative-facts/>. Accessed June 13, 2017.

2. For more on the correspondence theory of truth, see p. 3.

3. Justin McBrayer, “Why Christians Must Reject Alternative Facts,” *Dallas News*. Accessed June 15, 2017. <https://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/commentary/2017/02/01/christians-must-reject-alternative-facts>

4. F. Leroy Forlines, *The Quest for Truth: Theology for a Postmodern World* (Nashville: Randall House, 2001) 27–29. In this place Forlines notes that postmodernism leaves many casualties—among them truth, reason, nature, metanarrative, morality, and cultural ideals.

theological discussion, has been slow in its manifestation to the broader culture, but it is now here.

On November 8, 2016, the editors of the Oxford Dictionaries declared the word of the year to be the adjective *post-truth*. They defined this term as: “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, Christians have often been caught up in the competing tides of post-truth culture. Such responses led Christian leaders to pen articles like Trevin Wax’s “‘Alternative Facts’ and Christians as Gullible Skeptics”<sup>6</sup> and Ed Stetzer’s “Facts Are Our Friends: Why Sharing Fake News Makes Us Look Stupid and Harms Our Witness.”<sup>7</sup>

This connection has also led some to blame Evangelicalism for the post-truth phenomenon of “fake news” and “alternative facts.” Christopher Douglas’s article “The Christian Right’s Origins of Fake News and ‘Alternative Facts’” points out that conservatives fall for fake news at a two-to-one ratio to liberals.<sup>8</sup> He asserts that two primary forces created this situation. The religious right has rejected “expert elites,” indicated by their rejection of the theory of evolution and the battle for inerrancy. Thus, he argues, the eventual rise of the religious right continued to promote this skepticism and prompted the current environment, which seeks a definition of truth outside the mainstream.

Molly Worthen, in her article “The Evangelical Roots of our Post Truth Society,” presents essentially the same argument.<sup>9</sup> She posits that Evangelicalism’s teaching on biblical inerrancy and rejection of a scientific worldview are to blame. These things, together with the rise of Van

5. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016>. Accessed July 6, 2017.

6. Trevin Wax, “‘Alternative Facts’ and Christians as Gullible Skeptics” *The Gospel Coalition*, January 23, 2017. Accessed June 15, 2017. <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/trevinwax/2017/01/23/too-many-christians-are-gullible-skeptics/>.

7. Ed Stetzer, “Facts Are Our Friends: Why Sharing Fake News Makes Us Look Stupid and Harms Our Witness,” *Christianity Today*, January 22, 2017. Accessed June 15, 2017. Stetzer reminds us that “integrity matters. . . . If unchurched people think they must commit intellectual suicide to become Christians, it hinders the work of gospel proclamation and cultural engagement.” <http://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2017/january/facts-are-our-friends.html>.

8. Christopher Douglas, “The Christian Right’s Origins of Fake News and ‘Alternative Facts,’” *Alternet*. March 3, 2017. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/christian-rights-origins-fake-news-and-alternative-facts>.

9. Molly Worthen, “The Evangelical Roots of our Post Truth Society,” *The New York Times*, April 13, 2017. Accessed June 15, 2017. [https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/13/opinion/sunday/the-evangelical-roots-of-our-post-truth-society.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/13/opinion/sunday/the-evangelical-roots-of-our-post-truth-society.html?_r=0).



Tilian presuppositionalism herald for her the relativism that drives the modern post-truth phenomenon.

While the scope of this essay does not provide time to engage in the numerous problems associated with the theses presented in these articles, one of the things that they have understood correctly should be pointed out. The idea of truth (and how one knows truth) is intimately connected to the concept of inerrancy. This has been true from the beginning. The connection between words and truth are bound up in the very fiber of Christianity as a people of the Book. Words matter because they can communicate truth. As Scripture is identified with the Word of God, we understand it to be truth. So, in many ways, the Christian argument for inerrancy is the argument for truth itself.

For this reason, in order for us to understand how we have gotten to this point, and why we can still believe in inerrancy, we first need to examine some brief principles of epistemology. Once we know how we have gotten to a modern understanding of truth, we will be able to understand the modern debates on inerrancy. Then, we can outline why belief in inerrancy is sound and how we should work to communicate this to a post-truth world.

#### EPISTEMOLOGY

Epistemology is the philosophical examination of truth claims. It answers the question of how we know what we think we know. Epistemology is the justification that allows us to move from belief to knowledge. Classically, this has been expressed in the correspondence theory of truth. The correspondence theory holds that truth is defined as the result of a premise being in agreement with the state of affairs. In this system, truth is objective and independent of human feelings, desires, or preferences.

This correspondence is expressed according to an epistemic structure known as foundationalism. Foundationalism argues that beliefs are justified through what are called basic or foundational beliefs. Foundational beliefs are beliefs that are self-justifying or self-evident. These basic beliefs form the foundation of all knowledge.

The earliest theologians of the Church such as Jerome and Augustine expressed a foundationalism that recognized both reason and revelation as basic beliefs. They began with the assertion that God was truth and this truth had been made known in the person and work of Jesus. Yet through their training in classical Greek thought, they realized that truth could also be found in other ways. They admitted that even the pagans



had come to understand some aspects of the truth through observation and reason. Augustine argued that no matter how it was discovered, all truth was God's truth.<sup>10</sup>

Thomas Aquinas, following in their footsteps, argued for two books of truth. The book of nature was a body of truth that could be glimpsed through observation and reason. The book of revelation, which he viewed as higher and more authoritative, contained truth available only through God's special revelation.<sup>11</sup> Such a division laid the groundwork for the medieval understanding of theology as the pinnacle of all the arts and the surest means of discovering truth.<sup>12</sup> Such an understanding continued through the Protestant reformers and can be found in the writings of Luther and Calvin among others.<sup>13</sup>

With the rise of the Enlightenment and the birth of modern science, things began to change. The two books of Thomas were radically divided into truth that could be discovered through observation (science) and beliefs available through revelation (theology).<sup>14</sup> While foundationalism would continue as the basic epistemic structure, observation, more and more, came to be seen as the only means of sure truth. This movement was aided by the thought of the philosophers David Hume<sup>15</sup> and Immanuel Kant.

Kant's thought further divided science and philosophy into two different realms of knowledge.<sup>16</sup> Science continued to base itself on the belief that observation was the only means to truth and thus the only basic belief. Spurred on by greater and greater advances in discovery and

10. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* XL.60-61. Augustine refers to Christians learning truth from non-Christian sources as "spoiling the Egyptians."

11. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Book 1, Question 1, Article 1.

12. For such an understanding see Bonaventure, *The Reduction of All Arts to Theology*.

13. See Robert Kolb, "The Bible in Reformation and Protestant Orthodoxy," in D. A. Carson ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 89-114, especially Luther, 90-98; and Calvin, 104-11.

14. Notice that the parallel here is not complete. It is not truth through observation and truth through revelation as in Thomas. Instead it is truth through observation and *belief* through reason. Already there was significant skepticism arising as to whether anything could be objectively known about the metaphysical world.

15. Hume, though a skeptic, was also an empiricist. He did not believe we could gain objective truth by reason alone. He did, however, assert that certain "habits of thought" could allow for some knowledge about the world to filter through our experience. See his *Enquiries Concerning Human Nature* (esp. XII.3).

16. Kant's thought divided all possible "knowledge" into two realms: the phenomenal world of sense experience and the noumenal world of faith. See his *The Critique of Pure Reason*.

technique, empiricism<sup>17</sup> became the basis for modernism. As more problems were solved, modernism came to be incredibly optimistic that all the challenges facing human civilization could be rectified by science and that the world was ever progressing toward utopia.<sup>18</sup>

While science marched onward, philosophy struggled to respond. An early attempt to answer Kant's critique of reason was Existentialism. Existentialism capitulated to Kant and argued that meaning and truth could be found only through a "leap of faith."<sup>19</sup> Others said that if we can examine aspects of truth over a long period of time in a particular culture, we ought to be able to examine certain truth claims accurately.<sup>20</sup> When this task proved too difficult, Nihilism developed, arguing a position of absolute skepticism.<sup>21</sup>

Philosophy ultimately concluded that "truth" was a human construction, learned in community and determined by individual will.<sup>22</sup> Instead of truth being defined by agreement with reality (objective truth), truth was what the individual understood it to be. It was therefore malleable and indeterminate outside the personal sphere. Individual beliefs were no longer understood to be founded on earlier, more basic concepts (foundationalism) but instead were seen as a complex web of independent but connected ideas (coherentism).

As the modernist experiment crumbled in the twentieth century through world wars, genocide, AIDS, and terrorism, people realized modernism's utter failure to fulfill its promises. They became disenchanted with its claims, and when they turned once again to philosophy,

17. Empiricism is the belief that scientific observation is the surest means of obtaining truth.

18. As evidence of this development, and important for its broader introduction to society, see the evolutionary thought of Charles Darwin as presented in his *Origin of the Species*, 1859.

19. For a Christian attempt at Existentialism See Soren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling*.

20. This philosophical position is usually called logical positivism and can be seen in the work of philosophers like Bertrand Russell, Alfred North Whitehead, and the early Ludwig Wittgenstein. The truth claims that could be analyzed were limited to those which could be empirically investigated thus the system is sometimes known as empirical positivism.

21. Nihilism teaches that nothing can be known, therefore denying truth's very existence.

22. This conclusion was the result of the later work of Ludwig Wittgenstein and the linguistic analysis of Jacques Derrida, who made the argument that all things were constructed by our language. This argument is found throughout his many works, and all of them make for extremely difficult reading. For one of the most pointed examples of this thought see his *On Grammarology*.

they found, quite literally, nothing. Truth, or “truth,” as it was now known, was nothing but the perception of the knower.

With the rise of skepticism and even more with postmodernity, foundationalism, which had been the overarching understanding of epistemic justification for millennia, came under attack. Foundationalism, prominent in several different justificatory systems, including the rationalism of Descartes and Augustine and the empiricism of Locke and others, was rejected as an aspect of modernism. Instead, post-foundationalists posited an epistemic theory known as coherentism, which teaches that beliefs are adopted inferentially within a web of other beliefs that require no separate, epistemic warrant.<sup>23</sup>

The philosophical shift described here produced the post-truth world in which we live today. Evangelicalism’s rejection of such modernist reductionism in evolution and higher criticism of Scripture is symptomatic of this shift rather than causative. Instead, evangelicals have consistently worked to preserve an earlier form of foundationalism that recognized the principle of revelation as a basic belief and God’s Word as an inerrant expression of truth.<sup>24</sup>

#### INERRANCY

Inerrancy as evangelicals have come to understand it is a product of the Fundamentalist/Modernist debates of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Inerrancy had always been assumed as a characteristic of the authority of God’s Word. God’s perfect nature was understood to

23. R. Scott Smith expounds the implications of this historical, philosophical shift from foundationalism to coherentism for the concept of inerrancy in his article, “Non-Foundational Epistemologies and the Truth of Scripture.” In D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, 831–71.

24. Modern evangelical philosophy has taken seriously some of the more recent critiques of certain forms of Enlightenment foundationalism. While some have returned to earlier, classically Christian models (“broad foundationalism”), they have at the same time been very critical of other foundationalist approaches as too modernist (“narrow foundationalism”). See Ronald Nash’s argument against narrow foundationalism in his *Life’s Ultimate Questions: An Introduction to Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 279–82. This style of foundationalism is characteristic of what is known as “Reformed epistemology” and may be seen in authors such as Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Faith and Rationality* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983); Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); and Kelly Clark, *Return to Reason* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990). See also D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

manifest itself in all God's works, including Scripture.<sup>25</sup> It was not until the rise of skepticism, which divided the realms of faith and reason and shifted epistemology toward a modern empiricism, that questions about the nature of Scripture arose. Higher criticism asserted that Scripture was a collection of human documents and, as such, was capable of error.

The rise of Darwinism in the nineteenth century also raised new questions for the Christian church. This, and the philosophical current of the day, spurred many questions relating to the historical character of the Bible. Some began to seek the spiritual meaning rather than the literal meaning of the text. They began to employ a hermeneutic of suspicion that sought to de-supernaturalize the text and get at the true spiritual kernel. They came to believe that the Bible expressed only spiritual truth in mythic, poetic, and cultural ways.

The liberal scholarship of the day began with the presupposition that there was no such thing as the supernatural. Such scholarship confined knowledge to empiricism, holding that there could be no basis for knowledge outside scientific observation. With this conclusion in place, there was no room for miracles, a virgin birth, or even a divine Jesus. Spirituality was no longer rooted in the Word but in an existential experience with the divine. At most, Scripture was a human record of revelation.

As a counter to the movement away from traditional theology, many conservative churches and theologians reacted by forming the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 to combat what they believed was heresy. At a meeting in 1895, this group published a list of five Fundamentals that they believed were necessary for all Christians and Christian churches to maintain. These fundamentals were (1) the inerrancy of Scripture, (2) the divinity of Jesus, (3) the virgin birth, (4) substitutionary atonement, and (5) Jesus's literal resurrection and impending return.

Lyman Stewart published a series of pamphlets between 1910 and 1915 entitled *The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth*, which defended these fundamental beliefs of Christianity. All mainline denominations in America were embroiled in this debate, with the Presbyterians leading

25. See Charles E. Hill, "'The Truth Above All Demonstration': Scripture in the Patristic Period to Augustine," and Robert Kolb, "The Bible in the Reformation and Protestant Orthodoxy," in D. A. Carson, ed. *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, 43–88, 89–114; and Robert D. Preus, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: The Early Church Through Luther," and John H. Gerstner, "The View of the Bible Held by the Church: Calvin and the Westminster Divines," in Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 357–84, 385–412. Also helpful is John Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: Infallibility and Inerrancy in the Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).

the way. In all cases, the unwillingness of the conservatives to compromise core biblical teachings and their inability to convince the majority led to schism.

J. Gresham Machen, who founded Westminster Theological Seminary following the liberal conversion of Princeton Seminary, summarized the teaching of the older Princetonians and the feelings of many conservatives of his time when he reflected:

I tried to show that the issue in the Church of the present day is not between two varieties of the same religion, but, at bottom, between two essentially different types of thought and life. There is much interlocking of the branches, but the two tendencies, Modernism and supernaturalism, or (otherwise designated) non-doctrinal religion and historic Christianity, spring from different roots. In particular, I tried to show that Christianity is not a "life," as distinguished from a doctrine, and not a life that has doctrine as its changing symbolic expression, but that—exactly the other way around—it is a life founded on a doctrine.<sup>26</sup>

The same sentiment was expressed in his work *Christianity and Liberalism*, published in 1923. This work presented the Fundamentalist platform under chapters devoted to doctrine, God and man, the Bible, salvation, and the church. He expressed that the debate of his day was ultimately about the question of authority. Does authority reside in Scripture revealed by God or in fallen human beings who interpret it according to their own religious feelings and scientific presuppositions and prejudice? He said:

The Christian man . . . finds in the Bible the very Word of God. Let it not be said that dependence upon a book is a dead or an artificial thing. The Reformation of the sixteenth century was founded upon the authority of the Bible, yet it set the world aflame. Dependence upon a word of man would be slavish, but dependence upon God's word is life. Dark and gloomy would be the world, if we were left to our own devices and had no blessed Word of God. The Bible, to the Christian is not a burdensome law, but the very Magna Charta of Christian liberty.

It is no wonder, then, that liberalism is totally different from Christianity, for the foundation is different. Christianity is

26. J. Gresham Machen, "Christianity in Conflict" Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics. Accessed July 6, 2017. [http://www.reformed.org/books/christianity\\_in\\_conflict/](http://www.reformed.org/books/christianity_in_conflict/).

founded upon the Bible. It bases upon the Bible both its thinking and its life. Liberalism on the other hand is founded upon the shifting emotions of sinful men.<sup>27</sup>

This same theme is underscored by J. I. Packer in his famous *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God*. Though he dislikes the term "Fundamentalism," preferring to identify these beliefs with historical evangelical Christianity, he likewise understands that the debate is about epistemology and authority rather than any supposed errors or insufficiency in the text. The question for Packer is whether or not we are going to take God at His Word. Packer equates the "evangelical" view with the traditional view and defines it in this way:

Its basic principle is that the teaching of the written Scriptures is the Word which God spoke and speaks to His Church, and is finally authoritative for faith and life. . . . What Scripture says, God says. The Bible is inspired in the sense of being word-for-word God-given. It is a record and explanation of divine revelation which is both complete (*sufficient*) and comprehensible (*perspicuous*).<sup>28</sup>

Contrasted with this view is what he titles the subjectivist view. He identifies both mystical and rational varieties. However, he asserts that, contra the traditional view, the subjectivist view holds that "the final authority for my faith and life is the verdict of my reason, conscience, or religious sentiment" or "what 'I feel' that God says."<sup>29</sup> Packer argues that the subjectivist position "is based on an acceptance of the presuppositions and conclusions of nineteenth-century critical Bible study, which are radically at variance with the Bible's claims for itself."<sup>30</sup> His understanding here is important for our current discussion because it is these same epistemological commitments, devoid of any foundation outside

27. J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*. This work has since been published in a number of different formats. I consulted the online edition published by the Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics. Accessed July 6, 2017. [http://www.reformed.org/books/chr\\_and\\_lib/](http://www.reformed.org/books/chr_and_lib/). Helpful resources on Machen and his life include: Ned B. Stonehouse, *J. Gresham Machen: A Biographical Memoir*. 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987); and D. G. Hart, *Defending the Faith: J. Gresham Machen and the Crisis of Conservative Protestantism in Modern America* (Philipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2003).

28. J. I. Packer, *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958), 47. Italics in original.

29. *Ibid.*, 50.

30. *Ibid.*, 72.

the individual, that allow for the diversity of perspectives all claiming to be truth today.

Packer, in this small work, provides a compendium of basic definitions and clarification of the doctrine of inerrancy. While Packer is correct in his assertion that inerrancy is the classical teaching of the church, the full development of this doctrine had remained latent until the nineteenth century. Like the Trinity, Christology, and soteriology, heresy would refine its basic principles and strengthen the underpinnings of belief. As we have seen, Packer first framed the question in the terms of authority. He then refuted the liberal concept that the evangelical position demanded a dictation theory of inspiration affirming both the divine origin and human agency of Scripture.<sup>31</sup> Scripture confirmed its inspiration as the Word of God through fulfilled prophecy and through its own testimony.<sup>32</sup> Christ's teaching demonstrated that the Old Testament was the Word of God,<sup>33</sup> the apostles added to this Christ's life and teachings, and the earliest kerygma outlined and expanded in the remainder of the New Testament.<sup>34</sup>

The inerrancy of Scripture is rooted in its divine inspiration. "The biblical concept of Scripture, then, is of a single, though complex, God-given message, set down in writing in God-given words; a message which God has spoken and still speaks."<sup>35</sup> Scripture's origin in God means that it is infallible ("wholly trustworthy and reliable") and inerrant ("wholly true").<sup>36</sup> The authority, inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of Scripture are ultimately confirmed by the power and work of the Holy Spirit in inspiring and illuminating it.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, for Packer, the ultimate confirmation of inerrancy is the subjective experience of the individual Christian in relationship with God.

Thirty years later, a new evangelical champion would step to the fore. Whereas Packer took a particularly presuppositional approach to the doctrine of inerrancy, Norman Geisler would continue to develop its defense through a more evidentialist tactic. Even though there were differences in approach, both theologians agreed on the epistemological

31. *Ibid.*, 77–82.

32. *Ibid.*, 53; see also 85–91.

33. *Ibid.*, 54–62.

34. *Ibid.*, 62–64.

35. *Ibid.*, 88.

36. *Ibid.*, 95.

37. *Ibid.*, See also R. C. Sproul, "The Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit," in Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy*, 337–56.



basis of the divide between a conservative inerrantist position and a more liberal errantist view. Geisler states,

Errantists do not hold a double standard but rather a different theory of truth. Could it be, then, that the real problem is that a fundamental issue that occasions the difference between the two major camps of evangelicals on biblical inerrancy is that they are presupposing different theories of truth? This writer proposes that this is indeed the case. One thing is certain: Different theories of truth will make a significant difference in what one considers to be an "error," or deviation from the truth. In fact, what counts as an error on one definition of truth is not an error on another definition of truth.<sup>38</sup>

Geisler was responding to traditional liberals and some in the evangelical community who were moving away from this evangelical distinction. He proposed that errantists hold an intentionality view of truth that defines a statement as true "if it accomplishes what the author intended it to accomplish." This view includes three corollaries: (1) Factual assurances need not correspond to reality; (2) factually correct statements can be false; and (3) persons and propositions can be characterized as false.<sup>39</sup>

Geisler proposes that inerrantists hold to the correspondence view of truth, which understands truth to be agreement with the actual state of affairs. This view includes four corollaries: (1) a statement's truth does not depend on the intention of the speaker; (2) one can make a true statement that reveals more than what one intends to say; (3) truth is a characterization about propositions, not reality itself; and (4) reality is neither true nor false—it just is.<sup>40</sup>

Geisler reminds us that factual communication would break down without a correspondence view of truth. Factual communication depends on informative statements. However, informative statements must be factually true (that is, they must correspond to the facts) in order to inform one correctly. Further, since all communication seems to depend ultimately on something's being literally or factually true, then it

38. Norman L. Geisler, "The Concept of Truth in the Inerrancy Debate," originally published in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October-December, 1980. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://normangeisler.com/concept-of-truth-in-the-inerrancy-debate/>.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.



would follow that all communication depends in the final analysis on a correspondence view of truth.<sup>41</sup>

The fullest evangelical definition of inerrancy and its implications is found in the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*.<sup>42</sup> The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy sponsored a conference on inerrancy in Chicago in 1978. More than two hundred evangelical scholars collaborated to produce a document that affirmed specific teachings and clarified what they did and did not mean in reference to the doctrine of inerrancy. The short statement produced by this group persists as the clearest expression of evangelical doctrine on inerrancy to date.

*Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*  
*A Short Statement*

1. God, who is Himself Truth and speaks truth only, has inspired Holy Scripture in order thereby to reveal Himself to lost mankind through Jesus Christ as Creator and Lord, Redeemer and Judge. Holy Scripture is God's witness to Himself.

2. Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms; obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises.

3. The Holy Spirit, Scripture's divine Author, both authenticates it to us by His inward witness and opens our minds to understand its meaning.

4. Being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teaching, no less in what it states about God's acts in creation, about the events of world history, and about its own literary origins under God, than in its witness to God's saving grace in individual lives.

5. The authority of Scripture is inescapably impaired if this total divine inerrancy is in any way limited or disregarded, or made relative to a view of truth contrary to the Bible's own; and such lapses bring serious loss to both the individual and the Church.<sup>43</sup>

41. Ibid.

42. The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. Accessed July 6, 2017. [http:// library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI\\_1.pdf](http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf).

43. Ibid.

It is with these principles in mind that evangelicals have continued to proclaim God's faithfulness to us in His Word and to argue for it in the midst of a world growing ever more hostile to the very concept of truth.

#### INERRANCY IN A POST-TRUTH WORLD

Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, argues for the continued importance and relevance of the doctrine of inerrancy with the following words:

The way out of hermeneutical nihilism and metaphysical anti-realism is the doctrine of revelation. It is indeed the evangelical, biblical doctrine of revelation that breaks this epistemological impasse and becomes the foundation for a revelatory epistemology. This is not foundationalism in a modernist sense. It is not rationalism. It is the understanding that God has spoken to us in a reasonable way, in language we can understand, and has given us the gift of revelation, which is his willful disclosure of himself.<sup>44</sup>

Since evangelicals understand the Bible to be God's self-revelation, traditional arguments for inerrancy have affirmed it logically, stating that because God is perfect and incapable of lying, His revelation must also be perfect and without error. They have also affirmed it biblically, noting the Bible's claim to be the Word of God and Jesus's and the disciples' recognition of the divine nature of Scripture. Similar biblical arguments for inerrancy have included the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, the unity of Scripture, and the moral character of Scripture. In addition, the impact of the Bible on cultures around the world and its indestructibility throughout history have also been proffered as defenses of the divine nature and therefore inerrancy of Scripture. Arguments very similar to these may be found in the writings of F. Leroy Forlines.<sup>45</sup>

Yet Forlines seems to grasp that, with the shifting sands of post-modernity, there really is no such thing as a "proof" for inerrancy or perhaps for anything else. We can strengthen beliefs through demonstrating

44. R. Albert Mohler, "When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy," in J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett, eds. *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*. Counterpoints Series, ed. Stanley N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 29–64, 31.

45. For a good example of this traditional approach, see Forlines, *The Quest for Truth*, 108–11.

their reasonableness and their coherence with known truths or beliefs. Yet this is not the same thing as proving them to be logically necessary.<sup>46</sup> In addition to these arguments, Forlines adds an existential one. Flowing from his total personality approach,<sup>47</sup> he claims that our understanding of inerrant Scripture is an *a priori* aspect of our creation in the image of God. In this sense inerrancy does not have to be documented as much as believed. Forlines contends that if one comes to believe that the Bible is God's Word, then the *a priori* idea of God as a "perfect being . . . holy, just, and fair" confirms Scripture's inerrancy.<sup>48</sup> This innate concept of God leads to a conviction that if a book is God's book, it must reflect His character and would therefore be inerrant.<sup>49</sup>

#### APPLICATION

While affirmations of the doctrine of inerrancy may be responsible for the birth of Fundamentalism, the church has always been committed to the authority of Scripture and its sufficiency for a relationship with God. Evangelical Christianity through the centuries has asserted what the Bible itself has taught regarding its divine source and its infallible effects. The inerrancy of Scripture flows from the character of its author. As Paul Harrison's *Free Will Baptist Catechism* reminds us, "the Scriptures are God's inspired and inerrant message to mankind. Whatever the Bible says is true is true. Whatever the Bible says is false is false."<sup>50</sup>

However, in a world of doubt and skepticism, what does the word *truth* mean anymore? How should the church respond, and what place does Scripture have in this cultural struggle? As apologists for God and Scripture, Christians must be clear that they are also apologists for truth. We must defend its objective existence and its correspondence with reality.

46. Forlines, *The Quest for Truth*, 111.

47. Forlines's total personality approach to theology and apologetics is his way of talking about how humans deal instinctively and intuitively with what he refers to as the inescapable questions of life. He describes this total personality approach in this way: "The personality is concerned with thinking (the activity of the mind), feeling (the activity of the heart, which refers to the seat of our emotions), and acting (the activity of the will). While we can distinguish the activity of the mind, heart, and will, we cannot separate the activity. The activity of each is deeply involved in the other. The mind, heart, and will are a functional unity." Thus, theology must speak to all aspects of what it means to be human. See Forlines, *The Quest for Truth*, 55.

48. Forlines, *The Quest for Truth*, 55.

49. Forlines, *The Quest for Truth*, 57.

50. Paul Harrison, *Free Will Baptist Catechism*, question 9, "What are the Scriptures?"

Timothy Tennent recognizes the prophetic call of Christians to speak truth in these troubled times. It is a cultural war as well as a heavenly one.

As the western world slips with ever increasing rapidity into a post-Christian cultural milieu, I am afraid that we will need to be ever mindful that we are in a post-truth cultural context, which stands in stark contrast to a Christian world-view which affirms truth claims rooted in God's self-disclosure. Because God is the creator of the universe, the whole of creation is founded on the bedrock of truth. Therefore, we must become the new vanguard of cultural truth-tellers who adamantly resist all forms of demagoguery which shroud truth for any desired outcome, even if it is a so-called "Christian end." . . . We are those who are rooted and grounded in not only the truth of God's revelation, but also we are those who still embrace the very notion of truth itself. That, in the end, may be our most valuable contribution to an ever fragmenting culture. This is also why we could very well be entering a very hopeful phase of Christian witness as we proclaim the gospel through word and deed.<sup>51</sup>

This recognition must also impact how Christians speak and what we choose to value. Because God's Word is true and because words are a vehicle for truth, Christians should be careful in what they say and how they say it. Our use of words should reflect the high value we place on truth. As Fred Dobb says, "Words matter profoundly in a tradition that says God created the entire world through speech. . . . We are told in Genesis chapter 1 that we who are created in the divine image should strive to be divine in our use of speech. That means every word we utter should reflect our values, and one of the highest of those values is truth."<sup>52</sup>

Christians should develop and work to defend a Christian epistemology. God is a rational, personal God who has created us in His image and has revealed Himself to us. The rationality of God is evident in creation, and we can know creation because we have the same rational principles at work in our minds. All truth is funneled through a system of

51. Timothy Tennent, "Fake News in a Post-Truth World." December 12, 2016. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://timothytennent.com/2016/12/12/fake-news-in-a-post-truth-world/>.

52. Kimberly Winston, "Thou Shalt Not Speak Alternative Facts: Religion and Lying," *Religion News Service*. Accessed June 15, 2017. <http://religionnews.com/2017/02/16/thou-shalt-not-speak-alternative-facts-religion-and-lying/>.

thinking or innate, *a priori* ideas that serve as a grid to help us understand the Word of God. This is part of the image of God in humanity. For this reason, true knowledge about the world and God is attainable. Some truths can be gained from sense experience, but others are based on reason and revelation. Regardless of the source, all truth is coherent and resonates with human experience.

Finally, the church must remember that the largest problem of humanity is not linguistic, cultural, moral, or theological; it is spiritual. Apologetics alone will not solve the problem. The gospel is framed as truth, but, as Forlines reminds us, it is truth for the entire person, not just the mind. Evangelism must remain our central focus. Our mission is to proclaim Jesus as the Word of God and His provision for salvation through His life, death, and resurrection. It is God's Word that presents this story, and we are its heralds. "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal" (2 Corinthians 10:5), but, empowered by the Spirit, we are called to be His witnesses and to tell His story (Acts 1:8). We have been convinced of truth because we have come to know the one who is Truth (John 14:6) and His Spirit testifies within us (John 14:17). Those without the Spirit cannot know the Word of Truth without coming to know Him who is Truth. "How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them" (Romans 10:14)?

Matthew J. McAfee

# The N. T. Wright Effect: A Free Will Baptist Assessment through the Theology of F. Leroy Forlines

## INTRODUCTION

There can be no doubt that, for a number of years, the stature of N. T. Wright has been casting an ever-increasing shadow over the landscape of popular and scholarly theological sensibilities. Part of the reason for this growing interest in Wright stems from the sheer number of publications being put out annually by this prolific writer. Another factor must surely be his engaging writing style and on-the-spot charisma from behind the lecterns and podiums of the conference circuit.<sup>1</sup> Under the surface of it all lies a well-trained New Testament scholar who has masterfully managed to package scholarly interests for popular consumption. For every academic publication Wright produces (or has produced in years past), one will find several other popular works treating similar topics in various ways, making him both the people's scholar and the scholar's scholar at the same time. This balance is to be commended for its potential in affecting substantive impact on the church for its edification.

Perhaps we need to defend devoting our attention to the work of Wright in this particular venue. It is safe to assume that Wright has not significantly influenced the Free Will Baptist movement as a whole. However, a growing number of younger Free Will Baptists are at least aware of Wright, even if they are not enthusiastic advocates of his writings. For this reason we should not underestimate the possibility of seeing more of what is referred to here as the "Wright Effect" rippling throughout our movement a few years down the road as our younger

1. My first significant exposure to N. T. Wright took place in 2004 at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in San Antonio, Texas. In that meeting Wright symbolized a champion defender of Jesus's resurrection against the doubting Dominic Crossan. Things changed rather drastically in the 2010 meeting of the same conference in Atlanta, Georgia, where Wright defended his version of the "new perspective" on Paul, particularly as it relates to justification. This incidentally placed him at odds not only with the Reformation tradition but also with most of his evangelical colleagues.

pastors and denominational leaders who have been exposed to or influenced by his work assume leadership roles in our beloved denomination.

The purpose of this essay is therefore twofold: painting Wright's theological perspective in rather broad strokes on the one hand and offering several notable critiques on the other. In an attempt to maintain relevance in this setting—especially in light of the fact that many will not have been exposed to Wright—we will observe Wright through the lenses of one of our own Free Will Baptist theologians, F. Leroy Forlines, whose theology will guide our foray into the world of Wright. As a disclaimer, I should point out that Forlines has greatly influenced my own thinking on many of the subjects tackled here. For this reason I must confess that that influence probably goes beyond formal reference. The rationale for choosing Forlines as Wright's conversation partner becomes readily apparent in the mere span of Wright's theological interests, which is comfortably matched by the diversity of Forlines's lifetime of theological inquiry on a variety of topics.

The aim of what follows is to present this broad overview by outlining three main areas where Wright's distinctive contributions are best conveyed. These are areas that have also been developed from within the Reformed Arminian perspective of Forlines. In doing so, one will find much to like about Wright. Yet at the same time, it will be helpful to raise a number of concerns in a tendency to overcorrect problems (many times he is right in identifying them!) both in popular evangelicalism as well as the wider Christian tradition. Some of the critique of this essay will have to do not simply with what Wright says but with what he does not say. The three main areas that will establish the structure of this analysis are: (1) creation and covenant, (2) salvation, and (3) eschatology. Following this treatment of these three areas, a few summary reflections will be offered on what this discussion means for Free Will Baptists.

#### CREATION AND COVENANT

One of the hot topics among evangelicals regarding N. T. Wright is his slant on justification and the way it has been redefined according to the so-called "new perspective" on Paul. This will be discussed more below. For now, this focus is somewhat misguided simply because Wright's view of justification represents a consistent outworking of more-fundamental commitments in other theological areas. The best place to begin, if we are to understand the thinking of Wright, is his understanding of creation and covenant. Even Wright himself argues his points about Paul and justification from these two platforms, all the

while claiming that we need to redefine their meaning and significance for Paul entirely.<sup>2</sup>

Wright is extremely helpful in his emphasis on God's work in creation as it relates to the covenant. Drawing on Psalms 19 and 74, as well as Isaiah 55, he concludes that "the creator God is the covenant God and vice versa; and his word, particularly through his prophet and/or servant, will rescue and deliver his people from the enemy."<sup>3</sup> God has created the world and has made humanity in His image in order to care for it, but sin has interrupted this divine plan, thus necessitating a "rescue operation" to set things back on track.

This rescue operation is covenant, and front and center in this covenant plan are the divine promises to Abraham. For instance, in discussing Romans 3–8 and Paul's understanding of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises, Wright argues that it is more than "nationalist territorial expansionism," as some would limit it. Rather, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic land promise in the new creation work of Christ "will result in God's renewed people receiving as their inheritance not merely one piece of territory but the whole restored cosmos."<sup>4</sup> The Romans text stimulating Wright's thought on this point is Romans 4:23, where Paul states that the Abrahamic promise meant that he would become "heir of the world."

The seed of Abraham becoming heirs of the earth has stimulated the thinking of Leroy Forlines, who emphasizes the Abrahamic covenant's broader significance. Forlines makes a strong case for the Abrahamic promise of land having its ultimate realization in the eschatological future.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, he argues, God's promise to Abraham of inheriting the land forever requires that it be after the resurrection of his body. Since Abraham did not inherit the land during his lifetime (Acts 7:5), it must refer to a future, post-resurrection inheritance.

This fact also leads Forlines to suggest that such an understanding influences one's view of the new heavens and the new earth, since a total annihilation of the created order as we know it would violate God's promise. The "heavenly country" Abraham is said to have anticipated in

2. Or, more precisely, he might state the whole issue as an area of neglect among Pauline scholars. See his discussion in *Paul in Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 21–39.

3. *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 24.

4. N. T. Wright, "New Exodus, New Inheritance: The Narrative Substructure of Romans 3–8" in *Romans and the People of God: Essays in Honor of Gordon D. Fee on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, eds. Sven K. Soderlund and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 31.

5. Forlines, *Romans in the Randall House Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Randall House, 1987), 113.



Hebrews 11:16, Forlines stresses, was a reference to quality rather than location. It is God's restoration of the created order as the eternal possession of the redeemed.<sup>6</sup> Forlines and Wright agree on the importance of the Abrahamic land promise for God's redemptive program. Yet the emphasis in Forlines tends toward its future significance in the eternal state, while Wright makes more of its immediate relevance.<sup>7</sup> Wright's eschatology will be discussed further below.

The language of Wright's discussion on creation and covenant is familiar. It sounds like the traditional language evangelicals are accustomed to, but its meaning according to his particular theological framework is not. This fact is laid bare when we contemplate his understanding of sin from two perspectives: (1) what happened at the Fall in Genesis 3 and (2) what is God's plan of redemption through covenant all about? In answer to the first question, Wright defines sin not as "the breaking of arbitrary rules; rather, the rules are the thumbnail sketches of different types of dehumanizing behavior."<sup>8</sup> In other words, it is not that we have violated some divine standard of behavior; we have failed to live up to all that God intended for us to be as human beings. Sin is conceived entirely from the human side of things and not from God's.

In his discussion of evil in the Old Testament, Wright explains that "judgment in the present is a matter of stopping evil in its tracks before it gets too far." Furthermore, "from within the story we already ought to perceive that this is going to be enormously costly for God himself. The loneliness of God looking for his partners, Adam and Eve, in the garden; the grief of God before the flood; the head-shaking exasperation of God at

6. In probing the matter of how we get from the land as Canaan to the land as world/earth, Forlines suggests it is because Abraham was not only the father of the Jews but was also the father of many nations. He states, "As a necessary inference, then, the whole earth is promised to Abraham and his seed" (*Romans*, 113). I would point out that although this argument is possible, it is not entirely necessary. For one, the borders of the land demarcated in Genesis 15:18 are vastly larger than is often assumed: "from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates." These two great rivers, the Nile of Egypt and the Euphrates of Mesopotamia, encompassed the known world at the time, at least from the ancient Near Eastern perspective. Furthermore, the land = world interpretation is already developed in Psalm 37, where the actual possession of it is envisioned from within the context of the reward of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked (Psalms 37:22, 34). Cf. also Proverbs 2:21-22: "The upright dwell in the land and the blameless remain in it. The wicked are cut off from the land; the treacherous are uprooted from it."

7. Or, to put it another way, Forlines interprets its realization in "the not yet," Wright in "the now."

8. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 180.

Babel—all these, God knows, he will have to continue to experience.”<sup>9</sup> So judgment is preventative. It stops the chaos experienced in the fallen created order before it gets too far. Judgment is not retributive in the sense of holding a fallen world accountable for violating God’s Law.

Sin is not so much an offense against God or a violation of His Word but is “the failure to be genuinely human: this means ‘missing-the-mark,’ *hamartia*, in other words, ‘sin.’”<sup>10</sup> As one reads Wright, it is easy to get the impression that God is not the God to be feared, necessarily, but the God who is, on the one hand, grieved by the human condition and the direction it is heading and who is, on the other hand, in a bind to defend himself in a world gone wrong. Though Wright never comes out and says so, one might get the impression that the whole mess of sin is somehow God’s fault and that creation is waiting impatiently for God to get it out of the mess He has gotten it into in the first place.<sup>11</sup>

Yes, Wright is entirely right in emphasizing the fact that the condition of the world after the Fall grieves God, which is a major motif precipitating the flood in Genesis 6. However, this is not the only aspect of sin. It is God’s wrath against fallen humanity in its rebellion against His ways that offers the basis for the terrible event of the flood. Again, Wright, in one breath, correctly articulates one side of sin’s theological meaning while at the same time downplaying (or even denying?) the other.

When we turn our attention more directly to God’s plan of redemption, or as Wright calls it, God’s rescue operation, this *a priori* view of sin works itself out more directly. These considerations take us to the significance of Jesus’s atoning work on the cross. Wright makes the case that the Gospels tell us that evil “was indeed the cause of Jesus’ death.” The death of Jesus was the result of both the political evil at work in the world and “the accusing forces which stand behind those human and societal structures,” those attempting to destroy the creation “the Creator is longing to redeem.”<sup>12</sup> Or, as he states elsewhere, “Jesus suffers the full consequences of evil: evil from the political, social, cultural, personal, moral, religious and spiritual angles all rolled into one; evil in the downward spiral hurtling toward the pit of destruction and despair.”<sup>13</sup>

9. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 52–53.

10. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 88.

11. For example, in commenting on first century Judaism’s perspective of sin and suffering in creation, he states that monotheism had come under considerable strain, “putting God’s credibility quite drastically on the line” (*Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 89).

12. *Evil and the Justice of God*, 83.

13. *Ibid.*, 92.

As one might notice here, Wright interprets God's setting the fallen world aright politically, seeing Christ's crucifixion as the death blow against the political empires of the world who have exalted themselves against the rule of God in the world. These rulers are indeed pawns of the sinister forces of evil working behind the scenes, and God has defeated them in Jesus.

The Gospels' story of the crucifixion, according to Wright, is "the story of the Creator God taking responsibility for what has happened to creation, bearing the weight of its problems on his own shoulders." Or more explicitly (citing an evangelistic tract), "the nations of the world got together to pronounce judgment on God for all the evils in the world, only to realize with a shock that God had already served his sentence."<sup>14</sup> This assessment is one of most troubling statements in Wright's work. Does this articulation provide a satisfactory explanation for evil in the world and its remedy? Was God taking responsibility for the demise of creation? How would such a reading of the Gospels square with one's interpretation of the fall in Genesis 3? Paul argues that sin entered into the world through one man, Adam, and that Christ took upon himself Adam's sentence in order to provide grace for all (Rom. 5).<sup>15</sup>

Unlike Wright, Forlines stands on the side of the Reformers when it comes to his views on sin, maintaining both the horizontal and vertical dimensions of sin and atonement. Forlines certainly views sin as a debilitating force at work in the world that dehumanizes the image bearers of God and sets the whole created order on a downward spiral of chaos and destruction. But he also maintains that God's Law has been violated, resulting in humanity's condemned status before their Creator.<sup>16</sup>

The perspective of human suffering cannot be sidelined if we are to maintain a robust view of sin biblically speaking. And we should not respond to Wright by downplaying this aspect of the Fall. However, seeing human suffering as the defining feature in a theology of sin makes it that much harder to legitimize the crucifixion of Jesus short of an act of

14. Ibid., 94.

15. In this same chapter, Wright further qualifies the significance of the atonement of Christ in this way: "For Paul, Jesus' death clearly involves (for example in Romans 8:3) a *judicial or penal* element, being God's proper *No* to sin expressed on Jesus as Messiah, as Israel's and therefore the world's representative" (*Evil and the Justice of God*, 95). But what Wright means by a "judicial" or "penal" element is not entirely clear. What remains clear as far as I can tell is that he is not using the term as it has been understood in the Reformation view of penal satisfaction (i.e., the satisfaction of God's wrath against sinners).

16. See his comments in *Classical Arminianism: A Theology of Salvation* (Nashville: Randall House, 2011), 15–34, 199–221.

exhibition without any real necessity.<sup>17</sup> In this regard Wright's theology of sin encounters the same problem faced by advocates of the governmental view of atonement generations earlier, though for different reasons.<sup>18</sup> Both the governmentalist and Wright root their theology of atonement in the love of God rather than His holy character. But the overly spiritualized results of governmentalist theology (i.e., less concern for the redemption of God's creation in favor of more mystical spirituality) part ways with Wright's overly politicized view of the Father's purpose in sacrificing the Son.

#### SALVATION

As has already been noted, Wright's views on salvation have sparked controversy within evangelicalism of late, particularly as it relates to his version of the so-called "new perspective" take on justification. This theological development naturally arises from his views on evil/sin and the justice of God. The major point of contention has to do with defining the expression "the righteousness of God," as well as the divine act of making believers righteous (i.e., being justified).

Forlines defends the Reformational understanding of imputed righteousness through the active and passive obedience of Jesus. Forlines asserts that Jesus met the requirements of the Law through His perfect obedience, which is then credited to believers through faith. This entire framework is grounded in a particular view of righteousness that is rooted in the character of a holy God who has made demands of His creatures. This "real" standard of behavior is reflective of His nature and must be maintained by the recipients of the covenant relationship. Israel

17. We should clarify here that this aspect of the crucifixion is not the only one for Wright. There is a public demonstration for the covenant people of Israel as a whole too: the death of Messiah was not so much the removal of the Deuteronomistic curses for individuals, but the nation as a whole. As he puts it, "It is not so much the question of what happens *when this or that individual sins*, but the question of what happens *when the nation as a whole fails to keep the Torah as a whole*," so that "the death of Jesus, precisely on a Roman cross which symbolized so clearly the continuing subjugation of the people of God, brought the exile to a climax. The King of the Jews took the brunt of the exile on himself" (*The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 146). This interpretation boils down to a form of exhibition, or a symbolic demonstration that the curse of exile has been brought to an end for the nation. Therefore, Wright sees a twofold public demonstration in the cross: one for humanity in general and one for the Jews in particular.

18. For a discussion of the governmental view of Jesus's atonement, see Forlines, *Classical Arminianism*, 221–29.

failed to do so, necessitating the coming of a second Israelite (Jesus, the true and faithful Israelite) who did what the first Israel could not.<sup>19</sup>

*Wright's "New Perspective" and Justification*

In setting the stage for his discussion on the new Pauline perspective of justification, Wright raises the so-called "narrative" reading of Paul, which he thinks is the key for coming to a proper understanding of the Pauline corpus as a whole. He defines this narrative interpretation by denying that it is simply a matter of acknowledging "the implicit narratives in Paul and drawing out their implications for detailed exegesis." Rather, it is much deeper: "that second-Temple Jews believed themselves to be *actors within* a real-life narrative," and that "the main function of their stories was to remind them of earlier and (they hoped) characteristic moments within the single, larger story which stretched from the creation of the world and the call of Abraham right forwards to their own day, and (they hoped) into the future."<sup>20</sup>

To me, this sounds much like what Forlines and others have called simply "progressive revelation" and its implications for understanding the Scriptures in terms of the greater progression of the redemptive story. Wright feels that his (and Richard Hayes's<sup>21</sup>) "narrative" perspective provides the basis for all things new regarding a theology of Paul (e.g., the doctrine of justification). However, this is not all there is to it. We might gain new insights from the text with a renewed (and proper) emphasis on the grand narrative of which the New Testament authors viewed themselves a part, but the innovations characteristic of the new perspective are grounded in something else.<sup>22</sup>

It all comes down to the Law, or Torah, which Wright does concede reveals the sin and corruption of humanity. "The more you embrace

19. I am deliberately couching my description of justification in language reflective of Wright's, only I am using it differently to reflect the traditional understanding of imputed righteousness.

20. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 11.

21. Richard B. Hayes, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

22. Even Forlines (*The Quest for Truth*, 347-55) arrives independently at conclusions regarding the first-century Jewish understanding of salvation similar (though distinct enough, as indicated in his discussion) to those of E. P. Sanders (*Paul and Palestinian Judaism* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977]), yet the direction of Forlines's thought in light of such insights could not be more distinct in his affirming the penal satisfaction view of the atonement and imputed righteousness. As I have already noted, Wright's view of God's justice as it relates to evil is a more telling factor for his view of justification than the so-called narrative reading of Scripture.

Torah," he says, "the more it does indeed show up your secret faults." But then he moves on to suggest that "God has done what the Torah, weakened by the flesh, could not do: that is, God has accomplished the goals for which the covenant was put in place, while dealing simultaneously with the fact that the covenant people were part of the problem within creation."<sup>23</sup>

This interpretive move, ever so subtle as it is, in some way pits God against Torah, depicting the revealed Law of God as something weak and fleshly and by implication a part of the problem in creation needing redemption. Torah, then, cannot be the true revealed nature of God to creation, but at the most is only the revealed will of God in the confines of creation's fallen nature.<sup>24</sup> In this way Torah no longer represents the external in-breaking of God's revelation but is instead part of the problem evident both in creation and in the covenant people.<sup>25</sup>

Again, this viewpoint may not really arise from a fresh reading of Paul. Instead, it reflects Wright's view of God's relation to the fallen created order. Since the covenant people are part of the problem, Wright concludes that it "creates a crisis for God himself, a crisis exactly parallel to the crisis for which Ezra saw so painfully: how is God to be both faithful to the covenant and just in his dealings with the whole of creation?"<sup>26</sup>

23. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 31.

24. This reminds me of similar arguments put forth by Peter Enns in his book on inspiration, where he explains that God revealed Himself through the imperfect literary mediums of the ancient Near East, irrespective of the truthfulness of what is being communicated (*Incarnation and Inspiration: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005]). For example, God utilized ancient Near Eastern "myth," since that literary medium would have been familiar to ancient Israel, irrespective of the medium's lack of concern for actual historical events. I am not saying that Wright's argument here is exactly the same, but it does resemble the kind of thought developed by Enns, who deals with a very different set of considerations.

25. Concerning Galatians 3:10–14, Wright presents the Law as "coming between the promises and their fulfillment" in that it only "brings curse, and not blessing" (*The Climax of the Covenant*, 151). The curse of the Law yielding exile is met in the death of the Messiah, who provides the means of covenant renewal through the removal of the curse. However, Wright limits the role of Torah to the historical context of Israel and not as reflecting the intrinsic nature of God: "Torah as it stands is not the means of faith, since it speaks of 'doing,' which is best taken in the sense of 'doing the things that mark Israel out,' and hence cannot be as it stands the boundary-marker of the covenant family promised to Abraham" (*Climax of the Covenant*, 150). I do not deny that Torah "as it stands" reflects the cultural concerns facing ancient Israel, but it does so as the application of God's moral standard for their own times. As such, it remains the standard by which individuals are measured, regardless of the times in which it is applied.

26. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 29.

As Wright states elsewhere, God is under obligation (self-obligation) to fix the mess of creation and covenant.

I do think Wright is correct in emphasizing the greater narratives of creation and covenant. Indeed these are sub-texts of Paul's thought, as Wright aptly demonstrates from his exegesis of key texts such as Colossians 1, 1 Corinthians 15, and Romans 1–11. Where one could quibble with the results of his exegesis is his insistence on redefining covenant. His view of covenant is one that does away with covenant stipulations altogether, since God's revelation through Torah is not free from the contaminations of fallen creation. This results in a collapse of covenant and the terms of covenant into one and the same thing. Or, perhaps more exactly, it yields the unhappy result of eliminating covenant stipulations altogether and redefines them in terms of one's relation to the covenant community as being "in" or "out."<sup>27</sup> To put it in New Testament terms, Wright reduces God's call for sinners to be saved (covenant) and the call for believers to live in obedience to Christ (covenant stipulations) into one thing, so that the real obligation for Christians to live in obedience is lost.

The *dikaiosynē theou* (traditionally rendered "the righteousness of God," which Wright rejects), then, is reinterpreted to mean God's faithfulness to His covenant promises. But it is a faithfulness that does not translate into any requirement of sinful, fallen creation.<sup>28</sup> This is why Wright speaks of God fulfilling "the covenant through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit."<sup>29</sup> He does not use the language of the fulfillment of the Law and/or covenant stipulations of God, which Israel failed to do (despite the fact that this is the exact language used by Jesus and Paul).<sup>30</sup>

27. See his discussion in *Climax of the Covenant*, 144–51, where he emphasizes that it was "Israel as a whole" that failed to keep Torah, not really the individual (146).

28. Elsewhere he argues that Paul's operative image in Romans is that of a Law court, which he suggests should govern our understanding of the meaning of righteousness. He defines righteousness not on the basis of moral rightness, but having the judge declare one to be "in the right" (*Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009], 69). For Wright, righteousness is a status that the believer obtains by God's declaration, as in the case of a Law court judge who declares one person to be "in the right" over the other in a particular case. He goes on to state that "to justify" does not "denote an action which transforms someone so much as a declaration which grants them status" (*Justification*, 91). In this case, that status is covenant membership.

29. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 37.

30. Matthew 5:17; Romans 3:30; 8:4 (which is based upon being "in Christ" in v. 1); 9:5 (cited by Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 44); 2 Corinthians 5:20–21.



Furthermore, this coalescing of covenant relationship (salvation) and covenant requirements (perseverance) allows Wright to conclude that Paul is not so much concerned about “how individual sinners find a right relationship with a holy God.” Rather, Paul is interested in how God can be true to covenant and creation, which he argues are one and the same.<sup>31</sup>

There has been a tendency for some in the West to view salvation too individualistically, disregarding the doctrine of the church and our role as members of Christ’s corporate body.<sup>32</sup> One can agree with Wright’s critique on this point. At the same time, however, the relationship of individuals to God’s covenant promises through Israel must also be stressed. This emphasis arises from any serious reading of Romans 9, where Paul argues extensively about the condition of faith for the election of individuals (Romans 9:30). Or consider Romans 11, where Paul clearly demarcates that individual Jews who lack faith are cut off from the covenant promises, while believing Gentiles are grafted in to become legitimate covenant members (Romans 11:11–24). Yes, Paul emphasizes an election into the covenant community, but it is the election of individuals through faith. This seems to be the whole point of Romans 9 in deconstructing first-century Jewish views on salvation.<sup>33</sup>

Wright defines *righteous*, then, as God’s being faithful to His redemptive plan. Consequently, the work of Jesus on the cross, for Wright, is the demonstration of faithful obedience to this plan. As Wright explains, “the sacrificial death of Jesus, in faithful obedience to God’s saving plan, has provided the remedy.”<sup>34</sup> This is obviously true, at least to a certain extent. We should clarify, however, that Torah is technically a part of God’s redemptive plan as well. And, yes, Jesus as a faithful Israelite did what no Israelite had been able to do.

Free Will Baptists can live with couching Jesus’s obedience in terms of God’s broader covenantal purposes. Yet there is no obvious reason that such a “perspective” should discount the view that justification comes from imputed righteousness (Jesus’s obedience to the Law credited to the believer). None of Wright’s arguments (nor those of other “new perspective” advocates) necessitate such a sharp either/or scenario. In fact, one could say that God’s redemptive purposes through His covenant with

31. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 37.

32. See especially 1 Corinthians 12:12–13; Ephesians 4:4–13.

33. See the discussion in Forlines, *The Quest for Truth*, 347–55, where he outlines two prevailing viewpoints from the first century concerning Jews and salvation: (1) that all Jews are saved, and (2) that all Jews must adhere to Torah (also noting the work of Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*).

34. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 53–54.



Abraham find specific expression in Torah, even though these specifics find fuller realization in the Word made flesh (or, we might even say, the Torah made flesh).

Wright's insistence on reinterpreting the righteousness of God in the general sense of "faithfulness to the covenant promise" is unnecessarily one-dimensional and at best vaguely defined. Furthermore, it is more difficult to apply this definition to the human side of justification whereby believers are "made righteous," which would technically mean one's faithfulness to God's covenant purposes.

Yet Wright's favorite phrase in explaining justification is to be declared "in the right," or in terms of creation, to put things in the right. In all of these cases, the justice and character of God rings hollow in its removal of any standard by which creation is to be measured. This is why the argument with Wright on Paul's view of justification ultimately does not concern a "new perspective" on Paul's understanding of creation and covenant as he defines them. Rather, it boils down to a different understanding of God's nature and a redefinition of sin and forgiveness.

It is at this juncture in the road where Forlines (and the Reformational tradition in general) and Wright part ways. As has already been pointed out from Wright elsewhere, "Sin, we note, is not the breaking of arbitrary rules; rather, the rules are the thumbnail sketches of different types of dehumanizing behavior."<sup>35</sup> In other words, sin has little to do with violating the word of God as it was stated for Adam and Eve, but rather it is the chaos unleashed in creation post-Eden. This is part of the picture, but it is not the whole picture. One cannot escape the fact that man has violated God's prescriptive command and as a result has been driven from His presence. As for judgment "in the present," Wright explains that it "is a matter of stopping evil in its tracks before it gets too far."<sup>36</sup> Once again, this removes any need for reconciling the relationship between God and man, since judgment is prevention of bad circumstances in creation rather than holding humanity accountable for disregarding divine revelation.

Besides, the Bible assumes certain expectations from those who enter into a relationship with God. This is true despite the arguments of some scholars for two different types of covenants in the Old Testament—one that expects something from those who enter into the relationship and one that does not. Such scholars argue that the covenant God made through Moses had the requirement of the Law (i.e., conditional) while the covenant through Abraham was entirely by grace and without

35. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God*, 180.

36. *Ibid.*, 52–53.

obligation (i.e., unconditional).<sup>37</sup> Yet, in all reality, both these factors are true of our relationship with God to some extent: God freely offers relationship, which, if accepted, has certain expectations. This is where it is accurate to speak of failure on the part of humanity in general with regard to God's covenant with creation and failure on the part of Israel concerning Yahweh's covenant with His people. They did not keep covenant fidelity, but Jesus, the true and faithful Israelite, did.

*Wright on Galatians 4 and the Paidagogos—More on Justification*

In classic Forlinesean fashion, Wright picks up on Paul's use of the *paidagogos* imagery of Israel and the Law, which depicts the people of God as immature children under the tutorship of the Law (i.e., the *paidagogos*).<sup>38</sup> In Christ, the New Testament people of God have been brought to full maturity and are therefore free from the Old Testament Law as their tutor.<sup>39</sup> However, the implications of the *paidagogos* seem to be different for Wright from what we find in Forlines. For example, Forlines argues that Jesus's submission to life under the tutorship of the Law demonstrates His active obedience to its demands and that that active

37. The background for this assumption comes from an appeal to two types of ancient Near Eastern treaty forms: (1) the suzerain treaty which emphasized the obligation of the servants, and (2) the grant which emphasized the obligation of the master toward his servant (see Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 [1970]: 185). As the argument goes, since there are two types of treaties in the ancient Near East, the same must be true of the Bible. For example, Michael Horton repeatedly emphasizes that the Abrahamic and David covenants parallel the ancient Near Eastern royal grant wherein the covenant obligations fall upon the master. This contrasts the Mosaic covenant and its resemblance to the suzerain-vassal treaty, which instead emphasizes the obligations of the servant (*Introducing Covenant Theology* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006], 41). Yet, the main parallel Horton cites for the Abrahamic covenant ceremony is an Assyrian suzerain-vassal treaty. Horton concedes, "As we have already seen, this ritual would have been well known in the ancient Near East, although its one-sidedness distinguishes it from typical suzerainty treaties in which the vassal would be made to take upon himself the oath and its terrible curses for violation" (145). The reason for this discrepancy is simply that these ancient treaties are not adopted as hard and fast categories in the biblical tradition; rather, the biblical authors evince an amalgamation of common covenant forms.

38. See Forlines's Appendix 2 devoted entirely to the *paidagogos* in *The Quest for Truth*, 491–98.

39. See Wright's discussion on this motif in *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 97–98. One of the important terms in Paul's treatment of the *paidagogos* here is *stoicheia*, usually rendered "elementary things/principles." Wright contends that these elements are "the local or tribal deities who had kept them under lock and key," so that "Paul is lining up the Torah along with the pagan landlord-gods" (98). I do not think this bald equivocation—pagan deities = Torah—is accurate. There is no denying that *stoicheia* in the New Testament refers to the oracles of God as delivered to Israel in the Law (cf. Hebrews 5:12; 6:1), but in keeping with the

obedience is imputed to believers through faith. This view of imputed righteousness—or Jesus’s fulfillment of the Law and its application to our account—is one of the hallmark points of disagreement between Wright and the Reformers. As we have noted several times, Wright defines righteousness not as obedience to God’s Word as revealed in the Law but faithfulness to His covenant promises. In other words, Jesus’s submission to life under the Law as tutor was a means of doing away with the Law, weak as it was, rather than as a means of fulfilling it.<sup>40</sup>

A similar argument is made from Romans 8, where, Wright claims, the work of the Son is “lined up over against that of Torah, whose failure to give the life it promised has been set out so spectacularly in [Romans] chapter 7.”<sup>41</sup> It must be said that the language Wright employs here—“failure to give the life it promised”—is a bit misleading. Even the proof text he cites from Romans 8:3–4 suggests something far less accusatory than the Law not delivering on its promises! The point of the passage is the fact that God sent His Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, in order that the just requirement of Torah might be fulfilled in us.”

The emphasis does not appear to be directed at the weakness of the Law but to the weakness of sinful flesh in its inability to live up to the Law. Furthermore, there is no exegetical way around this passage’s language regarding the requirement that Torah be fulfilled in us through Christ, not to mention the substitutionary / payment imagery of the “sin offering” to which the passage refers. Both these concepts can make sense only in terms of Christ’s active and passive obedience.<sup>42</sup> In the same

imagery of going from childhood to full adulthood in Christ, the idea of being freed from tyranny does not exactly correspond. The Torah as *paidagogos* communicates a temporary time of guidance until the time of adulthood, which indicates both contrast and continuity: contrast because it is the difference between immaturity and maturity; continuity because it is the Torah that trains the child in appropriate behavior in preparation for adulthood. I think Forlines’s treatment of Paul’s imagery on this point is much more helpful. Wright’s reading conveniently relegates the Law to a tyrannical overlord that is discarded in the work of Christ. Such an analysis fits with Wright’s view of sin and the justice of God stated elsewhere in that the Law is a part of the problem for the covenant people of God, representing the weak things of creation run amuck in the chaos and disorder of sin.

40. “Paul’s main aim here is, obviously, to reinforce his central point, that the Galatian Christians are already complete in Christ, and do not need to take upon themselves the yoke of Torah” (Ibid., 97).

41. Ibid., 99.

42. See Forlines, *The Quest for Truth*, 187–89. By “active obedience” we mean Jesus’s life of faithful obedience to Torah, whereas “passive obedience” specifically refers to his willful submission to enduring the full wrath of God on the cross as the substitutionary payment for sin. According to this view, Jesus’s active obedience provides the grounds for justification while his passive obedience is the means by which this perfect righteousness is made available for sinners through faith (i.e., penal satisfaction).

breath, however, it is also true that the Law had limitations in what it could do. Paul indicates this by describing “what the Law could not do.” However, those limitations were by design. In the imagery of Galatians, the Law’s design was to function as the *paidagogos* or tutor for the immature people of God in preparation for adulthood realized in the work of Jesus.

As Wright continues to deal with the major Pauline passages on the Law, we observe that each time he tackles the Law question, he somehow has to work his way around it in an attempt to reinterpret what seems to many scholars obviously clear. For example, in explaining the role of Torah in the redemptive work of Christ, Wright states: “I through Torah died to Torah, so that I might live to God (the “I” being the “I” of Romans 7:17–18 and Galatians 2:18).<sup>43</sup> The obvious question that Wright does not raise, much less provide an answer for, is this: Why would one need to do anything through Torah if it does not reflect any real obligation from God? The statement, which Wright makes leading up to this comment, that Torah was not the requirement for covenant but the response to covenant, though being absolutely correct, biblically speaking, does not alleviate this problem. If Torah is properly understood as the response to covenant, it still reflects something that God has indeed required from His people, regardless of whether or not they have done so.<sup>44</sup> For this

43. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 112.

44. Though I am unaware of anyone making such a claim, I think the role of Torah in the Old Covenant community provides an important correlation to the corresponding role of obedience to Christ in the New Covenant context. In both covenant contexts, the people of God are expected to demonstrate loyalty to their covenant Lord through obedience to His commands. In neither case do those commands merit covenant, but in both obedience demonstrates one’s being a legitimate covenant member. However, it is also true for both Old and New Covenant contexts that persistent disregard for God’s commands can lead to one’s being cut off from the covenant community, which, by the way, offers an argument from principle for the continuity between the Old and New Covenants. What is distinct about the New Covenant, however, is the superiority of Christ’s work, in this case being the only one able to exercise faithful obedience to the revealed will of God, which is then credited to the believer through faith. What does not seem to be contrastive between the Old and New covenants, however, is the possibility of being cut off from covenant in the case of persistent (high-handed?) disobedience to the Law of Christ. Of course, this argument will not be accepted by those of the Calvinistic persuasion, but it holds merit for those of us who are convinced of a more Reformed Arminian approach to the Scriptures. I have similarly expressed this idea elsewhere, arguing that the Old Testament presumptuous sins (literally, sins committed with a “high hand”) are equivalent to the sin of apostasy in the New Testament (McAfee, “F. Leroy Forlines on Presumptuous Sin in Numbers 15:27–30 and the Way Forward,” a paper presented for the Forlines Lecture Series of Welch College, March 2013; see also Forlines’s discussion, “Sins of Ignorance and Presumptuous Sins in the Old and New Testaments,” in *The Quest for Truth*, 467–87).

reason, there is no basis in Wright's arguments for his insistence on (re)interpreting "righteousness" as, of necessity, a reference to "one's covenant status as a member of God's people," nor that it must mean "covenant status" or "covenant community."<sup>45</sup>

Wright's interpretation of Philippians 3:6 is not convincing either, and certainly does not demand his redefined meaning for *dikaiosynē*. Here Paul contrasts the former "righteousness of my own" according to Torah and the "righteousness from God" that is according to faith, which is based on the faithfulness of the Messiah. Wright translates *hē ek theou dikaiosynē*, "the covenant status which comes from God," but the context certainly does not favor this interpretation.<sup>46</sup> The extent of Paul's argument arises from his own denial of being able to attain something from the Law. Granting Wright's own contention that adherence to Torah is in response to covenant and not a means of attaining covenant, this would likewise assume Paul's status as an old covenant member. Instead, what he now claims to have acquired is actual righteousness from God. The logic of Paul's argument seems to fall apart in the scheme of Wright's reading.

All in all, Wright has reinterpreted justification in two ways: (1) from the divine perspective: God's faithfulness to His own covenant promises, and (2) from the human perspective: the believer's declared status as a member of the covenant community. In both cases, the nuts and bolts of one's standing before God have been thrown out along with Torah, laden by the hindrances of fallen creation as well as its inability to deliver on what it promises. The Law has nothing to say about what God actually requires of His covenant people. Rather, it represents a tyrannical rule of enslavement over the covenant community, which Jesus essentially defeats. This redefinition removes the focus from the individual's standing before God as having violated His revealed Law to the individual's standing with regard to the covenant community (though even here Wright does not look at it from the angle of the individual's inclusion into the group). These commitments have significant eschatological ramifications, and which will be explored in the following section.

#### ESCHATOLOGY

The last area to be treated in this analysis is, broadly, eschatology, another subject on which Wright has made hallmark contributions. Several specific features constitute his general eschatological framework,

45. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 113.

46. *Ibid.*, 116.

and each of these will be examined briefly in turn. As a general rule, one can make the preliminary observation that Wright tends to emphasize the “now” of the “now/not yet” aspects of the kingdom, yielding an overly realized eschatology.<sup>47</sup>

To put it another way, the importance of God’s covenant program to right the wrongs of the created order after the Fall leads him to push back against the escapism evident in popular evangelicalism. This is the idea that since the world is heading for destruction, God is going to take us away to heaven where we will spend eternity as disembodied souls. Wright’s critique of this popularized eschatology is quite accurate—the view he bemoans fails to recognize the significance of God’s purposes in redeeming creation and the resulting new heavens and new earth.<sup>48</sup> However, in his attempt to correct this deficiency, Wright overcorrects by downplaying too much the eschatological “not yet.”

This treatment of Wright’s eschatology will focus on two relatively broad topics that will illustrate important concerns regarding his overly realized eschatology: (1) resurrection and the “soul” and (2) hell and judgment.

#### *Resurrection and the “Soul”*

For the most part, Wright is correct when he states in the introduction to his *Surprised by Hope* that an overemphasis on the disembodied soul after death has to some degree undermined the orthodox view of bodily resurrection taught in the New Testament. At the same time, however, Wright’s attempted corrective leads us to the other extreme of downplaying the reality of heaven above—understood in the New Testament as the other-worldly realm where God dwells<sup>49</sup>—and being

47. For discussions of inaugurated eschatology, see Carl F. H. Henry, *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947) and Russell Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 25–80.

48. As noted above, Forlines argues that God’s promise that Abraham would inherit the land, which was not realized in his lifetime, necessitates its fulfillment in the eternal state (*Romans*, 113). Forlines’s eschatology is appropriately grounded in his understanding of the Abrahamic covenant, evincing the kind of sensitivity to creation and covenant that Wright is at pains to promote. Yet Forlines does so without overemphasizing the eschatological “now” against the “not yet.”

49. The best treatment of this reality can be found in Hebrews, where the author contrasts the earthly tabernacle—a copy of what is in heaven—with the true tabernacle of the heavenly courts of God, where Christ entered in to offer himself as a once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 9:11, 23–24).

present with the Lord when the believer dies (2 Corinthians 5:8).<sup>50</sup> One begins to wonder if Platonism (which held that true life comes when one has been freed from the bonds of the physical body) has become the scapegoat for all things aberrant within the church. For example, Wright laments that “in much Western piety, at least since the Middle Ages, the influence of Greek philosophy has been very marked, resulting in a future expectation that bears far more resemblance to Plato’s vision of souls entering into disembodied bliss than to the biblical picture of new heaven and new earth.”<sup>51</sup>

Again, it appears that Wright pushes his case a bit too far in maintaining a strong distrust of a “disembodied state” following death. The following quotation offers a useful sample of such suspicion, namely, that one is reading the Bible with “Western” eyes more than with biblical ones:

What then about such passages as 1 Peter 1, which speak of a salvation that is “kept in heaven for you” so that in your present believing you are receiving “the salvation of your souls”? Here, I suggest, the automatic assumption of Western Christianity leads us badly astray. Most Christians today, reading a passage like this, assume that it means that heaven is where you go to receive this salvation—or even that salvation consists in “going to heaven when you die.” This then provides a dangerously distorted framework within which some of the key gospel sayings are interpreted, such as those in Matthew where Jesus talks of “entering the kingdom of heaven” or “having a reward in heaven” or “storing up riches in heaven.” Quite simply, the way we understand that language in the Western world is totally different from what Jesus and his hearers meant and understood.<sup>52</sup>

Wright follows the standard view of the Greek word usually translated “soul” (*psyche*), urging us that it does not refer to that part of the human person that will ultimately be “saved,” so to speak. Rather, the Hebrew concept of *nephesh* (Hebrew counterpart to Greek *psyche*) does not speak of one component of the human person, but rather envisions

50. For a similar critique on this point, see Markus Bockmuehl, “Did St. Paul Go to Heaven When He Died?” in *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue* with N. T. Wright, eds. Nicholas Perrin and Richard B. Hays (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2011), 211–31.

51. *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 80.

52. *Ibid.*, 151.



the whole, or as Wright puts it, “the real you.”<sup>53</sup> As we might expect, this formulation is too simplistic and does not account for the potential nuance of this word in the Old Testament. Though scholars have made similar assertions many times over, it does not reflect the actual situation in the Bible.<sup>54</sup>

Perhaps a better way of putting it is this: The Bible sees the whole irrespective of the parts, with new creation/resurrection signifying its restoration holistically and not partially. This perspective, however, does not deny the Bible’s portrayal of a two-stage fulfillment of this new creation reality along the now/not yet continuum—the believer’s regeneration/new birth signifying its inauguration and the bodily resurrection ushering in its final realization.

Belief in the so-called immaterial soul is not New Testament teaching as much as it is Platonism, according to Wright. He contrasts belief in an immortal soul with the New Testament’s immortal body. With regard to the “immortal body,” he explains, “There is a world of difference between this belief and a belief in an ‘immortal soul.’ Platonists believe

53. Ibid., 152.

54. See my discussion, “Two Testaments, One Soul,” [helwysocietyforum.com](http://www.helwysocietyforum.com/?p=2461), July 9, 2012. Accessed May 28, 2019. <http://www.helwysocietyforum.com/?p=2461>. James Barr offers a similar critique of the prevailing tendency in scholarship to insist that the ancient Hebrews could envision humanity only as a whole:

I have to confess to having said some of this myself at times: but, when one looks afresh at the materials, is it true? Can it all be true? There are so many reasons against it. Is it even remotely plausible that ancient Hebrews, at the very earliest stage of their tradition, already had a picture of humanity which agreed so well with modern esteem for psychosomatic unity? How did they manage to get it all so perfectly right, when the Greeks, apparently, so thoroughly misunderstood everything? Is there not an obvious bias in so many modern textbooks, which seem to want nothing more desperately than to deny that the Hebrews had any idea of an independent “soul,” worse still an immortal one? May it not be mistaken semantic analysis, inspired by admiration for the very “totality thinking” that it is supposed to demonstrate? (*The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993], 36–37).

My own research of this term in other Semitic languages (particularly Aramaic and Ugaritic) confirms these suspicions concerning the meaning of *nephesh* in the Old Testament. The basic meaning of this term in Ugaritic seemed to be “neck/throat,” from which we can trace the following developments: “neck/throat” > “vitality/life force” > “individual/person.” Even in the Old Testament, *nephesh* = “vitality/life force” can be detected in texts where the *nephesh* is said to depart the individual at death (e.g., Genesis 35:18).



that all humans have an immortal element within them, normally referred to as 'soul.'"<sup>55</sup>

Yet what are we to make of Jesus' words recorded in Matthew's Gospel, that we should not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul? Instead, Jesus warns us to fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28). Or what about Paul's remarks on the following contrast: being at home in the body and absent from the Lord versus one's absence from the body and presence with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8-9)? Paul's broader argument here describes the new creation reality of the believer in contrast to the pains of the current created order groaning under the curse of sin. Even if we acknowledge with Wright (and Forlines) that the current world will one day be renewed, we still have to maintain a certain level of discontinuity between what is true of creation now and what will be true of creation then. Wright's emphasis on the former results, even if unintentionally, in a denial of the latter.

### *Hell and Judgment*

Wright's eschatological emphasis on the here and now affects his interpretation of Gehenna in the New Testament, traditionally understood as referring to hell as a place of torment and divine judgment. In much the same way that he views Christ's defeat of sin on the cross politically, Wright denies that Gehenna is meant be read as a place of torment postmortem. It must be interpreted against the backdrop of Roman imperialism. He explains:

The point is that when Jesus was warning his hearers about Gehenna, he was not, as a general rule, telling them that unless they repented in this life they would burn in the next one. As with God's kingdom, so with its opposite: it is *on earth* that things matter, not somewhere else. His message to his contemporaries was stark and (as we would say today) political. Unless they turned back from their hopeless rebellious dreams of establishing God's kingdom in their own terms, not least through armed revolt against Rome, then the Roman juggernaut would do what large, greedy, and ruthless empires have always done to smaller countries (not least in the Middle East)

55. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 160.

whose resources they covet or whose strategic location they are anxious to guard. Rome would turn Jerusalem into a hideous, stinking extension of its own smoldering rubbish heap. When Jesus said, "Unless you repent, you will all likewise perish," that is the primary meaning he had in mind.<sup>56</sup>

Concerning the two parables addressing judgment after death (Luke 12:35–59; 16:19–31), Wright warns that they were "*parables*, not actual descriptions of the afterlife." The imagery Jesus used was typical of first-century Judaism (e.g., "Abraham's bosom"). Jesus did not intend here "to teach about what happens after death but to insist on justice and mercy within the present life."<sup>57</sup>

Later in his discussion of death and hell, Wright caricatures the traditional view of hell as being a place where they are "held forever in conscious torment." This kind of punishment amounts to nothing more than "a century of horror mostly dreamed up by human beings." He summarizes a second and third view on this question of death and hell: universalism that denies ultimate judgment for individuals and annihilationism or conditionalism where judgment entails individuals not being granted immortality at death. He argues for a fourth perspective, combining the "strongest" features of the traditionalists and the annihilationists/conditionalists. Accordingly, those who give themselves over to idolatrous practices will become what they worship in this life and in doing so reject "all signposts to the love of God" along the way. As Wright describes it:

With the death of the body in which they inhabited God's good world, in which the flickering flame of goodness had not been completely snuffed out, they pass simultaneously not only beyond hope but also beyond pity. There is no concentration camp in the beautiful countryside, no torture chamber in the palace of delight. Those creatures that still exist in an ex-human state, no longer reflecting their maker in any meaningful sense, can no longer excite in themselves or others the natural sympathy some feel even for the hardened criminal.<sup>58</sup>

56. Ibid., 176. Cf. also his comments on Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane warning His disciples concerning the hour of testing: "He knelt there, a mile or so from the Gehenna he had predicted as the city's smoldering fate, believing he had to go ahead, to stand in the breach, to take that fate upon himself" (*Evil and the Justice of God*, 88). Wright interprets Gehenna as a representation of the political evils of the day, evils that resulted in His eventual crucifixion.

57. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 176.

58. Ibid., 182–83.

It is difficult to know what to make of this statement, owing to its lack of clarity on several levels. From what Wright states earlier in the preceding paragraphs, one should assume that he sees these individuals as ceasing to exist after death. Their "hell" is a kind of hell on earth. Furthermore, the kind of idolatry Wright describes here is not so much a denial of the Creator *per se* as it is a denial of the divine image in which humanity was created. It is true that sin has distorted and continues to distort the *imago Dei* from the Fall onward. However, there is a real sense in which idolatry is a denial of God, a denial for which all offenders will be judged. Wright's insistence on maintaining a proper emphasis on God's final judgment seems to be undercut here in his attempt at redefining the biblical imagery of a postmortem punishment for sinners.

Wright, however, is actually quite hesitant to speak in terms of final judgment because he wants to leave the door open for the surprises of God. For example, in citing the book of Romans, Wright observes that even though Paul does mention the final condemnation of the wicked, his emphasis "falls on the fact that God has shut up all people in the prison house of disobedience in order that he may have mercy upon all." True, it cannot mean every individual, Wright argues, but on all kinds of people and that no one "this side of the grave" is beyond transformation.<sup>59</sup>

What about the other side of the grave? Wright curiously observes that the last and final vision of John in the book of Revelation of the New Jerusalem clearly identifies a particular category of people being "outside" the city walls. Furthermore, he notes, the river of the water of life flows out from the great city for the healing of the nations. This leads him to surmise: "This is not at all to cast doubt on the reality of final judgment for those who have resolutely worshipped and served the idols that dehumanize us and deface God's world. It is to say that God is always the God of surprises."<sup>60</sup> This leads Wright to conclude that "the most important thing to say at the end of this discussion, and of this section of the book, is that heaven and hell are not, so to speak, what the whole game is about."<sup>61</sup>

This entire discussion is at the least nebulous and at the most misleading. Wright exerts great effort in debunking the traditional understanding of death and the hereafter, but the alternatives he proposes are not entirely clear. On the one hand, he challenges the traditional view of

59. *Ibid.*, 183–84.

60. *Ibid.*, 184.

61. *Ibid.*

“going to heaven when you die” with the Bible’s emphasis on resurrection. On the other hand, he questions the validity of affirming the fiery torments of hell by counterclaiming a more generalized final judgment, but less clearly defined.

In the end, however, Wright downplays the importance of these questions about the eschatological destiny of individuals,<sup>62</sup> claiming that the real issue of importance is the here and now: Are we going to worship the creator by discovering what it means to become “fully and gloriously human,” or are we going to worship the world and thus dehumanize ourselves and further corrupt the present world?<sup>63</sup> There is no doubt that some popular manifestations of hell are terribly off the mark when it comes to what the Bible has to say about it. However, Wright’s alternative is even more problematic than what he critiques. In the same way that he eliminates the necessity for individuals to attain any kind of moral standard reflective of God’s nature in his redefinition of justification, he downplays (or even does away with) any notion of the unrepentant sinner suffering divine punishment in a place of eternal damnation after death.

#### CONCLUSION

This concluding section will summarize briefly the main points treated above. First, Wright is correct to emphasize the importance of understanding God’s redemptive work through covenant in light of God’s purposes in creation. The pervasiveness of sin’s destruction is everywhere, and God is doing something to make it new again. Yet on this very point, Wright’s emphasis on covenant and creation is lacking in its neglect of the vertical significance of sin—that humanity has violated God’s eternal Law and is therefore under divine wrath.

Second, and somewhat related to the first, Wright’s new perspective on justification is extremely problematic. In a nutshell, it sweeps aside the doctrine of imputed righteousness altogether. This essay has argued that such a move is not grounded in a new reading of Paul but rather stems from a reinterpretation of sin and the justice of God.

62. It should become clear at this point in our discussion that we could have added a fourth section in this paper under the heading “The Corporate versus the Individual,” but the limitations of time and space have precluded its inclusion here. Wright’s emphasis on the corporate over the individual affect multiple theological areas, including the three topics covered in this brief discussion: creation and covenant, salvation, and eschatology.

63. Wright, *Surprised by Hope*, 185.

Finally, Wright's overly realized eschatology must be noted, which sees all things "new creation" too much in the "now," losing the scriptural balance between the "now" and the "not yet." His emphasis on the bodily resurrection is entirely accurate biblically speaking, but he over-corrects in failing to acknowledge those things yet to come (e.g., eternal punishment for sinners).

As seen in this brief overview of Wright's theology with regard to creation and covenant, salvation, and eschatology, much can be gained from him. For one, his emphasis on the broad scope of God's redemptive purposes from creation to covenant is entirely accurate, and one sees similar concerns in the theology of Forlines. Another important corrective is his pushback against the encroachment of rugged individualism in American soteriology and its overemphasis on personal piety (i.e., my salvation is between me and God only) with little concern for the dynamics of living within the New Covenant community. So too it is right to decry the misunderstanding of God's redemptive work in relation to the whole of creation.

Likewise one must demur from the reluctance to see resurrection for what the New Testament makes it out to be—namely, an actual bodily resurrection—in favor of an overly spiritualized escapism that reinterprets resurrection almost exclusively in terms of disembodied souls going to heaven. From Genesis 3:15 onward, God has been carrying out His redemptive plan to restore fallen humanity and fallen Eden, culminating in John's glorious vision of the new heavens and new earth in Revelation 21. Surely other things can be heartily affirmed with Wright that would set the whole course of popular evangelicalism on a better path, but this discussion has been limited to these broader categories.

The concerns of this author arise not as much from what Wright seeks to correct as the way he goes about doing it. His entire research program from the ground up has been at pains to settle old scores with the traditional view on just about every topic he explores. Surely every generation must reassess the traditions it has inherited from its forebears with a fresh investment in the exegesis of Scripture. Tradition is never above healthy criticism.<sup>64</sup> What one finds in Wright, however, is not really a "corrective" to certain deficiencies in the traditional view of things, but rather what might be called an all-or-nothing approach.

64. I am using the term "tradition" in its broadest sense, that is, the interpretive traditions we have inherited from previous generations, both within our own context as Reformed Arminian Baptists and the broader context of the church. I am not using the term in the sense of "traditionalism," which elevates tradition to the extent that it can never be criticized or corrected.

The covenantal aspect of salvation, which is a hallmark of Wright's theology, is a welcomed corrective to the tendency of many evangelicals to overemphasize an individualistic approach to salvation. In the end, however, his corrective swings too far in the other direction so that individual election is done away with almost entirely. Not only does this move us outside the confines of orthodox Christianity, but it also cannot be reconciled with the witness of Scripture. (One could make similar arguments concerning his views on salvation and eschatology as outlined above.)

As the saying goes, the devil is in the details, and Wright too often takes the panoramic view of the forest when individual trees beg for attention. Furthermore, the constant barrage of "new" or "fresh" interpretations that fly in the face of most "traditional" interpretations tends toward preoccupation with the novel.

Wright needs to be read carefully and critically. There seems to be a tendency for some Wright "fans" to read him as saying what they want him to say. Yet often they fail to understand the underlying theological moorings driving his train of thought on significant issues. (A case in point would be his view of justification, which, as this essay has argued, is rooted in an understanding of sin and the justice of God quite different from our own Reformed Arminian reading.) Wright is careful in his use of words. Yet those fresh verbalizations of standard theological categories often end up amounting to radical reinterpretations of standard doctrinal commitments of the Christian faith. We should not be too quick to jump on the wagon of the Wright effect. There is a lot at stake.

Part of the problem is the failure to work out carefully a systematic theology from the Scriptures. Instead, there is a tendency in evangelicalism to hold up a loosely connected collection of theological ideas, each one being easily adjusted or even thrown out without regard to the wider effects of these changes on the others. The problem is exacerbated when this shoot-from-the-hip style of theology encounters the likes of an N. T. Wright. While this or that point sounds like a great idea, one has no theological moorings from which to analyze him critically. On the front end, evangelicals need to exercise greater care in fostering their own systematic approach to theology, not one cherry picked from thin air of course, but one that is grounded in faithful biblical exegesis.<sup>65</sup>

65. This whole paragraph stems from my own private interaction with Forlines concerning the topic of this essay. He states the problem rather directly, "If you don't have a penal satisfaction view of the atonement, you don't have systematic theology, just a loose

So from a Reformed Arminian systematic theological vantage point, what exactly is at stake? Let us be clear in recognizing that if Wright is correct on these matters, then the distinctions that comprise Reformed Arminianism as we know it are null and void. Too often Free Will Baptist theology is thought of as simply evangelical plus apostasy and feet washing. On the contrary, the Reformed Arminian tradition of Free Will Baptists and its distinction from other Arminian persuasions is the very thing Wright's theology undermines.

Our affirmation of man's total depravity and his being under divine condemnation is an affront to Wright's redefinition of sin and atonement. Furthermore, our commitment to the penal satisfaction view of the atonement and imputed righteousness through the active obedience of Christ—that is, His complete obedience to the Law of God—is one of the major doctrinal viewpoints Wright has been at pains to refute for most of his publishing career. Our theological tradition has also been rather firm in its defense of hell as a literal place of divine punishment for those not having had Jesus's substitutionary death, the only means of satisfying God's wrath, applied to their account through faith. These are major doctrinal departures, leaving little that resembles our own theological commitments. To give up one of these doctrines in effect eliminates the whole. For Free Will Baptists, these are the stakes of the Wright effect, and they are high.

topical arrangement of ideas." He bemoans the tendency for many to have a shallow view of salvation consisting of a collection of separate theological parts only loosely held together, which is not a theological system. I believe that Forlines's perception of this theological deficiency characteristic of so many is one of the main reasons the concerns we are raising here regarding N. T. Wright are so important.

# The Truth about Transgenderism

## INTRODUCTION

At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life. Beliefs about these matters could not define the attributes of personhood were they formed under compulsion of the State.<sup>1</sup>

Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy penned these words in a 1992 opinion in the case *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. Without exploring all the details of the case, which concerned abortion regulations in Pennsylvania, the ultimate outcome of the decision was to uphold the fundamental point of *Roe* in *Roe v. Wade*.

Though this case only indirectly pertains to the subject of this essay, it has some underlying connections to Justice Kennedy's words: ". . . one's *own* concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." Those words give pause to those operating from a Christian worldview. Historic Christianity recognizes that some aspects of human life are not subject to one's own definition. In fact, Christians believe that God defines existence, meaning, the universe, human life, and everything else. He has revealed them, even if in a limited way, through creation and through the conscience, but has definitively revealed them through His Word and through His Son.

What happens, however, when this account of reality is rejected? What happens in a fallen world where we understand that clearly perceiving the nature of things is often difficult? Since both unbelievers and believers experience this challenge, even if in different ways, how does a society flourish that has redefined fundamental categories such as personhood, gender, and sexuality? How can it survive, much less thrive?

Transgenderism presents modern Christians with an instance in which essential aspects of human nature are not only being reevaluated, but also being reconfigured altogether. Transgenderism is one of the defining conflicts of our contemporary moment. Though it has

1. *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833, 851 (1992). An earlier version of this paper was presented on July 17, 2017, at the Annual Session of the National Association of Free Will Baptists. Modest changes have been made to the original draft, though some of the developments on the public policy and cultural fronts have not been altered owing to their rapid pace of new developments.



sometimes been called *transsexualism*, and is often conflated with related but distinct issues such as same-sex attraction or a condition known as *intersex*;<sup>2</sup> it is a subject worthy of its own attention.

In this paper we will attempt (1) to situate this subject in its contemporary social, cultural, and legal context; (2) to understand transgenderism in its own terms; (3) to place gender and sexuality in a biblical and theological framework; and (4) to develop a Christian response guided by apologetic wisdom and authentic compassion.<sup>3</sup>

### *Our Contemporary Context*

Though the social and cultural developments surrounding transgenderism are quickly changing, this debate about transgenderism came to the center stage for many in 2015 when former Olympian and reality-television actor Bruce Jenner began to self-identify as Caitlyn Jenner.<sup>4</sup> Jenner made this announcement in an interview with journalist Diane Sawyer on national television. Jenner gave a follow-up interview to Sawyer two years later after “his/her” transition.<sup>5</sup> This interview placed the issue at the forefront of many people’s minds. Though some ridiculed Jenner’s announcement, suspecting it to be a publicity stunt at worst, or the ramblings of a confused old man at best, a more telling illustration of the overall societal response was the fact that Jenner was given ESPN’s Arthur Ashe Award for Courage in 2015.

Prior to and following Jenner, there have been a number of other notable stories involving transgenderism in mainstream popular culture.

2. The term *intersex*, sometimes used interchangeably with “hermaphrodite,” is a generic term referring to an array of conditions in which a child is born with a reproductive/sexual anatomy atypical of male or female, or where sex is otherwise ambiguous. Such conditions are typically correctable through surgical means. Though this is sometimes conflated with the subject of transgenderism, it constitutes a very different clinical and medical situation.

3. To attempt to discuss transgenderism “in its own terms” is not to concede to the key contentions of the LGBT lobby in any way. Rather, trying to explain the terminology and arguments from the transgendered community’s perspective is predicated on the notion that it is difficult to respond in an intellectually serious way to a poor argument if that argument is not presented in a way that its advocate would actually recognize. As I move deeper into the response section of this paper, I will more critically engage the argument.

4. The examples given in this section have been only modestly altered, though many other examples could have been provided in the last several years.

5. The “his/her” grammatical construction here calls attention to the very linguistic confusion that many are grappling with in light of the claims and expectations of transgendered persons and advocates. To use one’s preferred pronoun is more than a mere social courtesy. Rather, it is rooted in a larger concession about the nature of reality according to the worldview of advocates of transgenderism.

Laverne Cox, transgendered actor/actress, stars in *Orange is the New Black*, a critically-acclaimed television series featuring a transgendered person as one of the main characters. Actor Jeffrey Tambor played a lead role of a transgendered person in the Golden Globe-winning series *Transparent*.

The 2015 motion picture *The Danish Girl*, adapted from an earlier novel, tells the story of one of the earliest known persons to undergo gender-reassignment surgery.<sup>6</sup> Eddie Redmayne's performance of the Swedish-born artist Einar Wegener who became Lilli Elbe, earned him an Oscar-nomination for Best Actor. The film was also nominated for Best Picture in 2016.

*I Am Jazz* is a reality-television program in its fifth season on the cable network TLC. It shares the story of a transgendered teenager named Jazz who is continuing his/her transition from male to female, along with his/her supportive family and friends. Finally, older Americans likely recall the famous story of George Jorgenson. Jorgensen was a World War II veteran who, in 1951, made headlines by receiving hormonal replacement therapy and undergoing gender-reassignment surgery. George became "Christine." This was the first well-publicized case involving a self-identified transgendered person in America.

Mainstream magazines, journals, and periodicals of various kinds have also contributed to our increased awareness of the issue. Consider the *Time* Magazine cover from the June 9, 2016, edition, which featured Laverne Cox, the actor/actress mentioned earlier. The headline read, "The Transgender Tipping Point." Such language at least makes the descriptive claim that some sort of cultural threshold has been reached—and perhaps surpassed. A later edition of *Time* on March 27, 2017, featured a cover with the by-line: "How a new generation is redefining the meaning of gender." Notice the explicit use of the term "redefinition" to characterize the scale and scope of what is taking place.

Finally, the cover of the January 2017 edition of *National Geographic* addressed "The Gender Revolution." It sparked a great deal of controversy, though it was later followed up by a two-hour television special hosted by journalist Katie Couric.

6. The term *gender-reassignment* is fraught with baggage because it assumes the conclusion of the transgender argument, which is that gender can be assigned, wrongly assigned, reassigned, etc. It has now come to be called "gender-affirming surgery" since transgender advocates recognize that this linguistic move better assumes their gender ideology. However, in mainstream usage "gender-reassignment" continues to be the most frequently used terminology.

These few examples help to reinforce the point that this topic is far from being peripheral but is very much in the mainstream. Though transgenderism first emerged in the medical literature in the mid-nineteenth century, it has only recently arrested our attention in a way that we cannot ignore.<sup>7</sup> As Albert Mohler pointed out in a seminar at the National Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in 2016, most publications on this topic have been published since 2004.<sup>8</sup> I would observe that most date much closer to 2010.

Most readers likely understand the urgency of these issues. They are troubled and confused by what they see and hear. They may even be angered by what they see and hear. Or perhaps they themselves are one of the untold number who have experienced some inner conflicts with their gender and sexuality. Regardless of the scope of one's own experiences, many are finding their lives and ministries intersecting with a small but growing slice of the American public that either identify as transgendered, have a family member or friend who is transgendered or has serious questions about what gender and sexuality are, or are themselves struggling with their sense of self.

Others still are not convinced. Either they do not believe that this confusion exists in their own community, or they are convinced that it will pass as fads do. I believe that the vast amount of anecdotal evidence suggests quite the opposite.

### *Emerging Conflicts*

It would not be surprising for some who live in less-progressive states and communities to feel that these issues are not as urgent and thus do not demand extensive attention. Yet the present evil age prevents Christians from insulating themselves from the confusion of the times.

Many have not considered the full-range of implications of a truly gender-neutral society or a society that is generally in turmoil over what gender is. One obvious area of practical impact would be the issuing of birth certificates, passports, and other information vital to everyday life. On July 10, 2017, Oregon became the first state to allow gender-neutral driver's licenses. If one prefers, his or her license can say "not-specified"

7. Edward E. Moody, Jr., "Ministering in a Changing Sexual Landscape—Helping those who Struggle with Gender Dysphoria," *Fusion* (Fall 2016), 1.

8. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "A Biblically Compassionate Response to Transgender Persons," National Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, 2016.

for gender.”<sup>9</sup> On June 27 of the same year, the District of Columbia had already allowed drivers to simply mark X as opposed to male or female, creating a non-binary choice for drivers.<sup>10</sup>

In May 2016 the Obama administration issued a directive that said that the well-known law known as Title IX protects the right of transgender students to use restrooms and locker rooms that match their gender identities. Though this has since been rescinded under the Trump administration’s Education Department, similar disputes continue to find their way into the courts on local, state, and even national levels.

In an 8–3 decision in May 2017, the U.S. Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is a form of sex discrimination. However, until the Supreme Court determines the meaning of “sex” in Title VII, the Seventh Circuit Court’s ruling will remain the law of the land in the seventh district states (i.e., Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin).<sup>11</sup>

If the school system was not close enough to home, consider one of the most widely accessed websites in the world: Facebook. In the last few years, Facebook has shifted from providing two gender choices to approximately seventy and has added a custom option.<sup>12</sup> Below is a message from the Facebook Diversity team posted in February of 2015:

Last year we were proud to add a custom gender option to help people better express their identities on Facebook. We collaborated with our Network of Support, a group of leading LGBT<sup>13</sup> advocacy organizations, to offer an extensive list of gender identities that many people use to describe themselves. After a

9. Associated Press, “New York Post Oregon is first state to allow gender-neutral driver’s licenses.” Accessed July 11, 2017. <http://nypost.com/2017/07/05/oregon-is-first-state-to-allow-gender-neutral-drivers-licenses/>.

10. Emanuella Grinberg, “You can now get a gender neutral driver’s license in D.C.” Accessed July 11, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/27/health/washington-gender-neutral-drivers-license/index.html>.

11. There are numerous other laws being considered in several U.S. states and Canadian provinces regarding transgenderism. A few notable instances include changing regulations regarding the way foster parents and adoptive parents are mandated to deal with children who identify as transgendered. This is becoming especially problematic for Christian parents and churches in Europe.

12. This was at the time of the original presentation in July, 2017.

13. Members of the LGBT community sometimes use the acronym “LBGT,” “LGBT,” “LBGTQ,” or “LBGTQ+.” For the sake of consistency, I have used “LGBT” throughout, which stand for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender(ed).” As an aside, many commentators have debated whether it is helpful to evaluate the actual metaphysical and moral

year of offering this feature, we have expanded it to include a free-form field.

Now, if you do not identify with the pre-populated list of gender identities, you are able to add your own. As before, you can add up to ten gender terms and also have the ability to control the audience with whom you would like to share your custom gender. We recognize that some people face challenges sharing their true gender identity with others, and this setting gives people the ability to express themselves in an authentic way.

The expanded custom gender option is available to everyone who uses Facebook in US English.<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps other readers have heard of the Genderbread person.<sup>15</sup> Devised by an advocate of the transgender community, the GenderBread person is a user-friendly, disturbingly *kid-friendly* visual aid to help people better understand how gender and sexuality “really work.” However, since its initial publication, it has been increasingly replaced in favor of the Gender Unicorn as a pedagogical tool in instructing youth about gender and sexuality.<sup>16</sup>

In September 2016, 24-year-old Chloe Allen was the first ever transgender soldier to serve on the frontlines of the British army. She said she “hoped to inspire others to be themselves, after speaking out about beginning the process of gender reassignment. . . . Allen, who joined the army four years ago as Ben, has now officially changed her name and started hormone therapy. ‘I’d love to inspire people to just come out and be themselves.’”<sup>17</sup>

In the final years of the Obama Administration, the United States Army began formally educating soldiers on new transgender policies

claims of the LGBT community as a singular group since sexual orientation, for example, is not univocal with gender identity. It is beyond the scope of this essay to enter into that piece of this overall discussion. Suffice it to say that most if not all of the general biblical-theological principles that will be outlined below would apply to persons who would pursue an aberrant sexual attraction or gender identity.

14. Accessed July 11, 2017. <https://www.facebook.com/facebookdiversity/posts/774221582674346>.

15. Accessed July 10, 2017. <https://www.genderbread.org/>.

16. Accessed May 28, 2019. <http://www.transstudent.org/gender/>. This graphic was produced by an organization for transgender student educational resources.

17. “Transgender soldier is first female to serve on British army frontline.” Accessed July 15, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/sep/17/transgender-soldier-is-first-female-to-serve-on-the-front-line>.

put into place under the Administration's Department of Defense. Under the Trump Administration, a temporary hold was placed on allowing more transgendered persons to enlist. Later President Trump announced that transgendered persons would not be allowed to serve in the military. The issue was debated internally among military advisors and administration officials, ultimately resulting in a more restrictive policy on transgendered persons serving in the military.<sup>18</sup> Clearly legal developments and public policy are moving targets. Particularly, any settled or permanent changes on the military front will be slow to take effect given the thousands of persons already enlisted in the armed services who identify as transgendered. The precise number is difficult to ascertain based on various reports.

In electoral politics, former North Carolina Governor Pat McCrory arguably lost his bid for a second term in 2016 due to the aggressive campaign against his signing of the so-called "bathroom bill." Also known as HB-2, the "bathroom bill" was passed by the General Assembly which required persons to use the bathroom corresponding to their biological sex, or what most have been calling gender all this time. The law ultimately cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue, and cost Governor McCrory a second term—at least this is the popular sentiment about that campaign. In professional sports, in 2016 Chris Mosier became the first transgender member of Team USA Olympics.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, in late January the Boy Scouts of America announced that they would be changing their policy on how they admit scouts relative to their gender. In essence, as long as one's gender identity is male,

18. "Joint Chiefs: No Changes on Transgender Policy Until White House Issues Guidance." Accessed July 29, 2017. <https://townhall.com/tipsheet/christinerous-selle/2017/07/27/general-theres-no-changes-on-transgender-policy-until-white-house-issues-policy->. There have continued to be developments on this front that amount to a tug and pull between the President and his advisors and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Note: Since this material was originally presented, the Department of Defense has revised its policy to be more restrictive on transgendered persons serving in the military. See "5 Things to Know about DOD's New Policy on Military Service by Transgender Persons and Persons with Gender Dysphoria." Accessed May 22, 2019. <https://www.defense.gov/explore/story/Article/1783822/5-things-to-know-about-dods-new-policy-on-military-service-by-transgender-person/>.

19. "Chris Mosier on Making History as First Trans Member of Team USA." Accessed July 11, 2017. <http://www.rollingstone.com/sports/features/chris-mosier-first-trans-team-usa-member-w432272>.

regardless of what their birth certificate says about their sex (male or female), they will begin accepting and registering such persons.<sup>20</sup>

There have been and will be other firsts. Anytime there is a social or cultural movement such as this one, which cloaks itself in the language of rights, there are always thought to be barriers to cross. As they are crossed, they are celebrated by some and ridiculed by others, while most go with the flow, even if with some uncertainty. From the ballfields to the DMV, from the high school locker room to the church pew, the issues surrounding transgenderism touch every aspect of life because gender is and has been so fundamental to society for millennia.

Some Christians do not yet take seriously the impact of this issue on those they love and serve. Others who do understand the impact too often mistake name-calling for righteous anger. The challenge of transgenderism should engender the latter, along with Christlike compassion and wisdom.

Christians believe that God made us and has a plan for humanity. As important as this truth is, it is insufficient to understand the breadth and depth of this issue. Church leaders who fail to teach their people about these issues should remember that the world is already teaching and forming their congregants. Parents who similarly fail or refuse to teach their children should recognize that the world is already teaching them. Even people who struggle in this area, and who are convinced God has something to say about their struggle, must seek biblical answers in the face of alternate stories the world will tell them. Non-Christian classmates and colleagues are eager to teach. ABC, HBO, Netflix, and the *New York Times* are as well. People thinking themselves to be pioneers in genetics, neuroscience, pediatrics, psychiatry, endocrinology, and more will teach us. Christians, therefore, must try to understand this emerging conflict.

#### UNDERSTANDING TRANSGENDERISM

##### *Key Terms*

In order to understand this topic, basic vocabulary and concepts regarding transgenderism must be considered. An initial review of these will serve the reader well later when transgenderism is evaluated biblically, theological, and pastorally. Borrowing from a well-known LGBT-advocacy website, Stonewall, a quick review of terms will be beneficial.

20. Emanuella Grinberg, "Boy Scouts open membership to transgender boys." Accessed July 11, 2017. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/30/us/boy-scouts-transgender-membership/index.html>.



**Cisgender or Cis**—Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. Non-trans is also used by some people.<sup>21</sup>

A person who was biologically male, for example, who also accepted male as his gender identity, would describe himself as “cisgender.” To use this language typically signals that the person has rejected the traditional binary understanding of gender as either male or female, though he himself happens to accept the gender that aligns with his biological sex. A second commonly-used term is simply “trans.” It can be defined as:

an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans people may describe themselves using one or more of a wide variety of terms, including (but not limited to) Transgender, Transsexual, Gender-queer (GQ), Gender-fluid, Non-binary, Gender-variant, Crossdresser, Genderless, Agender, Nongender, Third gender, Two-spirit, Bi-gender, Transman, Transwoman. . . .

For the sake of space, the full entry has not been provided. One quickly discovers that vocabulary becomes difficult to follow because there are so many terms that belong to the transgender lexicon. Here we simply note that while *transsexual* is a term with roots further back in the twentieth century, most often people simply say “trans, transman, transwoman, transgendered, or genderqueer” (this is especially the case among younger people).

Another related phrase is “coming out.” While “coming out” is typically language associated with those who reveal their identity as lesbian or gay, the same phrase is sometimes used by persons who publicly reveal themselves to be transgender, whether as a “transman” or “transwoman.”

21. Accessed May 17, 2017. <https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms>; All definitions and quotations below are derived from this website. It should be noted that most LGBT advocacy groups use the same terminology in the same way, with only small variations.



The next several terms are as central to the discussion as any other:

**Gender**—Often expressed in terms of masculinity and femininity, *gender is largely culturally determined and is assumed from the sex assigned at birth.*<sup>22</sup>

**Sex**—Assigned to a person on the basis of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions. Sometimes the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ are interchanged to mean ‘male’ or ‘female.’

These two terms, followed by gender identity, are at the crux of understanding the claims of transgenderism. The assumption is that gender and sex are two different things, though traditionally they have been mistakenly seen as interconnected categories. Gender is said to be a social construct that is too hastily mapped onto the perceived biological traits of a child, that is, having male or female genitalia or chromosomes. The latter is better understood as *biological sex*, while the former is an aspect of one’s psychological make-up or inner sense of self. The effort to maintain that distinction makes sense practically when one looks further into the lexicon:

**Gender identity**—A person’s innate sense of their own gender, whether male, female or something else . . . which may or may not correspond to the sex assigned at birth.

Gender identity as a concept is distinguished from biological sex. Traditionally these have been seen as one and the same. Or gender identity has been treated as a necessary extension or expression of biological sex. The link between the two is severed in light of the claims of transgenderism. This new configuration grows even more complex when one considers that how this gender identity is expressed may or may not correspond to any conventional understanding of masculinity or femininity. Instead, gender expression signals “how a person chooses to outwardly express their gender, within the context of societal expectations of gender. A person who does not conform to societal expectations of gender may not, however, identify as trans.”

Gender identity is likely the term most have heard, even if its meaning has been a little unclear. Yet it is at the heart of the discussion of why some males are identifying as female, females as male, and others along

22. Italics added.

the *spectrum* of gender. In transgender ideology, gender binaries do not and should not exist. Rather, the metaphor of a spectrum captures the fluidity of gender as some members of society have come to understand it. While biological sex may indeed be associated with only two scientifically demonstrable options, gender identity—and how that identity comes to be expressed—remains practically limitless in its permutations.

Who identifies as transgendered? It depends on which sources one consults. Some figures show as many as 700,000 people in America (about 0.2 percent of the U.S. population). Some claim it is as many as 1.4 million (about 0.4 percent). One can find studies that will support many other numbers as well. This is itself an interesting point to consider. One might wonder if the public attention to the issue has made people more prone to identify as transgendered because it is more socially acceptable. Or perhaps the definitions of transgenderism for purposes of research hold true across studies, since that would certainly shape what figure one ultimately arrived at. GLAAD, an advocacy group for the LGBT community, published a survey which found that 20 percent of millennials identify as something other than cisgender or exclusively straight.<sup>23</sup>

### *The Fundamental Claims and Experiences of Transgenderism*

Though it is often associated with same-sex attraction or homosexual orientation, transgenderism is not the same thing as homosexuality. As the now-famous (and crude) adage goes, sexual orientation is about who you go to bed *with*; Gender identity is about who you go to bed *as*. To put it a different way, sexual orientation is about who you love; Gender identity is about who you are or perceive yourself to be. It is about one's sense of self psychologically and emotionally. This corresponds to how the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) describes something known as Gender Dysphoria.

### *Problem, Condition, or What?*

The fifth edition of the DSM (known as "DSM-5") cites "Gender Dysphoria" as a situation in which individuals identify both psychologically and emotionally with a sex other than their biological sex. One has to look more closely at the evolution of how the issue has been

23. Catalina Gonella, "Survey: 20 Percent of Millennials Identify as LGBTQ." Accessed December 6, 2018. <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/survey-20-percent-millennials-identify-lgbtq-n740791>. March 31, 2017. We should certainly be skeptical of any statistic provided by an advocacy group, such as the 20 percent figure cited above. This gives the impression that transgenderism is as common as college debt in millennials. Politics and ideology frequently distort the data in sexuality and gender debates.

understood and described clinically to get a sense of why it has developed into the moral challenge it is.

In the DSM-III (1980), “transsexualism” simply appeared as a particular psychiatric condition. By DSM-IV (1995), “Gender Identity Disorder” solely appeared. In the DSM-IV-TR, Gender Identity Disorder was placed in a section on Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders. In the DSM-5, Sexual Dysfunctions, Paraphilias, and Gender Dysphoria are broken out into distinct sections. Gender Identity Disorder has been changed to Gender Dysphoria. Gender Dysphoria focuses on the *distress* or discomfort experienced because of the incongruence between one’s sex at birth and gender. The Stonewall Organization’s website defines it thus:

**Gender dysphoria**—used to describe when a person experiences discomfort or distress because there is a mismatch between their sex assigned at birth and their gender identity. This is also the clinical diagnosis for someone who doesn’t feel comfortable with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Much could be said about this from a clinical perspective. However, much has been written on both sides of the debate about the merits of this evolving way of classifying the transgender experience. It is clear that a surprising amount of political pressure enters into the discussion when professional organizations, including the American Psychiatric Association, revise their previous conclusions about certain conditions. How one defines something will affect what kind of response is prescribed. Some consider Gender Dysphoria a condition to be treated, but not a condition in the conventional sense. According to this perspective, it is the *distress* created by the incongruence of gender and sex that is the issue, as well as the social stigma created by a binary-minded society. Although the data shows that Gender Dysphoria—especially in youth—eventually resolves in the vast majority of cases,<sup>24</sup> sometimes such feelings persist. Or, because the affirmed gender is thought to be one’s true self, action is proactively taken. Some level of “transitioning” will often be pursued.<sup>25</sup>

24. See the research below by Mayer and McHugh.

25. The Stonewall organization’s website defines “transitioning” as “the steps a trans person may take to live in the gender with which they identify. Each person’s transition will involve different things. For some this involves medical intervention, such as hormone therapy and surgeries, but not all trans people want or are able to have this. Transitioning also might involve things such as telling friends and family, dressing differently and changing official documents.”

Some who struggle with Gender Dysphoria do take hormonal suppressors or have gender reassignment surgery. Some youth who experience Gender Dysphoria also may take puberty-inhibiting medications to delay certain secondary sexual characteristics until the child and the parents can come to a decision about how to proceed into adulthood. Hormonal treatments are often a part of the transgender experience, regardless of the individual's age. In the case of a male-to-female (MTF) transgendered person, estrogen will be given along with androgen to suppress testosterone development. In a female-to-male transgendered person, testosterone will be given.

There is also a social and personal context for how such persons begin their process of coming out as transgendered. It may be beneficial to consider how this actually transpires. Wes Crenshaw, a clinical psychologist from Kansas, has come to describe dealing with youth in terms of a Conflict Model. The first conflict is when they come out to self, recognizing that something is different about them, that they may not be who they have thought they are or told they are. A second conflict is when they begin to come out to others. This is when such youth begin to express their changing sense of identity in their dress, in their mannerisms, and even in their speech (both in form and substance). A third conflict is when they begin to talk with their parents and family about what level of transition they want to pursue. In the case of youth, this is essential because most states require adult consent for minors wanting this type of medical intervention. A final conflict occurs with one's therapist. Typically therapists are doing evaluation or therapy, but they are playing both roles here. Because of the seriousness of this issue, one seeking transition therapy has to have one or two letters from mental health providers certifying that no mental health concerns are present.

As indicated above, there is no one single path one travels from being whom we perceive that person to be to whom they have decided to present themselves as. It does help to know how this tends to develop from the observational level, even though Christians certainly would have qualms with how this is being narrated. This will be considered more later.

One issue that often comes up in the literature—especially dealing with youth—concerns the struggles parents have. Many will struggle more with this type of development than if the child identified as a homosexual. It is one thing to learn that Billy likes Tommy, not Sally. It is another thing for Billy to say he thinks Sally is trapped inside him. Parents feel they know their children. They give birth to them, raise them, and know them intimately. While some parents appear quick to

accept changing norms surrounding the encouragement of youth to pursue what they perceive to be their true selves, many struggle. It is like a death in the family to say goodbye to one person and hello to another. This again has significant implications as we consider a Christian response.

### *Causes of Gender Dysphoria*

As in debates over same-sex orientation, similar debates follow this topic, such as the question of causation. Though the “born-this-way” narrative common to explaining same-sex attraction often shows up in mainstream thought about transgenderism, it still is far from being a settled question.

One of the most impressive reports that surveys, summarizes, and assesses findings from the biological, psychological, and social sciences on this topic is a report produced by Mayer and McHugh in the Fall 2016 edition of *The New Atlantis*. Mayer is a medical researcher and current scholar-in-residence in the Psychiatry department at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine. Paul McHugh is the former chief of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins Hospital. His name may be familiar because it was his hospital that pioneered sex-change surgeries for years but then ceased performing such procedures when evidence began suggesting that though many who received the surgery were satisfied, their “psychosocial adjustments” were no better than for those who had not.<sup>26</sup> This journal article extensively considers a great deal of research having to do with causation and Gender Dysphoria, and they ultimately conclude that this is an unsettled question. Mark Yarhouse, another important figure who has studied this closely and written on it, has concluded the same.<sup>27</sup>

### *Language Matters*

By now it ought to be clear that language is central not only to how we define an issue but also to how we define ourselves. As mentioned earlier, Facebook has contributed to these efforts at self-definition.

26. Lawrence S. Mayer and Paul R. McHugh, “Sexuality and Gender: Special Report,” *The New Atlantis* (Fall 2016) 60: 108–13. This report is just part of the extensive amount of attention that has been given by Mayer, McHugh, and others to the questionable “science” undergirding the contentious claims of transgenderism. Ryan Anderson’s most recent book on this subject helpfully exposes many of the inconsistencies when it comes to both the science, surgical outcomes, and varied opinions in the medical community. See Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (New York: Encounter, 2018).

27. Mark Yarhouse, *Understanding Gender Dysphoria: Navigating Transgender Issues in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015).

Certainly efforts to foster our generation's obsession with self-construction and self-redefinition can be seen in all manner of ways. However, in the transgender community and beyond, it is nothing short of breathtaking. From new pronouns to new compound words, to the very idea that one should actively try to create new words that presumably correspond to new and unique gender realities, this is the world of many transgendered persons. But these developments can be seen in other significant ways as well.

The evolving language in the DSM mentioned above demonstrates a great deal of uncertainty about this among many medical professionals through the years. An entire separate article could be written on this since so many journals and journal articles have explored those developments. This article will simply note one related development, which is the evolution of the name of the procedures by which one might transition.

It used to be said that one was having a sex-change surgery. That term for various reasons was eventually discarded. After all, gender is a property of the mind, not the body. The goal is to bring the body in line with the mind (which is typically the opposite of what mental health practitioners seek to do). Eventually this procedure was called "gender-reassignment surgery." However, this was seen to be inadequate since it was not the gender being changed, but certain anatomical features of the body. Moreover, since gender identity was something individuals were born with just as they were born with their biological sex, the surgery in reality was said to be *affirming* what one already knew to be true. So now some have begun calling these surgeries "genital-reassignment" or "gender-affirming surgery." More commonly one simply speaks of "transitioning."

Certainly more could be said about this complex phenomenon. Nicholas Teich's *Transgender 101* is a good entry-way into the subject in the terms of someone who identifies as transgendered but is also well-informed about the history, terminology, and experience.<sup>28</sup> Teich is not only an author and advocate, but he started the first summer camp for transgendered youth.

Having attempted to gain a better understanding of the subject, it will be beneficial at this point to turn to a development of the biblical and theological framework necessary to understanding the issue further and forming a pastoral and practical response.

28. Nicholas Teich, *Transgender 101: A Simple Guide to a Complex Issue* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

## A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

*Anthropological Holism*

As Christians develop a biblical and theological framework for understanding and responding to transgenderism, it is beneficial to focus on two crucial elements. First a biblical understanding of human nature, that is, a biblical anthropology, must be embraced. Second, the entire biblical storyline of redemption must be reclaimed in order to re-narrate gendered, human experience for the church and the world.

*Setting the Stage*

Ryan T. Anderson puts our contemporary moment in acute, theological perspective.

The two-thousand-year story of the Christian Church's cultural and intellectual growth is a story of challenges answered. For the early church, there were debates about who God is (and who is God). . . . A thousand years later, with the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Church saw renewed debates about salvation—building on those Augustine had waged with Pelagius, no less. Whichever side you favor with in the debates of the sixteenth century, they left the Church as a whole with a much richer theology of justification, ecclesiology, and soteriology. Debates about the nature of God, of salvation, and of the Church never disappear, of course. But today, the most pressing heresies—the newest challenges for the Church's teaching and mission—center on the nature of man. The tribulations that marked the twentieth century and continue into the twenty-first—totalitarianism, genocide, abortion, and the sexual ideology that has battered the family and redefined marriage—have sprung from a faulty humanism. I don't mean to equate each of these human tragedies with the others, but they all spring from *faulty anthropology, a misunderstanding of the nature of man.*"<sup>29</sup>

Confusion in practice almost always, *at least partly*, derives from faulty understanding. Though all Christians would do well to have a richer understanding of theological truths such as the hypostatic union,

29. Ryan T. Anderson, "Same-Sex Marriage & Heresy." Accessed April 16, 2017. <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2015/07/same-sex-marriage-and-heresy>. Italics added.



or complementarianism, they desperately need to recover biblical anthropology in order to face these contemporary challenges.

I had the privilege of serving as a Visiting Professor at the Free Will Baptist seminary in Pinar del Rio, Cuba, in January of 2017. My subject matter was Theological Anthropology. As I prepared my lectures, I recognized that though I was still in the Western world, I was in a different country with a rather unique history. I feared that at least some of what I wanted to convey would not translate well. However, I was gratified to find that the themes covered were very clearly received, at least as far as I could tell. Aside from having able translators and knowing a modest amount of Spanish, the real issue is that the nature of humanity underpins everything in our lives, whether we are citizens of Cuba, Canada, Spain, or anywhere else. One really cannot understand labor laws, criminal justice, medical standards, abortion policy, and a hundred other areas of public policy and practice without dealing with anthropology. A view of human personhood, worth, value, and need is presupposed in all these enterprises.

Moreover, biblical anthropology is *theological*. It is not theological in the narrow sense of how some use that word to refer only to the Trinity, Christological heresies, or justification by faith. Rather, it has to do with what God has made and how He has made what He has made. The first thing desperately needed to provide a foundation for responding to transgenderism is an *anthropological holism*. Ultimately, that is just a technical way of saying that Christians (and unbelievers for that matter) need to see themselves as the complete humans beings they were made to be.

### *Man in the Image of God*

It is gratifying to read and hear of more discussion of the doctrine of the image of God in Free Will Baptist circles. This is not to suggest that this did not happen in the past, but it does seem that this emphasis in the Free Will Baptist movement and other evangelical denominations in recent years is no accident. Free Will Baptists recognize that this unique quality of human beings, said to be true only of *human* creatures, provides us with the resources needed to think rightly about questions of life after conception, race, disabilities, and certainly gender and sexuality.

When people read any sort of biblical or theological explanation of the image of God, they often immediately move to discuss matters of human dignity, rationality, morality, relationality, creativity, and any number of other qualities that might be rooted in the image of God. Indeed, biblically it could be argued that all of these are properties of humanity.



However, aside from clarifying how we arrive at all of these affirmations, it is helpful to note that the most *obvious* feature mentioned in Genesis 1:26–28 that appears to be connected to the image of God in man concerns gender. “Male and female He created them,” it says twice. There is something about the way God has designed human beings as one thing that presents itself in two forms: binary—sexed beings and gendered beings. Yet this binary is not some ugly ditch that separates people according to mere anatomy. No, this is a *complementary* design that enables human beings to flourish and do precisely the things God calls for them to do throughout Scripture.

The mention of gender is followed by what is often called the “creation mandate.” This includes both calls to dominion or stewardship over the created order, as well as fruitfulness in terms of bringing forth new life. It seems that humans are “co-creators,” or more accurately, “sub-creators,” as the novelist J. R. R. Tolkien put it. Only when they embrace their distinct gender and unite with another distinct gender can that union bring forth more gendered, image-bearing beings.

Many biblical commentators have spoken of Genesis 1 and 2 as complementary creation accounts. The first (chapter one) is a larger picture of the cosmos coming into being, while the second (chapter two) hones in on the specifics of the human’s role in that unfolding drama. This is a fair gloss on these chapters, though certainly more could be said. In Genesis 2, image-bearing, gendered-beings are said to be the union of two substances: soul/spirit and body. They are both material and immaterial.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, “the concept that our gender can be different than our biological sex is a modern form of the old Gnostic idea.”<sup>31</sup> Later Adam, the first man, is given the task to work Eden and to keep it, to name the animals, and to procreate. These are all difficult if not impossible to do without being embodied, gendered, sexually-differentiated beings. Moreover, they cannot relate to God who is spirit if they too are not spiritual bodies, or embodied souls.

Even if Adam and Eve did not know what God knew about chromosomes, there appears to be no complexity before the Fall in their embracing the givenness of sexual design. Furthermore, as humans have gradually been able to learn through the gift of general revelation, a

30. I owe this formulation to Onelio Licor of the Cedros de Libano Seminary in Pinar del Rio, Cuba. For years I had long been dissatisfied with the typical formulation of “spiritual” and “physical” or “material.” It seemed to imply that the body or bodily activity had no spiritual implications.

31. Andrew T. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate* (London: The Good Book Company, 2017), 26.

correspondence clearly exists between biology (in terms of chromosomes, anatomy, and secondary sexual characteristics) and gender. While it is true that socialization or nurture plays a role in how people come to understand and express themselves as males and females, this in no way undoes the fundamental distinction built into the fabric of creation. As Andrew Walker poignantly states the matter, the question is whether the Creator has the right to speak into the debate over gender.<sup>32</sup> If He does, then this reconfigures whether personal experience or biblical revelation is determinative in resolving the confusion in this area.

### *Other Scriptures*

Other Scriptures help to cultivate a fuller, holistic understanding of humanity that includes a binary, gendered dimension. In Deuteronomy 22:5, Moses tells the Israelites that God has said, “A woman shall not wear a man’s garment, nor shall a man put on a woman’s cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.”

Deuteronomy 22:5 is the exact kind of verse many want to avoid. Some apologists want to steer clear of the Old Testament when debating skeptics. Others simply know there is a lot of strange material that should be moved past hastily on the way to presenting Jesus. At least, the pressures of contemporary culture tempt one to make such moves. Certainly, most Christians do understand that in the New Covenant there are aspects of the Old Covenant—the dietary laws for instance—that have been fulfilled in Christ and therefore are no longer binding on the consciences of New Testament Christians.

However, one should be reminded of two caveats: First, the typical divisions between moral, legal, and ceremonial laws that have traditionally existed are themselves limited in helping us discover the full spiritual significance of the Old Testament law.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, the New Testament draws from the Old Testament in reinforcing certain fundamental principles in many different and interesting ways. Pastors certainly will recall that one of the main biblical justifications for their being compensated for their ministries comes from Deuteronomy also (cf. 25:4). Readers are told not to muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain. Church staff members should not feel slighted for being associated with a beast. Instead, they should remember that the apostle Paul draws from the Deuteronomic code in 1 Corinthians 9:9 and 1 Timothy 5:18 to make a

32. Walker, *God and the Transgender Debate*, 51–2.

33. Dr. Matthew McAfee, Provost and Professor at Welch College, and Dr. Heath Thomas of Oklahoma Baptist University have been instructive to my thinking on this issue.

point about God caring for creatures, especially humans, and that they as laborers are worthy of their wages.

In a similar way, even if we may disagree about what constitutes masculine clothing and feminine clothing in modern Western fashion (and certainly it differs globally), Deuteronomy reinforces a distinction that goes back to creation that is to shape how human beings present themselves. There is to be no intentional blurring of the distinction between male and female.<sup>34</sup> Some of Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 11 about men and women further illustrates how the New Testament makes these kinds of moves.

However, some people claim that Jesus never said anything on this particular topic. This is a common tactic of those opposed to orthodox Christian thought and practice, supposedly to show how Christians are at odds with the founder of their religion. To most of these opponents, one may consider politely asking them, "Have you ever read the Bible? All of it? Jesus had." It is why in Matthew 19, when He was asked about divorce, Jesus appealed to Genesis 2, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'There-fore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.'" With these words Jesus reasserted the gendered, binary nature of human beings, as well as the fact that this unique design remains intact despite the Fall, still serving as a basis for understanding human relationships.

Leroy Forlines, among others, has contributed to this holistic understanding of human personhood. In our generation we need to revisit the ontological foundations behind his total personality approach to theology in order to demonstrate that the Bible sets forth specific claims about gendered existence: Human beings are divinely created persons, a union of material and immaterial substances, for whom gender is an essential property. Gendered sexuality is an expression of this unique design, which equips us for pleasure, for procreation, and for picturing the divine glory of God on earth. Yet even this crucial claim must be situated into the entire biblical storyline as we think about responding to the confusion of our times.

### *Reclaiming the Biblical Storyline*

One of the qualities of a great deal of late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century biblical studies and theology has been the emphasis on

34. Preston Sprinkle, "A Biblically Compassionate Response to Transgender Persons," 2016 National Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society.

story, narrative, and the literary dimensions of the Bible.<sup>35</sup> Space constraints preclude a consideration of them. However, two claims need to be posited. First, there need not be an artificial distinction between history and theology, literature and theology, or narrative and theology. Differences exist, but not as some have made them out to be. Second, and more importantly, in order to understand the transgender debate and be equipped to help people, Christians need to add to our biblical anthropology a big-picture view of Scripture.

Some comments of former U.S. Vice-Presidential candidate Tim Kaine illustrate this point. In September of 2016, Kaine was speaking to an annual dinner for the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest and most influential LGBT civil-rights group in the world. As a committed Catholic, he was in a unique position, given his church's official position on sexuality, gender, and a number of other things the HRC is committed to redefining. In speaking of the tensions that he faced in supporting the LGBT community and being in good standing with his church, he said the following: "I think it's going to change because my church also teaches me about a Creator in the first chapter of Genesis who surveys the entire world, including mankind, and says, 'It is very good.'" He added, "Who am I to challenge God for the beautiful diversity of the human family? I think we're supposed to celebrate it, not challenge it."<sup>36</sup>

Such remarks frustrated many Catholics and evangelicals when they heard them. Yet it is rather simple: If one lacks a biblical understanding of the Fall and sin—or any understanding of the Fall and sin—and how sin touches not just what we do, say, or think, but our entire being, of course one would make such a claim. While this author does not know the depth of Senator Kaine's confessional beliefs, one may simply take his remarks at face value. Assuming he is not merely pandering for votes, one is left to conclude that he has a defective view of the Christian faith. Reclaiming the biblical storyline helps avoid such confusion. The issues Christians find when they listen carefully to the beliefs and experiences of transgendered persons is that these individuals are often questioning

35. E.g. Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Reclaiming Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014); Matthew Y. Emerson, *The Story of Scripture: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* Nashville (B&H Academic, 2017); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006).

36. "Roman Catholic Tim Kaine says church may change same-sex marriage view." Accessed December 6, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/sep/11/roman-catholic-tim-kaine-same-sex-marriage-church-may-change-view>; Sept 10, 2016.

why they feel the way they feel. There is at least some period of this before they begin to express their affirmed gender. Something happens along the way when they come to a persuasion about whether they are people with a problem to be helped, or if this is “just who I am, my true self.” The greatest reason many come to either conclusion is their stories, that is, the *narrative* that is working itself into their minds and hearts.

This is where the church has a responsibility to help make sure that people understand that we do not experience this world, our relationships, our sexuality, our sense of self, or any aspect of human life, in the world of Eden. No, we live life to the right-hand side of Genesis 2. We live in the world of Genesis 3 and beyond. To make sense of what we feel, why we feel it, how we should feel, we must situate ourselves in the story properly.

Christians who know how to talk only about the good of creation are likely to say things that essentially reinforce the sentiments of Senator Kaine. Christians who know how to talk about how warped and ruined this world is will remain discouraged and withdraw from having a cultural presence. Or they will be tempted to wage war on transgendered persons, as opposed to seeing them as “people to be loved,” as Preston Sprinkle puts it.<sup>37</sup> Christians who talk about redemption only in a surface-level way may leave their hearers assuming that Jesus’s ministry to the sinners in the Gospels is one of unqualified affirmation of all people’s condition, quite apart from faith and repentance—even repentance from distorted ways of perceiving one’s own identity.

The church must teach a biblical view of creation, fall, redemption, and final redemption (restoration). As it does this, its members must come to understand how each of these doctrines helps them make sense of singleness, marriage, divorce, remarriage, same-sex attraction, gender confusion, and more. Only a biblical creation and fall can help make sense of the complexities of how human beings, fearfully and wonderfully made as they are, could experience such confusion in the area of gender and sexuality. Even if general revelation could eventually show conclusively that nature or nurture led to these problems, this would still comport with the realities of a fallen world that we know from Scripture.

In these days it is especially important that Christians learn to use words like *nature* very carefully. *Nature* is an incredibly complicated

37. Sprinkle, “A Biblically Compassionate Response to Transgender Persons.”

word with all kinds of meanings.<sup>38</sup> Allen Verhey in his insightful book *Nature and Altering It* cites at least sixteen different definitions.<sup>39</sup> In fact, many have noted that *nature*, like the word *culture*, is fraught with the most confusion in the English-speaking world. We experience nature only after Genesis 3. This does not mean that creation's goodness is not real. It does not mean that there is not a natural law. It just means that our ability to apprehend it is fallen. Accordingly, this should chasten the types of intellectual moves people make when they assume that the condition or qualities they were "born with" are unqualified aspects of a good identity that is to be lived out according to their own self-conception.

### *Final Theological Reflections*

The eminent theologian Oliver O'Donovan does a wonderful job bringing together much of what has been discussed above, helping pave the way for a conclusion with some pastoral, practical reflections. In his 1984 book *Begotten or Made?* he notes the following about what we now refer to as transgenderism:

When God made mankind male and female, to exist alongside each other and for each other, he gave a form that human sexuality should take and a good to which it should aspire. None of us can, or should, regard our difficulties with that form, or with achieving that good, as the norm of what our sexuality is to be. None of us should see our sexuality as mere self-expression, and forget that we can express ourselves sexually only because we participate in this generic form and aspire to this generic good. We do not have to make a sexual form, or posit a sexual good. We have to exist as well as we can within that sexual form, and in relation to that sexual good, which has been given to us because it has been given to humankind.<sup>40</sup>

There is a sexual form and an intended good in God's design of male and female. Christians must see that biblically, communicate it clearly, and live it consistently. This includes the difficult and sometimes daunting

38. Norman Wirzba follows a recent tradition of authors like Joseph Sittler in speaking more in terms of creation as opposed to nature. See Norman Wirzba, *From Nature to Creation: A Christian Vision for Understanding and Loving Our World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015).

39. Allen Verhey, *Nature and Altering It* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 1–12.

40. Oliver O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 29–30.

task of helping people see the body as a gift to be received, not rejected, despite the complexities that it may bring.

#### A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

##### *Learning to Listen*

By far the most important thing Christians can do in responding to questions about gender—whether they are the concerns of church members, family, or neighbors—is to listen. Richard John Neuhaus, citing a pastor-mentor of his early in his ministry, once wrote that “seventy percent of counseling is just listening.”<sup>41</sup> This is good wisdom.

Yet listening must be understood in a few different ways. First, Christians must commit themselves to listen to all the Scriptures have to say about gender and sexuality. This is true not just for parents and teachers, but for all believers. There are no short cuts in this arena. Careful reflection and study are required.

Second, believers need to listen to the voices in our lives. Whatever they must do to make time and space and develop an interest in conversation, they should do so. How else will they know the questions people are asking? How else will they be able to hear the cries for help, to detect warning signs when they first present themselves? Christians are people of compassion. Jesus looked on the multitudes and had compassion, not contempt. Listening conveys concern and compassion. It is a prerequisite. When believers hear about the suicide rates in the transgender community, it ought to break their hearts for the confusion, hopeless, and in some cases violence that has prompted such tragic choices. According to the journal *European Psychiatry*, approximately 41 percent of transgender persons attempt suicide compared to 5 percent in the general population who do so.<sup>42</sup> Violence against transgender persons is also a significant problem that should elicit real compassion.

Third, Christians need to listen, albeit carefully, to the voices in the world around them. Not everyone needs to become an expert on transgenderism. If people sense God’s leadership to pursue this further, then they should do so carefully, bringing others along into their study, and committing that inquiry to the Lord. Yet most simply need to learn to understand how purported experts, journalists, and others are framing the issues in order to respond with apologetic wisdom, which will be

41. Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 93.

42. A. Williams, “Risk Factors for suicide in the transgender community.” Accessed December 6, 2018. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0924933817318357>.



described below. Sometimes our debates are already won by opponents because we allow them to set the terms for the debate without pressing them on the inconsistencies and ambiguities inherent in those terms.

### *Apologetic Wisdom*

Reference was made earlier to the January 2017 edition of *National Geographic*. The most precise way to describe that piece of journalism is to say that it is an agenda looking for an audience. Remember, this is a journal committed to scientific aims. This edition presents gender diversity as a brute fact, not as a fairly recent social trend about which many in the sciences are still rather dubious. These sorts of publications seldom report the many unsettled scientific questions surrounding gender. They never tell readers about the many people harmed by gender transition when the changes do not resolve their psychosocial issues. They rarely report the people who committed suicide after transitioning. When they do, they usually imply the suicides are to be blamed on society for being “transphobic,” not on the medical professionals who held out false promises concerning surgical technique.

The journal that is framed as reporting the new frontiers of gender begins with two shorter pieces written, not by transgendered persons, but by leading feminists. The famous Gloria Steinem is asked, “What do you consider the most pressing gender issue today?” She responds by saying, “I suppose getting rid of [the idea of] gender. . . . The idea of race and the idea of gender are divisive.”<sup>43</sup> This is an interesting insight considering what Steinem has been trying to do for the last fifty years. It seems that it would be infinitely more difficult to fight for gender equality, to talk about all women have to offer to the world, and to provide them with a social space to tell their unique stories if the *idea* of gender itself were abolished.

The magazine also features the testimonies of several pre-adolescent girls who could not engage in certain desirable roles and activities because they were not boys. Aside from the problems of those cultures where women are viewed as something less than men, it seems that the authors are conflating the question of gender roles with gender identity, which are two separate issues.

A Christian response here affirms these little girls as children and young women with *inherent* dignity, regardless of what their society says. Society does not have to say, “Become a boy. Long to be a boy. Act like gender is not part of who you are” in order to attain the goods

43. Gloria Steinem, *National Geographic*, (January 2017), 8.

associated with another gender. This does not bring opportunity, but more self-deception. The magazine conflates conversations about equality with economics, confuses popular culture with science, and commits journalistic fraud. Unfortunately, the televised special on gender hosted by Katie Couric does not redeem the journal.

Some other peculiar arguments from the LGBT movement are made to try to eliminate the idea of a gender binary. In several places one can see the argument using the example of plants and the fact that some of them change genders (or sexes). It seems to make sense to suggest an analogy between gender-changing plants and people, if one does not believe in the image of God, or if one believes that man is not fundamentally different from animals or even plants.

Other authors have pointed out that in various cultures there are third genders, or multiple genders, or no pronouns for “he” or “she.” Of course, there are also some cultures and language groups that do not have a past or future tense in their language, which does not mean that members of those tribes do not experience time. There is certainly a close connection between language and reality (in many ways), but this argument feels again like an agenda looking for an illustration.

One especially interesting illustration comes from Nicholas Teich. He notes that, in Africa, “there is a record of belief in gods who transcended gender boundaries in at least 28 different tribes.”<sup>44</sup> The appeal to African religious metaphysics to justify a contemporary Western belief is strange since many outside the transgendered community have been told for some time that theology has no place in the debate. Certainly there are other arguments for the obliteration of gender binaries, and some are stronger than others. The above arguments are used here because of their appearance in mainstream, popular publications.

Though one may be skeptical of the claims and arguments of transgender advocates, apologetics must also be gentle and clear even as they confront bad arguments. Berating an unchurched teenager who visits one’s church after he nearly enters the wrong restroom most likely lacks prudence and charity. One of the first principles of Christian apologetics is to know one’s audience. One must know the turf on which one stands. If a Christian is invited to debate a professor at a local community college, it will require certain preparation. If one is counseling a church member sincerely looking for help, that is an entirely different context. If one has met someone who already has “transitioned” from male to female, or female to male, that conversation will go differently than one

44. Teich. 73

with someone who may not themselves be transgendered but who may be sympathetic to the movement's aims.

This is another one of the challenges of responding to transgenderism. Not all of American society accepts these changing views on gender. It is very difficult even to gain a concrete statistic on how many people identify as transgender. Yet the genius of association has allowed the LGBT community to make tremendous gains in terms of mainstream support from those outside the movement. Most people, because of their antipathy toward racism, are sympathetic to many of the aims of the Civil Rights Movement. Most are sympathetic toward homosexuals who were victims of violence in past generations. Most are sympathetic to people who feel trapped or confused. The genius of the LGBT movement is to map their program onto the stories and struggles of these other groups. This engenders significant sympathy for their cause among the general public. Christian sympathy looks different for several reasons. Among them is the fact that Christians love people and listen to them. They are willing to walk alongside them, but Christians must come to the truth at some point.

#### *Loud and Proud, Silent and Struggling?*

Preston Sprinkle notes that among transgendered persons there is not just one type of person. He refers to some as "loud and proud" and others as "silent and struggling."<sup>45</sup> This is a helpful framework to think about in pastoral care. Sometimes Christians formulate their response to problems without respect to the persons involved. This is an extension of the point above about knowing whom we are talking to. This presumes we listened carefully.

In the LGBT community, one encounters many "loud and proud" individuals. These have not only come out, but they have also identified themselves with a growing minority movement which has particular methods, aims, and arguments that run counter to Christian faith. So when Christians think of transgenderism, it can be easy to classify all persons with gender concerns in this category. However, Christians do so at their peril and that of those with gender concerns. Most people do not wake up one morning and say, "You know, I know I've been a girl all this time, but I think I'm a boy now. I am now going to go and report this to my family, my co-workers, and my friends, and lose all of them immediately." That is not how it happens. Christians need to exercise real care and nuance in the way they talk about this confusion and even the sin that gives rise to all kinds of problems.

45. Sprinkle, "A Biblically Compassionate Response to Transgender Persons."

*Identity, Community, and Destiny*

As discussed above, coming to identify as transgendered has a great deal to do with narratives. Whose story of the world and the self will win? we could ask. This inevitably leads to talking about community. It is important to present transgenderism in its own words before trying to analyze it and respond to it. This essay has used the phrase “LGBT community” a few times, but with hesitation because it feels that the word “community” is so overused in our society and often used in problematic ways. Nevertheless, this is the kind of language people often use to describe their associations, relationships, and loyalties. Christians know a great deal about community because they are the *ecclesia*, the people of God, the body of Christ. Listening, apologetics, discernment—all of these are powerless without the presence of a living community of people who live the truth of gendered existence.

Though the statistics are difficult to come by, it does appear that many who identify as transgendered have some kind of church background. Some of these are Baptists, Presbyterians, adults who spent their formative years as Methodists, Catholics, and beyond. This leads to a whole set of questions about what kinds of communities those were, and why individuals arriving at different experiences and beliefs about gender felt they could not stay or should not stay. Those in leadership have the challenge of leading their churches to understand that bearing with people in their struggles is not equivalent to compromise.

At the same time, church leaders should not be intimidated about this emerging confusion. Though they may not have extensive training in psychology or counseling, they should be aware that traditional approaches to therapy have shown to be helpful in dealing with those experiencing Gender Dysphoria. Often great personal trauma accompanies gender confusion, whether in adolescents or adults. The “you must transition” script of so many transgender advocacy groups simply does not account for the many stories of “detransitioners” whose gender problems were only further exacerbated by accepting the counsel of physicians or psychologists to try to conform the appearance of their body to the state of their mind.<sup>46</sup>

The church must also train and equip its teachers and leaders to know how to spot signs of confusion, to encourage and pray with parents dealing with troubled youth, and to be ready to engage in other practical ministry skills. Church leaders must learn to train greeters to know that they can greet people without knowing the intimate secrets of their lives

46. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 49–76.

on the first Sunday. There is a lot to be said about how leaders work with people coming into the church who may at some point seek membership versus those who have grown up in the church and may already be members who are accountable to the body. Additionally, factors like age, family dynamics, and the amount of visible gender-non-conformity in one's context will affect how an individual responds. One thing is certain: Identity and destiny are connected to community—whether healthy community, unhealthy community, or no community.

It seems that part of genuine community means not getting tripped on the surface-level things.<sup>47</sup> Members of the community note them but move beyond them. This is about one's sense of self: Who am I? Who did God make me to be, if He does exist? Such questions demand that the church show radical hospitality, love patiently, pray fervently, and model biblical manhood and womanhood.

It is controversial to say, but it must be noted that the mainstreaming of same-sex attraction and transgenderism has emerged one generation after the steepest rise in out-of-wedlock birth rates (which often means single-parent homes) and the continual fallout of no-fault divorce. It may be a good time to pause and remind those older church members who tend to scowl at the millennials in their communities and churches that *their* generation helped create this mess. The entire church is in it together. That is the commitment and challenge of biblical community. The people of God acknowledge their fallen condition and submit it to Him.

## CONCLUSION

The principles outlined in this essay provide the beginnings of what is needed to form a more-concerted effort to address the confusion. Christians will need to remember that even as their knowledge of the psychological, sociological, and theological issues may increase, so must their effort in prayer, listening, and loving. The church cannot make the mistake of assuming that this is primarily an intellectual struggle. One's sense of self, happiness, wholeness, and identity are often elusive things that need more than arguments. They need models from men and women who, despite their brokenness, hang-ups, confusions, and

47. As a personal aside, I had a male family member who came to a family gathering some months back, and his finger nails were painted. This is a man who married into the family. One of my relatives who will remain nameless said, "What's *that* supposed to mean?" That male in-law did not come to the last family gathering. It is not that the question itself could never be asked. Rather, it was the tone as well as the fact that this is not really someone with whom a relationship of trust, respect, and love was already present.

struggles, have chosen to embrace the call to live according to God's design in gendered sexuality.

Oliver O'Donovan helps conclude these reflections:

Our task is to discern the possibilities for personal relationship which are given to us with this biological sex, and to seek to develop them in accordance with our individual vocations. Those for whom this task has been comparatively unproblematic (though I suppose no human being alive has been without some sexual problems) are in no position to pronounce any judgement on those for whom accepting their sex has been so difficult that they have fled from it into denial. No one can say with any confidence what factors have made these pressures so severe. Nevertheless, we cannot and must not conceive of physical sexuality as a mere raw material with which we can construct a form of psychosexual self-expression which is determined only by the free impulse of our spirits. Responsibility in sexual development implies a responsibility to nature—to the ordered good of the bodily form which we have been given. And that implies that we must make the necessary distinction between the good of the bodily form as such and the various problems that it poses to us personally in our individual experience.<sup>48</sup>

Human beings' responsibility to embrace their God-given design is a vocation. It is something to which God has graciously called humanity. And if He calls people to do something, He will give them the grace, guidance, and resources to do it. This is what Christians must remember and help their transgendered neighbors come to understand about the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not a message that one's life can be free from the consequences of sin, or that those consequences can be fixed by human technique, but that Jesus died and rose again so that people might die to sin and experience newness of life as men and women.<sup>49</sup>

48. O'Donovan, *Begotten or Made?*, 29.

49. In addition to the works mentioned in the notes above, the following sources are recommended: Margaret A. Hagen, "Transgenderism Has No Basis in Science or Law," <http://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2016/01/16143/>; Michael Hanby, "A More Perfect Absolutism," *First Things*, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/10/a-more-perfect-absolutism>; Edward E. Moody, Jr. "Helping Those Who Struggle with Gender Dysphoria." *Fusion* (Spring 2016); J. Matthew Pinson, Matthew Steven Bracey, Matthew McAfee, Michael A. Oliver, *Sexuality, Gender, and the Church: A Christian Response in the NEW Culture Landscape* (Nashville: Welch College Press, 2016); Vaughan Roberts, *Transgender* (Epsom, Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2015); James Emery White, "Losing the Transgender Debate . . . for all the Right Reasons," <http://www.churchandculture.org/blog.asp?id=10375>

Jeffry A. Blair, Jr.

# Cultivating a Culture of Wisdom in the Local Church

## INTRODUCTION

American culture has become a youth-driven culture. Youth culture values new over old, innovation over tradition, revolution over preservation, and zeal over wisdom. The biblical vision for the Lord's community, the church, is a culture of Wisdom. The central values of Wisdom culture are stability, order, continuity, productivity, and maturity. Much of the contemporary American church has been heavily influenced by the youth-driven culture that has risen to hegemony in the past few decades, resulting in a lack of emphasis on the cultivation of wisdom and maturity. Many churches have neglected intergenerational interaction in which the "fathers" and the "sons" spend significant time together, replacing it with a silo approach that segregates youth from elders.

This essay consists of an exegetical investigation of Scripture in its Second Temple context with the purpose of articulating the biblical prescription of Wisdom culture. Its ultimate objective is to provide a solid, biblical foundation for pastors to draw on as they labor to build a strong culture of Wisdom in their local churches.

## THE HISTORY OF JUVENILIZATION

Americans do not want to grow up. Historian and U.S. Senator Ben Sasse says in his recent book *The Vanishing American Adult*, "I believe our entire nation is in the midst of a collective coming-of-age crisis without parallel in our history. We are living in an America of perpetual adolescence. Our kids simply don't know what an adult is anymore—or how to become one. Many don't see a reason even to try. Perhaps more problematic, the older generations have forgotten that we need to plan to teach them. It's our fault more than it is theirs."<sup>1</sup>

*American culture has become a youth culture.* Worse, the American church has been profoundly affected (or infected) with the youth-driven culture that has arisen in the United States in the past few decades. Youth ministry expert Thomas Bergler is troubled by the impact that youth

1. Ben Sasse, *The Vanishing American Adult: Our Coming-of-Age Crisis—and How to Rebuild a Culture of Self-Reliance* (New York: St. Martin's, 2017), 2.



culture has had on the American church. In his book *The Juvenilization of American Christianity*, he offers the following description of this phenomenon he has named “juvenilization.” It is, he says, “the process by which the religious beliefs, practices, and developmental characteristics of adolescents become accepted as appropriate for Christians of all ages. It begins with the praiseworthy goal of adapting the faith to appeal to the young. But it sometimes ends badly, with both youth and adults embracing immature versions of the faith.”<sup>2</sup> How and why has the shift from a culture of Wisdom to a youth-driven culture occurred in the Christian church in America?

### *Cultural and Historical Reasons*

Some of the reasons for this shift are technological. Phyllis Tickle describes how the automobile “freed Americans to roam at will, thereby loosening them from the physical ties that had bound earlier generations to one place, one piece of land, one township, one schoolhouse, and one community church.”<sup>3</sup> This is just one illustration of many demonstrating how technological advances have hastened this shift.

Bergler’s historical analysis shows that the proliferation of youth ministries both in the church and in parachurch organizations was a response to the instability of American culture during the Great Depression and the tumultuous decades that followed. In this context, “concerned Christians launched dozens of new youth organizations . . . in the hopes of protecting young people from the evil effects of these crises and mobilizing them to make a difference in a dangerous world.”<sup>4</sup>

Because of the independent nature of many of these organizations, they were free to experiment in an effort to be relevant and attractive to the emerging youth culture. Eventually the methods of these parachurch organizations made their way into the mainstream of the church via youth ministries, “and what worked in youth group was eventually accepted in the church as a whole.”<sup>5</sup> A quote from Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawson Ross draws many of these cultural and historical strands together:

2. Thomas E. Bergler, *The Juvenilization of American Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) kindle edition, loc. 81–83.

3. Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence: How Christianity is Changing and Why* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 85–87.

4. Bergler, loc. 91–92.

5. Ibid, loc. 108.

Hagestad and Uhlenberg argue that children/youth, working adults and older adults have been systematically separated institutionally, socially and spatially. They call this age-based separation the “*tripartition of the life course*,” which “emerged as the state adopted rules using chronological age to require children’s school attendance, while excluding them from the workplace, and entitling older persons to pensions. Children and youth are channeled into daycare and schools where they spend most of the day with a narrow band of age peers. For adults, days are anchored in work settings that exclude the young and the old. And older people, who have limited access to school and work sites, are expected to live retired lives of leisure.” Throughout the ages Christians have tended to emulate—often unintentionally or unthinkingly—the culture around them, and as American culture has become more and more generationally fragmented over the last hundred years, churches have followed that same trend.<sup>6</sup>

Young and old are not spending much meaningful time together, and, as a result, the young often despise age and maturity. “Many Americans don’t like to think of themselves as adults, because it implies that the good part of their lives may be over,” states Bergler.<sup>7</sup> Paul told Timothy, “Let no one despise your *youth*” (1 Timothy 4:12).<sup>8</sup> In today’s youth-driven culture, “Let no one despise your *age*” is more appropriate.

### *Pragmatic and Philosophical Reasons*

Churches have noticed that the methods, music, and approach of youth-driven ministry seem to attract people. Therefore, many “adult” services today look like what youth group meetings and contemporary Christian rock concerts did twenty years ago. When generational conflict occurs in the church, the simplest way to deal with it is to separate them. Each individual has multiple options from which to choose to fit his or her taste or maturity level. Allen and Ross describe it this way:

6. Holly Catterton Allen and Christine Lawson Ross, *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community and Worship* (Downers Grove: Ill. IVP Academic, 2012), 37–38, quoting Gunhild O. Hagestad and Peter Uhlenberg, “The Social Separation of Old and Young: A Root of Ageism,” *Journal of Social Issues* 61 (2005): 346. Italics added.

7. Bergler, loc. 270.

8. Scripture quotations in this article are from the Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1946, 1952, and 1971 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

The youth group can enjoy loud music, flashing lights and cool videos; the Millennials can pull into their intimate settings; Gen Xers can have their contemplative yet technologically savvy style; Boomers can choose old rock-style praise tunes using guitars and drums; the older generations can sing traditional hymns; and the children get to sing “Father Abraham” as often as they wish. All in all, a very amenable solution—except it is a perfect recipe for generational isolation.<sup>9</sup>

The Wisdom Way explored in this study pushes back hard against such trends. Wisdom is a way of being in the world. It is a comprehensive way of understanding the Creator and His creation. Christian leaders must reassume responsibility to cultivate cultures in which the ways of Wisdom may flourish.

In 1 Corinthians 3:10, Paul describes himself as a *sophos architekton*, a wise master builder. First Corinthians 3:10ff. is primarily for pastors and others in Christian ministry to whom the Lord has given the responsibility of constructing the building of God. The remainder of this essay will explore what being a *sophos architekton* means so that Christian ministers might “be careful” (1 Corinthians 3:10b) how they build the church.

The essay begins by investigating the Wisdom worldview and tradition that Paul *received* as a member of the community of Yahweh: How had Israel’s Wisdom tradition shaped and informed Paul’s worldview and values? Then the essay will examine how Paul took up that tradition and *applied* it to his ministry as a wise master builder. Here the focus will be 1 Corinthians 1–4, but other texts in the Pauline corpus will be considered, noting how the Wisdom tradition influenced the ways in which Paul created and shaped congregations. The last section will discuss how this Pauline vision of Christian ministry speaks into twenty-first-century American culture. What does it mean today for a Christian minister to be a wise master builder who takes great care in how he builds?

#### THE TRADITION PAUL RECEIVED

##### *The Worldview and Vision of Wisdom*

From the beginning to the end of the Bible, one Way has been revealed, received, and faithfully passed down to Yahweh’s people. An examination of the Wisdom Way will enable an understanding of the task of Christian ministry.

9. Allen and Ross, 42.

### *Order and Stability*

The first chapter of the Bible is the foundation of the Wisdom world-view.<sup>10</sup> Duane Garrett maintains, "Genesis 1:1 stands behind all biblical wisdom tradition."<sup>11</sup> A fundamental conviction of Wisdom is that the Creator is a God of *order*. The movement of Genesis 1 is from *tohu wabohu* to *tov*, from chaos to cosmos. William Brown, an expert in Wisdom studies, explains the nature and significance of Genesis 1:

It is in fact the most densely structured text of the biblical corpus, characterized by an intricate array of correspondences and variations. Genesis 1:1–2:3(4a) evinces a literary cohesion that *bears certain theological and ethical implications*. Suggestively absent is any hint of opposition or disruption in the cosmic process. Chaos, with a capital "C" has no place in this cosmic order, for creation is conducted decently and in order.<sup>12</sup>

Genesis 1 begins its description of the material world as "without form and void" (1:2; *tohu wabohu* is supposed to sound frightening), the initial state of the world as a disordered chaos. The seven-fold refrain of Genesis 1, "God saw that it was good," overcomes the chaos. This refrain comes to a crescendo in its seventh occurrence: "It was very good" (1:31). When God's creative activity is complete, the world is well-ordered, every part of it perfectly suited to its purpose. Also, the symmetrical form of Genesis 1:1–2:4 reveals that the Creator has created an orderly creation.<sup>13</sup>

God builds order into the fabric of His good creation. This well-ordered creation reflects the character of the Creator who is a God of order and life. Looking ahead, Paul grounds community ethical obligations in

10. Bruce K. Waltke states, "The creation account is a highly sophisticated presentation, designed to emphasize the sublimity (power, majesty, wisdom) of the Creator God and to lay the foundations for the worldview of the covenant community" (*Genesis: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001], 56. *Italics added*).

11. Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 53.

12. William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos: The Genesis of Moral Imagination in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 36. *Italics added*.

13. Many commentaries on the book of Genesis include schematics like this one. See, for instance, Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 6–7; Waltke, 56–58; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, vol. 1A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 120–21; Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 4. The table below is basically Sarna's. The inclusion of the reversal of *tohu* and *bah* is with Waltke and Mathews.

	Days of Forming (overcoming tohu)		Days of Filling (overcoming bohu)
Day	Creative Act	Day	Creative Act
1	Light	4	The luminaries
2	Sky, leaving terrestrial waters	5	Fish and fowl
3	Dry land	6	Land creatures
	Vegetation (lowest form of organic life)		Humankind (highest form of organic life)

this Wisdom observation when He instructs the Corinthians to conduct their meetings in an orderly way: “For God is not a God of confusion [*akatastasias*] but of peace [*eirēnēs*]. . . . All things should be done decently and in order [*taxin*]” (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40). That Paul is reasoning from a Wisdom worldview is confirmed by a similar text, James 3:13–18:

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good life let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This wisdom is not such as *comes down from above*, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder [*akatastasia*] and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable [*eirēnikē*], gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity. And the harvest of righteousness is sown in peace [*eirēnē*] by those who make peace [*eirēnēn*]. (Italics added.)

Both Paul and James ground community ethics in the nature of God. The God of Wisdom is a God of order. Therefore, His people must live according to the Wisdom that comes down from their Father above. James has already used this imagery in 1:17: “Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” The “perfect gift” to which James refers is primarily the wisdom for which he has instructed the community to ask of God (1:5).

James 1 also has strong connections to the Genesis creation narrative.<sup>14</sup> In James 1:17, the God who gives wisdom is “the Father of lights” (Genesis 1:14–18). God’s *reliability* is stressed in the phrase “with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” This *stability* of God is in contrast to the unwise man who is “like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind,” the “double-minded man” who is “unstable [*akatastatos*] in all his ways” (1:6–8). The image of God in 1 Corinthians 14, James 1, and James 3 is of *reliability*, *stability*, and *order*. James calls the community of Yahweh to imitate their Father and Creator by putting away their instability, jealousy, and chaotic behavior in order to participate in the peace of God. All of this is grounded in Genesis 1.

The worldview of Wisdom is a vision of a world of cosmos rather than chaos in which society, community, family, and individual are established in peace, reflecting the well-ordered world God has made. Leo Perdue articulates the idea in this way: “A righteous and stable society embodies or actualizes the cosmic order originating at the time of creation.”<sup>15</sup> A sampling of statements from the Old Testament illustrates the conviction that the righteous person may experience the stability of God’s good creation. Note how the following texts stand in contrast to the “double-minded” and “unstable” person who is “tossed to and fro” (James 1:17):

The *world* stands firm, never to be moved (1 Chronicles 16:30).

He who does these things (righteous/wise acts) shall never be moved (Psalm 15:5).

Thou didst set the *earth* on its foundations,  
so that it should never be shaken (Psalm 104:5).

For the *righteous* will never be moved;  
he will be remembered for ever (Psalm 112:6)

A *man* is not established by wickedness,  
but the root of the righteous will never be moved (Proverbs 12:3).

14. Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 87–88.

15. Leo G. Perdue, “Cosmology and Social Order in the Wisdom Tradition,” in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo Perdue (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 472.

*Maturity and Productivity*

The final text, Proverbs 12:3, reveals a connection to another image connecting God's good creation to the life of Wisdom. Returning to Genesis 1–2, the first cycle of creation (days one through three) reaches its fullness in the fruitfulness of plant life (Genesis 1:12). The second cycle (days four through six) comes to a climax in the abundance of animal life and, finally, in the command to humanity to "be fruitful and multiply" (1:28).<sup>16</sup> The stability and reliability of the world that God has created issues in productivity and prosperity. It is no coincidence that the only two books of the Old Testament that speak of a "tree of life" are Genesis and Proverbs.<sup>17</sup>

Alluding to Genesis 2:9 and 3:22, Proverbs 3:18 presents Wisdom herself as "a tree of life to those who lay hold of her." In 11:30, however, "the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life." In his Proverbs commentary, Garrett groups 11:28–12:4 into a unit under the heading, "The Source of Life."<sup>18</sup> Proverbs 11:28b states that the "righteous will flourish like a green leaf."

Taken together, Proverbs 11:28, 11:30, and 12:3 paint a picture of wise men and women who would be at home in God's perfect garden: they are like trees with deep and strong *roots* that provide stability and productivity (12:3); their *leaves* always flourish, green and verdant (11:28); they are, therefore, trees that give life to their community through their words and deeds (11:30).

My children and I often close the day by bowing beside their bed and praying Psalm 1 together:

Blessed is the man  
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
 nor stands in the way of sinners,  
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
 but his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
 and on his law he meditates day and night.  
 He is like a tree  
 planted by streams of water,  
 that yields its fruit in its season,  
 and its leaf does not wither.  
 In all that he does, he prospers.

16. Waltke, 58.

17. Revelation is the only other biblical work in which "tree of life" is found; Revelation 2 and 22 both look back to the Genesis creation account.

18. Garrett, 128.



The wicked are not so,  
but are like chaff which the wind drives away.

Two observations are in order regarding this psalm: First, it powerfully communicates a vision of the sort of life the wise person might enjoy—a life of stability, maturity, and productivity. The psalmist juxtaposes this image with that of the fool whose existence is marked by transience. Second, the act of praying Psalm 1 with my children for years so that they know it by heart is in keeping with the major purpose of the Wisdom project—to inculcate the wisdom of our “fathers” into the souls of our children so that they might become like the tree they pray about.

James L. Kugel notes that the typical piece of Wisdom literature is the anthology of proverbs, collections containing sayings that come back again and again to the same themes, formulated a bit differently in each instance. Kugel proposes that one of the reasons for this form is that the collections are “not so much intended to be read as inculcated.” He explains, “Here I mean to evoke the English word’s Latin antecedent, *inculcare*, ‘to pound in, to grind down.’ . . . Repeating the same idea in different formulations seems to have served as a form of indoctrination, pounding in wisdom’s basic doctrines with only slightly different variations.”<sup>19</sup>

The foundation of the Wisdom worldview is that God is a God of order who has built order into the fabric of God’s good creation. The creation stories in Genesis 1–3 testify to the stability, reliability, and productivity of Yahweh’s world. The vision of Wisdom is that human beings and their communities would reflect and incarnate the beauty of God’s creation in its stability, reliability, and productivity. The question that naturally follows is, “How does this happen?” This question leads us beyond the consideration of the Worldview of Wisdom to the Way of Wisdom.

### *The Way of Wisdom: Growing Up and Passing It Down*

Proverbs 1–9 provides the clearest and fullest presentation of the way of Wisdom’s acquisition and transmission. In Proverbs 1, the “father” encourages the “son” to make every effort to receive the wisdom that the father is passing down to him. The one long sentence from v. 1 to v. 6 is a string of purpose statements laying out the aim of the book: to instruct the “simple,” the “youth,” the “son” in wisdom.

19. James L. Kugel, “Ancient Israelite Pedagogy and Its Survival in Second Temple Interpretations of Scripture,” in *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and the Early Church*, ed. Karina Martin Hogan, Matthew Goff, and Emma Wasserman, *Early Judaism and Its Literature* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 19–21.

The first thing to notice is that the context of the transmission of wisdom is highly *relational*. The wise father and mother are deeply invested in their child's acquisition of wisdom. Second, the learning of wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 is presented as a *process* that occurs over time in the context of an ongoing relationship. In his study of the Instruction genre in the ancient near east, Stuart Weeks observes that most works of Instruction are presented as a single speech given at a particular time. In contrast, "The father-son instruction in Proverbs 1–9 is placed in a broader context of ongoing parental and other instruction."<sup>20</sup> That the son is encouraged to "cry out for insight" and "seek it like silver and search for it like gold" (2:1–4) indicates that the acquisition of wisdom will not happen quickly. Chapter 6 of the extra-canonical book Sirach builds on Proverbs 2 by emphasizing the necessity of tenacity if the son would grow up to be wise,

My son, from your youth up choose instruction,  
and until you are old you will keep finding wisdom.  
Come to her like one who plows and sows,  
and wait for her good harvest.  
Search out and seek, and she will become known to you;  
and when you get hold of her, do not let her go.  
For at last you will find the rest she gives,  
and she will be changed into joy for you.  
If you are willing, my son, you will be taught,  
and if you apply yourself you will become clever.  
If you love to listen you will gain knowledge,  
and if you incline your ear you will become wise.  
Stand in the assembly of the elders.  
Who is wise? Cleave to him.  
If you see an intelligent man, visit him early;  
let your foot wear out his doorstep (from Sirach 6).

The picture that emerges is of one growing in wisdom over a long period of time, seeking hard for wisdom until finally reaching maturity. Wisdom cannot be acquired by passive receptivity; it requires active pursuit. Although Wisdom "cries aloud in the street" (Proverbs 1:20), the child must also "cry out" for wisdom (2:3). Third, *one who has grown up*

20. Stuart Weeks, *Instruction and Imagery in Proverbs 1–9* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 38–39. Deuteronomy 6:7 presents pedagogy in the Law as on-the-go: "you shall teach them diligently to your children, and you shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise."

*must hand down Wisdom.* In Proverbs 4:1–5, the father explains to the son that he received the same instruction from his father when he was a child,

When I was a son with my father,  
tender, the only one in the sight of my mother,  
he taught me, and said to me,  
“Let your heart hold fast my words;  
keep my commandments, and live;  
do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my  
mouth.  
Get wisdom; get insight (vv. 3–5).

Three generations are involved here in the transmission of wisdom and instruction. The son of Proverbs 4 has become the wise father of Proverbs 1. He is able to act as teacher to his son, not simply by virtue of being a father, but because he has attained wisdom and insight by listening to his own father. The order of Wisdom culture did not, of course, stop at the front door of the family home. As we move outward into the public arena of Israelite society, we notice that the elders and fathers (plural, the aged of the community) fulfill the functions that parents and grandparents perform in the household (see Deuteronomy 32:7).

### *The Way of Wisdom Incarnate*

Here I want to summarize my findings regarding Jesus and the Wisdom tradition of Israel so that we might see how Jesus both passed on and transformed the tradition. First, more than seventy percent of Jesus's words in the Gospels are in Wisdom forms<sup>21</sup> They present Him as a sage, a teacher of Wisdom. Second, Jesus presented Himself as the very *incarnation* of Wisdom. That which was personification in Second Temple Jewish literature<sup>22</sup> had become incarnation in Jesus. Jesus, therefore, is the final Word on the Wisdom of God. Third, both the form of Jesus's teaching, primarily parable, and the content of Jesus's teaching emphasize that humility is a prerequisite for understanding the mystery of His kingdom.

The wisdom of Jesus is *counter-order* wisdom. Jesus comes down into the world from heaven, assumes the form of a Galilean peasant, and teaches that “the first will be last, and the last will be first,” “whoever wants to be great must be a servant,” and “whoever wants to save his life

21. Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Sage: The Pilgrimage of Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 155–56.

22. See Proverbs 1; 3:19–20; 7–9; Job 28; Sirach 24; Wisdom of Solomon 6–10; 4Q184; 1 Enoch 42; Baruch 3:9–4:4; 2 Esdras 5:9–10.

must lose it.” This was a difficult message to receive for the proud and self-righteous who refused to accept the authority and identity He claimed for Himself. That the wisdom of Jesus was *counter-order* does not mean, however, that it was *anti-order*. James Williams explains how Jesus’s teaching, though disorienting in form and counter-order in content, still communicates a message of order: “What they<sup>23</sup> seek is another and better kind of order. What they pose against the timeless types of traditional order is an intuition or vision of a counter-order—a reality or dimension of reality that is over against the traditional or commonly-accepted view of the world. . . . For Jesus the counter-order is a transcendent state of things which is announced as God’s arriving rule.”<sup>24</sup>

Jesus welcomed those who would humble themselves and believe His claims into the counter-order kingdom of God, and He revealed to them the “hidden things” of the kingdom (Matthew 11:25–30). The “things hidden by the Father” had a long history. Quoting Psalm 78, Matthew claims in 13:34–35 that the parabolic teaching of Jesus is at least as old as the creation itself:

All this Jesus said to the crowds in parables; indeed he said nothing to them without a parable. This was to fulfil what was spoken by the prophet:

“I will open my mouth in parables,  
I will utter what has been hidden since the foundation of the world.”

The message of Jesus was not something new and counter to what God had been doing from the beginning. In fact, “the message and mission of Jesus were nothing other than the working out of God’s plan of salvation from the beginning.”<sup>25</sup>

Fourth, Jesus’s mission was not merely to reveal His message but to train His disciples to understand His counter-order wisdom so that they would be fully equipped and able to teach others.<sup>26</sup> This training was accomplished because the disciples had responded to His call to “follow

23. I.e., counter-order teachers such as Qoheleth and Jesus.

24. James G. Williams, *Those Who Ponder Proverbs: Aphoristic Thinking and Biblical Literature* (Sheffield, UK: Almond, 1981), 81.

25. Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, vol. 33A, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1998), 390.

26. Note the logical and lexical links between Matthew 11:25–30; 13:51–52; and 28:18–20.

me." They had remained with Him for three years, and thus each of them had become

like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock (Matthew 7:24–25); and

like a tree which bears fruit, and yields, in one case a hundred-fold, in another sixty, and in another thirty (Matthew 13:23).

Jesus's ministry and message were in keeping with the Wisdom tradition He had received as a sage of Israel. As one who had "increased in wisdom" (Luke 2:52) until He had grown up, and who was the incarnation of the Wisdom of God, Jesus faithfully passed down the counter-order Wisdom that was older than creation itself so that His disciple-brothers understood the meaning of the cruciform saying,

Whoever would save his life will lose it,  
and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it (Matthew 16:25).

### *Wisdom in the Hands of the Apostle Paul*

E. J. Schnabel's article on Paul and Wisdom reveals an abundance of connections between Paul's letters and Jewish Wisdom literature. Schnabel notes that "Paul referred to wisdom (*sophia*) more than any other writer in the NT (forty-four of the seventy-one occurrences)."<sup>27</sup> Ben Witherington also points out that

of all the extra-canonical books Paul cites or alludes to, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon are used more than any other sources, and in fact more than many sources in the Old Testament itself. He alludes to Sirach twenty-six times according to Nestle-Aland . . . and these allusions are spread throughout the Pauline corpus, including in Romans 1, Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and 1 Thessalonians. . . . He cites or alludes to the Wisdom of Solomon some forty times, including notable examples in Romans and 2 Corinthians.<sup>28</sup>

27. E. J. Schnabel, "Wisdom," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993), 967. Italics in original.

28. Witherington, 307.

What does Paul *do* with the Wisdom tradition he *received*? The *locus classicus* for Paul and Wisdom is 1 Corinthians 1–4.<sup>29</sup> In this text Paul, as their “father in Christ Jesus” (4:15), addresses his “beloved children” (4:14) who are, much to his disappointment, still “babes in Christ” (3:1). Paul has judged them to be immature, based on their childish arrogance that created divisions in the body of Christ at Corinth. Paul hopes that they will become “imitators” of him (4:16) and grow up in Christ, admonishing them in 14:20, “Brethren, do not be children in your thinking; be babes in evil, but in thinking be mature.” For even Paul can testify, “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways” (13:10).

In 2:6–7 Paul says, “Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification.” Paul’s words echo Matthew 11 and 13, where Jesus gives thanks to the Father for hiding the wisdom of Jesus’s message and mission from the “wise and understanding” and revealing it “to infants” (Matthew 11:25). In 1 Corinthians 2:7, the hidden wisdom is decreed before the ages, and in Matthew 13:35 it is hidden from the creation. It is the same wisdom that the Father has hidden from the wise and understanding (Matthew 11:25) and that stands against the wisdom of this age and of the rulers of this age while being imparted to the mature (1 Corinthians 2:6b). Paul is passing on what he had received from his Lord.

For Paul, the essential content of Wisdom is Christ—the Wisdom of God, the Power of God—crucified. That is why Paul resolved to preach nothing among them except “Christ and him crucified” (2:2). The core of Wisdom is that only by laying one’s life down in self-sacrificial love can one live. Wisdom is essentially cruciform, and maturity is defined by cruciformity. Paul knows that the only remedy to the disunity in the church is love expressing itself in the humility of cruciformity.<sup>30</sup> The “perfect/mature” in 1 Corinthians 2:6, therefore, are not those who have embraced some esoteric and deeper wisdom reserved only for the few. Rather, they are those whose eyes have been opened to perceive the “secret and hidden wisdom of God” (2:7), which is nothing other than

29. Schnabel notes that 1 Corinthians 1–4 has “the highest concentration of the word group *sophia/sophos* in the Pauline corpus (twenty-six occurrences)” (969).

30. Love expressing itself in the humility of cruciformity is also the point of Philippians 2:1–11.

the truth that life comes only through the death of self-giving love. The continuity of the message of Paul and Jesus with respect to Wisdom is the crucial point to make: Maturity is defined by cruciformity.

Paul also knew that at the heart of Wisdom is the conserving of culture and teaching through intergenerational instruction. For Paul, the faithful transmission of the tradition is a matter of primary importance. Paul tells the Corinthians, "For I received from the Lord what I also *handed on* to you. . . ." (1 Corinthians 11:23. Italics added).<sup>31</sup> He encourages the Thessalonians to "stand firm and hold to the *traditions* which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter" (2 Thessalonians 2:15. Italics added).<sup>32</sup> Paul exhorts Timothy, "What you have heard from me before many witnesses *entrust* to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2. Italics added), and he tells the Corinthians that he has sent Timothy "to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church (1 Corinthians 4:17)."<sup>33</sup>

The context for the transmission of tradition is the household of God or the family of God. Paul took this up from Jesus, who taught that the kingdom of God was Family (Matthew 12:46–50). Paul's letters are filled with family language. The household of God included men, women, slaves, masters, children, grandparents, who were all one in Christ. All of these met together in the same house, an intergenerational church "where the older, wiser sisters and brothers know their younger siblings well, and advise, guide and accompany them on their journeys, while the younger siblings work with, care for and join their older siblings on their journeys."<sup>34</sup> *The intergenerational household church was the primary context for Christian discipleship and life.* James Frazier states, "The best way to be formed in Christ is to sit among the elders, listen to their stories, break bread with them, and drink from the same cup, observing how these earlier generations of saints ran the race, fought the fight, and survived in grace."<sup>35</sup>

Paul's ministry also focuses on a concern for stability and order (1 Corinthians 14:33). He clearly intends that the communities he founded

31. The verb is *paradidōmi*, which in contexts of instruction means to pass to on traditional content.

32. *Paradosis*, the substantive of *paradidōmi*, is the content of the instruction.

33. "Ways in Christ Jesus" is *tas hodous mou tas en Christō Iēsou*, which may be translated as "patterns of life" and is equivalent to the rabbinic idea of *halakhah*. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 374.

34. Allen and Ross, 34.

35. James Frazier, *Across the Generations: Incorporating All Ages in Ministry*; quoted in Allen and Ross, 17.



be essentially conservative. He calls for stability, the preservation of tradition, wise leadership that is provided by settled elders who know how to maintain order in their own homes, and deference to be given to leadership (see also Hebrews 13:17).

This can appear to be overbearing. It is also the case, however, that Paul was keenly aware of the particularities of the people and the places where he ministered. He does not intend the gospel to upend every detail of local culture. He paid close attention to the “way things are done around here.” Paul did not have a “one size fits all” approach.

A wise pastor, according to Paul’s example, pays close attention to the place where the Lord has planted him and does not attempt to impose on his particular people and place a ministry model that he has snatched from its original soil where it may have produced much fruit. Instead, he stays long enough and pays close enough attention to his place so that he can apply the universal gospel to his specific context in ways that are appropriate for his people. Each local ministry must be tailor-made—by to mix metaphors—the shepherd that God has assigned to these sheep. I now turn to the application of the exposition of the biblical data.

#### THE CHRISTIAN PASTOR AS WISE MASTER BUILDER

##### *The Maturity of the Family*

##### *Keeping the Family Together*

Ten years ago I led our church to maximize its space—parking lot, Sunday school, sanctuary—by offering two services each Sunday morning. Most people, including the leadership, thought it was a good idea. Our first service was at 8:30, a traditional service with hymns accompanied by a piano and a song leader. The second service was a contemporary service with a praise team, drums, guitars, and contemporary music (sometimes I even took off my tie). Sunday school was in between. We sent slick promotional cards to every address in our zip code: “Two Services—One Purpose.” In the first week, our attendance jumped significantly. The early service was mostly older folks, while the later service was predominantly younger families. It was a great success.

Four years later I announced in the early service that we would be going back to one service. There was great applause. There were two reasons for reverting: First, I was worn out. I sang in the choir, preached, taught Sunday school, sang in the choir again, and preached again. My voice was giving out. Second, and more importantly, I saw that we had divided the church along generational lines, and the division had

damaged the morale of our older brothers and sisters. There were no young people worshiping with them and, though they knew that youth filled the second service, their eyes seldom saw young faces and families. Additionally, Sunday morning worship had been the only time our teens were with the adults; this was now gone, as the teens all came to the second service. They seldom saw any gray hair in God's house. We were a house divided, and it was a rookie mistake. We had become a silo church. As the pastor, I had failed to foster an atmosphere of family.

I will not wade into the debate about multi-site, multi-service, multi-whatever church. I will weigh in on this issue: Churches should be *multi-generational* (and multi-ethnic, if the local demographic allows), and *inter-generational*,<sup>36</sup> and the generations should be together as much as possible. I can also say this with certainty: It was a mistake to divide our church into services based on music styles because it inevitably divided our church along *generational lines*. If I had it to do over again, and dividing into two services was our only option, I would have identical services and do everything possible to get the generations in the same physical space together.

One of the primary reasons that churches split worship services by styles is that they want to give people what they like. What we did was a mistake because dividing the church by affinity groups *promotes individual taste over church unity*, the very thing Paul is exercised to excise in his churches. In Philippians 2, Paul encourages the Philippians to follow the example of Jesus, who humbled Himself, laying down His life for the church's benefit. When they humble themselves, Paul reasons, their humility will lead to church unity. Verse 4 is an important Pauline proverb. Paul does not often employ formal proverbs but, when he does, he hits the center of the mark. In these proverbial statements, Paul captures his essential theology of church life in just a few words. That this sentiment is scattered throughout his letters shows how central it was to Paul:

Let each of you look not only to his own interests,  
but also to the interests of others (Philippians 2:4).

36. Multi-generational means only that multiple generations attend the same church; intergenerational means the generations are together.

Let no one seek his own good,  
but the good of his neighbor (1 Corinthians 10:24).<sup>37</sup>

Let each of us please his neighbor  
for his good, to edify him (Romans 15:2).

The Corinthians were in danger of splitting based on taste (1 Corinthians 1:12), and Paul had no interest in appeasing them, because “love does not seek its own” (13:5). *Division based on personal preference that creates intergenerational separation short-circuits Wisdom transmission.* A wise master builder knows that keeping his people together in spite of their differences teaches them to deny themselves and take up their crosses and follow Jesus. A wise master builder fosters an atmosphere of family by creating space in which the “fathers” and the “sons” can interact with one another in significant ways. The place to begin, of course, is the main worship service, but Sunday school, home groups, service projects, retreats, and any other kind of gathering conceivable is available for getting the family together. These all allow for the transmission of the tradition and for transformation through imitation.<sup>38</sup>

### *Practicing What We Preach*

Proper administration of the congregation is an important part of cultivating a culture of Wisdom. Paul’s primary strategy to cultivate unity and cruciformity, however, in 1 Corinthians 1–2, is to preach the cross. Barely stopping for a breath, Paul says, “For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:17a) . . . but we preach Christ crucified (1:23a). . . . For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (2:2).” Christian pastors must continually preach the cross of Christ.

We must also, however, consider the words of Richard Baxter, the seventeenth-century English Puritan pastor and scholar, who, in his classic book on pastoral life and work, *The Reformed Pastor*, wrote, “Take heed to yourselves, lest your example contradict your doctrine . . . lest you unsay with your lives, what you say with your tongues; and be the greatest hinderers of the success of your own labors. . . . It will much more

37. This is “a maxim in the style of Wisdom literature,” says Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. J. W. Leitch, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 176. For the same idea, see 1 Corinthians 13:5: “Love . . . does not seek its own.”

38. For other ideas on intergenerational interaction, see Allen and Ross, 273–92.

hinder your work . . . if you build up and hour or two with your mouths, and, and all the week after pull down with your hands.”<sup>39</sup>

We must practice what we preach. If what we preach is Christ crucified, then our people must see us carrying our cross. A wise master builder models maturity by laying down his life for his sheep. Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). Surely Peter recalled these words when Jesus said to him on the shore of the sea, “Feed my lambs . . . tend my sheep . . . feed my sheep” (John 21:15–17).

### *Paying Attention to Our People*

Acts 20:18–20 will serve as a text to provide the transition from the previous section to this one: “You yourselves know how I lived among you all the time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews; how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house.”

Paul highlights two things in this passage: his humility before the Ephesians and his proximity to the Ephesians. *Paul knew his people*. In our culture there is an acute problem of “absentee fathers.” Pastors must not be “absentee pastors,” locking themselves away in a secret study. Pastors must pay attention to their people if they would know their people and transmit their “ways in Christ” to them. Being with our people can itself be an act of cruciformity.

If we would truly be *with* our people, we must learn truly to listen to them. Recall Solomon’s famous request from God (1 Kings 3:7–9). Solomon responds to God’s offer to ask for whatever he might desire: “I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. . . . Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern thy people.” The Hebrew for “*understanding mind*” is literally “a hearing heart.” The LXX translates it *kardian akouein*, “a heart to hear.” Second Chronicles reworks the phrase to the more familiar “wisdom” (1:7–10). Read synoptically, wisdom equals a “hearing heart.”

39. Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2001), 63. First published in 1656. “Reformed” describes Baxter’s ecclesiology, not his soteriology (he was not fully Calvinistic). It describes what the book aims to accomplish: that Protestant pastors would reform their lives and ministries and so conform to true gospel ministry. Baxter’s book is an exposition of Acts 20:28, “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which he obtained with the blood of his own Son.”

In the subsequent story of Rehoboam (1 Kings 12), the narrator comments that the reason for the split of the kingdom was that Rehoboam “answered the people harshly, and forsaking the counsel which the old men had given him, he spoke to them according to the counsel of the young men. . . . So the king did not hearken to the people. . . . And . . . all Israel saw that the king did not hearken to them.” Solomon asked for a “listening heart”; his son refused “to listen” to the people and the wise counselors but instead listened to the young fools, and the kingdom was split.<sup>40</sup>

Eugene Peterson, in *The Contemplative Pastor*, says he has no interest in being a “busy” pastor. Rather, he wants to be “a pastor who listens.” Peterson continues,

A lot of people approach me through the week to tell me what’s going on in their lives. I want to have the energy and time to really listen to them so that when they’re through, they know at least one other person has some inkling of what they’re feeling and thinking. Listening is in short supply in the world today;<sup>41</sup> people aren’t used to being listened to. I know how easy it is to avoid the tough, intense work of listening by being busy—as when I let a hospital patient know there are ten more people I have to see. (Have to? I’m not indispensable to any of them, and I am here with this one.) Too much of pastoral visitation is punching the clock, assuring people we’re on the job, being busy, earning our pay. The question I put to myself is not “How many people have you spoken to about Christ this week?” but “How many people have you listened to in Christ this week?”<sup>42</sup>

Pastors, and those who listen to their sermons, know that listening can be hard work. Listening often feels much like cross-bearing, but Wisdom listens. That is how the story begins: “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction, and do not forsake your mother’s teaching” (Proverbs 1:8). Listening is not only for the young and simple. Qoheleth

40. See also Walter Brueggemann on Solomon’s request for a “hearing heart” and its implications for wise leaders who must not rely on “technical knowledge” but rather a listening and discerning heart, well-attuned to the world as it actually is: “But the discernment to which human persons are enjoined is not simply technical knowledge. It is, rather, a sense of how things are put together and how things work in God’s inscrutable deployment of creation.” Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 465.

41. This was 1989. How much greater is the challenge to listen today.

42. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 30–31. Italics in original.

observes, “Better is a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king, who will no longer take advice” (Ecclesiastes 4:13). James adds, “Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak” (James 1:19).

### *The Stability of the Building*

This section will lay out a number of ideas that help to cultivate the sort of stability that is at the heart of Wisdom culture. These include an approach to change in the church, church leadership, and the importance of liturgy.

#### *Turning the Ship without Rocking the Boat*

Nobody likes to have the rug pulled out from under their feet. Nobody. As a father I have tried to follow a bit of sound parenting advice I picked up somewhere: When bedtime or bath time or departure time is approaching, and your children are doing something—playing a game, drawing a picture, watching a television program—you should give them as much time as possible to prepare for the change. It is not only unwise but rude, even for a parent, to charge into the room and announce, “Now is the time!” and suddenly end their activity. I have found that if I tell my kids, “In fifteen minutes . . .,” it avoids protest, reminds them that what they are doing matters to me, and gives them a chance to adjust. Nobody likes to have the rug pulled out from under them, and that includes church members.

*A wise pastor knows how to turn the ship without rocking the boat.* He understands that tradition matters to people. He realizes that it is wise to be thankful for, and humble before, the things we have received from the generations that have gone before us. He appreciates—especially in these days when so much is changing so quickly—that people need stability, and the church ought to be a place that offers it. *This is not a status quo bias at work.* I am not advocating for freezing forever all our ways as they are. They could have been other than they are. Our songs, our instruments, our orders, our buildings, and myriad other things could have been much different and are not optimal in every way.

What the Christian pastor must aim for is an approach to change, based on the biblical vision of Wisdom, that maintains as much stability as possible. One might call it a *stability bias*. Realizing that one’s boat is going the wrong direction is no excuse to capsize it by turning as quickly as possible. Even if the change of direction is desperately important, sinking the ship is not helpful.

Edmund Burke, the eighteenth-century Irish-born member of the British House of Commons, was an energetic and brilliant advocate for

what he called “equipoise.”<sup>43</sup> Yuval Levin says that Burke’s arguments were always “about finding a balance between stability and change—the quest that . . . was at the core of Burke’s ambitions . . . equipoise . . . is not stagnation, but rather a way of thinking about change and reform.”<sup>44</sup> Burke argued that change should happen through evolution rather than revolution.<sup>45</sup> To move from a nautical to a domestic metaphor, if one must live in the house, it is better to remodel one room at a time than to take a wrecking ball to the entire structure and begin all over again. Levin continues to describe Burke’s approach, which is “to ground the new in the old . . . and so to provide for continuity and stability so that *problems are addressed while the overall order is not unduly disturbed*.”<sup>46</sup> This approach is wise and requires patience. We must remember that we are farmers and builders, cultivating and constructing.

Far from changing the place, if we would be like Paul, we would accommodate ourselves to it. Some people read Paul as if his approach to dealing with people were something like a gunslinger who bursts through the swinging doors of the saloon and announces, “There’s a new sheriff in town, and things are going to change around here!” Nothing could be further from the truth. Paul was exceedingly patient with people and keenly aware of the particularities of people and their places. As Hudson Taylor said when he arrived in China, “In all things not sinful, Chinese.”<sup>47</sup> Paul said it this way,

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a slave to all, that I might win the more. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law—though not being myself under the law—that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ—that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the

43. See Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Chios Classics. No other bibliographical information is provided) kindle edition. “Equipoise” is the subject of the last paragraph of his work and is, in fact, the last word of the book.

44. Yuval Levin, *The Great Debate: Edmund Burke, Thomas Paine, and the Birth of Right and Left* (New York: Basic, 2014) kindle edition, loc. 250–59.

45. *Ibid.*, loc. 1428.

46. *Ibid.*, loc. 2749. Italics added.

47. Quoted by Ebbie Smith, “Culture: The Milieu of Missions,” in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 268.



weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some (1 Corinthians 9:19–22).

The key concept in this passage is “rights.” Paul has a number of rights that he could claim but does not so that nothing would hinder the gospel. Far from clinging to his rights, he is “a slave to all” and “under the law of Christ” in order to “win” more people. Richard Hays comments, “Paul’s slavery to Christ is expressed in the form of submitting himself in various ways to the cultural structures and limitations of the people he hopes to reach with the gospel.”<sup>48</sup> Hays goes on to say, “By using the expression ‘under Christ’s law’ he is asserting that the pattern of Christ’s self-sacrificial death on a cross has now become the normative pattern for his own existence.”<sup>49</sup>

Paul’s philosophy of accommodation is a form of cross-bearing for the good of the receptor culture. Yes, Paul calls on them to “imitate” him and conform to his “ways in Christ” (1 Corinthians 4:16–18), but he says this as one whose lifestyle is to know the people and to accommodate himself to their culture so that they might come to know Christ. Nobody likes to have the rug pulled out from under his or her feet. When a pastor arrives in a particular place and a particular time, he must get to know his context, patiently loving his people and laying down his life for them, and begin to make changes as the Spirit directs him, because stability and order are fundamental features of God and His creation.

### *The Stability of Counter-Order Liturgy*<sup>50</sup>

Brother John woke up in a bad way that morning. He was nauseated, the room was spinning, and he was having problems with his eye. After John collapsed on the couch, his wife called for help. When the first responders arrived, they were certain he was having a stroke. They loaded him into the ambulance and sped off to Tulsa. As John lay in the gurney, he began to sing the Ira Stamphill lyrics, “Many things about tomorrow, / I don’t seem to understand; / But I know who holds tomorrow, / And I know who holds my hand.” On the way to Saint John hospital, he sang “Amazing Grace,” “The Old Rugged Cross,” and “Somebody Loves Me,” among others. He told me, “I wasn’t afraid, because I knew who held my hand.” There was one reason John could

48. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 153.

49. *Ibid.*, 154.

50. I use the word *liturgy* here in its broad sense, not in terms of “high church” worship but in terms of intentional practices and patterns of worship.

sing these songs that brought him so much comfort in that moment: *He knew them*. He had sung them often enough and long enough for them to sink into his soul and stick. What does Wisdom look like on Sunday morning, the primary gathering time and place for God's people?

I borrow an image here from Ken Heer, Wesleyan pastor and denominational leader, who, in his book, *Ancient Fire*, quotes a French philosopher: "Take from the altars of the past the fire—not the ashes."<sup>51</sup> Heer connects this image to Leviticus 6:8–13, in which the Lord commands the priest who is attending the altar, that each morning he "take up the ashes . . . and carry forth the ashes outside the camp," but that also the "fire shall be kept burning upon the altar continually; it shall not go out." The main concept of Heer's book is:

We must retain the central essence of worship and leave behind the residue of worship elements that no longer connect people to God, though they may once have served a purpose. . . . Leaders of worship must exercise great care and insight to determine what is ash and what is fire. They must be careful not throw out the fire with the ashes. The critical responsibility of those who lead the church in worship is to keep the fire.<sup>52</sup>

There is no claim here that the Leviticus text addresses this issue, but the imagery is helpful, and the approach is wise. Continuing to say the Mass in Latin was a case of allowing the ash heap to pile high. Casting out the hymns that have sustained the church for decades—and in many cases, centuries—and singing only songs that are currently on the Christian radio top ten is a contemporary case of throwing out the fire. *The way of Wisdom seeks meaningfully and deeply to connect the worship of this generation to the generations of believers who have gone before*. As Heer warns, "There is a danger if the church moves into the future with no understanding of or connection with its past. Spiritual amnesia will cause a loss of direction and momentum into the future."<sup>53</sup>

Wisdom dictates that the corporate worship of God's people be a source of stability and peace, both in the culture of the church and in the lives of individual Christians. Let us say it in this way: The gospel is an

51. Ken Heer, *Ancient Fire: The Power of Christian Rituals in Contemporary Worship* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan, 2010), 5. He does not say which French Philosopher. I suspect he is referring to Jean Jaurès.

52 Ibid.

53. Ibid., 62.

invitation not only to be saved from our sin but also to come into a sanctuary, a refuge of truth and love and family.

Vern Bengston, professor of sociology at the University of Southern California, and his colleagues conducted a longitudinal study of 350 families between 1970 and 2008, regularly interviewing the family members through the years, seeking to understand transmission of faith through generations. They tell the story of a young woman whose teen years were characterized by chaos. They explain that she “took comfort in the predictable routine” of going to church with her grandfather: “It meant we were all going to be in the same place together. . . . And, you know, my grandfather had a carnation in his lapel. We sat in the same seats. It was really predictable. And most of what was going on in my family life just wasn’t really that predictable, except when I was with the whole family. It was predictable. And we liked that.”<sup>54</sup> A wise master builder instills stability in God’s family through the church’s liturgy because he knows that the ways our fathers worshiped contain deep wisdom and healing.

James K. A. Smith has shown how the liturgical traditions of the church also oppose the consumerism, materialism, militarism, and hedonism of twenty-first-century American culture as it is promoted through the liturgy of the secular culture.<sup>55</sup> Above I have presented liturgy as providing rest for the soul. Smith’s analysis offers another layer to our consideration of stability. James 1:5–8 presses for the sort of stability that is nothing less than the integrity of the whole person, the opposite of the “double-minded man, unstable in all his ways” (v. 8). “In all his ways” is a Jewish way of expressing that “the total conduct or way of life of the person in question is unstable or vacillating.”<sup>56</sup> *Christian liturgy can bring stability to the integrity of our identity*, a rich resource to settle such questions as “Who are we?” and “What are we becoming?” Smith’s thesis is that through full-bodied liturgy, our hearts are transformed. He maintains that “liturgies—whether ‘sacred’ or ‘secular’—shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most

54. Vern L. Bengston, Norella M. Putney, and Susan C. Harris, *Families and Faith: How Religion is Passed Down Across Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 105–06.

55. James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 25.

56. Davids, 75. This is “two-ways” language is common in Wisdom literature (Psalm 1; 1QS 3; Matthew 7:13ff; Proverbs 10:9). Recall Paul’s “my ways in Christ” from 1 Corinthians 4.

basic attunement to the world. In short, liturgies make us certain kinds of people, and what defines us is what we love."<sup>57</sup>

He describes the nature of the conflict and what is at stake in this battle between sacred and secular liturgies:

From the perspective of Christian faith, these secular liturgies will often constitute a mis-formation of our desires. . . . Secular liturgies capture our hearts by capturing our imaginations and drawing us into ritual practices that "teach" us to love something very different from the kingdom of God. By the same token, Christian worship needs to be intentionally liturgical, formative, and pedagogical in order to counter such mis-formations and misdirections. While the practices of Christian worship are best understood as the restoration of an original, creational desire for God, practically speaking, Christian worship functions as a counter-formation to the mis-formation of secular liturgies into which we are "thrown" from an early age.<sup>58</sup>

We do not want our worship to reinforce the consumeristic, individualistic, materialistic, anti-gospel values of the world; however, juvenilized worship often does this. In fact, the rationale for many current worship trends is that it must appeal to the larger culture. One must be careful at this point, because, remembering Taylor, "In all things not sinful, Chinese." The issue that requires deep, reflective discernment is whether or not our worship practices do, in fact, reinforce the sinful, harmful attitudes and ways of the surrounding culture.

It is not always obvious, but we must do the difficult, prayerful work of considering how a *lifetime of exposure* to our worship practices will form our people. Those practices that primarily aim at inducing a momentary feeling for "refueling" must attract the most careful scrutiny. Children clamor for a daily sugar high. Wise adults prefer daily spinach, though it may require us to acquire the taste for it. If a man never outgrows his hankering for sugar, he will find himself obese, with rotten teeth. Pastors, as parents, are responsible here. I share Smith's worry about when

key historical practices are left behind. While we might be inclined to think of this as a way to update worship and make it contemporary, my concern is that in the process we lose key aspects of formation and discipleship. In particular, we lose

57. Smith, 25.

58. Ibid., 88.

precisely those worship practices that function as counter-formations to the liturgies of the mall, the stadium, and the frat house.<sup>59</sup>

Smith would agree with culture watcher David Kinnaman, CEO of the Barna Group, who recently said, "After countless interviews and conversations, I am convinced that historic and traditional practices, and orthodox and wisdom-laden ways of believing, are what the next generation really needs."<sup>60</sup>

### *Christian Canticles as Counter-Culture*

"Canticles" here is from the Latin *canticulum*, "songs." Music inculcates. The longest book in the Bible is Psalms. Anthony Ceresko, an Old Testament scholar with unique expertise in Psalms and Wisdom, argues that the psalms serve the function of "world-building."<sup>61</sup> As Wisdom is concerned with transmitting culture ("the world") from one generation to the next, so "the cult with its sacred songs functioned to maintain, reshape, and celebrate that world."<sup>62</sup> Psalm 1, a Wisdom psalm, stands at the head of the psalter, indicating, in part, that in the singing and knowing of these songs, there is the stability and productivity of the tree planted by the waters.<sup>63</sup>

Recall John singing in the ambulance, experiencing God's peace through songs that he knew by heart. Our churches must sing songs until they sink into our souls so that we can sing them from our hearts. They become a treasury to draw on to express the overflow of our hearts, whether sorrow or joy.<sup>64</sup> When we sing only new songs so that they are cycled out before anyone knows them (i.e., cannot even yet sing along, much less know them by heart), we have robbed our people of a precious

59. *Ibid.*, 153.

60. David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 202.

61. Anthony R. Ceresko, "The Sage in the Psalms," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo Perdue (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 218. See also Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, Augsburg Old Testament Studies (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1984), 26.

62. *Ibid.*, 219.

63. Psalms 1, 19, and 119 are all Wisdom songs, Torah songs, and creation songs. The singing of the psalms is itself, in all of the variety of the songs, meditation on the Torah of Yahweh. The psalms are not simply reflections upon life in God's world but also mediations on life as *Yahweh's covenant people*.

64. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, articulates an understanding of Psalms in terms of orientation, disorientation, reorientation. The book of Psalms provides songs for every range of human emotion and experience, from desperate lament to overflowing joy.

resource for life. *Our corporate music is not mainly about the experience of the moment but about formation for a lifetime.*

### *Communion as Counter-Culture*

In Holy Communion, the many threads of Wisdom culture we have identified in this study come together. From the very beginning, we, the church, have gathered around the Lord's table together. We gather around the table as a family of brothers and sisters (1 Corinthians 1:10; 11:33). This appointment at the table has been passed down to us through our fathers from the Lord Himself (1 Corinthians 11:23) and kept for nearly two thousand years, a testimony to stability. Our gathering around one table celebrates our union with one another in Jesus,<sup>65</sup> a demonstration of the demolishing of barriers through His blood (Ephesians 2:14–22).<sup>66</sup> It is a miracle and a parable in which all God's people can take part. It speaks to all of us.

In our congregation we have two Down Syndrome family members—Brother Eddie, in his 60s, and Sister Ashley, in her 30s—who, having possibly understood little-to-nothing of my sermon, love to gather at the table with us. Eddie often calls me “Father Blair” (he has a Catholic background) as he passes by me. Amos Yong shares the testimony of Judy, a mentally challenged adult, on what the Eucharist means to her, “I want to eat Jesus bread. . . . I can't wait until I can eat Jesus bread and drink Jesus juice. People who love Jesus are the ones who eat Jesus bread. . . . Jesus' skin and meat turned into bread and Jesus' blood and guts turned into juice—that's Jesus' bread and Jesus' juice, and I want to eat it and drink with all the other Christians at church 'cause I love him so.”<sup>67</sup>

Jesus is as present and real to Judy as are “all the other Christians at church,” her brothers and sisters. Her “remembering” of Jesus is clearly more than a mere recollection of a story. Remembering is a core concern, not only of Wisdom (e.g., Proverbs 3:1; 4:5) but of the entire Bible. Jesus

65. First Corinthians 10:16–17, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation (*koinōnia*) in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation (*koinōnia*) in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” Hays comments, “The Eucharistic celebration creates not only *koinōnia* with Christ but also unity within the community” (Hays, 167).

66. The Corinthians were destroying the meaning of the meal when they created divisions in the receiving of the Lord's Supper (11:18), which Paul brings to a sharp point in vv. 20–21, “When you meet together, it is not the Lord's *supper* that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with *his own supper*.” When there are divisions, it is not the Lord's Supper.

67. Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 193.

says, "Remember Me" (Luke 22; 1 Corinthians 11). Allen Verhey says that, in the Bible, remembering is "related to the formation of identity and the determination of conduct." For Israel it was "both worship and tradition" that solidified their memory and formed their corporate identity. "Memory," he says, "provided community and continuity." *Without memory, identity is impossible* (remember Goldie Hawn as Joanna Stayton in "Overboard" or Matt Damon as Jason Bourne). In the Eucharist, "when believers gathered around this table, they remembered the past. . . . This remembering was constitutive of identity and community and determined conduct in the present."<sup>68</sup>

### CONCLUSION

D. H. Williams voices concerns that many in the evangelical world are both feeling and expressing:

Tradition functions as the memory of the church. . . . It is here where evangelicals and free church Christians are at greatest risk, because guarding the church's memory has little to do with the purposes that guide most contemporary worship services. Programmatic needs set the agenda for content and order more than a consciousness that the church's tradition as memory is essential for feeding the Lord's sheep. No doubt the trendy styles of worship and proclamation are attracting more people, but what are they being given once they come in the doors and stay? All the relational activity in the world cannot make up for an absence of a content grounded in the church's historical memory.<sup>69</sup>

When our people come into the sanctuary, they ought to experience the stability of identity that is grounded in the Lord Jesus and what He has handed down to us through His church. The practices I have discussed are not ashes; they are fire. We may have to fan them into flame. Wise master builders are like parents who insist that their children eat their vegetables. Our people are inundated with worldly liturgy every day. Wise pastors connect their people to the counter-cultural, wise worship ways of our heritage. As Mark Galli states, "The liturgy begins by

68. Allen Verhey, "Remember, Remembrance," in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 668–69.

69. D. H. Williams, *Evangelicals and Tradition: The Formative Influence of the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 36.



saying that our culture needs not so much to have its 'presenting needs' met as to be gently and calmly invited into a wiser culture."<sup>70</sup>

Finally, we must remember that we serve a Savior who still "walks . . . among the lampstands" (Revelation 2:1), and we are filled with the Spirit whom Jesus described thus, "the Wind blows where it wills" (John 3:8). Theologian and historian Jaroslav Pelikan said, "Tradition is the living faith of the dead, traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. And it is traditionalism that gives tradition such a bad name."<sup>71</sup> Daniel T. Jenkins, Welsh Congregationalist theologian, adds, "The Church on earth does not merely cherish the memory of a dead and departed Master. She can never, therefore, be merely traditionalist. Her Lord remains in active communion with her and constantly speaks new words to her, that in the ever-changing situations of life she may know that He is the Lord indeed, who rules over the present and future as well as the past."<sup>72</sup>

In all this may our Lord, who "gives to all men generously" the wisdom for which they ask, give us also the wisdom we need in these days to bring Him glory and build His Kingdom. Amen.

70. Mark Galli, "A Deeper Relevance: Why many evangelicals are attracted to that strange thing called liturgy," *Christianity Today*, May 2, 2008. Accessed June 18, 2019. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/may/36.38.html>.

71. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Vindication of Tradition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 65.

72. Daniel T. Jenkins, *Tradition, Freedom, and the Spirit* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1951), 11–12.

# Book Reviews

*Authorized: The Use and Misuse of the King James Bible.* By Mark Ward. Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham, 2018. 154 pp. \$12.99 paperback.

Here is a book I am enthusiastic about. Every pastor would do well to read it and consider carefully what Dr. Ward (Ph.D., Bob Jones University; now at Logos Bible Software) has to say. I wish every pastor would buy the book in quantity and use it for a study group in his church, perhaps on Wednesday nights. The issue under discussion is of essential importance, and it is one the laity are interested in—and often needlessly confused about. Ward writes engagingly and on a level everyone can understand.

In summary, Ward says that we need *both* to keep using the King James Version *and* for good reasons to make use of other versions that have been produced by evangelical, Bible-believing, Protestant Christians. His first chapter is “What We Lose as the Church Stops Using the KJV.” Five things he says about the King James Version are: (1) It promotes intergenerational ties in the body of Christ. (2) It allows Scripture memory by osmosis. (3) It serves as a cultural touchstone. (4) It reinforces the implicit trust Christians have in the Bible in their laps as well as (5) the implicit trust non-Christians have in Scripture. Ward loves the King James, and rightly so. But the rest of the book shows what we lose if we limit ourselves to the King James, and those are important things, too.

Chapter two is “The Man in the Hotel and the Emperor of English Bibles.” Ward explains just what has led to other translations. To put it simply, the English language has changed dramatically, and there is a lot of the King James usage that people do not understand—and often do not realize they do not understand!

Chapter three begins to develop this theme. It is entitled “Dead Words and False Friends.” These are two categories of usage where the King James is no longer understood by English-speaking people. Dead words are words that are no longer used in the language. People often just read past them and could not tell you what they mean if they were asked. These are words like *trow*, *bray*, *unicorn*, *champaign*, *pate*, *leasing*, *bruit*,

*collop, durst, and emerod*. Only people who have grown up on the King James—and not all of them—understand such words.

The “False Friends” are even more important. These are words or phrases that meant one thing when the King James was published and mean something very different now, four hundred years later. Often the difference is a subtle one, so that today’s readers *think* they understand when they really do not. Ward is at his best in giving helpful illustrations. Take 1 Kings 18:21, for example, “How long *halt* ye between two opinions?” Probably even the most experienced Bible readers think that means something like stopping between two different opinions, unable to make up one’s mind. It does not mean that. In 1611 *halt* meant to be lame or limp. The English Standard Version translates the same passage with: “How long will you go limping between two different opinions?” Ward selects six similar passages as illustrations, and he convinced me: there is a meaningful amount of King James usage when we do not even know that we do not know what it means. I was already aware of this issue to some degree: I have really heard a preacher use a passage in the Bible that includes the word *reins* and then use the reins that guide a horse to explain what is meant! The chapter concludes with twenty-five more illustrations.

Chapter four—“What Is the Reading Level of the KJV?”—does not contribute directly to Ward’s main purpose, but it is interesting and exposes the folly of many misleading claims that the reading level of other versions is more difficult than the King James. The opposite is true.

Chapter five, entitled “The Value of the Vernacular,” explains the most basic truth that lies behind all this: namely that the Lord intended, when He gave His Word through human instruments, that people should have His Word in their everyday language so that its meaning is immediately clear to them. Simply put, the King James was that in 1611, but in our day it is not. Even the King James translators, in their long *Preface*, said that this was what the Bible ought to be.

In chapter six Ward deals with “Ten Objections to Reading Vernacular Bible Translations.” He provides helpful answers to arguments against using recent translations. One of these, objection 9, is that these versions are based on inferior Greek and/or Hebrew texts. Ward disposes of this objection in just a little over three pages. I have mixed feelings about his approach to the issues that arise from differences in manuscripts. On the one hand, it seems too simplistic; on the other, it may really be all that is needed for most sensible discussions by pastors and laity—non-specialists, in other words. Ward is right in indicating that most of the manuscript differences are inconsequential, that no matters of basic Christian

doctrine or practice are involved, and that all the versions (regardless what decisions they make about manuscript differences) made by evangelical Protestants are equally the Word of God.

In chapter seven Ward answers the question, "Which Bible Translation is Best?" His answer, in a way, is "all of them." Any of them can be helpful. Even so, Ward explains different approaches to translation, and this will help us use different versions wisely.

Get this book. You will find it helpful and be glad you did.

Robert E. Picirilli  
Welch College  
Gallatin, Tennessee

*The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions.* By Mark J. Boda. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. 240 pp. \$24.00 paperback.

Mark J. Boda is an Old Testament professor at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario. He is a well-respected scholar holding a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge and has authored numerous books on the Old Testament. More than that, he is a devout Christian whose main concern is faithful exposition of God's Word.

In his recent book, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology*, Boda surveys three major themes in the Old Testament that are the driving force of redemptive theology. Boda illustrates these three themes as pulses of Old Testament theology. First there is the Narrative Rhythm (God's historical action), second is the Character Rhythm (God's active character), and finally there is the Relational Rhythm (God's relational activity). In these three core chapters, Boda provides great detail on how Scripture highlights God as the Redeemer of rebellious people in these different ways.

Boda explains in a later chapter that while these three rhythms of Old Testament theology all have their primary focus on the redemption of Israel, they all ultimately make a connection to the redemption of the rest of culture and creation. He goes on to show how these three themes persist in the New Testament, and how they are "dominated by the goal of creating a redeemed community."

After examining *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology* in the three theological rhythms of the Old Testament and describing how these rhythms are realized in the New Testament, Boda then considers the impact of the truth of Scripture on church, culture, and creation in

today's context. Boda stresses, "It is this God of the Scriptures who continues to interact with humanity and all creation who is our only hope and so our only object of trust and worship."

In his final chapter, Boda issues a call for response. Considering the theological truths about a God who redeems undeserving people, Boda draws the readers' attention back to themselves and encourages them constantly to ask the question, "Do I have a personal knowledge of God?" He ends his book with a prayer that everyone will long for true intimacy with God.

There are many aspects of *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology* that are worth noting, such as the attention to detail in the Hebrew Bible, the thorough research in both primary and secondary sources, and a clear theme that is present throughout the entire book. However, the best way to characterize Boda's book is to say it is well-balanced. There are some parts of the book that are very technical, but Boda never fails to explain the practical significance of the issues he discusses. Still, he theologically grounds his points of application in Scripture. In fewer than two hundred pages, Boda produces a thorough theology of the Old Testament with a clear pastoral application without sacrificing depth in either area.

*The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology* is a book for pastors, professors, students, and even lay-Christians who are interested in learning more about the God of the Bible. It challenges one to think theologically about Yahweh, and to apply these theological truths to one's everyday life. This book invites readers to engage with the Lord with their total personalities. It speaks to the mind with deep theological concepts about God in the Old Testament. It speaks to the will with points of application. And finally, it speaks to one's emotions as it beautifully describes God's redeeming work for an undeserving people.

Zachary A. Vickery  
University of Glasgow  
Glasgow, Scotland

*Luke in the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible.* By David Lyle Jeffery. Edited by R. R. Reno et. al. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2012. 336 pp. \$35.00 hardcover.

David Lyle Jeffrey was born in Ottawa, Canada, in 1941. He received his B.A. at Wheaton in 1965 and his Ph.D. from Princeton in 1968. Since 2000, he has served as Distinguished Professor of Literature and Humanities at

Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He is also Professor Emeritus of English Literature at the University of Ottawa. Since 1966, he has served as a guest professor at Peking University in China. Since 2005, he has also served as Honorary Professor at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing. He has taught as a visiting professor at a number of major universities around the world.

Jeffrey is internationally known as a medievalist and as an expert in the biblical tradition as reflected in Western Art and Literature. He is the author of numerous books and articles published in leading scholarly journals. He is best known for books such as *English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* and *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*.

This is the latest volume in the Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible, a multi-volume set of commentaries written by internationally recognized scholars. This set provides a theological interpretation of the biblical books in light of the historic beliefs and traditions of the Christian faith. Rather than considering tradition to be the enemy of good biblical interpretation (as many interpreters do), these volumes make extensive use of early commentaries and Christian art to help explain the meaning of the biblical books.

Jeffrey is not a traditional New Testament scholar, and this volume is his first comprehensive commentary. Although his background in Greek and other ancient languages is strong, he is not primarily a student of the various schools of New Testament interpretation. He is an expert in early Christian art and literature. He brings to the study of Luke a wealth of information on how this Gospel was used and understood by the church during the early and medieval periods of its history.

This volume devotes little attention to discussions about date, authorship, and sources which have dominated much of the study of Luke in recent years. Instead, Jeffrey gives serious attention to statements about the Gospel of Luke found in the writings of early Christians such as Ambrose, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and others. He briefly considers the dating of the book and concludes that it was likely written in the early 60s. He notes that "about half the content of Luke is not found in the other gospels." He explains that Luke emphasizes certain themes such as prayer and the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit.

One unique feature of this commentary is its use of Jewish and early Christian sources to help explain the meaning of different passages. The author provides an extensive discussion of the angel Gabriel, who "appears four times in the canonical scriptures, each time with a messianic message." Jeffrey explains how Gabriel is described both in the Jewish interbiblical literature and in early Christian writings. One of the

strengths of this commentary is that it places Luke in the larger context of ancient literature, both Jewish and Christian.

This volume demonstrates an understanding of how terms were used in the first century. For example, in his discussion of the birth of Jesus, Jeffrey notes that the Greek word *ktalyrna* was not ordinarily used to describe a public inn. It was, rather, a guest room in a private home. The “stable” was probably not a separate building but a room attached to the home where the animals belonging to the family were kept at night.

Luke 21:7–26 is Luke’s version of the Synoptic Apocalypse; it is one of the most difficult and controversial passages in the gospel. In 21:7 the disciples ask Jesus two important questions, “When shall these things be?” and “what sign will there be when these things shall come to pass?” (KJV). As Jeffrey notes, Jesus ignores the first question but gives a detailed answer to the second. A part of Jesus’s answer is found in Luke 21:20, which says, “And when ye see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the destruction thereof is nigh.” Jeffrey explains that the church has generally interpreted these words as referring to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by the Romans. The “times of the Gentiles” mentioned in v. 24 was generally understood to refer to the time beginning with the destruction of the city.

In v. 25 the scene suddenly shifts. Jesus says, “There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars.” Christian writers such as Ambrose, Augustine, Bede, Cyril of Alexandria, and Calvin have traditionally understood these words as referring to the Second Coming of Christ.

Another passage in Luke that has provoked considerable discussion through the centuries is the statement that Jesus made while on the cross, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” Jesus’s statement has raised two questions that have been much debated in the church. The first is, “Is paradise the same as heaven?” The second is, “Are the saints who have departed now in paradise?” The author provides a useful summary of how these questions have been answered in both ancient and modern times.

This commentary is theological in the sense that it focuses the reader’s attention on the theological and spiritual message that Luke communicates to his readers. Jeffrey does not allow detailed discussions of form and redaction criticism to distract him from that overall goal. He is well aware of the current debates surrounding the study of Luke, but he rarely engages in them. His focus is on the Gospel as a finished product and how it presents the message of Christ.



There are several unique features of this commentary. One of these is the author's many references to art, music, and literature. In his discussion of the Parable of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15, Jeffrey gives several examples of how this parable has been depicted in art, music, and literature. He also points out how this parable was used in sermons preached in the early church.

This commentary is comprehensive and insightful. It challenges the reader to interact with Luke's Gospel and to reflect on how it must have impacted the early believers who listened attentively as it was read to them. This volume will not replace the exegetical commentaries written by Bock, Marshall, Nolland, Stein, Green, and others. However, it makes a unique and valuable contribution to Lucan studies. It deserves a place on the shelf of the minister or Bible teacher.

Thomas L. Marberry  
Randall University  
Moore, Oklahoma

*The Promise of Arminian Theology: Essays in Honor of F. Leroy Forlines.* Edited by Matthew Steven Bracey and W. Jackson Watts. Nashville: Randall House Academic, 2016. 328 pp. \$25.99 paperback.

Growing up in the Free Will Baptist denomination, there were a few names I heard spoken often and with much respect. These were the names of our theologians, those who sought to explain and defend the tenets of our Reformed Arminian doctrines. One of these names was Mr. F. Leroy Forlines. In *The Promise of Arminian Theology: Essays in Honor of F. Leroy Forlines* (hereafter *The Promise*), published by Randall House Academic, the fifteen authors, well-acquainted with and influenced by Mr. Forlines's personal and professional work, seek to "celebrate his life, work, and legacy" (2).

Forlines, who recently celebrated his ninety-second birthday, has had a writing and teaching career that spans more than six decades. He has written on many topics, several of which are discussed in this volume. His *Systematics*, and his later, more-developed systematic theology, *A Quest for Truth*, are perhaps his most notable works. Yet he has also written at length on ethics and human personality in various books, pamphlets, and unpublished writings. *The Promise* was written as a *Festschrift*, or celebratory writing, to commemorate his lifetime of study.

In order to cover the variety of topics about which Forlines has written, *The Promise* is divided into four parts. These sections are bookended

by an introduction and conclusion written by the editors of the work. Part one, on prolegomena, looks at theological method and several significant assumptions in Forlines's writing. Part two focuses on Forlines's work in articulating a Reformed Arminian perspective on soteriology. Part three widens its scope to look at ethics, culture, and the church. The book closes with part four, comprising three personal tributes that describe Forlines as a father, colleague, and mentor.

Forlines is exceptionally gifted at pairing deep theological truths with practical application. *The Promise* honors this ability by including a section at the end of each chapter discussing implications of the doctrines previously considered. This was one of my favorite parts of the book and one of the aspects I would encourage readers to ponder as they work their way through the chapters. The beauty of Forlines's work is that he has continuously sought ways to apply his theology to his cultural context. In this way, his work is still relevant, beneficial, and needed in today's cultural landscape.

Two of the chapters were especially poignant, standing out as favorites in the book. The first was Kevin Hester's "Election and the Influence and Response Model of Personality," which presents a detailed summary of Forlines's understanding of the Reformed Arminian doctrine of election (55–80). This is a very difficult topic and may be neglected at times owing to its complexity. Hester meticulously examines Forlines's view and defends Forlines's methodology. Hester also highlights other Reformed Arminian sources on the topic and calls for more study to be done in this particular area. I found the chapter informative and encouraging. We do not have to shy away from more difficult passages of Scripture or doctrines of the faith, as Forlines and Hester show. Instead, we can interpret passages and doctrines with integrity, armed with sound biblical exegesis and a commitment to understanding the entirety of Scripture.

The second chapter I found most interesting was Matthew McAfee's "Forlinsean Eschatology: A Progressive Covenantal Approach" (141–72). This chapter covered another topic that many avoid because of the various interpretations present in evangelical circles. McAfee does a remarkable job of presenting Forlines's view, while admitting his own differing conclusion on some aspects of eschatology. This chapter discusses the extent of eschatology as a study of much more than a timeline of Christ's return. It encouraged me to remember God's promises rather than worry about the events of the future, as I am often wont to do when considering end-times events. It also showed that even those who may disagree

with Forlines on certain points should still have much respect for him and his biblical approach.

While *The Promise* is a great resource for those trying to understand more about the Arminian tradition, it is not light reading. The truths discussed in these pages are deep matters that cannot be skimmed over if the reader wants to understand them fully. This is not a book to speed-read, but one to work through slowly and deliberately. It is worth the time it takes to do so.

That is not to say that the book is difficult to comprehend. It speaks of the complex issues as succinctly as possible without oversimplifying them. This is also true to the writing style of the honoree himself, who makes theology understandable to the common man while respecting the complexity and seriousness of the doctrines. There is a delicate balance between giving simple, timeless truths while also honoring a rich scholastic history in the church, something both Forlines and the book's contributors achieve quite well. The writers also provide extensive bibliographic information with helpful resources for further study on their topics, which could not otherwise be fully expounded in the book.

As someone who has struggled to understand how Free Will Baptists came to have the doctrinal views they do, I found *The Promise* an exceptionally encouraging, insightful read. It gave me a love for the work of Leroy Forlines and an appreciation for his lifetime of study of various important subjects. *The Promise* challenges its readers not simply to think deeply on theological matters but to be transformed by their conclusions as well.

Emily Vickery  
Welch College  
Gallatin, Tennessee

*No Quick Fix: Where Higher Life Theology Came From, What It is, and Why It's Harmful.* By Andrew David Naselli. Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham, 2017. 160 pp. \$19.99 paperback.

Andrew Naselli's personal experience with higher life theology alongside his personal desire to learn and study this movement enabled him to write this excellent book. *No Quick Fix* is a concise version of a more detailed academic work written under the title *Let Go and Let God? A Survey and Analysis of Keswick Theology*. *No Quick Fix* is condensed and simplified from the original work for the purpose of communicating with

the laity. It is a book that will help local church pastors, deacons, Sunday school teachers, and others directly involved in the church's teaching ministry to recognize the problems of Higher Life theology and how subtly dangerous this thinking can be.

According to the author, the purpose of the book is to equip the body of Christ and to warn the church about this misunderstanding of sanctification. In the introduction, Naselli writes, "I'll consider this book a success if it helps you understand Higher Life theology better so that you follow a more biblical way in your Christian walk" (4).

*No Quick Fix* has a total of 111 pages. Because of the brevity of the book, the reader should expect, not a complex, detailed approach to Higher Life theology but instead a simple discussion of this movement. The author divides the book into two main parts. Part one analyzes the origin of Higher Life theology and outlines what the movement actually is. The second part discusses why Higher Life theology becomes dangerous for any believer who desires to follow biblical teaching. Throughout the book, the author uses a series of figures or diagrams that give more detailed and graphic information, helping the reader to understand more clearly what Naselli is trying to communicate.

The brevity of the book could create a stronger desire in the reader to find out more details on how to avoid this problematic teaching and at the same time how to understand what holiness means for the Christian. One unique feature of the book is the list of recommended resources for the Christian life that can be found in the appendix. This list of additional books provides resources to aid the reader in his or her understanding of Christian living. The author, though he criticizes Higher Life theology, desires that readers discover the biblical doctrine of holiness, challenging them to find a more excellent way to glorify Christ through an intimate and sincere walk with Him.

The author traces the origin of Higher Life theology back to Wesleyan perfectionism, including such well-known theologians as John Wesley, John Fletcher, and Adam Clarke. He outlines a series of stages until he arrives at what we know today as Higher Life Theology or Keswick Theology (referring to the Keswick Convention initiated back in 1875 in England). The Keswick Convention shifted from Higher Life theology to a more Reformed view of progressive sanctification after 1920. The author identifies some modern day authors and institutions that teach Higher Life theology. People such as Lewis Sperry Chafer and institutions such as Dallas Theological Seminary are pinpointed as bastions of Higher Life theology.

It is the task of the writer to explain why a spiritual quick fix will not work for us long-term. But what does he mean by a *quick fix*? A *quick fix*, from the author's perspective, is the idea that through a mystical encounter with God or a special manifestation of the Holy Spirit, the believer is able to experience a blessing that will enable him to live a victorious Christian life over sin and temptation. Though Naselli recognizes some elements in Higher Life theology as positive, he goes on to prove how harmful this teaching can be, outweighing the positives of Higher Life theology.

Of particular interest to me personally were Naselli's ten reasons why Higher Life theology is harmful. As a shepherd of God's flock, there is always a deep sense of responsibility when transmitting God's truth to His people and overseeing them in their spiritual walk with the Lord. It is here that the author goes into detail, explaining why Higher Life theology is so harmful. He gives more time to the first reason, using an entire chapter just for it, and then more briefly reviews the other nine reasons. Here the reader will see the value of the Reformed view of progressive sanctification (which is also the historic Free Will Baptist and Reformed Arminian view).

According to Naselli, Scripture teaches that sanctification is a process that continues as we grow in our personal relationship with the Lord (2 Peter 3:18). Higher Life theology denies the New Testament teaching that all believers are justified and are being progressively sanctified. There is a great danger when we try to separate these aspects of salvation. Such a separation creates a realm of possibilities through an experiential or "feelings-oriented" encounter with God, after justification, instead of completely trusting the finished work of Christ on the cross on our behalf. Naselli comments, "Progressive sanctification is distinct from justification yet *inseparable* from justification. Faith alone justifies, but the faith that justifies is never alone. God's grace through the power of His Spirit ensures that the same faith that justifies a Christian also sanctifies a Christian" (51). As believers, we are called to mature in our walk with God, and that means we will continually and gradually grow, expand, and experience a life of holiness that will glorify our Lord.

*No Quick Fix* is an excellent book. It explains Higher Life theology at a basic level from a biblical perspective. In this book confused believers can obtain an answer that provides freedom from the frustration of not obtaining what Higher Life theology promises. The book outlines a biblical and historically consistent view on conquering sin and living a Christ-like life. In short, *No Quick Fix* offers a healthy perspective in seeking the holiness that the Bible teaches. I consider it a helpful tool for those

responsible for teaching, discipling, and guiding believers. The work can also help laypeople gain a more accurate understanding of sanctification and the Christian life. This book will aid readers in avoiding confusion and frustration from a misunderstanding of a higher level of spiritual life that in reality does not exist. It could be very beneficial for small groups, fostering discussion and further study of this subject.

José L. Rodríguez  
Welch College  
Gallatin, Tennessee

*Reasons We Believe: 50 Lines of Evidence that Confirm the Christian Faith.* By Nathan Busenitz. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008. 224 pp., \$18.99 paperback.

The perennial proof text for those practicing apologetics comes from 1 Peter 3:15, where Peter admonishes his readers to “honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (ESV). The command is clear: to defend the Christian faith to anyone who may inquire. Yet the issue of *how* to defend the faith has elicited significant dialogue throughout church history.

Questions concerning a biblical understanding of sin’s noetic (intellectual, mental) effects, epistemology (how we know), and anthropology (the doctrine of the human person) have rightfully been addressed, garnering various perspectives from apologists. Some have argued for a strict presuppositional approach (e.g., Cornelius Van Til, John Frame, Scott Oliphint), while others have advocated for a more evidential or natural theology approach (e.g., Gary Habermas, Josh McDowell, William Lane Craig). Others still lean moderately presuppositional but are found in between on the spectrum of methods (e.g., Francis Schaeffer, E. J. Carnell, Ronald Nash, Leroy Forlines), or have taken a different approach all together (e.g., G. K. Chesterton, C. S. Lewis).

Nathan Busenitz, dean of faculty and assistant professor of theology at the Master’s Seminary, offers a helpful guide to defending the Christian faith. Busenitz has experience as a pastor and is currently working as an academic. In his book *Reasons We Believe*, he seeks to offer his own contribution to the work of defending Christian belief. In his own words, this book “will survey the case for the reliability of the two-fold authority on which Christianity rests—namely the Bible and the person of Jesus

Christ" (23). The volume unabashedly fixes its foundation within and upon the Christian Scriptures.

The book itself is divided into six separate sections. Beginning with the second section, each section has ten chapters. Excluding prefatory material, section introductions, and the like, the book has fifty chapters, each evaluating a different proof. Section one begins with foundational remarks concerning methodology, epistemology, and an articulation of the gospel, though Busenitz avoids overly technical language. Section two begins with the doctrine of God and gives ten arguments for His existence and character. Sections three and four both deal with Scripture: section three with the Bible's overall veracity and section four with the reliability of the New Testament. Sections five and six deal with the person of Jesus Christ: section five with His divinity and section six with His resurrection. Formatted differently from previous sections, section six is organized as an annotated outline. The reason for the change in the final section is "in the interest of space" (193).

While it could be argued that these sections are predicated on one another (e.g., the doctrine of God before the doctrine of Scripture, the doctrine of Scripture before the viability of the resurrection) the author notes that the organization allows for readers to skip "around from place to place depending on their own questions or interests" (17). Busenitz's chapters are concise enough that the average reader will find this book especially helpful as a resource in foundational arguments, or at the very least an introduction to basic apologetic arguments.

Busenitz makes his premise clear, noting "it is only right that an examination and defense of biblical Christianity begin with the Bible" (23). Further, his "conviction is that any defense of biblical Christianity must begin with the Bible. . ." (17). This conviction runs the gamut of the book. He notes that one of the goals of the book is first to establish reason from Scripture, and it is only from this beginning premise that one should move to external evidence. He further notes that, unlike Scripture, external evidence does not establish the viability of the Christian faith, but rather corroborates the Bible's claims.

Therefore, while the term is not used in the book, his methodological approach is distinctly presuppositional. Busenitz reiterates throughout the book the need to begin with Scripture, since it is a defense of *biblical* Christianity that he is articulating (23). Yet, Busenitz does not offer a Van Tilian type of presuppositionalism that may cast off any and all external evidences as irrelevant. He seeks first to establish a belief in Scripture and only then moves to corroborating arguments.



Further, Busenitz makes references to other foundational issues with regard to apologetics without elaborating extensively or using technical terminology. For example, reason two under section three states that we believe the Bible is true “because it explains life in a way that corresponds to reality” (79). One may note that undergirding this very premise is a correspondence view of truth, though Busenitz does not investigate the more technical side of this argument. Yet he does mention that for “the Christian, . . . presuppositions and priorities come from the Bible and involve” theology, metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and anthropology (79).

The sheer number of the arguments levied in this volume may be a positive or negative, depending on the preference of the reader. For those more familiar with various apologetical arguments, one may desire more robust chapters offering more thorough accounts of each positive claim. These chapters are very concise and cover various apologetic arguments briefly. Conversely, those new to apologetics may appreciate the wide span of arguments offered in defense for the faith.

Overall, Busenitz should be commended for his work in *Reasons We Believe*. He has offered a unique resource for those in ministry that reinforces a belief in Scripture while practicing apologetics. Busenitz shows that one does not, and should not, jettison a biblical foundation when seeking to defend the faith and convince those who are skeptical about Christianity.

Christopher Talbot  
Welch College  
Gallatin, TN

*Thomas Aquinas*. By K. Scott Oliphint. Great Thinkers Series. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2017. xiv + 147 pp. \$14.99 paperback.

*Thomas Aquinas* is one of the first three volumes in P&R Publishing’s new *Great Thinkers* series. This series, which in addition to this volume will feature early volumes on Marx and Derrida, promises to be as interesting and engaging as the same publisher’s *Modern Thinkers* series, from which this reviewer greatly benefitted in graduate school many years ago.

K. Scott Oliphint is the foremost representative in his generation of the apologetic methodology of Cornelius Van Til. What many Van Tilians call presuppositional apologetics Oliphint terms covenantal apologetics. This is the apologetic and epistemic approach the author brings to his

introduction to Thomas Aquinas. Thus, there is an undercurrent of critique of what some have called "Reformed Thomism." Despite the fact that Oliphint approaches his subject from a consistently Van Tilian perspective, his treatment of Thomas will resonate with presuppositionalists and "Reformed epistemologists" of all varieties. However, those who lean toward evidentialist and natural-theology approaches to epistemology and apologetics will also benefit greatly from interaction with Oliphint's scholarship. Not since the course I had on Thomas Aquinas with Professor George Linbeck at Yale twenty-five years ago have I had such an enjoyable interaction with Thomas's thought.

Oliphint approaches his subject from the vantage point of traditional Reformed theology, focusing mainly on the relationship of his thought to Reformed theology's two *principia*, the *principium essendi* (existence—God himself) and the *principium cognoscendi* (knowledge—divine revelation). In this vein, he states one of his most important theses at the outset: "Whatever 'Reformed Thomism' might be, or might mean, in our current context, it cannot be a synthesis of biblically foreign Thomistic teachings and a consistent biblical theology" (3). Oliphint believes that Thomas's reliance on Aristotle and his Arabic interpreter Avicenna predisposed him to a philosophical framework that is at odds with biblical epistemic categories.

Oliphint's discussion of the "Foundation of Knowledge" (*principium cognoscendi*) will absorb most of this review, since it gets to the heart of the major differences in evangelical interpretations of Thomas. Oliphint emphasizes what Thomas calls the *duplex veritatis modus*, or two modes of truth about God. He quotes Thomas as saying that some truths about God "wholly surpass the capability of human reason," things like the doctrine of the Trinity. Yet there are other divine truths "to which even natural reason can attain," such as that God exists and that there is only one God. These two things, Thomas says, "the philosophers proved demonstratively of God, being guided by the light of natural reason" (12).

Thomas repeats the above line of reasoning from the *Summa contra Gentiles* (SCG) in his *Summa Theologiae* (ST), in response to the question "Whether God Can Be Known in This Life by Natural Reason." Thomas's answer is "Yes." Oliphint explains that, in Thomas's thought, "natural reason forms the foundational structure of which revelation is the superstructure" (13). He goes on to cite ST that "natural knowledge begins from sense," that is, empirical, *a posteriori* data, and can "go as far as it can be led by sensible things." Yet natural reason gets us only so far. The

essence of God cannot be established by a reliance on *a posteriori* data but must rely on *a priori* knowledge provided via special revelation.

This approach to natural reason, Oliphint explains at length, affects the way Thomas reads biblical passages such as Romans 1 (42–50) and John 1 (35–41). Unlike typical Reformed exegesis, which sees the universal knowledge of God in Romans 1 as being *a priori* knowledge written by the divine hand on the human constitution, Thomas sees it as a neutral natural reason available to everyone without special revelation. This is similar to how he sees the statement in John 1:9: The “true light which gives light to everyone” is, to quote Thomas’s commentary on the Gospel of John, “the light of natural reason.” For all people “are enlightened by the light of natural knowledge” (14, cf. 35–42).

However, in his commentary on the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard, Thomas seems to contradict himself by affirming a third category. In addition to natural reason and revelation, the two components of the *duplex veritatis modus*, Thomas says there is an “obscure and indirect” knowledge of God that everyone has that is “ambiguous and confused.” Yet this should not be taken to mean that Thomas thinks God’s existence is self-evident, which the Reformed would later argue. Thomas refutes this in the section of the ST entitled “Whether the Existence of God is Self-Evident?” This is where Thomas rebuts Anselm’s ontological argument for God’s existence.

Oliphint emphasizes Thomas’s concept of *Praeambula Fidei*, the preambles of the faith. This comes from the ST, in which Thomas argues that God’s existence “and other like truths about God” can be “known by natural reason” and thus are “not articles of faith, but are preambles to the articles.” Oliphint’s discussion of the views of traditional Thomists such as the Notre Dame philosopher Ralph McInerny, who differ strongly from the revisionist views of twentieth-century Roman Catholic scholars such as Etienne Gilson and Henri de Lubac, is particularly insightful and clarifying, given that Evangelical Thomists tend to agree with revisionist views rather than the long-standing traditional Thomistic understanding of Thomas.

It is an irony that Oliphint’s reading of Thomas, as a Van Tilian presuppositionalist, agrees with more traditionalist, Neo-scholastic Thomists such as Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange and more recent thinkers such as McInerny and Edward T. Oakes, as well as younger conservative Roman Catholic scholars such as Lawrence Feingold, Steven Long, and Bernard Mulcahy. This is ironic because these scholars’ actual epistemic and apologetic approaches differ so strongly from Oliphint’s. It is interesting that more-presuppositionalist or Reformed thinkers tend to concur

with the Thomist tradition on what Thomas Aquinas actually thought. The evangelical evidentialist reading of Thomas tends to agree more with post-World War II revisionist interpretations of Thomas by Roman Catholic thinkers such as Gilson, de Lubac, and Marie-Dominique Chenu.

For 700 years traditional Thomism has argued that the preambles of the faith are “purely philosophical” and are “necessary in order properly to assess the knowledge of God” (25–26). McInerny and other classical Thomists believe the revisionist views muddy the waters and obscure the distinction between nature and grace, and thus between philosophy and theology. These traditional Thomists argue that, for Thomas, it is a bedrock truth that nature corresponds to natural reason, or philosophy, and grace corresponds to sacred doctrine. Thus there are two kinds of theology, one included in sacred doctrine and one included in philosophy, which belong to two separate realms. This leads classic Thomists such as McInerny to insist that, for Thomas, philosophy is “autonomous” (McInerny’s word) from sacred doctrine.

Oliphint’s critique of Thomas’s epistemology from the vantage point of Reformed theology is incisive. He explains that Reformed theology differs from Thomas’s thought when it comes to faith and reason. Thomas believes that natural reason or natural knowledge is a neutral epistemic category—a natural light from God under which all reasonable people operate regarding the knowledge of God. The Reformed have typically taught that there is no neutrality between belief and unbelief. Thus they reinforce the Augustinian thrust of *fides quaerens intellectum* (faith seeking understanding) and the Anselmian motto *credo ut intelligam* (I believe in order that I may understand) in a more apriorist approach to religious knowledge that diverges from Thomas’s aposteriorist approach.

It is important to note that Oliphint does not suggest that all divine knowledge, for Thomas, is the province of natural reason. Yes, Thomas believes it is possible for “the philosophers” such as Aristotle and the medieval Islamic philosophers to “to prove the existence of God” (quoting SCG, 32) in a way that all reasonable people can acknowledge because of the light of natural reason. Yet this does not entail that he thinks all religious knowledge falls within the realm of natural reason or philosophy. Only the preambles of the faith such as the existence, oneness, and certain other attributes of God fall into the category of philosophy. Other, higher doctrines, such as the Trinity, atonement, justification, and other doctrines, fall into the category of *sacra doctrina* and thus cannot be proven by philosophers via the light of natural reason.

Oliphint's most important contribution to Aquinas studies is his comparison of Thomas's thought to the epistemic categories of Reformed theology, which Oliphint says emphasizes and requires "an antithesis between the knowledge of unbelievers and the knowledge of Christians" (34). Oliphint convincingly shows the difference between this view and that of Thomas. For example, in his exegesis of Acts 17, Thomas argues that Paul is appealing to the Athenian philosophers, whom Paul thought "were able to know the truth by natural reason" (34). Reformed exegesis, Oliphint explains, has tended to interpret this passage in the opposite way, again emphasizing the antithesis between the knowledge of believers and unbelievers concerning divine truth.

This point illustrates one of the most noteworthy differences between Oliphint's treatment of Thomas and most other treatments: that is, his unusual interest in Thomas's exegesis of New Testament passages that are critical to standard Reformed epistemic understandings to show the opposition of Thomas's exegesis to that of Reformed exegesis. One reads long and hard in books on Aquinas before finding the sort of exegetical discussion that Oliphint engages in over three dozen pages (see esp. 34–51).

Oliphint's estimation of the difference between a Reformed epistemic and that of Thomas is summed up in the following quotation: "The Reformers were clear about the necessity of including the deep and dire consequences of depravity in their theological prolegomena. Once that truth is understood, applied, and developed, we begin to see that there is no such thing, since the fall, as a 'natural reason' that can produce true knowledge of the true God. The best that natural reason can do, since the fall, is to produce an idol, a god of our own imaginings" (53). This might sound like an unduly strong critique of Thomas and natural theology. But it is not that different from other broadly Reformed thinkers in the twentieth century—not only Van Til but also writers as diverse as Dooyeweerd, Barth, Clark, Henry, Carnell, Schaeffer, Newbigin, and even C. S. Lewis.

Of special interest is the fact that Oliphint believes that Reformed concerns about Thomas are not alleviated even if one accepts the revisionist understanding of Thomas as presented by Gilson, de Lubac, and others. Even if the revisionist interpretation were correct, he argues, "there is no escaping [Thomas's] commitment to the neutrality of reason. And it is that commitment that allows for an incompatibility of the philosophical with the theological in his *principia*, which renders them impossible to merge" (121). Yet Oliphint thinks that most Thomists—today and over the past seven centuries—get Thomas right, and he believes they

convincingly argue their case for the classic Thomistic interpretation of Thomas's epistemology.

It is noteworthy that Oliphint does not disagree with revisionists who argue that Aquinas believes God's grace is necessary for people to use their natural reason. This is akin to saying that God has given us minds and expects us to use them. The debate Oliphint has with Thomas is not whether divine grace is needed to exercise one's natural reason in non-religious matters, but whether, when human beings exercise their natural reason, it alone can lead them to a knowledge of God. Oliphint says no, but he convincingly shows that Thomas says yes. Thus, simply saying that grace makes the use of natural reason possible does not soften Thomas or Thomism for Oliphint. His concern is that, for Thomas, natural reason alone, *a posteriori* thinking, can lead to a true knowledge of God, rather than idolatry.

Thus, in his discussion of Thomas's five ways, or five proofs for the existence of God, in his chapter on the *principium essendi*, Oliphint laments that Thomas "begins, as he always does, with sense experience—he has no room for the *a priori* in his proofs" (59). Oliphint is quick to point out, again, that, for Thomas, most divine truth is not *a posteriori*. The truths of sacred doctrine necessarily make room for *a priori* knowledge, but not the *praeambula fidei*, or the proofs for God's existence, which are the domain of what McInerny calls "autonomous" philosophy or natural reason.

In his critique of Thomas's five ways, Oliphint contrasts Thomas's approach with Oliphint's own more-Reformed categories. His analysis presents a nuanced understanding of natural theology, which he says, in traditional Reformed theology, is a "product of 'pilgrim theology,' the theology of 'the regenerate'" (79). Only with the pre-understanding provided by special revelation do Aquinas's five ways make any sense.

Oliphint's work constitutes a monograph on the contrast between the epistemology of Thomas Aquinas and that of Reformed theology, and a critique of Thomas's epistemology from the vantage point of Reformed theology. It is the only book-length treatment of this sort that this reviewer has ever come across and for that reason alone deserves a wide readership. Oliphint's work is well-written and more perspicacious than that of his mentor Cornelius Van Til. The latter would be proud of the way his disciple has extended his work and contextualized it for the twenty-first-century discussion.

Having said that, however, even those from the broader Reformed world of epistemological and apologetical approaches that lean more in the direction of a "presuppositional" or "Reformed Epistemology"

model will find much to appreciate and agree with here. Many of those who, while not Van Tilians, have concerns about whether natural theology or evidentialist and “classical apologetics” models offer the most fruitful means of dialogue in a post-Christian intellectual milieu, will find much they agree with here, and delicious food for thought that will aid in their understanding of modern evangelical apologetics and epistemics, over much of which the Angelic Doctor casts a long shadow.

One negative thing about this book is the way that Oliphint (admittedly, only briefly) conflates Arminianism and Thomism, almost as if to suggest that an Arminian soteriology precludes the adoption of more-Reformed construals of epistemology and apologetics. This is inaccurate and unfortunate and reflects a similarity to this same sloppy approach to Arminianism in Van Til’s writings. This reviewer’s writings have shown that there is a way to be “Reformed Arminian,” thus realizing the biblical wisdom in much Reformed thought without embracing its predestinarianism—and this includes classic Reformed conceptions of epistemology, apologetics, eschatology, and the cultural implications of the Christian worldview.

Despite that one caveat, Oliphint’s book is very well done and is must-reading for anyone who wants to understand the difference between Reformed theology and the thought of Thomas Aquinas with regard to matters relating to religious epistemology. It is sufficiently clear to be accessible for students and interested laity yet will be of great interest to scholars as well. I highly recommend it.

J. Matthew Pinson  
Welch College  
Gallatin, Tennessee

*Sexuality, Gender, and the Church: A Christian Response in the New Cultural Landscape.* By J. Matthew Pinson, Matthew Steven Bracey, Matthew McAfee, and Michael A. Oliver. Nashville: Welch College Press, 2016. xiv + 256 pp. \$19.99 hardback.

It is no secret that the modern-day church is in the midst of a culture that is experiencing a radical shift in the views of sexuality, gender, and marriage. Many questions arise within the church over how it should respond to such an extensive and rapid shift. How should the church respond to a congregant who professes to be a homosexual? How do parents deal with children who admit to having same-sex attraction or who



struggle with gender identity? *Sexuality, Gender, and the Church* is a phenomenal resource that biblically addresses these issues and seeks to apply biblical truth to the contemporary context.

Chapter one, written by J. Matthew Pinson, sets the tone for the book by discussing the relationship between church and culture. Pinson believes the church is responsible for engaging and transforming the culture. He advocates the position of Abraham Kuyper, the Christian prime minister of the Netherlands in the early twentieth century, who espoused the idea that Christianity should continually transform the culture around it. This can happen only when Christians are involved in various cultural endeavors (e.g., politics, business, education, the arts, etc.). Pinson also warns against becoming like the culture, noting that “the early Christians did not become like the culture to reach the culture. Rather, they were radically distinct from the culture” (8). This mindset takes hold only when the church views Scripture as the source of God’s absolute truth. Culture is not relative; it is not made up of products with no truth value. This means that, when it comes to dealing with issues such as sexuality, gender, and marriage, the church must deal with these issues from the perspective of truth. The church cannot afford to retreat from culture, nor can it afford to allow worldliness to infiltrate the church. Such thinking sets the premise for the book’s discussion regarding the church’s response to the sexual revolution in the current culture.

In chapter two, Matthew McAfee presents the Bible’s teaching on sexuality, gender, and marriage. McAfee immediately asserts from the beginning that the issue of “human sexuality is not something of secondary importance in the Bible but a central theme in the story of redemption” (15). He approaches the issues of sexuality, gender, and marriage as being directly tied to the self-worth of humanity (humankind being made in the image of God) as well as God’s grand design of creation and humanity’s proper relationship to it. McAfee explains that Scripture clearly teaches that gender distinction, the definition of marriage (one man and one woman for life), and the sexual union that exists within the confines of marriage are not cultural constructs. Instead, they are essential elements of God’s design that serve as the “bedrock on which human civilization is built” (20). He analyzes important texts such as Genesis 1 and 2, Leviticus 18, Romans 1, and several others. He also demonstrates that God’s people should stand for His revealed truth and live accordingly. McAfee contends it is the responsibility of the church to allow the Bible to inform the thoughts and practices of marriage and sexuality.

In chapter three, Pinson discusses how Free Will Baptists have historically approached the issues surrounding marriage and sexuality. He gives attention to Free Will Baptist tradition dating back to the early English General Baptists. Pinson notes, "The historic General and Free Will Baptists viewed marriage squarely in the context of the family" (52). Free Will Baptists have traditionally viewed the family as the central unit of society. Pinson emphasizes how Free Will Baptist tradition stresses the biblical distinction between male and female and why this distinction is imperative to marriage, sexuality, and the family.

In chapter four, Matthew Steven Bracey discusses different aspects of Christian integrity and why it is crucial for the engagement of culture's contentious issues. Bracey emphasizes the need for Christians to stand for biblical integrity in the public square. He contends that the only way this is possible is for Christians to live with lifestyle integrity. The church must resolve to live morally as well as lovingly. He also deals with questions regarding the proper response to inquiries such as "should I attend a same-sex marriage ceremony?" and questions regarding Christian liberty.

In chapter five, Bracey gives a short history lesson over how American culture and government evolved over the past century in order to explain reasons for the current culture and political climate. He does an excellent job outlining the intent of America's founding fathers over government policy and religious liberty. He defines religious liberty both theologically and legally while stressing the need to defend it. Chapters four and five provide practical advice on issues surrounding the church's engagement of society, government, and politics.

Chapter six, written by Michael A. Oliver, provides practical advice for helping those who deal with same-sex attraction. Oliver discusses how the secular mental health profession and digital media contribute to culture's normalizing of same-sex attraction. He demonstrates from Scripture that struggling people desperately need the truth and hope of the gospel. He also provides steps on how people struggling with same-sex attraction can attain genuine hope, addressing situations that Christians commonly encounter. For example, how should the church respond to congregants struggling with homosexuality? What about parents dealing with children who are struggling with same-sex attraction? Oliver provides biblical and practical advice for those battling with homosexuality as well as the Christian trying to help someone who is struggling.

Chapter seven is a sermon written by Matthew McAfee which serves as the conclusion of the book. McAfee dives deeply into Scripture and

identifies the problem of sin and sexual purity. His sermon discusses the issues of sexual purity within the contexts of anthropology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. McAfee affirms Scripture's call for the church to be sexually pure and to aid those who are battling sexual sins.

*Sexuality, Gender, and the Church* is a great asset to anyone's library. The book is unique in that it deals with the issues of today's sexual revolution on all fronts: theologically, pastorally, psychologically, and legally. Written on a popular level, the book represents the finest of Free Will Baptist scholarship yet is valuable for personal or small group study. It is also a book that can provide wisdom and truth to those currently battling with the issues surrounding today's changing sexual landscape.

Josh Butler  
Ahoskie Free Will Baptist Church  
Ahoskie, NC

*Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology, Cultural Liturgies: Volume 3.* By James K. A. Smith. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2017. 256 pp. \$22.99 paperback.

*Awaiting the King* is the final volume of James K. A. Smith's cultural liturgy series. Smith is a philosophy professor at Calvin College and author of more than a dozen books. He began the series in 2009 with the publication of *Desiring the Kingdom*, followed by that of *Imagining the Kingdom* in 2013. Smith's project argues that men and women are fundamentally creatures of embodied desire who are shaped by cultural liturgies. Thus, Christian witness and discipleship should seek not only to inform cognitively but also to form affectively.

*Awaiting the King* carries this aim forth in reference to public theology. As the church finds itself between the already and not yet of Jesus's first and second comings, how should it engage the political sphere in a manner that diminishes neither the church nor the state? Smith answers this question in the context of the Reformed tradition, seeking to offer "something of an 'assist'" to the legacies of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Nicholas Wolterstorff, and Richard Mouw (8).

Smith begins by discussing the religious nature of the state, which forms its citizens with cultural liturgies in the same way the church forms its citizens with church liturgies. Because the stakes are so high, Christians should not "check out" but should embrace their responsibility toward public life, even though they are sojourners in this world.

Expounding upon Augustine's *City of God*, Smith explains that the citizens of the City of God should not "retreat into holy huddles" through withdrawal but rather should "seek the welfare" of the City of Man. The two cities do not inhabit two spaces, such as the "two kingdoms" theory suggests, but rather two eras (46, 77). "So we don't shuttle between jurisdictions of two kingdoms," says Smith, "we live in the seasons of contested rule, where the principalities and powers continue to grasp after an authority that has been taken from them" (160). Men and women are thus citizens of only one city. Each city is fundamentally ordered by the content and *telos* of what its inhabitants love. As a result, Smith encourages a posture of "healthy suspicion" toward the state that avoids both unwarranted optimism and "apolitical and anticultural pietism" (35).

Just as the state has a religious nature, the church has a political nature. The church is a *polis* that teaches its citizens to pray that King Jesus's kingdom come and His will be done on earth as in heaven. The church fosters a vision for human flourishing, forms its people through worship, and sends them into the world with the hope of seeing "earthly politics bent, if ever so slightly, toward the kingdom of God" (63). The church's politics thus ripple the world's politics. Public theology is "not about sequestering the church from the messiness of 'engagement'; it's about intentionality with respect to the church's formation *for* engagement" (55). Yet in its zeal for political engagement, the church must not forget its ecclesial formation.

The church offers the state a legacy of its institutions because theologians rank among the unacknowledged legislators of liberal democracy and of capitalism. Following Oliver O'Donovan's lead, Smith points to the "craters" of the gospel's impact in the Western world, evidenced in its promulgation of liberty, mercy in judgment, natural rights, and openness to speech (95, 102–05). In this way, liberal democracy and capitalism steward the values of the coming King. By thus holding that they are not antithetical to Christianity, Smith departs from his position in *Desiring the Kingdom*. Despite this rich, evangelical heritage, the story of late modern liberalism is that of a prodigal who has rejected his father's instruction. Yet the church, instead of writing off this wayward son, should offer hope amid its brother's despair and emptiness. The church is a "paradigm society," (109) seeking the state's "conversion" (111–12) through which the state can experience "growth, change, [and] 'progress'" (120).

The church should not seek the prodigal's rescue in a minimalist way though. Smith lays this charge at the feet of Neo-Calvinist public theology, which, he holds, has "sequestered 'political' truth from transcendent claims," "ceded too much to secularism and liberalism," and failed to

emphasize the formation of dispositions, habits, and virtues (142, 144–45). Christian witness to the political sphere should be more than the minimal witness of creation norms, natural law, and common grace but should also include the witness of the “transformative power” of the gospel and evangelicalism (151). Public theologies based on natural law and on rationalism face a fundamental epistemic challenge, explains Smith. The radical effects of man’s sin mean that he requires divine illumination. However, because the problem of natural law is epistemic and not ontological, the Spirit of God must illuminate man’s darkened mind and heart.

Yet what should the church do when its formation fails, when its people do not display the fruit of the Spirit? Hypocrisy evidences “a church that has lost its missional, evangelical center and that [has] forg[otten] how to pray, ‘Thy kingdom come’” (160–61 n. 12). Smith points to the “ecclesial failures” of colonialism, racism, and Rwandan violence (170–86), tracing the blame to “the lamentable reality of denominational division and ‘ecclesial competition’” (186). The way forward, says Smith, is that the church should recognize its deformation, repent of its sins, and resolve to pursue Christian formation.

Smith’s basic argument in *Awaiting the King* is constructive: the church is a polis that focuses on forming people in the virtues of Christ to engage the messy public sphere. He writes from the vantage point of a former fundamentalist, who, he says, attended to the political implications of Kuyperian tradition but not to its ecclesial implications. Thus, Smith, seeing the vital nature of the church, hopes to “‘reform’ Reformed public theology” (8).

Smith’s content is rich, his argumentation strong, and his scope broad. He approaches the topic primarily from standpoints of philosophy, history, and ethics. As with *Desiring the Kingdom* and *Imagining the Kingdom*, he includes sidebars within the chapters that illustrate his theme through films, music, novels, politics, television, and other cultural artifacts. Throughout the book, he interacts with many authors, especially Augustine, Stanley Hauerwas, Alasdair MacIntyre, Oliver O’Donovan, and Charles Taylor. Smith appreciates them for their emphasis on the church’s role in the cultivation of Christian virtue. Still, he offers critique when he differs from them, such as when he disagrees with the conclusions of Hauerwas and MacIntyre that liberal democracy and capitalism are incompatible with a Christian ethic. In fact, Smith states that the Christian gospel helped produce them.

At times, Smith’s reflections are excessive or even shocking. For example, he quotes O’Donovan’s criticism that the United States Constitution

marked “the symbolic end of Christendom” and that the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause created a formula for heresy (102 n. 19). At one point, Smith even compares the struggles of Christian men and women finding their identity in Christ as a peculiar people to that of a Jewish gay man striving to embrace his identity.

Throughout *Awaiting the King*, Smith carries forth some of his arguments from *Desiring* and *Imagining*. For example, he continues to criticize the concept of *worldview* for emphasizing knowledge to the detriment of desire, preferring instead Taylor’s concept of social imaginaries. Accordingly, worldview approaches to ecclesial formation are incomplete and dualistic at best. However, Smith does not explain the inadequacy of worldview *per se*. The concept of worldview can presumably emphasize the importance of the heart, alongside the mind and the will, as much as social imaginaries or any other terminology put forward can. This is seen, for instance, in James Sire’s articulation of worldview as a “fundamental orientation of the heart” (*Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept*, second edition [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015], 141).

Similarly, Smith is critical of the nomenclature of “transforming” culture, asserting that such notions result in the church assimilating to broader culture (xii, 18). Smith specifically gives critique of H. Richard Niebuhr’s *Christ and Culture*. Nevertheless, Smith also finds fault with cultural retreat. Furthermore, he criticizes “two kingdoms” public theologies for withholding the capacity of evangelical obedience to governments, rulers, and states (102 n. 19). In the end, his theory of Christ and culture calls for a Christian political engagement that is undergirded by ecclesial formation and that seeks the state’s change and conversion. Although Smith wishes to distance himself from the language of transformation, that is the basic position he propounds. In all fairness to Niebuhr’s ideal typology, the paradigm guilty of cultural assimilation is not that of Christ the transformer but rather that of the Christ of culture. In fact, Niebuhr also identified the former as the *conversionist* type and the latter as the *accommodationist* type, which incidentally are the very words Smith uses.

Finally, Smith does well to emphasize the importance of building a public theology on the divine light of illumination in contrast to the natural light of reason. God has not been silent but has revealed himself to humanity. Thus, the church should not operate as if it is “working in the dark with everyone else, without revelation and illumination” (157). Instead, says Smith, “political theology is scandalously rooted in the specificity and particularity of God’s self-revelation in Christ” (158). This means that a Christian public theology is not limited to natural law; it



should also reflect the cosmic scope of Jesus's lordship. To the extent market participants are unsympathetic to Christian principles manifested in the public square, Smith reminds readers that God's Spirit can illuminate their darkened hearts. He also reminds them that Christ's kingdom pronouncement is universal and certain, thereby implicating public life, even if it is not yet realized.

Despite a few missteps along the way, *Awaiting the King* is enjoyable and compelling on the whole. It is particularly appropriate for academics, ministers, and students interested in the intersection of church and state. Smith's emphasis on the ecclesial formation of virtue both challenges and convicts, and his call for political engagement is a helpful corrective against the temptation to forsake the public square. In conclusion, Smith issues a convincing charge to those awaiting Christ their king.

Matthew Steven Bracey  
Welch College  
Gallatin, Tennessee

*The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation.* By Rod Dreher. New York: Sentinel, 2017. 272 pp. \$17.88 hardcover.

Among the varied approaches to church and culture, retrieval now serves as a growing choice for American Christians. For those seeking to imagine and navigate the role of Christian witness within a changing Western landscape, especially those seeking to maintain traditional Christian beliefs and practices, retrieval is an important tool.

Amid the growing number of Christians deploying and advocating various forms of retrieval, few have proved as evocative as journalist Rod Dreher. A Google search leads one to conclude that Dreher's *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* is one of the most important, controversial, and thought provoking books of the last decade.

Inspiration for Dreher's approach is found in Benedict of Nursia. Benedict, an early monk who was the father of Western Christian monasticism, served Christ by cultivating and promoting virtue through monastic living. Benedict's vision revolved around a Christian community of practices such as communal prayer, hospitality, labor, and what we might call scholarly learning. These practices became part of the structured life of a monastery outlined by Benedict. Dreher argues that Christian communities, families, and individuals should draw from



Benedict's monastic rule and establish new, communal spaces where Christian faith may flourish and thrive, even as mainstream culture becomes increasingly hostile and post-Christian.

*The Benedict Option* is divided into two sections. In the first Dreher seeks to "explore the philosophical and theological roots of our society's fragmentation and explain how the Christian virtues embodied in the sixth-century *Rule of Saint Benedict* . . . can help all believers today" (4). The second section focuses on how conservative Christians can adapt the Benedictine Rule to modern living. Undergirding and layered within both sections is Dreher's belief that the values and ideals necessary for faithful Christianity in the modern world and the virtues necessary for passing on the faith cannot be accomplished *politically*. This guiding supposition is expressed early when Dreher writes, "Rather than wasting energy and resources fighting unwinnable political battles, we should instead work on building communities, institutions, and networks of resistance that can outwit, outlast, and eventually overcome the occupation" (12).

Dreher's two main objectives then are (1) to analyze Western culture generally, and post-Christian America specifically, and (2) to provide examples of counter-cultural approaches to living. Does *The Benedict Option* successfully accomplish these goals?

Dreher largely succeeds in providing examples of fruitful, communal, Christian accountability outside the cultural mainstream. By providing portraits of men's groups like the Hall of Men, where Christians pray and discuss theology and history instead of football, Dreher shows a way to forge friendships not based on entertainment. By highlighting churches that practice intentional discipline, Dreher helps readers envision the possibilities of communal accountability based on Christian precepts. By raising awareness of modesty-based clothing companies like LuLaRoe, Dreher demonstrates ways he believes clothing can reflect transcendent values. Finally, by outlining alternatives to public education, Dreher helps readers glimpse the importance that right thinking plays in developing disciples who will view the world and their purpose in it from a Christian perspective rooted in the classical tradition. Collectively, these varied examples in *The Benedict Option* provide concrete portraits of real people living lives driven by more than the technology, practices, and beliefs undergirding the modern world. These individual portraits help show the difference intentional Christianity might make in how one lives.

This strength, however, is also the book's weakness. Dreher is correct that something significant has changed in America with the sexual

revolution. He is also right that certain practices and virtues, often considered traditional and considered good by orthodox Christians, are now considered passé and potentially dangerous by many secular elites. Unfortunately, the amount of attention, detail, and wisdom needed for discussing these things proves impossible for Dreher's method of writing to provide. Anecdotal evidence may be adequate and even helpful for providing a concrete picture of ways Christians can live counterculturally, but explaining what has happened to Western culture and American society specifically requires a level of scholarship absent in *The Benedict Option*.

Consider Dreher's account of Benedict and the Benedictines. If this is the way for faith to survive aggressive paganism, we might expect more attention to be given to the original Benedictine movement and Benedict. While Dreher makes some assertions, he does not say much to describe the original purposes of Benedict or the Benedictine monasteries (odd for a book titled *The Benedict Option*.) To this reviewer it appears that Benedict was more concerned with how he and others might live according to the Gospels, and not much concerned with surviving or transforming society. Dreher's snapshots do provide a vision, but what this vision actually has to do with Benedict's Rule is hardly proven, only asserted.

Also consider the book's subtitle, where the reader is told this is a strategy for Christians who find themselves living in a "post-Christian nation." According to Dreher, the sexual revolution and American political and cultural fallout demand certain forms of withdrawal from mainstream culture. However, simple questions arise when considering Dreher's assertions. For example, was America a Christian nation when slavery was the law of the land? Under that system families were broken up by masters undergirded by state power. What makes the current situation warrant a withdrawal by Christians that was not apparently merited by slavery rooted in pagan racial theories or later Jim Crow laws in the South rooted in the same theories? Dreher may have answers for these questions and others, but his method does not provide the research and argumentation needed to make the case necessary for the level of his assertions.

In the final analysis, what are readers to make of Dreher's retrieval attempt? *The Benedict Option* is different in significant ways from Benedict himself and the way actual Benedictines live today. Despite that flaw, the book does help readers envision what it could mean to live a countercultural life guided by resources from the Christian tradition. While Dreher's book is limited in its historical and theological

explanations for why the modern West is increasingly hostile to traditional Christian belief and practice, or what an adequate response would necessitate, it does succeed at raising crucial questions. Such questions are ignored by Christians and churches at their own peril. Despite its shortcomings, this book should be read, considered, and discussed with as many others as possible.

Charles Cook  
Avery Trace Middle School  
Cookeville, Tennessee

*The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal.* By Charles Swindoll. Nashville: Faithwords, 2010. 304 pp. \$23.99 hardcover.

The church has been incapacitated by the drug of postmodernism. "Postmodernism thrives on chaos. It desires to destroy all moral criteria and replace it with no criteria. It seeks a world in which everything is relative, where there is no truth, and perception alone is reality. Since God's eternal truth has no place in such a world, with the rise of postmodernism we witness a commensurate decline in biblical knowledge" (xvii). Rather than placing God's Word as the final authority for church practice, relying on the sufficiency of the Gospel's message to draw sinners, and awaiting transformation that comes only by a Spirit-led and Scripture-fed life, much of the church has settled for man-focused methods, marketing gimmicks, and microwaved maturity. A call for awakening is desperately needed.

In his book *The Church Awakening: An Urgent Call for Renewal*, Charles Swindoll writes with the clarity of a seasoned author, the heart of a burdened pastor, the innovation of a young man, and the insight of an eighty-year-old man. Some who have known the author's ministry over many years may be hesitant to hear his perspective on this topic. But Swindoll's call for renewal is not the boasting of newly-proven church growth methods or a rationalization for some trending worship style. In fact, the opposite is true. In this book Swindoll incites his readers to place Scripture as the highest authority and bemoans the years he spent placing human interest as the focus of his own ministry.

Swindoll begins with four essentials found in Acts 2:42 that should be found in every church. "When the first body of believers gathered together, they devoted themselves to four essentials. Did you notice them? Here are the four essentials: teaching, fellowship, breaking of

bread, and prayer. This verse is not only descriptive of what the early church did; it is also prescriptive of what all churches must do" (15). In many churches, these essentials have not been forsaken maliciously, but have been carelessly set aside in an attempt to reach the lost. "There is a major problem with adapting a church to fit the lost person, rather than the church following God's design for what He intended it to be. Here it is, plain and simple. The church is a body of people called out from among the world for the distinct and unique purpose of glorifying their Savior and Lord. Nowhere in the book of Acts or the Epistles do we see a church called to provide a subculture for nonbelievers. The lost don't need to find at church a world that's like their world outside the church. The church is not competing with the world. Jesus is not a brand. The church needs to guard against compromising the Word of God so that it tastes more palatable to newcomers" (90).

Swindoll gives great attention to squashing the notion that a church should be operated like a business, with the pastor as the CEO, employing gimmicks and marketing strategies. In the early church, "there were no secular organizational structures or church politics. There was no guru of authority or 'chairman' of anything. There were no power grabs from control freaks. There were no personal maneuverings, infightings, financial squabbles, or turf protection. Instead, we see a place where a spiritual emphasis took precedence over the world's way of doing things." The author gives great balance on this topic. "When considering church growth, we must think strategically, we must preach creatively, and our worship must connect. Absolutely. But we must also be careful. A marketing mentality and a consumer mind-set have no business in the church of Jesus Christ. By that I mean, Jesus is not a brand, . . . human thinking does not guide God's work, . . . and the church is not a corporation. The church of Jesus Christ is a spiritual entity, guided by the Lord through the precepts of His Word" (82).

Without a doubt, the consumer mentality has manifested itself in the worship of the church. Swindoll does not shrink back from adding his voice to the narrative of the so-called worship wars. He calls the church back to true worship that upholds the Word of God as the only way to know God. The author also effectively differentiates between the *essence* of worship and the *expression* of worship. "The *essence* of worship has to do with our internalizing our adoration. When we worship we affirm a deep, personal commitment. That is what God seeks. The *expression* of worship, on the other hand, moves us into the outward forms of worship, . . . the ways we express our praise to God. That may be as varied as whatever culture is expressing it" (117). Swindoll helpfully points out

that the “war” is over the *expression* of worship when our focus should be the *essence* of worship.

One of the most valuable portions of the book is Swindoll’s explanation of a contagious church. The pastor who boasts that preaching is the only way to build a church will be quite uncomfortable in this section (I certainly was at times). A strong pulpit ministry alone is not God’s plan; rather, truth must be proclaimed in the context of a contagious church. “It’s the context that makes a church contagious. It’s the people. And it’s more than a curiosity at the numbers of people. It’s their passion. It’s their Spirit-directed enthusiasm. It’s the obvious work of God engaging the lives of believers in a meaningful connection, a genuine compassion, and an almost electric excitement about reaching out into the community and investing themselves wholeheartedly into places of ministry” (76).

Swindoll walks a fine line, but he does so with pinpoint accuracy. He stays true to four essentials while calling churches to consider the need for the right context. The church needs “biblical truth taught in an interesting manner and lived out in unguarded authenticity—in our relationship with our Lord and with one another. The Bible affirms that a ministry is contagious when it remains strong in grace, when the older mentor the young, when it pulls together in tough and desperate times, and when it endures regardless of the challenges” (267).

Throughout the book, in Pauline fashion, Swindoll describes various problems within the modern American church. But all these problems are merely symptoms, indicators that point to one problem: erosion. The author describes erosion as exactly what happened to the church in Ephesus when they had forgotten their first love. Swindoll even confesses that erosion had occurred in his own church and that one of the greatest struggles of his ministry was stopping the slow erosion and getting back to his first love. “Something has drifted far off course if, when you worship, there isn’t a sense of awe and respect for your heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. That’s what concerned Jesus so much about the first-century Ephesian church—their perfunctory, ho-hum, business-as-usual attitude about life and ministry. By the way, Jesus has that same concern for us in the twenty-first century” (230).

I highly recommend this book. Charles Swindoll’s insight will be a treasured contribution to the body of practical ministry resources for many years to come. While there may be other authors who can give

insight to the individual subjects, few pastors can provide the “big picture” necessary to weave these observations into a coherent whole.

Daniel Webster  
Welch College  
Gallatin, Tennessee





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