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## EDITORIAL

This issue has a touch of the ‘modern’ about it. Of course there are herein copious references to the bible, Christian tradition (e.g. Augustine, Calvin) and the history of the Faith, but the emphasis falls on the 19th to 21st centuries. Essays on those ‘Victorian’ phenomena of David Livingstone and Classical Dispensationalism start us off. Then, reaching back into the early 20th but arguably as far as the Disruption of 1843, there is something on the balancing act of the Free Church of Scotland (and supposedly other cognate denominations in some other countries) in attempting to be a national church that is ‘in it’ but not completely of it, in being ‘for it’. Then we turn to two ‘issues’ that are not entirely new but seem extremely pressing in our century for the whole of our shared human existence as well as a Christian response with integrity and wisdom: the ecological ‘crisis’ and the nature of forgiveness.

And this is where Augustine would encourage Christians but also (and perhaps principally in their providential use of law as well as virtue) Christian rulers (not least when elected) to add their ethical efforts to make the society less evil than it otherwise would be. Robert Markus’ view of the saeculum as neutral space perhaps does quite not do justice to where Augustine saw the cosmic battle of the ‘sixth day’ continuing: not in heaven but on earth. Moreover, one might want to ask which sins are to be opposed rather than ‘sin’ in the abstract.

The idea of the church being distant just enough to be able to see the nation (echoes of Hugh McDiarmaid), the better to witness to it yet, without being so distant as to be unfamiliar—this is a large concern for all churches a century on from the issue of the Church and Establishment in Scotland. As I write, Scotland has just elected a new ‘Holyrood’ Parliament, leading to more of a multi-party system, while the Church of Scotland decides to pare its number of theological colleges down to one.

This journal is not intended to give some sort of bi-annual commentary on the state of the world or country we inhabit, but we do hope that some wisdom can be learned from the articles (and reviews) that follow, even as we expand our horizons.

One last thing: as will be obvious to most readers by now, both the Scottish Evangelical Society annual conference and the biennial Rutherford House-led Edinburgh Dogmatics Conference have ceased trading. It is our aim (at HTC) to run a conference in August of next year to draw some of the threads from both of these, so that an attendee might find something ‘biblical’, theological and ‘church-facing’, where practitioners

and scholars can come together and even, for a couple of days, be unable to tell each other apart.

*Mark W. Elliott,  
May 2026*

DAVID LIVINGSTONE  
(19TH MARCH 1813–1ST MAY 1873)

ALISTAIR WILSON, LECTURER IN MISSION AND NEW TESTAMENT  
AT EDINBURGH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

INTRODUCTION

According to Professor Andrew F. Walls, ‘If any “man in the street”—at least, in any British street—were asked at any time in the last century to name a Christian missionary, it is likely that he would name David Livingstone.’<sup>1</sup>

The first of May 2023 will be the 150th anniversary of Livingstone’s death and so it is appropriate that we give some attention to this famous missionary at this time.

Many Christians have encountered, and presented, Livingstone as a ‘hero of the faith’. Such terminology is used on a number of books about Livingstone, particularly those written for young people.<sup>2</sup> Ruth Tucker comments, ‘David Livingstone was the hero of Victorian England—and a hero for generations to follow.’<sup>3</sup> According to John MacKenzie, ‘He was lionised to a greater extent than almost any other figure of the nineteenth century such that he was elevated to the status of a Protestant saint endowed with virtues that, for a period, placed him almost beyond criticism.’<sup>4</sup> No fallen



(Photo: Thomas Annan (1829–1887), Public domain)

<sup>1</sup> Andrew F. Walls, ‘The Legacy of David Livingstone’, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (1987), 125. Available at <https://www.bu.edu/misology/missionary-biography/1-m/livingstone-david-1813-1873/> [Accessed 03/08/2022].

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Sam Wellman, *David Livingstone: Explorer and Missionary, Heroes of the Faith* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Ruth A. Tucker, *From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2004), 155.

<sup>4</sup> John M. Mackenzie, ‘David Livingstone – Prophet or Patron Saint of Imperialism in Africa: Myths and Misconceptions’, *Scottish Geographical Journal*, 129 (2013), 277.

human being is capable of living up to such adulation and it was, therefore, inevitable that other writers would hold rather different opinions of Livingstone.

Tim Jeal, who originally published his biography of Livingstone in 1973 and then produced an updated version in 2013, writes,

Whatever [my biography's] other merits may be, I think its longevity is mainly due to my having gained access to a wide variety of previously unpublished papers which enabled me to present a portrait of Livingstone strikingly different from the hagiographical depictions of my three biographical predecessors.<sup>5</sup>

Jeal assesses Livingstone in terms that are far from heroic,

Livingstone, with his missionary aims and his almost messianic passion for exporting British values and culture, seemed to his successors to have provided the moral basis for massive imperial expansion.<sup>6</sup>

By the late nineteenth century, the so-called 'scramble for Africa' would see European leaders carve up the vast majority of the continent of Africa in an effort to exploit the rich resources of Africa for the benefit of their own nations. Was Livingstone complicit in this?

With respect to Livingstone's character and personality, Ruth Tucker comments, 'He was a frail, temperamental human being with serious personality flaws that hindered his ministry throughout his entire life.'<sup>7</sup>

Mark Shaw and Wanjiri Gitau wisely comment, 'The truth about Livingstone probably lies somewhere between these extremes of opinion.'<sup>8</sup>

MacKenzie comments elsewhere that 'the name of Livingstone has been invoked, often in wholly contradictory causes, in so many controversies associated with empire and its demise in the twentieth century, with cultural and political issues in the United Kingdom in the same period, and in the identities formed in the Scottish diaspora throughout the world.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Jeal, *Livingstone* (New Haven, IN: Yale University Press, 2013 [1973, 1985]), xi.

<sup>6</sup> Jeal, *Livingstone*, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Tucker, *From Jerusalem*, 155–156.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Shaw and Wanjiru M. Gitau, *The Kingdom of God in Africa*, Revised and Updated (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2020), 195.

<sup>9</sup> John M MacKenzie, 'General Editor's Introduction' in Justin D. Livingstone, *Livingstone's Lives: A Metabiography of a Victorian Icon, Studies in Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), xii.

According to T. J. Thompson, ‘Victorian biographies of David Livingstone (and indeed, many more modern studies) tended to be almost entirely hagiographic, ignoring the complex nature of Livingstone’s character.’<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the brochure for the 2022 Westminster Conference asks, ‘Esteemed through generations as an example of Christian piety and celebrated as a pioneer missionary, should we still consider him a hero of the faith or relegate him to a villain of history?’<sup>11</sup> I will attempt to help us reach an informed and reflective response to this question.

My purpose in this paper is not to provide a substantial biography of Livingstone. Many useful secondary sources are available, ranging from short dictionary articles to full-scale critical biographies. I have consulted many of these works and the footnotes show how frequently I have learned from the work of other writers, but I attempt to draw particularly on the primary source of David Livingstone’s own work, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, published in 1857 by John Murray of London.<sup>12</sup> The full subtitle of the work, in the lengthy form typical of the time, is ‘including a sketch of sixteen years’ residence in the interior of Africa, and a journey from the Cape of Good Hope to Loanda on the West Coast; thence across the continent, down the river Zambesi, to the Eastern ocean’. This, in itself, tells us a good deal about Livingstone’s remarkable life, particularly as many dramatic events took place after this initial narrative was completed. I will provide some brief biographical details for those who may not be familiar with the details of Livingstone’s life, but I will quickly move on to analysis of several significant questions relating to his life and work.

Justin Livingstone has written an important study of ‘the use, function, and evolution of the biographical tradition that has drawn sustenance from the Victorian era’s foremost missionary and explorer, David Livingstone’.<sup>13</sup> He explains,

This book, then, is not another biography. Its terrain is not the chronicle of Livingstone’s life from factory ‘piecer’ to international superstar, nor an account of his missionary activity and explorations in southern and central

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<sup>10</sup> T. J. Thompson, “Livingstone, David,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larsen et al. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 370.

<sup>11</sup> Westminster Conference 2022 brochure.

<sup>12</sup> David Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*, (London: John Murray, 1857).

<sup>13</sup> Livingstone, *Livingstone’s Lives*, 2.

Africa. It is, rather, a book about biography, an examination of the ways in which one subject has been used, abused, represented and remembered.<sup>14</sup>

Livingstone's study offers valuable reflection on the ways in which writers have engaged with David Livingstone's life.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

- Born in Blantyre, Lanarkshire, Scotland: 19th March 1813
- Studied Medicine and Theology: 1836–1840
- Joined London Missionary Society: 1838
- Travelled to Africa: December 1840 (arrived 1841)
- Relocated to Mabotsa, with Kgatla people (working under Mosielele): 1843
- Relocated to Kolobeng, with Kwena people (working under Sechele): 1845
- Mauled by a lion:
- Married Mary Moffat (daughter of Robert and Mary Moffat) in Kuruman: January 1845
- Crossed the Kalahari
- Sent his family back to Britain and began journey across Africa as 'nduna' of Sekeletu of the Makololo: 1852
- Returned to Britain and published *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa: 1856–58*
- Various expeditions, with a second return to Britain: 1858–1873:
- Death of Mary Moffat: 1861
- Meets Henry Morton Stanley: late October/early November 1871
- Died in Chief Chitambo's village (modern Zambia): 1st May 1873
- Funeral in Westminster Abbey: 18th April 1874

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<sup>14</sup> Livingstone, *Livingstone's Lives*, 2.

According to Scott Sunquist, ‘history is neither a record of what happened in the past nor a list of supposed facts of the past. History is the art of telling as accurate a story about the past as possible. Because history is the story of people and not things, it is told in a way that reflects how people live and how we hear about human lives.’<sup>15</sup> This paper attempts to listen to a range of testimony concerning David Livingstone and to offer reflections that treat all of that testimony seriously.

### **Origins**

David Livingstone ‘missionary and explorer, was born in the Lanarkshire village of Blantyre, Scotland. His family was originally of Highland origin, a factor in Livingstone’s character and thinking that has often been under-emphasized in reference to his linguistic and cultural empathy with Africans.’<sup>16</sup> Livingstone reflects that,

Our great-grandfather fell at the battle of Culloden, fighting for the old line of kings; and our grandfather was a small farmer in Ulva, where my father was born. ... Finding his farm in Ulva insufficient to support a numerous family, my grandfather removed to Blantyre Works, a large cotton manufactory on the beautiful Clyde, above Glasgow; and his sons, having had the best education the Hebrides afforded, were gladly received as clerks by the proprietors, Monteith and Co.<sup>17</sup>

### **A Hard Life**

Young David’s life was characterized by limited resources and hard work. He writes,

The earliest recollection of my mother recalls a picture so often seen among the Scottish poor—that of the anxious housewife striving to make both ends meet. At the age of ten I was put into the factory as a “piecer”, to aid by my earnings in lessening her anxiety. With a part of my first week’s wages I purchased Ruddiman’s “Rudiments of Latin”, and pursued the study of that language for many years afterward, with unabated ardor, at an evening school, which met between the hours of eight and ten. The dictionary part of my labors was followed up till twelve o’clock, or later, if my mother did not inter-

<sup>15</sup> Scott W. Sunquist, *The Shape of Christian History: Continuity and Diversity in the Global Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2022), 34.

<sup>16</sup> T. J. Thompson, “Livingstone, David,” in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larsen et al. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 366.

<sup>17</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 17–18.

ere by jumping up and snatching the books out of my hands. I had to be back in the factory by six in the morning, and continue my work, with intervals for breakfast and dinner, till eight o'clock at night. I read in this way many of the classical authors, and knew Virgil and Horace better at sixteen than I do now.<sup>18</sup>

The role of a 'piecer' was dangerous and demanding: 'His job involved ducking under the cotton spinning jenny machines to tie together the broken threads, with the machines moving the whole time.'<sup>19</sup> Evidently, young David Livingstone was exceptionally motivated with the result that he could make the most of his academic abilities in spite of demanding family circumstances and the rigours of long hours and a dangerous employment.

### *Livingstone's Christian convictions*

David Livingstone was brought up in a Christian home. Although the family had belonged to a presbyterian church initially, they later become associated with a Congregational church. Livingstone was clearly instructed in the Christian faith while young and soon came to a personal experience of Christian faith.

Great pains had been taken by my parents to instill the doctrines of Christianity into my mind, and I had no difficulty in understanding the theory of our free salvation by the atonement of our Savior, but it was only about this time that I really began to feel the necessity and value of a personal application of the provisions of that atonement to my own case. The change was like what may be supposed would take place were it possible to cure a case of "color blindness". The perfect freeness with which the pardon of all our guilt is offered in God's book drew forth feelings of affectionate love to Him who bought us with his blood, and a sense of deep obligation to Him for his mercy has influenced, in some small measure, my conduct ever since. But I shall not again refer to the inner spiritual life which I believe then began, nor do I intend to specify with any prominence the evangelistic labors to which the love of Christ has since impelled me. This book will speak, not so much of what has been done, as of what still remains to be performed, before the Gospel can be said to be preached to all nations.<sup>20</sup>

Even in this clear Christian testimony, we see a statement of the reticence which characterized Livingstone with respect to speaking of his Chris-

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<sup>18</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 18–19.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.david-livingstone-birthplace.org/david-livingstone-and-the-blantyre-cotton-works> [Accessed 29th March 2023]

<sup>20</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 19.

tian faith. This perhaps contributed to the perspective of some that he was more of an explorer than a 'missionary'. This passage leaves us in no doubt, however, about the reality of Livingstone's Christian faith.

### ***Studies and China in Mind***

It is clear that Livingstone's Christian faith quickly shaped his plans for his future career. He writes,

In the glow of love which Christianity inspires, I soon resolved to devote my life to the alleviation of human misery. Turning this idea over in my mind, I felt that to be a pioneer of Christianity in China might lead to the material benefit of some portions of that immense empire; and therefore set myself to obtain a medical education, in order to be qualified for that enterprise.<sup>21</sup>

This comment indicates that Christian convictions motivated Livingstone's plans for future service. It is also clear that he regarded medical training as the most appropriate manner in which he might be 'a pioneer of Christianity'.

Livingstone's hard work and dedication led him to studies in medicine and divinity. The latter point to a conviction that ability to read the Greek New Testament and to explain Christian doctrine would be necessary skills for his future calling. The toil of cotton-spinning, to which I was promoted in my nineteenth year, was excessively severe on a slim, loose-jointed lad, but it was well paid for; and it enabled me to support myself while attending medical and Greek classes in Glasgow in winter, as also the divinity lectures of Dr. Wardlaw, by working with my hands in summer. I never received a farthing of aid from any one, and should have accomplished my project of going to China as a medical missionary, in the course of time, by my own efforts, had not some friends advised my joining the London Missionary Society on account of its perfectly unsectarian character. It "sends neither Episcopacy, nor Presbyterianism, nor Independency, but the Gospel of Christ to the heathen." This exactly agreed with my ideas of what a missionary society ought to do;<sup>22</sup>

The closing lines of this quotation demonstrate that Livingstone's Christian convictions were strong but not sectarian.

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<sup>21</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 20.

### **Qualified**

Livingstone was an excellent student, who demonstrated independence of thought and judgement. While these are admirable qualities, they clearly led him to have a rather awkward examination.

Having finished the medical curriculum and presented a thesis on a subject which required the use of the stethoscope for its diagnosis, I unwittingly procured for myself an examination rather more severe and prolonged than usual among examining bodies. The reason was, that between me and the examiners a slight difference of opinion existed as to whether this instrument could do what was asserted. The wiser plan would have been to have had no opinion of my own. **However, I was admitted a Licentiate of Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons.** It was with unfeigned delight I became a member of a profession which is pre-eminently devoted to practical benevolence, and which with unwearied energy pursues from age to age its endeavors to lessen human woe.<sup>23</sup>

Perhaps it was already clear, even to Livingstone himself, that his determined commitment to a position or to a task might have significant consequences. Nonetheless, Livingstone indicates self-awareness regarding the limitations of his knowledge and sought to be a 'life-long learner'. As he wrote,

The want of time for self-improvement was the only source of regret that I experienced during my African career. The reader, remembering this, will make allowances for the mere gropings for light of a student who has the vanity to think himself "not yet too old to learn".<sup>24</sup>

### **A Change of Plan**

All appeared to be progressing smoothly towards Livingstone travelling to China, but then international conflict demanded a change of plan. Due to this conflict, Livingstone, could no longer travel to China. Livingstone explains,

But though now qualified for my original plan, the opium war was then raging, and it was deemed inexpedient for me to proceed to China. I had fondly hoped to have gained access to that then closed empire by means of the healing art; but there being no prospect of an early peace with the Chinese, and as another inviting field was opening out through the labors of Mr. Moffat, I was induced to turn my thoughts to Africa; and after a more extended course of theological training in England than I had enjoyed in

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<sup>23</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 20.

<sup>24</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 22.

Glasgow, I embarked for Africa in 1840, and, after a voyage of three months, reached Cape Town. Spending but a short time there, I started for the interior by going round to Algoa Bay, and soon proceeded inland, and have spent the following sixteen years of my life, namely, from 1840 to 1856, in medical and missionary labors there without cost to the inhabitants.<sup>25</sup>

The reference to the ‘opium war’ draws attention to the wider context of imperialism to which we shall return shortly. A brief account of the relationship between the opium war and Christian mission can be found in Professor Brian Stanley’s book, *The Bible and the Flag*.<sup>26</sup> At this point it is not necessary to go into the circumstances in detail. It will suffice to say that when Britain forced China to permit the import of opium by means of military force, Britain was, in the words of Stanley, ‘fighting a war of aggressive economic imperialism’.<sup>27</sup> The end of the war created a complicated situation for mission: ‘The British missionary movement (and also the American) thus welcomed the favourable outcome for missions of a war fought in the cause of free trade – a war whose morality it had consistently criticized.’<sup>28</sup>

According to Sunquist,

China was forced open for trade by foreign gunships. Coming off those ships were opium traders with their kegs of Indian-produced opium, and missionaries with their Hong Kong-printed tracts and Scriptures.<sup>29</sup>

## QUESTIONS

In the remainder of this paper, I wish to address three main questions with respect to David Livingstone:

- Was he really a ‘missionary’?
- Did he support and enable imperialism?
- Did he act inappropriately towards his wife and family, towards his colleagues, and towards the people of Africa?

<sup>25</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 21–22.

<sup>26</sup> Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant missions and British imperialism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries* (Leicester: Apollos, 1990), 104–109.

<sup>27</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 106.

<sup>28</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 107.

<sup>29</sup> Scott W. Sunquist, *Understanding Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 94–95.

As we attempt to answer these questions, we will see, I suggest, that the harshest judgments of Livingstone have been unduly harsh, but also that we should be very cautious about describing him as a ‘hero’ without appropriate qualification.

#### WAS LIVINGSTONE A ‘MISSIONARY’?

The simple answer is ‘yes’! We may identify several items of evidence which clearly point to this conclusion:<sup>30</sup>

- Livingston joined the London Missionary Society (1838)
- Livingston stated his intention to serve as a Christian missionary
- Livingston frequently refers to his Christian convictions
- Livingston refers to his conducting acts of worship

To illustrate this point, we might consider the following comment by Livingstone,

The general instructions I received from the Directors of the London Missionary Society led me, as soon as I reached Kuruman or Lattakoo, then, as it is now, their farthest inland station from the Cape, to turn my attention to the north. Without waiting longer at Kuruman than was necessary to recruit the oxen, which were pretty well tired by the long journey from Algoa Bay, I proceeded, in company with another missionary, to the Bakuena or Bakwain country, and found Sechele, with his tribe, located at Shokwane.<sup>31</sup>

Livingstone clearly indicates that he followed directions from the LMS as he developed his work in Africa.

Elsewhere, Livingstone describes a meeting he had with a group of Africans in which he explained biblical accounts and their significance in the light of Jesus Christ.

Shinte was most anxious to see the pictures of the magic lantern; .... The first picture exhibited was Abraham about to slaughter his son Isaac; it was shown as large as life, and the uplifted knife was in the act of striking the lad;

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<sup>30</sup> Justin Livingstone, Livingstone, Justin D. “Livingstone’s Life & Expeditions.” Adrian S. Wisnicki and Megan Ward, eds. *Livingstone Online*. Adrian S. Wisnicki and Megan Ward, dirs. University of Maryland Libraries, 2015. Web. <http://livingstoneonline.org/uuid/node/76ab1aa0-2bf4-4c42-adf7-c8c4ee960236..> Accessed 28/11/2022.

<sup>31</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 22–23.

the Balonda men remarked that the picture was much more like a god than the things of wood or clay they worshiped. **I explained that this man was the first of a race to whom God had given the Bible we now held, and that among his children our Savior appeared.**<sup>32</sup>

The more complicated answer to the question, ‘Was Livingstone a missionary?’ is ‘Yes, but ...!’ There are several reasons for this view. First, Livingston understood his role as a Christian missionary as ‘much more than is implied in the usual picture of a missionary’. In particular, he considered addressing the physical needs of the African people a fundamental aspect of his calling. With particular reference to the impact of lack of food on the ability of people to engage seriously with the process of learning, he writes,

In addition to other adverse influences, the general uncertainty, though not absolute want of food, and the necessity of frequent absence for the purpose of either hunting game or collecting roots and fruits, proved a serious barrier to the progress of the people in knowledge. Our own education in England is carried on at the comfortable breakfast and dinner table, and by the cosy fire, as well as in the church and school. Few English people with stomachs painfully empty would be decorous at church any more than they are when these organs are overcharged. Ragged schools would have been a failure had not the teachers wisely provided food for the body as well as food for the mind; and not only must we show a friendly interest in the bodily comfort of the objects of our sympathy as a Christian duty, but we can no more hope for healthy feelings among the poor, either at home or abroad, without feeding them into them, than we can hope to see an ordinary working-bee reared into a queen-mother by the ordinary food of the hive. *Sending the Gospel to the heathen must, if this view be correct, include much more than is implied in the usual picture of a missionary, namely, a man going about with a Bible under his arm.* The promotion of commerce ought to be specially attended to, as this, more speedily than any thing else, demolishes that sense of isolation which heathenism engenders, and makes the tribes feel themselves mutually dependent on, and mutually beneficial to each other.<sup>33</sup>

Second, in 1857, Livingston resigned from the London Missionary Society.

Third, subsequent to his resignation from the London Missionary Society, Livingston spent his later life pursuing ambitious travel projects, at least some of which did not seem to have any clear relationship to Christian mission as typically understood.

<sup>32</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 221.

<sup>33</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches*, 35–36. Emphasis added.

Livingstone trained as a scientist and devoted a considerable amount of time and effort to observation of the world around him. With regard to Livingstone's scientific work on one particular journey, Andrew Ross comments,

On the journey [1853–1856] Livingstone spent a great deal of time gathering and noting all kinds of information about the insects, animals and people of that stretch of Africa. ... No other European traveller in southern and central Africa in this period commented on the fauna and flora in such detail or with such scientifically trained accuracy of observation.<sup>34</sup>

Tim Jeal describes Livingstone as a 'missionary-explorer'.<sup>35</sup> According to Stephen Tompkins, however, 'David Livingstone was not a great missionary. He wasn't even a good one.'<sup>36</sup> These comments raise the prior question, what is a 'missionary'?

### *How do we define 'missionary'?*

Our perception of Livingstone as a missionary may depend partly on our definition of a 'missionary'? We may also have to consider Livingstone's activities as a doctor, scientist, and cartographer as part of his 'calling'. Do we operate with a 'sacred-secular divide'?<sup>37</sup>

- Was Livingstone engaging in 'holistic' or 'integral' mission?
- 'A Traditional Missionary'?

Alice Ott states that 'Livingstone was anything but a "traditional" missionary.'<sup>38</sup> Ott's view seems to be confirmed by Livingstone's own words,

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew C. Ross, *David Livingstone: Mission and Empire* (London: Hambleton Continuum, 2002), 85.

<sup>35</sup> Tim Jeal, *Livingstone* Revised and expanded edition. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), xi.

<sup>36</sup> Stephen Tompkins, 'David Livingstone. Hero or Failure?'. <https://www.reform-magazine.co.uk/2013/02/david-livingstone-hero-or-failure/> [Accessed 03/08/2022]

<sup>37</sup> On the concept of the 'sacred-secular divide', see Mark Greene and Ian J. Shaw (eds), *Whole Life Mission for the Whole Church: Overcoming the Sacred-Secular Divide through Theological Education* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2021).

<sup>38</sup> Alice T. Ott, *Turning Points in the Expansion of Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 174.

Sending the Gospel to the heathen must, if this view be correct, include **much more than is implied in the usual picture of a missionary, namely, a man going about with a Bible under his arm.** The promotion of commerce ought to be specially attended to, as this, more speedily than anything else, demolishes that sense of isolation which heathenism engenders, and makes the tribes feel themselves mutually dependent on, and mutually beneficial to each other.<sup>39</sup>

We may feel that Livingstone's portrayal of a missionary is a caricature (and it does seem to be an image that he uses on more than one occasion, as we will see below), but his words make clear that he did not consider himself to confirm to the 'usual picture of a missionary'.

Andrew Ross cites another passage which both reinforces the comments Livingstone made in the quotation we have just considered and hints at the frustration Livingstone felt in response to accusations he apparently received.

My views of what is missionary duty are not so contracted as those whose ideal is a dumpy sort of man with a Bible under his arm. I have laboured in bricks and mortar, at the forge and at the carpenter's bench, as well as in preaching and in medical practice. I feel "I am not my own". I am serving Christ when shooting a buffalo for my men, or taking an astronomical observation, or writing to one of His children who forget, during the little moment of penning a note, that charity which is eulogized as "thinking no evil"; and after by His help got information, which I hope will lead to more abundant blessing being bestowed on Africa than heretofore, am I to hide the light under a bushel merely because some will consider it not sufficiently, or even at all, *missionary*?<sup>40</sup>

Alice Ott considers Livingstone to be a missionary, but a missionary who was engaged in what might be described as 'holistic' or 'integral' mission.

Christianity and civilization, when combined with the essential element of commerce, was a mid-nineteenth-century attempt to eliminate the systemic social injustice of slavery and the slave trade in Africa. It was thus an early attempt at "holistic mission," though that was a term that neither [Thomas Foxwell] Buxton nor Livingstone would know or use.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 35-36.

<sup>40</sup> Andrew C. Ross, *David Livingstone: Mission and Empire* (London: Hambleton Continuum, 2002), 122-123.

<sup>41</sup> Ott, *Turning Points*, 175.

## WHAT WAS LIVINGSTONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH IMPERIALISM/ COLONIALISM?

Did Livingstone support and/or enable 'imperialism' and/or 'colonialism'? In order to answer this question we must spend some time clarifying the definitions of the key terms. Brian Stanley's 1990 book remains a nuanced and authoritative discussion of the topic and we will use his definitions in the following section.<sup>42</sup>

### ***'Imperialism'/'Colonialism'***

Stanley acknowledges that, 'The missionary movement stands accused of having been in consistent liaison with an unholy historical partner described interchangeably as imperialism or colonialism.'<sup>43</sup> Although these terms are often used interchangeably, there is value in precisely identifying the connotations of a series of closely related terms.

### ***'Imperialism' Defined***

According to Stanley,

The essence of imperialism is control by an alien national or racial group; such control may be primarily political or primarily economic, and need not imply formal territorial rule; it may also be contrary to the original intentions of the imperial power, or only indirectly related to these intentions.<sup>44</sup>

### ***'Colonization' Defined***

Stanley then shows the relationship between 'imperialism' and 'colonization':

From the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries European imperialism most frequently took the form of colonization, the movement to establish white settler communities in the non-European world<sup>45</sup>

### ***'Colonialism' Defined***

While similar in sound, 'colonization' and 'colonialism' are to be distinguished:

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<sup>42</sup> Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag* (Leicester: Apollon, 1990).

<sup>43</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 33.

<sup>44</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 34.

The alternative (and largely subsequent) expression of imperialism known as “colonialism” is distinguished from colonization by the fact that the alien dominant group remains non-resident in the imperialized territory.<sup>46</sup>

Stanley continues, ‘Colonialism, therefore, may be defined as that form of imperialism in which the imperial power imposes governmental control on a territory without resort to large-scale human settlement.’<sup>47</sup>

How, then, did Christians come to terms with the imposition of imperial power on other nations? Stanley suggests that theological convictions regarding divine providence played a significant part both in their accepting the circumstances being worked out on the world stage and also in their having a sense of moral responsibility to speak out against injustice. Stanley explains,

Christian belief in divine providence goes a long way towards explaining why most missionaries and their supporters accepted imperialism as a general historical process, but the converse of their belief in providence was their unrelenting insistence on moral and spiritual responsibility – an insistence which again and again led missionaries to challenge and criticize the reality of imperial policy on the field.<sup>48</sup>

### ***The ‘Three cs’: Christianity, Commerce, and Civilization***

In an address given to Cambridge University on 5 December 1857, David Livingstone said,

I beg to direct your attention to Africa; I know that in a few years I shall be cut off in that country, which is now open: Do not let it be shut again! I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity; do you carry out the work which I have begun. I leave it with you!<sup>49</sup>

What did Livingstone mean when he said, ‘I go back to Africa to try to make an open path for commerce and Christianity’? Was he complicit in the exploitative project of those who sought financial gain? Several questions arise with respect to the relationship between Livingstone and Imperialism:

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<sup>46</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 34.

<sup>47</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 34.

<sup>48</sup> Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag*, 70.

<sup>49</sup> Cited in Thomas Pakenham, *The Scramble for Africa* (Abacus, 2015 [1991]). Kindle Edition, 26.

***What was Livingstone's attitude towards imperial authorities?***

Livingstone recognised imperial authorities, but it is also clear from some of his statements that he was angered by imperial aggression. It is perhaps also the case that he exercised some self-censorship so as not to publicly criticise authorities. We shall see each of these approaches in the following citations.

*Civilization, Christianity, and Commerce*

With a view to this, the missionaries at Kuruman got permission from the government for a trader to reside at the station, and a considerable trade has been the result; the trader himself has become rich enough to retire with a competence. Those laws which still prevent free commercial intercourse among the civilized nations seem to be nothing else but the remains of our own heathenism. *My observations on this subject make me extremely desirous to promote the preparation of the raw materials of European manufactures in Africa, for by that means we may not only put a stop to the slave-trade, but introduce the negro family into the body corporate of nations, no one member of which can suffer without the others suffering with it.* Success in this, in both Eastern and Western Africa, would lead, in the course of time, to a much larger diffusion of the blessings of civilization than efforts exclusively spiritual and educational confined to any one small tribe. These, however, it would of course be extremely desirable to carry on at the same time at large central and healthy stations, *for neither civilization nor Christianity can be promoted alone. In fact, they are inseparable.*<sup>50</sup>

*Did Livingstone 'open the way' for colonial expansion?*

Gambian scholar Professor Lamin Sanneh who, along with Professor Andrew Walls, was a pioneer in the discipline of World Christianity, presents a sympathetic account of Livingstone's work in his important book, *Translating the Message*. Yet his account is not uncritical. He writes,

This is in no way a defense of Livingstone against the view that he helped open the way for colonialism in Africa, thrusting Africa into the world economic and political system. In fact he did do that, and perhaps worse. His wish to see the Zambesi region develop into a successful commercial field—cultivating and exporting cotton, fostering intertribal harmony, and rechanneling energies previously expended on the slave trade—had in it the seeds of imperial rivalry and expansion.<sup>7</sup>

However, he then identifies a significant difference in his eyes between the goals of missionaries and colonialists,

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<sup>50</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 36. Emphasis added.

Mission aimed at the establishment of national churches and envisaged a future without itself, whereas colonialism saw only the perpetuation of dependency.<sup>51</sup>

### 'Benevolent Colonialism'

If Livingstone was influenced, even to a limited extent, by the attitudes and activities of colonialism, we should nonetheless recognize that 'colonialism' may be understood to have taken different forms at different times. According to Bevans and Schroeder,

[Henry] Venn and Livingstone are representatives of the wave of missionaries during a time that would later be called *benevolent colonialism*. The next phase of this missionary period was to be shaped by the advent of high imperialism.<sup>52</sup>

We may have legitimate concerns concerning David Livingstone's links with colonialism, but we should be careful not to ascribe to him the attitudes and approaches seen in the 'Scramble for Africa' which dates from a later period.

Justin Livingstone highlights an interesting feature of Livingstone's *Missionary Travels*: comments which were in the original manuscript but were omitted in the final published book.

*Missionary Travels* is also interesting for what it leaves out. In the original handwritten manuscript of the book, for instance, Livingstone had included a substantial critique of the Cape Frontier Wars, in which he criticised colonial violence at length. Perhaps in fear of alienating the establishment, or perhaps at Murray's prompting, this passage – running to almost thirty pages – is excluded from the published text (Livingstone 2011; Livingstone 2014).<sup>53</sup>

What do these deleted comments tell us? I suggest that they offer conflicting evidence. On the one hand, the deletion of the comments suggests that Livingstone gave in to pressure (of one kind or another) not to criticise the authorities in print. On the other hand, the existence of a substantial section of critical material in the handwritten manuscript indicates that Livingstone was in no way supportive of the actions of the

<sup>51</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 153–154.

<sup>52</sup> Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), 214.

<sup>53</sup> Justin Livingstone, 'Livingstone's Life and Expeditions', <https://livingstoneonline.org/life-and-times/livingstone-s-life-expeditions> [Accessed 19/11/2022]

imperial authorities. This latter point is reinforced by Livingstone's comments reproduced by Ross in his biography. Livingstone wrote,

But while England has been sympathizing with the struggles for freedom which she herself knows how to enjoy, she has been struggling to crush a nation fighting as bravely for nationality as ever Magyar did ... We are no advocates for war but we would prefer perpetual war to perpetual slavery. No nation ever secured its freedom without fighting for it. And ever[y] nation on earth worthy of freedom is ready to shed blood in its defence. In sympathising with the Caffres we side with the weak against the strong.<sup>54</sup>

According to Ross, 'No later colonialist would have written as Livingstone wrote of the Xhosa attempt to defend their autonomy, at a time when an official British document referred to them as "irreclaimable savages"'.<sup>55</sup>

Ross cites a comment of Livingstone's to indicate the level of solidarity that he showed to the African people: 'There is not a native in the country but knows now for certain whose side I am on.'<sup>56</sup>

#### HOW DID LIVINGSTONE RELATE TO AFRICANS?

We can address this question in two ways. First, we may consider how Livingstone spoke of his relationship with Africans in his own writings. Second, we may consider how Africans related to Livingstone, as far as we can discern this.

- What attitude did Livingstone display towards Africans?
  - Language
  - Description of culture
  - Description of character

#### *Language used of Africans*

Livingstone uses several terms with respect to Black Africans which we would now either consider offensive or, at least, potentially problematic:

- 'Caffres'<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ross, *David Livingstone*, 242–243.

<sup>55</sup> Ross, *David Livingstone*, 243.

<sup>56</sup> Ross, *David Livingstone*, 244.

<sup>57</sup> This term, particularly in the form it was widely used of Black Africans in South Africa ('the K word') is recognised to be deeply offensive and its use

- ‘Heathen’
- ‘Savages’
- ‘Natives’
- ‘Negros’

An initial word of caution is that we should be careful not to use a modern standard to evaluate an earlier time. In some cases, terms that have negative connotations in our society were regarded as more ‘neutral’ in the time they were used by historical figures.

We cannot, however, excuse Livingstone’s use of language on this basis. Livingstone is aware that at least one of the terms he uses to describe black Africans, namely ‘Caffre’, is regarded by the African people as an ‘insulting epithet’, yet he uses it repeatedly nonetheless. In describing the various African ‘families’, Livingstone writes,

The Makololo, or Basuto, have carried their powers of generalization still farther, and arranged the other parts of the same great family of South Africans into three divisions: 1st. The Matebele, or Makonkobi—the Caffre family living on the eastern side of the country; 2d. The Bakoni, or Basuto; and, 3d. The Bakalahari, or Bechuanas, living in the central parts, which includes all those tribes living in or adjacent to the great Kalahari Desert. 1st. The Caffres are divided by themselves into various subdivisions, as Amakosa, Amapanda, and other well-known titles. *They consider the name Caffre as an insulting epithet.*<sup>58</sup>

It is unclear why Livingstone continues to use the term freely despite acknowledging its offensive nature. Livingstone has apparent respect for the African people so perhaps he would not have used this term in their presence. Perhaps he uses this term in a work written for a European readership because he recognizes that it is a term widely used by his compatriots. Whatever the explanation might be, Livingstone’s continued use of a term which he knows to be insulting to the people he lives and works with appears to be a significant failure in judgement and Christian love.

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would open the user to accusations of hate speech. I have retained the word in the citations of Livingstone’s own words for the sake of historical accuracy since it is significant for our understanding of Livingstone. I do not intend to cause any offence and I hope readers will understand the reason for including the word.

<sup>58</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 155–156. Emphasis added.

Similarly, Livingstone can refer to the Africans as ‘poor savages’, as in the following quotation:

When I spoke to Mr. Hendrick Potgeiter of the danger of hindering the Gospel of Christ *among these poor savages*, he became greatly excited, and called one of his followers to answer me. He threatened to attack any tribe that might receive a native teacher, yet he promised to use his influence to prevent those under him from throwing obstacles in our way.<sup>59</sup>

It is important to notice that, in this recorded incident, Livingstone is acting in the interests of the Africans contrary to those who would deprive them of educational opportunities. It is also significant that Livingstone sometimes uses rather pejorative language of the people of the United Kingdom so we should not understand his terms as indicating a sense of racial superiority, though we might well ask whether his language is evidence of some form of paternalism based, perhaps, on class or education. So, for example, Livingstone writes with respect to certain African people,

**They might be called stupid in matters which had not come within the sphere of their observation, but in other things they showed more intelligence than is to be met with in our own uneducated peasantry.** They are remarkably accurate in their knowledge of cattle, sheep, and goats, knowing exactly the kind of pasturage suited to each; and they select with great judgment the varieties of soil best suited to different kinds of grain. They are also familiar with the habits of wild animals, and in general are well up in the maxims which embody their ideas of political wisdom.<sup>60</sup>

Modern readers rightly balk at Livingstone describing the African people as ‘stupid’ but it immediately becomes clear from contact that he does not mean ‘foolish’ or ‘incapable’ as a general characteristic of the people but rather he speaks of a lack of knowledge or skill with respect to a particular matter with which they have not been familiar. With respect to the matters they know well, Livingstone states that they are ‘remarkably accurate in their knowledge’. What’s more, he commends the Africans (in the same breath as denigrating a group of his own people in a startlingly dismissive phrase) as those who showed, in some areas, ‘more intelligence than is to be met with in our own uneducated peasantry’.

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<sup>59</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 47. Emphasis added.

<sup>60</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 30.

### ***Description of Language and Culture***

Livingstone devoted himself to understanding the Tswana language thoroughly. His notes on the language were later important to linguists. He describes his commitment to grasping the language and culture of the African people among whom he lived and worked.

Here [Lepelole (now Litubaruba)], *in order to obtain an accurate knowledge of the language, I cut myself off from all European society for about six months, and gained by this ordeal an insight into the habits, ways of thinking, laws, and language of that section of the Bechuanas [Batswanas] called Bakwains, which has proved of incalculable advantage in my intercourse with them ever since.*<sup>61</sup>

Ross describes how Livingstone developed his knowledge of African culture as follows,

Livingstone undertook two further extensive journeys. On these journeys he travelled with African companions only. The first of these journeys lasted from 10 February 1842 until end of June 1842. The second began in mid February of 1843 and ended with his return to Kuruman on 20 June 1843. ... They were a means of Livingstone getting to know the language and the people. ...

He also gained considerable insight into the thought and culture of the Tswana. ... All of this already marked him out from most other missionaries in Africa at that time, who showed neither serious interest in nor any sympathetic understanding of African culture.<sup>62</sup>

### ***Description of African Character***

Livingstone often speaks highly of Africans, showing them considerable respect, yet he sometimes tends towards 'paternalism'. For example, he speaks highly of the Batswana, and by extension all African people, 'The Bechuanas, moreover, in all probability possess that imperishability which forms so remarkable a feature in the entire African race.'<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, in describing the beginnings of his relationship with Sechele, Livingstone writes,

I attached myself to the tribe called Bakuena or Bakwains, the chief of which, named Sechele, was then living with his people at a place called Shokuane. *I was from the first struck by his intelligence, and by the marked manner in*

<sup>61</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 23. Emphasis added.

<sup>62</sup> Ross, *David Livingstone*, 44.

<sup>63</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 96.

*which we both felt drawn to each other.* As this remarkable man has not only embraced Christianity, but expounds its doctrines to his people, I will here give a brief sketch of his career.<sup>64</sup>

Livingstone recognised the agency of the African people. He states,

*In our relations with this people we were simply strangers exercising no authority or control whatever. Our influence depended entirely on persuasion; and having taught them by kind conversation as well as by public instruction, I expected them to do what their own sense of right and wrong dictated. We never wished them to do right merely because it would be pleasing to us, nor thought ourselves to blame when they did wrong, although we were quite aware of the absurd idea to that effect. We saw that our teaching did good to the general mind of the people by bringing new and better motives into play. Five instances are positively known to me in which, by our influence on public opinion, war was prevented; and where, in individual cases, we failed, the people did no worse than they did before we came into the country.*<sup>65</sup>

Despite the obvious respect that Livingstone shows towards the Africans, we find a tension in his language. He can speak positively of the Batswana while also using language which we would, I imagine, find inappropriate as a way of describing a particular ethnic community.

*They might be called stupid in matters which had not come within the sphere of their observation, but in other things they showed more intelligence than is to be met with in our own uneducated peasantry.* They are remarkably accurate in their knowledge of cattle, sheep, and goats, knowing exactly the kind of pasturage suited to each; and they select with great judgment the varieties of soil best suited to different kinds of grain. They are also familiar with the habits of wild animals, and in general are well up in the maxims which embody their ideas of political wisdom.<sup>66</sup>

This suggests that Livingstone did not feel the discomfort with his use of language that we feel today. The fact that he can describe a group of his own compatriots as ‘our own uneducated peasantry’ shows that he does not intend to be discriminatory towards the Africans on account of their being Africans.

Livingstone’s confidence in the African people is shown in another section of his book where he states,

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<sup>64</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 26. Emphasis added.

<sup>65</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 29–30. Emphasis added.

<sup>66</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 30. Emphasis added.

Our chief hopes rest with the natives themselves; and if the point to which I have given prominence, of healthy inland commercial stations, be realized, where all the produce raised may be collected, there is little doubt but that slavery among our kinsmen across the Atlantic will, in the course of some years, cease to assume the form of a necessity to even the slaveholders themselves. Natives alone can collect produce from the more distant hamlets, and bring it to the stations contemplated.<sup>67</sup>

Livingstone is confident that indigenous Christian witness and labour can transform local circumstances. He comments,

In Madagascar, a few Christians were left with nothing but the Bible in their hands; and though exposed to persecution, and even death itself, as the penalty of adherence to their profession, they increased ten-fold in numbers, and are, if possible, more decided believers now than they were when, by an edict of the queen of that island, the missionaries ceased their teaching.<sup>68</sup>

#### HOW DID LIVINGSTONE RELATE TO HIS FAMILY?

Did Livingstone subject his family to unwarranted suffering? There is no doubt that Livingstone's family life was far from typical. Livingstone's wife, Mary, was the daughter of missionaries Robert and Mary Moffat. She had lived in Africa for many years and the wedding was in Africa.

The family experienced significant trials and tragedies. Some of these appear to a modern observer to be at least partly exacerbated by a lack of thought on the part of Livingstone. For example, Andrew Ross recounts the experience of the family crossing the Kalahari while Mary is on the verge of giving birth:

The children were unwell and Mary's pregnancy was advanced. They returned to Kolobeng after an appallingly difficult crossing of the Kalahari in the middle of August 1850. A week later Mary gave birth to a little girl. All the children caught a bronchial infection prevalent among the Kwena at that time and the baby, Elizabeth, died of it. ...

Mary was also ill, indeed she suffered paralysis of some of the facial muscles, and Mrs Moffat insisted that Mary, David and the children go to Kuruman in order to recuperate. They stayed there from November 1850 to February 1851.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 480.

<sup>68</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 96.

<sup>69</sup> Ross, *David Livingstone*, 60.

Perhaps we might say, 'Well that was what was considered reasonable in those days.' It was not, however, considered reasonable by Livingstone's mother-in-law. Mary Moffat, Livingstone's mother-in-law and the distraught grandmother of his children, wrote to Livingstone,

Was it not enough that you lost one lovely babe and scarcely saved the others, while the mother came home threatened with Paralysis? And will you again expose her and them in those sickly regions in an exploring expedition? All the world will condemn the cruelty of the thing, to say nothing of the indecorousness of it.<sup>70</sup>

Ross is correct to point out that Livingstone wrote with great tenderness about his family, and particularly of the loss of the baby, and also that his wife, Mary, chose to accompany him on his travels.<sup>71</sup> Yet, I do not think it is unreasonable to ask whether it was wise to choose to travel with his pregnant wife and three children under five years of age when the journey was fraught with danger. Ross explains,

This was a very drastic decision since this trip would entail crossing a stretch of the Kalahari, then entering an area where there were patches of tsetse fly which might wipe out their oxen and leave them stranded. Beyond the Kalahari the travellers would be exposed to malaria in a way they were not in Kolobeng.<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, we may question the wisdom of sending his wife and children to Britain to stay for years in a place and with people they did not know while he travelled, even as we recognize that this was approved by the LMS. Livingstone wrote,

Having placed my family on board a homeward-bound ship, and promised to rejoin them in two years, we parted, for, as it subsequently proved, nearly five years. The Directors of the London Missionary Society signified their cordial approval of my project by leaving the matter entirely to my own discretion; and I have much pleasure in acknowledging my obligations to the gentlemen composing that body for always acting in an enlightened spirit, and with as much liberality as their constitution would allow.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ross, *David Livingstone*, 60.

<sup>71</sup> Ross, *David Livingstone*, 60.

<sup>72</sup> Ross, *David Livingstone*, 58.

<sup>73</sup> Livingstone, *Missionary Travels*, 80.

## HOW MAY WE LEARN FROM THE LIFE AND WORK OF DAVID LIVINGSTONE?

We may learn from an individual in all kinds of ways. We may learn from a person's words but also from their actions. We may learn from what we consider admirable and also from what we consider questionable or simply deplorable. We do not have to engage in hagiography in order to learn from an individual in a respectful manner.

Recent biographies offering significantly different perspectives on Livingstone suggest that, 'a truly "definitive" biography can never be written. Established portraits always provoke response . . .'<sup>74</sup> Yet Justin Livingstone is surely correct to assert, 'Some versions of history will clearly have greater credibility than others.'<sup>75</sup>

Edward Smither summarises Livingstone's impact on mission as follows:

Though he parted ways with the LMS in [1857], he remained committed to evangelism. A passion to get to new villages and communities that had not been exposed to the gospel actually drove his exploration. Relatedly, Livingstone labored to bring about transformation in Africa specifically through ending the slave trade. Striving to open Africa to Christianity and commerce, he was convinced that if Europe and the West did business with Africa, then Africans would cease trafficking other Africans in the global slave trade. Finally, due to his fame as an explorer and his speaking tours in Britain, he mobilized many more missionaries for Africa. The Anglican Universities' Mission to Central Africa was founded in 1857 as a direct result of Livingstone's pleas for more laborers for the harvest in Africa.<sup>76</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Those of us who take seriously the full extent of biblical theology will recognise in David Livingstone a faithful, yet flawed, Christian man. He was a man of great gifts and motivation and in many ways demonstrated the characteristics of a faithful servant of Jesus Christ. Nonetheless, we also see signs of a determination bordering on wilfulness and, perhaps, obsessive determination.

As we look back on Livingstone's life and work, we must acknowledge that Livingstone was a person of his time—as are we all—with all that this entails. We may admire certain aspects of his life and work without

<sup>74</sup> Livingstone, *Livingstone's Lives*, 284.

<sup>75</sup> Livingstone, *Livingstone's Lives*, 7.

<sup>76</sup> Edward L. Smither, *Christian Mission: A Concise Global History* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 131.

treating him uncritically. The harshest modern judgments of Livingstone are almost certainly unfair. Far from being an agent of colonialism, Livingstone generally stood with Africans against oppressive powers, yet we do see tendencies towards paternalism in some of his comments. There is also clear evidence that Livingstone loved his family and that they loved him, although he put great strain on his family by some of his decisions.

Some of those who came after Livingstone may be criticised for not recognising the contribution of his African fellow-travellers but Livingstone can hardly be blamed for the attitudes of others.

Ultimately, I believe that Livingstone is worthy of respect and careful attention. Nonetheless, he need not be our ‘hero’.

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# DID CLASSICAL DISPENSATIONALISM TEACH MULTIPLE WAYS OF SALVATION?

JOHN CARPENTER

From its inception in 1828, Dispensationalism has been dogged by accusations that it teaches multiple ways of salvation.<sup>1</sup> Its advocates often insist that these accusations are unfounded; that they are all based on misunderstandings and a few “unfortunate statements taken in isolation.”<sup>2</sup> Many, if not all, leading dispensationalists insist that their system has never made any such claim. While Charles Ryrie (1925–2016) insisted, “Dispensationalism does not teach two ways of salvation, and there are sufficient statements by dispensationalists to prove the fact.”<sup>3</sup> He complains that claims to the contrary are “repeated with the regularity of a dripping faucet.”<sup>4</sup> The Dallas Theological Seminary Statement of Faith on dispensations states, “dispensations are not ways of salvation... salvation in the divine reckoning is always ‘by grace through faith,’ and rests upon the basis of the shed blood of Christ.”<sup>5</sup> Michael Svelg matter-of-factly notes that “mainstream dispensationalists... insisted on soteriological continuity in every dispensation.”<sup>6</sup> Joining the chorus are dispensational scholars E. Schuyler English (1899–1981), Mal Couch (1938–2013), Anthony C. Garland, Matt Sherro, and Michael Vlach.<sup>7</sup> With such force-

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<sup>1</sup> I am dating the beginning of dispensationalism from the publication of John Nelson Darby’s *The Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ*.

<sup>2</sup> Tony Garland, “Does Dispensationalism Teach Two Ways of Salvation?” *The Conservative Theological Journal*, March 2003, p. 1. <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/documents/articles/4/4.htm?x=x>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1965), 112–113.

<sup>4</sup> Ryrie, *Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), ebook, (<https://www.google.com/books/edition/Dispensationalism/eo3BxTfTqJEC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=>, accessed July 23, 2021), 105.

<sup>5</sup> Dallas Theological Seminary, Doctrinal Statement, Article V. <https://www.dts.edu/about/doctrinal-statement/>, accessed July 21, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Michael J. Svelg, “The History of Dispensationalism in Seven Eras,” *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption: A Developing and Diverse Tradition* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015), 49.

<sup>7</sup> English wrote, “Dispensationalism teaches that man is saved by grace and grace alone in any age.” (“E. Schuyler English Looks at Dispensationalism,” *Christian Life*, XVIII, 5 [September 1956]: 25, according to Daniel Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum* [Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI,

ful claims and emphatic denials, one would think that evidence of classical dispensationalism teaching otherwise would be rare and vague. One would be wrong.

From the outset, I admit that classical theologians of dispensationalism – which I define as ranging from John Nelson Darby to Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952) – taught, at times, that salvation in every dispensation was only through Christ.<sup>8</sup> Darby wrote, “Every sinner in all ages is saved as such, individually, by grace.”<sup>9</sup> Likewise, Chafer wrote, “God never saved any one person or group of persons on any other ground than that righteous freedom to do so which the Cross of Christ secured.”<sup>10</sup> (More on this later.) Yet, at other times, the founders appeared to teach otherwise. The issue is their consistency. The question, here, is not whether the founders of dispensationalism sometimes taught a continuity of salvation, but whether they at other times, taught the opposite. That is, did they

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1980], 34.) Mal Couch (1938-2013), founder of Tyndale Theological Seminary, wrote that classical dispensationalists “*never believed* that one is saved by the law.” (Mal Couch, *A Biblical Theology of the Church* [Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1999], 34, emphasis original.) Anthony C. Garland wrote, “Normative dispensationalism has *never* taught anything other than a single way of salvation.” (Garland, “Does Dispensationalism Teach Two Ways of Salvation?” 1, [The Conservative Theological Journal - March 2003, <https://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/documents/articles/4/4.htm?x=x>, accessed November 24, 2025] emphasis original.) Matt Sherro writes, “Dispensationalism has always taught one way of salvation.” (Matt Sherro, “Salvation and Dispensationalism”, March 9, 2017, <http://exploringthetruth.Org/salvation-and-dispensationalism/>, accessed July 23, 2021.) Michael Vlach emphasizes, “*dispensationalism has not and does not teach multiple ways of salvation.*” (Michael Vlach, “What is Dispensationalism,” *Christ’s Prophetic Plans*, John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, editors [Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012], e-book. Emphasis original.) In an editorial for The Gospel Coalition, he wrote that dispensationalism affirms “salvation has always been by grace through faith alone.” (Michael Vlach, “Dispensational Theology,” *Concise Theology* series, nd, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/dispensational-theology/>, accessed July 26, 2021.)

<sup>8</sup> Since I am defining classical dispensationalists as from Darby to Lewis Sperry Chafer, then dispensationalists after Chafer commenting on the founders of the system are regarded as secondary sources.

<sup>9</sup> J. N. Darby, *Collected Works*, vol 11, “Elements of Prophecy,” (nd) 47. (<https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/darby/PROPHET/11003E.html>, accessed July 7, 2023.) He also wrote, “A sinner at all times since the fall is saved in the same way, no Christian can doubt that for a moment.” J. N. Darby, *Collected Works*, vol 10, “Law,” 12.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis S. Chafer, “Editorial,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol. 102, No. 405 (1945), 1.

contradict themselves? Did their theology, in fact, teach multiple ways of salvation?

## DISPENSATIONS AND THE IMPLICATIONS OF DIFFERENT WAYS OF SALVATION

The first hint that dispensationalism taught different ways of salvation is in the very concept of “dispensations,” in particular, a dispensation of law contrasted with a dispensation of grace. Charles Ryrie admitted that the terminology implies soteriological discontinuity: “labeling the present dispensation as that of Grace has been taken to mean that dispensationalism teaches there was no grace in any other age.”<sup>11</sup> Labelling the current era the “Dispensation of Grace” invites the conclusion that the prior “Dispensation of Law” relied on law-keeping for salvation. However, dispensationalists protest that such a conclusion is presumptuous, that it demonstrates simplistic, superficial knowledge of the system. They can then present numerous quotations of dispensationalists that support their contention that “dispensations” were never about salvation but rather about “testing.” Anthony Garland specifies that these “tests associated with dispensations are not for salvation.”<sup>12</sup> But that begs the question as to what is being tested. If not salvation, then what? William Trotter (1818-1865), a contemporary of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), wrote that “The conversion of souls has taken place under every dispensation that God has established since the fall... But the characteristics of the dispensation are to be found in that which relates to *the divine government of the earth*.”<sup>13</sup> Hence, what distinguishes the dispensations is how one relates to God’s government kingdom. C. I. Scofield wrote, “A dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect of obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God.”<sup>14</sup>

Specifically, some early proponents of dispensationalism, like Lewis Sperry Chafer, used terms like “divine government” or “testings” to define dispensations, but these concepts are so interwoven with God’s Kingdom and one’s ultimate status with God that they are effectively synonymous with salvation. The “divine government” is not distinct from God’s kingdom. Scholars are so accustomed to making fine distinctions that they

<sup>11</sup> Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 111.

<sup>12</sup> Garland, “Does Dispensationalism Teach Two Ways of Salvation?” (2003), <http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/documents/articles/4/4.htm?x=x#sdfootnote14sym>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> William Trotter, *Plain Papers on Prophetic and Other Subjects*, 406. Emphasis original.

<sup>14</sup> *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford, 1909), 5.

sometimes fail to see that two things with different names are functionally identical. To be in God’s kingdom is, *ipso facto*, to be saved. For example, in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, Paul speaks of “inheriting the Kingdom of God” as equivalent to final salvation. So, to be tested of one’s relationship to the Kingdom or “divine government,” however it is phrased, is functionally the same as to be tested whether one is saved. Thus, if the “Divine Government” determines who enters the Kingdom, then the criteria for government are the criteria for salvation. If the administration changes from Grace to Law, or vice versa, and inclusion in the Kingdom – effectively the same as being saved – relies on passing the test of that administration, the mode of salvation has effectively changed. If one fails the test, then one’s one is shown to be excluded from God’s Kingdom. That is another way of speaking of exclusion from salvation. If the administration of God’s rule changes, there is reason to believe that the criteria for who is saved under the different administration have changed.

“To be tested for ‘obedience,” as Scofield suggests, is inherently to be tested for salvation, unless one embraces antinomianism by severing obedience from salvation entirely. Since salvation produces “the obedience of faith” (Romans 1:5, 16:26), sanctification cannot be fully divorced from justification. This creates a theological dilemma regarding the nature of the “test” under the dispensation of law.

If the test was merely to demonstrate righteousness, then it is akin to the Reformed “third use of the law” (*tertius usus legis*).<sup>15</sup> However, if this testing is the condition for entering the Kingdom, it ceases to be sanctification and becomes a work-based justification—precisely the charge dispensationalists deny. Furthermore, removing the old test of the law, with the new “dispensation of grace,” implies that believers today lack legal admonition, effectively rendering the present age antinomian. For Darby, the law “played no part in the accomplishment of salvation” for Christians.<sup>16</sup> There was no “evangelical use of the law. Conversely, if passing the “test” of law-keeping had been required to procure justification, then the method of salvation has indeed changed from one dispensation to the next. If it was not – that is, if one could fail the test and yet still be justified – what was the test for? Therefore, despite modern denials, the dispensational structure forces a choice between present-day antinomianism or historical discontinuity in the way of salvation.

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<sup>15</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 2.7.12-13

<sup>16</sup> Crawford Gribben, *J. N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism* (Oxford University Press, 2024), 45.

Hence, even if dispensationalism has been revised to avoid the suggestion that it originally taught differing ways of salvation under differing dispensations, it is now frequently criticized for falling into antinomianism.<sup>17</sup> Michael Vlach defends dispensationalism from this charge by noting that “Dispensationalists believe the Law of Christ as described in the New Testament.”<sup>18</sup> However, Vlach’s defence assumes first that the “dispensation of grace” begins with or before the Lord Jesus’ ministry; that is, at the onset of the New Testament, so that the teachings of Christ apply to the Christian. Classical dispensationalism did not believe that. For Darby, a new dispensation, that of “Spirit,” apparently dawns with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18ff), being “the command on which the dispensation hung.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the teachings of Jesus fall in the prior dispensation and hence are not binding on Christians.

Like Darby, Scofield, and Chafer placed the ministry of Christ under the “dispensation of law.” Scofield wrote, “The sacrificial death of the Lord Jesus Christ introduced the dispensation of pure grace.”<sup>20</sup> The result is that even the teachings of Jesus, such as the Sermon on the Mount, are not for the church. So, Scofield concluded, the Lord’s Prayer’s petition for forgiveness, “forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors,” is “legal ground. ... Under law, forgiveness is conditioned upon a like spirit in us; under grace, we are forgiven for Christ’s sake, and exhorted to forgive because we have been forgiven. ...”<sup>21</sup> Scofield is pointing out how even the teachings of Jesus (i.e., “the law of Christ”) fall within the “dispensation of law” and are inapplicable to the Christian. For some dispensationalists, this results in claiming that all the teachings of Jesus, even after the resurrection, are no longer relevant.<sup>22</sup> Thus, classical dispensationalism

<sup>17</sup> This was the theme of John Gerstner, for example in *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*, (Brentwood, TN, Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1991) and followed by R. C. Sproul.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Vlach, “How Two Covenant Theologians View Dispensationalism,” 2012, [https://www.preteristarchive.com/2012\\_vlach-how-two-covenant-theologians-view-dispensationalism/](https://www.preteristarchive.com/2012_vlach-how-two-covenant-theologians-view-dispensationalism/).

<sup>19</sup> *Collected Writings of John Nelson Darby*, Volume 14 (London, Stow Hill and Bible Tract Depot, n.d.), e-book. – [https://www.google.com/books/edition/Collected\\_Writings\\_by\\_John\\_Nelson\\_Darby/1BpqBgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Darby,+%22](https://www.google.com/books/edition/Collected_Writings_by_John_Nelson_Darby/1BpqBgAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=Darby,+%22), accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>20</sup> C. I Scofield, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, (New York: Fleming H. Revel Company, 1896), 16.

<sup>21</sup> *Scofield Reference Bible*, Matthew 6:12.

<sup>22</sup> For example, in a debate with a “Church of Christ” representative, Brian Edwards, pastor of Hope Church, Danville, Va., seeks to refute the claim that baptism is necessary for salvation, according to the Church of Christ inter-

appears caught between the devil of antinomianism and the deep blue sea of changing ways of salvation.

Our task here is not to explore all these questions raised by introducing the structure of dispensations into Biblical theology. Rather, let us note that dispensations impact soteriology in one way or the other, John MacArthur's claim notwithstanding: "dispensationalism shapes one's eschatology and ecclesiology. That is the extent of it. ... [T]rue dispensationalism makes no relevant contribution to soteriology."<sup>23</sup> That assumes theology is highly compartmentalized, with a major hermeneutical concept that only affects eschatology and ecclesiology without influencing soteriology.

In fact, soteriology is closely interwoven with both ecclesiology and eschatology. Soteriology explains why and how people are saved, that is, how sinners become the people of God. Ecclesiology explains who is saved, who are "the people of God." They are those to whom God gives the covenantal promise, "I will be their God, and they will be my people."<sup>24</sup> Soteriology defines salvation. Ecclesiology can be defined, at least in part, as the study of who is saved, who constitutes the assembly of those on whom God will have final mercy (the implications of that statement point to an eschatological subject). The objects of soteriology are the subjects of ecclesiology.

For example, in his commentary on Romans 9:24-29, Darby interweaves soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.<sup>25</sup> The question arises naturally: if the Jews are "my people" in God's eyes simply based on their ethnicity, then is not the basis of their salvation different than that of Gentile "sons of the living God"? A dispensationalist interlocutor replied,

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pretation of Mark 16:16, by countering that Mark 16:16 is "pre-first century church." That is, since the church came to be only at Pentecost, ostensibly inaugurating a new dispensation, then Jesus' instructions to His disciples even post-resurrection, are not for the church. (c. 1:02.20, "church of Christ vs Baptist, Robertson-Edwards Saved By Faith Alone Debate," Johnny Robertson, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozK4FZmXCTk&ab\\_channel=JohnnyRobertson](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ozK4FZmXCTk&ab_channel=JohnnyRobertson), accessed July 20, 2021.)

<sup>23</sup> John F. MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), appendix two.

<sup>24</sup> "Thus, the people of God are those in both the Old and New Testament eras who responded to God by faith, and whose spiritual origin rests exclusively in God's grace." C. Marvin Pate, "Church, the," *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, <https://www.studydrive.org/dictionaries/eng/bed/c/church-the.html>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>25</sup> J. N. Darby, On the Epistle to the Romans, [https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/darby/MISCELLA/33015G\\_C.html](https://www.stempublishing.com/authors/darby/MISCELLA/33015G_C.html), accessed July 23, 2021.

“Darby and the others were clear that Jews were God’s people by way of *election*, not ethnicity.” This is a distinction without a difference since it is the ethnicity that is elect; that is, one is elect by being in the ethnicity. Early critics of dispensationalism saw it suggesting that “the means of salvation were in flux, which, if true, would unsettle many other aspects of systematic theology.”<sup>26</sup> To claim that pieces of ecclesiology or eschatology can be pulled out without affecting soteriology, like pulling pieces of a Jenga puzzle without the whole thing toppling, invites investigation. Hence, this article.

Today, claiming that dispensations imply different ways of salvation can result in being accused of not having read the primary sources carefully enough.<sup>27</sup> This accusation cannot be levelled against Benjamin Wills Newton (1807-1899). He was a co-founder of the Plymouth Brethren with J. N. Darby, originally a partner with Darby, and yet he came to believe that, if Darby’s theology was followed logically, it implied two distinct and separate ways to salvation. Darby had defined dispensations as “any arranged dealing of God in which man has been set before his fall, and having been tried, has failed, and therefore God has been obliged to act by other means.”<sup>28</sup> These terms -- “fall,” a trial and failure, God acting – naturally encourage the idea that people are falling from grace, from a state of favour with God, of justification, and that God is acting to rescue people from that disfavour; that is, from His wrath, so suggesting salvation. Further, on John 1:17, Darby commented, “Law requires from man what he ought to be before God, and, if he fulfils it, it is his righteousness. Truth in Christ shows what man is (not ought to be), and what God is, and, as inseparable from grace, does not require but brings to man what he needs.”<sup>29</sup> Darby’s “writings were ... not entirely consistent,” including on this point.<sup>30</sup> Even where he explicitly affirmed salvation by grace in

<sup>26</sup> Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism*, 195.

<sup>27</sup> For example, Micah Martin claims that the revision of comment on John 1:17 in *The New Scofield Reference Bible* (1967), should be accepted as clarifying what Scofield really meant “by anyone who is intellectually honest” (“Did Scofield Teach Multiple Ways of Salvation?” July 12, 2019, <https://contendingearnestly.wordpress.com/2019/07/12/did-scofield-teach-multiple-ways-of-salvation/#comments>, accessed July 26, 2021.)

<sup>28</sup> John N. Darby, *Collectanea*, 6, [https://stempublishing.com/authors/darby/New8\\_95/38Collectanea.html](https://stempublishing.com/authors/darby/New8_95/38Collectanea.html), accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> John N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, “John 1,” <https://stempublishing.com/authors/darby/synopsis/index.html>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Daniel G. Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism: How the Evangelical Battle over the End Times Shaped a Nation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2023), 21.

every age, formulations such as this introduced instability into his system, and the issue we are exploring is the consistency of the founders of dispensationalism. Darby appears to imply – by “if he fulfils it” – that righteousness, and thus justification and thus final salvation, could have been achieved through the law during that dispensation. Glenn R. Kreider admits as much: “In this statement, Darby seems to imply the possibility of achieving righteousness through the law.”<sup>31</sup>

Because of these suggestions, Darby’s friend B. W. Newton “considered Mr. Darby’s dispensational teaching as the height of speculative nonsense.”<sup>32</sup> Newton believed, as had most Protestants until the advent of dispensationalism, that the church “includes all the faithful from Abraham to the present; that it is not something unique to New Testament times.”<sup>33</sup> The church is the assembly of God’s people, the gathering of people God has redeemed. However, for Darby, there is a distinction between the church, to whom God reveals himself as Father, and the Jews to whom he reveals “the character of Jehovah, the king ... by reestablishing them in earthly glory.”

The Jews, then, are the people by whom, and in whom, God sustains His name of Jehovah, and His character of judgment and righteousness. The church are the people in whom, as in His family, the Father reveals His character of goodness and love.<sup>34</sup>

Here, Darby claims one people are God’s “by the spirit of adoption,” “sons of the living God,” on the one hand, and, on the other, another who are

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<sup>31</sup> Kreider, “Sola Fide in Every Dispensation,” *Forged From Reformation*, Christopher Cone and James I. Fazio, editors, [San Diego: Southern California Seminary Press, 2017], 429.)

<sup>32</sup> H.A. Ironside, *A Historical Sketch of the Brethren Movement* (Neptune, New Jersey: Loizeaux Brothers, 1985), 25.

<sup>33</sup> “John N. Darby and the Brethren Assemblies,” <http://www.johndarby.org/difficulties/>, accessed July 20, 2021. Alister McGrath notes that the view that the Church has replaced Israel as the people of God, known as supersessionism, had a “wide consensus” in the early church. (Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2d ed. [Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998] 461-62.) For more documentation of the church fathers’ teaching on supersessionism, see Michael J. Vlach, “Rejection Then Hope: The Church’s Doctrine of Israel In the Patristic Era,” *The Masters Seminary Journal*, 19/1 (Spring 2008): 57-60.

<sup>34</sup> John Nelson Darby, “Israel’s Restoration: The Manner of Its Accomplishment.”

simply “God’s people,” apparently by right of ethnicity.<sup>35</sup> But since salvation could legitimately be defined as how one becomes one of God’s “my people” (in contrast to his “not my people,” as in Hosea 1:9-10), if God has two different people, does he then have two different ways of becoming one of them? If there are two different assemblies of God’s people – the church and Israel – that suggests that there are two different ways to become part of those people, hence different ways of salvation. Because of this, Newton “was vehemently opposed to the idea of the church being a special company of whose calling and destiny the Old Testament knows nothing, a line of things emphasized by Mr. Darby....”<sup>36</sup>

Stephen Sizer notes that “Newton and others saw Darby’s elevation of Israel above the church as ‘full-blown heresy’... Darby’s scheme, followed logically, implied two distinct and separate ways to salvation.”<sup>37</sup> In particular, he believed that Darby’s suggestion that Israel would be blessed without faith in Jesus Christ was, “virtually to say there are two kinds of Christianity, two Gospels, two ways, and two ends of salvation.”<sup>38</sup> In April 1845, Newton issued a declaration of thirteen points in which he differed with Darby. Declaration VII states, “That there is no salvation and no life apart from union with the person of the Son of God, and that all who so rise in Him are sons of God.”<sup>39</sup> The implication was that Darby was teaching the opposite, namely that there was salvation apart from Christ, presumably through law-keeping. Newton cannot be dismissed as not having heard classical dispensationalists. Crawford Gribben notes that “many antagonists” accused Darby “of teaching salvation by law in the Old Testament and by grace in the New Testament.”<sup>40</sup> If “many antagonists” and at least one friend are coming to the same conclusion, perhaps the problem is with the logical implications of his system. Hence, Darby, the founder of dispensationalism, was understood by originally sympa-

<sup>35</sup> John Nelson Darby, “Israel’s Restoration: The Manner of Its Accomplishment.”

<sup>36</sup> Ironside, *A Historical Sketch*, 25.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Sizer, “John Nelson Darby--The Father of Premillennial Dispensationalism,” August 31, 1998, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120207121049/http://www.theologue.org/JNDarby-SSizer.htm>, accessed July 20, 2021.

<sup>38</sup> As noted by B. W. Newton and S.P. Tregelles, *Teachers of the Faith and the Future* (Taunton, Phoenix, 1969), 75, according to Steven R. Sizer, “The Promised Land: A Critical Investigation of Evangelical Christian Zionism in Britain and the United States of America since 1800” (Ph.D. Thesis, Middlesex University, 2002), 54.

<sup>39</sup> Ironside, *A Historical Sketch*, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Gribben, *J. N. Darby and the Roots of Dispensationalism*, 36, note 27, p. 173.

thetic partners to be implying that ways of salvation changed with the dispensations.

### THE SCOFIELD REFERENCE BIBLE

If Darby is usually recognized as the founder of dispensationalism, C. I. Scofield (1843-1921) is one of its “governing principals,” a “world famous prince in the dispensational kingdom.”<sup>41</sup> This prince produced what is by far the most quoted piece of evidence used to show that classical dispensationalists taught multiple ways of salvation: the note in his famous reference Bible on John 1:17, “As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ... The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ...”<sup>42</sup> Dispensational defenders, like Charles Ryrie, note that Scofield is speaking of the beginning of the “dispensation of grace,” not the beginning of grace *per se*. “To be sure, the dispensationalist does not say that there was no grace ever displayed before the coming of Christ.”<sup>43</sup> But even so, Scofield claims that now, with Christ’s death and resurrection, “legal obedience” is “no longer” the “condition of salvation.” He implies, then, that “legal obedience” had been the “condition of salvation” before the death and resurrection of Christ, that is, during the “dispensation of law.” Here, Scofield specifically says that the “point of testing” was exactly about the “condition of salvation,” not some other revelation or facet of life unrelated to salvation. That Scofield never argues that anyone was actually saved by works during that dispensation is irrelevant. Even if the potential means of salvation was never fulfilled by a single individual does not alter the claim that there was an alleged means of salvation outside of Christ.

Scofield’s note to John 1:17 is commonly explained as a “misstatement.”<sup>44</sup> But who makes a misstatement in a published work, in a study Bible note to the prologue of John, one of the most theologically important texts in all of scripture? The claim that Scofield carelessly let slip a “misstatement” that is inconsistent with the rest of his theology, at such a crucial point, may be believable if he never suggested anything similar. E. Shuler English, chairman of the New Scofield Bible Editorial Committee, admitted

<sup>41</sup> Svigel, “The History of Dispensationalism in Seven Eras,” 69-100.

<sup>42</sup> *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1244-45.

<sup>43</sup> Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism, Revised and Expanded* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2007), ebook, <https://www.google.com/books/edition/Dispensationalism/eo3BxTfTqJEC?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Couch, *A Biblical Theology of the Church*, 34.

that the original note to John 1:17 needed “clarification” because “nowhere else in his writings does Scofield imply such a thing.”<sup>45</sup> Is that true?

R. Todd Mangum answers that question tersely: “This is not really true.”<sup>46</sup> For example, notes on Exodus 19 also suggested salvation through law-keeping. On Exodus 19:5, Scofield wrote, “What under law was condition, is under grace, freely given to every believer. The ‘if’ of v. 5 is the essence of law as a method of divine dealing and the fundamental reason why the law made nothing perfect (Romans 8:3; Hebrews 7:18, 19).” As in John 1:17, there is a strong contrast between salvation in the era of law and now. Salvation now is “freely given” whereas, according to Scofield, under the dispensation of law it was conditional. And he goes on. “The Abrahamic (Genesis 15:18, note) and New (Hebrews 8:8-12, note) minister salvation and assurance because they impose but one condition, faith.”<sup>47</sup> Hence, salvation in the Abrahamic and the New Covenant is conditioned on *Sola Fide*, which is distinguished from the dispensation of law in which salvation was conditioned on legal obedience. Even if no one successfully availed themselves of salvation and assurance through the law, Scofield is implying that, beginning at Sinai, legal obedience was the new “condition of salvation” until the dawn of the next dispensation.

Scofield confirms the retrogression of the dispensation of law. “The Dispensation of Promise ended when Israel rashly accepted the law (Ex. 19:8).” That Scofield says they accepted the Law “rashly” suggests that they should have remained under the previous dispensation and could have done so rightly. Chafer echoed a similar implication, “[Israel’s] choice [of accepting the law] was in no way required by God.”<sup>48</sup> Daniel Fuller noted, “The implication of this statement seems to be that Israel could have rejected the law without displeasing God.”<sup>49</sup>

Scofield continues, “Grace had prepared a deliverer (Moses), provided a sacrifice for the guilty, and by divine power brought them out of bondage (Ex. 19:4); but at Sinai they exchanged grace for law.”<sup>50</sup> This exchange of grace from the previous dispensation for the law of the next dispensation was not just for some kind of “test” unrelated to salvation, but as the “condition of salvation” itself.

<sup>45</sup> E. Shuyler English, “The New Scofield Reference Bible,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 (Jan-March 1967), 130.

<sup>46</sup> Mangum, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift: The Fissuring of American Evangelical* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 184.

<sup>47</sup> *Scofield Reference Bible*, 93.

<sup>48</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology IV*, 162.

<sup>49</sup> Fuller, *Gospel and Law*, 140.

<sup>50</sup> *Scofield Reference Bible*, 20.

Further, on 1 John 3:7, “he that doeth righteousness is righteous,” Scofield notes, in part, “The righteous man under law became righteous by doing righteously; under grace he does righteously because he has been made righteous.”<sup>51</sup> Here, he specifically states that the condition of justification – becoming righteous – was, in the dispensation of law, “doing righteously” in contrast to the condition of justification now, which is grace. Justification is unquestionably part of salvation, indeed, the grounds of it. Hence, Scofield’s note for John 1:17 is not inconsistent with other expressions of his theology.

As with Darby, Scofield was also perceived to be teaching different ways of salvation by contemporaries who studied him closely. In Scofield’s case, the perceiver was Oswald T. Allis (1871 –1952), one of the founding professors of Westminster Theological Seminary. In 1936, Allis wrote two articles for *The Evangelical Quarterly* critiquing dispensationalism and, in so doing, documenting how he believed it taught different ways of salvation.<sup>52</sup> That just seven years into the seminary’s existence, with the modernist controversy still alive and the fallout from the departure from Princeton still fresh, Allis and other leading Presbyterians thought dispensationalism was a sufficient problem to justify their engagement demonstrates how seriously Reformed theologians took dispensationalism in the first half of the twentieth century. Allis pointed out that the *Scofield Reference Bible*’s note for Matthew 10:5 stated, “The kingdom was promised to the Jews. Gentiles could be blessed only through Christ crucified and risen.” Allis commented, “Here we have a statement that seems clearly to teach that there was an essential difference between salvation for the Jew and salvation for the Gentile. The one needed the kingdom, the other needed Christ crucified and risen.” Allis noted that not only was the present age of grace contrasted with the past age of Law but also it is different from the future “dispensation of the Kingdom.” Commenting on “two distinct dispensations which are set definitely in contrast, and each has a Gospel of its own,” Allis concludes, “Salvation clearly will be on quite a different basis in the Kingdom age from what it is today in the Church age.”<sup>53</sup> Citing the *Scofield Reference Bible*’s “Summary” on the “Kingdom,” in which Scofield claims “The kingdom is to be established by power,” Allis comments, “Men are to be saved apparently by obedience

<sup>51</sup> *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1323.

<sup>52</sup> Oswald T. Allis, “Modern Dispensationalism and the Doctrine of the Unity of Scripture,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* VIII (January 1936): 22-35; and “Modern Dispensationalism and the Law of God,” *The Evangelical Quarterly* VIII (July 1936): 272-290.

<sup>53</sup> Allis, “Modern Dispensationalism and the Doctrine of the Unity of Scripture,” cited as page 30, in Daniel Fuller, *Gospel & Law*, 23.

to the King and not by trust in the Saviour.”<sup>54</sup> Further, Allis focuses on Acts 15:13ff, which Scofield describes, “Dispensationally, this is the most important passage in the N.T. It gives the divine purpose for this age, and for the beginning of the next.”<sup>55</sup> There the *Scofield Reference Bible* states, “The Gospel has never anywhere converted all, but everywhere has called out some.” In contrast, Scofield writes that during the Kingdom dispensation “the enormous majority of earth’s inhabitants will be saved.”<sup>56</sup> Allis takes offence at this statement for, he says, this claim makes the gospel less effective than “the Kingdom.” “What does this mean, if not that the preaching of the Cross is relatively of little efficacy as compared with... the Kingdom age?”<sup>57</sup> Once again, a careful, contemporaneous student of classical dispensationalism interpreted it as teaching various ways of salvation depending on the times despite dispensationalists’ claims otherwise. This contradictory nature of dispensational teaching likely owes something to the fact that dispensationalism did not arise in an academically rigorous environment, as Lutheran or Reformed theology did, but was “a lay theology formed and promulgated by preachers and laypersons.”<sup>58</sup>

#### LEWIS SPERRY CHAFER

That same year, Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871 –1952), one of the leaders of dispensationalism’s era of “promising propagation” (1900-1950),<sup>59</sup> essentially, pleaded guilty to Allis’ charge of differing means of salvation:

<sup>54</sup> Allis, “Modern Dispensationalism and the Doctrine of the Unity of Scripture,” <https://www.monergism.com/modern-dispensationalism-and-doctrine-unity-scripture>, accessed July 24, 2021. Scofield’s statement is in notes to Zechariah 12:8.

<sup>55</sup> *Scofield Reference Bible*, Acts 15:13, 1166, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/sco/acts/15.htm>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>56</sup> *Scofield Reference Bible*, Zechariah 12:8, 976, <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/sco/zechariah/12.htm>, accessed July 23, 2021

<sup>57</sup> Allis, “Modern Dispensationalism and the Doctrine of the Unity of Scripture.”

<sup>58</sup> Ben Wintherinton III, *The Problem With Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, and Wesleyanism* (Baylor University Press: Waco, TX, 2005), 95.

<sup>59</sup> Svigel “The History of Dispensationalism in Seven Eras,” 53. Svigel actually puts Chafer in the era of “Legalizing Precepts (1950–1980),” even though his *Systematic Theology* was published in 1947 because it was most influential in this era. However, Mangum claims that soon after Chafer’s death, dispensationalism distanced itself from his teachings, at least on salvation in the Old Testament (*The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift*, 182).

“There are two widely different, standardized, divine provisions, whereby man, who is utterly fallen, may come into the favor of God.”<sup>60</sup> Coming into the favour of God is essentially what “justification” – and thus salvation – is. He explains that these “two widely different, standard divine provisions” for what amounts to salvation are necessary because of the radical contrast between the church (“the heavenly people”) and the natural people of Israel:

The heavenly people, by the very exalted character of their salvation being “made” to stand in all the perfection of Christ... have no burden laid upon them of establishing personal merit before God... No meritorious system, such as was the Law, could possibly be applied to a people who by riches of divine grace have attained to a perfect standing.<sup>61</sup>

Just as in Allis’s description of Scofield’s system, so too Chafer’s described salvation in the present dispensation of grace as in stark contrast to the coming dispensation of the Kingdom. According to Chafer, the essential elements of the grace administration are “faith as the sole basis of acceptance with God, unmerited acceptance through a perfect standing in Christ, the present possession of eternal life, an absolute security from all condemnation, and the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit.” These elements are, according to Chafer, “not found in the kingdom administration. On the other hand, it is declared to be the fulfilling of the law and the prophets (Matt 5:17,18; 7:12), and is seen to be an extension of the Mosaic Law into realms of meritorious obligation.”<sup>62</sup> This is consistent with what he had written twenty years earlier in *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy* (1915): in the coming dispensation of the millennium “there will be a return to the legal kingdom grounds.”<sup>63</sup> “Return” implies that the “grounds” – as in the “basis” hence “basis of acceptance with God” – were indeed some legal achievement. These explicit affirmations of differing ways of salvation according to different dispensations (or “administrations”) were in response to Allis’ critique.

As with Darby and Scofield, contemporary students of the system saw that it was teaching various ways of salvation. This time James E. Bear of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia jumped into the fray, first with an article in *The Union Seminary Review* and then, after becoming chairman of the committee of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian

<sup>60</sup> L. S. Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 93 (October 1936): 410.

<sup>61</sup> Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” 415.

<sup>62</sup> Chafer, “Dispensationalism,” 416.

<sup>63</sup> Chapter VI, “Present Truth,” 7, [http://bartimaeus.us/pub\\_dom/the\\_kingdom\\_in\\_history\\_and\\_prophecy.html](http://bartimaeus.us/pub_dom/the_kingdom_in_history_and_prophecy.html), accessed July 23, 2021.

Church of the United States (the Southern Presbyterians), leading the adoption of an official resolution, in May 1944, about dispensationalism:

Dr. C. I. Scofield ... and Dr. L. S. Chafer, ... both teach a dispensational view of God's various and divergent plans of salvation for various groups in different ages.... It is the unanimous opinion of your Committee that Dispensationalism is out of accord with the system of the doctrines set forth in the [Westminster] Confession of Faith, not primarily or simply in the field of eschatology, but because it attacks the very heart of the theology of our Church. Dispensationalism rejects the doctrine that God has, since the Fall, but one plan of salvation for all mankind and affirms that God has been through the ages administering various and diverse plans of salvation for various groups...<sup>64</sup>

Chafer's reaction was to call the Committee's conclusion a "libelous statement." While he "protested this description of his views, he struggled to maintain a consistent line, as other fundamentalists identified his teachings as, at best, inconsistent on the issue."<sup>65</sup> He claimed that he only needed to explain himself, that the references that appear to show him teaching multiple ways of salvation – a "meritorious system" of the Law, "faith as the sole basis of acceptance with God" which is "not found in the kingdom administration" – "have no bearing on salvation whatever." The Presbyterian disciplinary committee reviewing his theology did not agree.

Chafer emphatically claimed that he "yields first place to no man in contending that a holy God can deal with sin in any age on any other ground than that of the blood of Christ." His statements, interpreted by the Presbyterian committee to be about salvation, were, instead, about "the rule of life which God has given to govern His people in the world."<sup>66</sup> He is apparently insisting on a separation between how God governs His people – otherwise known as the Kingdom of God or simply as the law – and salvation. Separating God's law, especially what in Reformed theology has been called the "third use of the law," from salvation seems to be fertile ground for antinomianism.<sup>67</sup> If one can talk of an "acceptance with

<sup>64</sup> James E. Bear, "Dispensationalism and the Covenant of Grace," *The Union Seminary Review*, 49 (July 1938): 285-307. 1944 PCUS Report on Dispensationalism, <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/pcus1944.html>, accessed July 21, 2021.

<sup>65</sup> Hummel, *The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism*, 195.

<sup>66</sup> Chafer, "Dispensational Distinctives Denounced," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 101 (July 1944): 259, according to Daniel Fuller, *Gospel and Law*, 30.

<sup>67</sup> "The third use of the Law (being also the principal use, and more closely connected with its proper end) has respect to believers in whose hearts the Spirit

God” and coming “into the favor of God” that, indeed, has “no bearing on salvation whatever,” then living in a pleasing way that is acceptable to and favoured by God is disconnected from salvation. So, if that is the case, professed believers can live with no regard for being acceptable to or favoured by God and still expect to be saved from wrath. Hence, we are back to a dispensation of antinomianism mentioned earlier. But to our point here, this dispensation with no third use of the law will not last into the next one when “there will be a return to the legal kingdom grounds.”<sup>68</sup>

In response to the charge of heresy, Chafer wrote an editorial in *Bibliotheca Sacra*, the title of which sums up his feelings: “Inventing Heretics through Misunderstanding.” (To be fair, I don’t believe that the Presbyterians were accusing him or most dispensationalists of being “heretics,” nor would I.) Rather than clearing up the misunderstandings, he muddied the waters. He states that the problem with dispensationalism’s critics is “the persistent failure on the part of men to recognize that Israelites were by physical birth born into covenant relation to God.”<sup>69</sup> He asks the rhetorical question: “Are there two ways by which one may be saved?” He seems to answer the question unequivocally: “There is, therefore, but one way to be saved and that is by the power of God made possible through the sacrifice of Christ.”<sup>70</sup> But then he equivocates. There is a “far lesser question,” he explains: “the precise human terms upon which men may be saved.” This is what, in Reformed theology, has been called “the instrumental cause of salvation.”<sup>71</sup> Salvation was earned by Christ (the meritorious cause), Chafer claims, but in different dispensations, people avail themselves of that salvation differently, by what he calls “human terms,” what Reformed theology traditionally labels “the instrumental cause.”

John Calvin defined the “instrumental cause of salvation” as the means “whereby the righteousness of Christ is applied to us.” “The formal or instrumental cause” of salvation is faith in Christ. The “material cause” (or meritorious cause) is the righteousness of Christ (Romans 3:24). The instrument, or tool, that brings that righteousness into our life, hence accomplishing justification, is faith (Romans 3:25).<sup>72</sup> The Westminster

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of God already flourishes and reigns.” John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II, vii, 6-12.

<sup>68</sup> Chapter VI, “Present Truth,” 7. [http://bartimaeus.us/pub\\_dom/the\\_kingdom\\_in\\_history\\_and\\_prophecy.html](http://bartimaeus.us/pub_dom/the_kingdom_in_history_and_prophecy.html)

<sup>69</sup> Chafer, “Inventing Heretics through Misunderstanding,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 102, number 405 (1945): 3. <http://newcovenantsanctuary.blogspot.com/2011/06/inventing-heretics-through.html>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Chafer, “Inventing Heretics through Misunderstanding,” 1.

<sup>71</sup> Mangum, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift*, 44.

<sup>72</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.14.17.

Confession further stated, “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and His righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification.”<sup>73</sup> J. I. Packer interprets this statement to mean that faith is the “means” of salvation. This saving “faith is an object-oriented response, shaped by that which is trusted, namely God himself, God’s promises, and Jesus Christ, all as set forth in the Scriptures.”<sup>74</sup> R. C. Sproul explains that the instrumental cause is like a tool. The instrumental cause of a sculptor’s statue is his hammer and chisel, the tools he uses to make the statue. Hence, faith in Christ is the tool believers use to gain righteousness.<sup>75</sup> For these theologians, justified believers before Christ were saved through the instrument of their faith in the promises eventually fulfilled by Christ. Hence, Abraham was justified by believing in the “gospel in advance” (Galatians 3:8).

While Chafer maintained *Sola Fide* (faith is key), he redefined its object. Our “belief is not centered on a son which each individual might generate, as in the case of Abraham, but in the Son whom God gave to a lost world....”<sup>76</sup> He argued that Abraham believed a promise regarding a son, whereas Christians believe in the Son of God. If the “content” of faith in the Old Testament was not Christ, then the instrumental cause of salvation has changed. The object of faith, and so the instrumental cause, has changed. “Dr. Ryrie has stated that the object of faith in every age has been God and that the content of faith was different in the Old Testament.”<sup>77</sup> Technically, dispensationalism retained *Sola Fide*, but by detaching Old Testament saints from the Messiah, it forsook *Soli Christi*.

Further, Chafer concluded his attempt to clear up the misunderstandings by stating, “It is only God’s power set free through Christ’s death that can save, and it is always and only through Christ’s death, whatever the human responsibility may be.”<sup>78</sup> But notice the admission, at the end, that “the human responsibility” changes with the dispensations. There is nothing unique to dispensationalism about recognizing that faithful

<sup>73</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, XI.2.

<sup>74</sup> J. I. Packer, “Good Works Are an Expression of Faith,” <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/articles/onsite/packer/works.html>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>75</sup> R. C. Sproul, “The Instrumental Cause of Justification,” Oct 14, 2019, <https://www.ligonier.org/blog/instrumental-cause-justification/>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Chafer, “Inventing Heretics through Misunderstanding,” 2-3.

<sup>77</sup> Grover E. Gunn III, *Dispensationalism: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow*, Footstool Publications, 1987, ebook, <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/gunn/Dispensationalism%20-%20Grover%20E.%20Gunn%20III.pdf>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Chafer, “Inventing Heretics through Misunderstanding,” 3.

believers would have had different ways to express their faith, i.e. responsibilities. What is unique about dispensationalism is that the responsibility is the instrumental cause of salvation. That is, in dispensationalism, the way believers procured the benefits of Christ's atonement was through law-keeping in that bygone dispensation and will be through the imposition of Christ's rule in a coming dispensation.

Chafer attempted to clarify that "human responsibility" changes with dispensations, but this defence backfires. As R. Todd Mangum notes, admitting a change in the "instrumental cause" (the responsibility) proves the critics' point: R. Todd Mangum sums it up,

If the point of issue is whether the *instrumental* cause may change from dispensation to dispensation, then Chafer's adamant insistence on the singularity and consistency of the *meritorious cause* misses the point – nor does his vigorous defense of this single meritorious cause relieve his view of the charge of teaching "two ways of salvation" the way he thinks it does. On the other hand, his explicit affirmation of changes in instrumental cause from dispensation to dispensation establishes the very point of his detractors' objection.<sup>79</sup>

Further, in his essay intended to dispel the misunderstanding that had supposedly libelled him as a "heretic," Chafer stated outright that for Israel, "salvation is dated to transpire at the second advent of Christ and according to Jehovah's irrevocable covenant with that nation, and is unique in every particular."<sup>80</sup> If for Israel, "salvation... is unique in every particular," then it is different than salvation for Christians. Yet, in the same breath, he insisted it relies "on that righteous ground alone" (Christ's death). Chafer fails to explain how salvation can be simultaneously "unique in every particular" and identical in its basis to the Church's. In attempting to prove continuity, he provided evidence of the opposite. Glenn Kreider, when citing Chafer's defence as if it answered Chafer's critics, does not see that in the process of trying to clarify that he believes in continuity of salvation, Chafer did, in fact, provide yet more evidence to the contrary.<sup>81</sup>

The Southern Presbyterians found that he and Scofield taught changing ways of salvation. After their report, dispensationalists became more conscious of the problem. Despite the Presbyterian controversy, Chafer's Systematic Theology explicitly contrasts the "dispensation of grace" with

<sup>79</sup> Original emphasis, Mangum, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift*, 182.

<sup>80</sup> Chafer, "Inventing Heretics through Misunderstanding," 3.

<sup>81</sup> Kreider, *Forged From Reformation*, 434. Kreider quotes from Chafer's editorial, to place the "misstatements" of dispensationalists that appear to show discontinuity in salvation in their context and sums up with a quotation from Ryrie that Chafer is his own best interpreter, as if that settles the question.

a “hopeless covenant of works.” He asserts that “men were therefore just because of their own works for God whereas New Testament justification is God’s work for man.”<sup>82</sup> Here, a founder of the system explicitly states that the grounds of justification change with the dispensations. The supposed era of grace in the prior dispensation was contrasted with the dispensation of Law that he called a “hopeless covenant of works.” He insisted, “It should be noted that no child of God under grace is subject to this hopeless conditional covenant of law works (Rom. 6:14).”<sup>83</sup>

Chafer used the term “covenant of works” which covenant theologians employ for the pre-fall covenant with Adam in the garden and the basis of the active obedience of Christ. Thus, in covenant theology, there is a “continuity of the covenants,” as even the covenant of works serves to ultimately save.<sup>84</sup> However, Chafer used the term as equivalent for the “dispensation of Law,” the era of the Law of Moses. “The children of Israel definitely chose the covenant of works, which is law, as their relationship to God.” By doing so, “They fell from grace.”<sup>85</sup> Further, to make the point clear, Chafer wrote, “According to the Old Testament, men were just because they were true and faithful in keeping the Mosaic Law. ... men were therefore just because of their own works for God whereas New Testament justification is God’s work for man in answer to faith (Rom. 5:1).”<sup>86</sup> Hence, Chafer explicitly states that the grounds for justification have changed with the dispensations.

## CONCLUSION

A straightforward reading of Darby, Scofield, and Chafer reveals that they occasionally taught soteriological discontinuity, modern denials notwithstanding. They were inconsistent. This filtered down to popular teachers, like William Evans (1870-1950), who wrote that salvation is “no longer by legal obedience,” implying it once was.<sup>87</sup>

Our question here is whether classical dispensationalists, the founding fathers of Darby, Scofield, and Chafer, taught that ways of salvation

<sup>82</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:219.

<sup>83</sup> Louis Sperry Chafer, “Major Bible Themes,” The Association of Messianic Congregations (1926), <http://www.messianicassociation.org/ezone42-lsc-major-bible-themes.htm>, accessed November 24, 2025.

<sup>84</sup> R. C. Sproul, “The Covenant of Works,” <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/covenant-works/>, accessed July 23, 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1948), 4:162-164.

<sup>86</sup> Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 7:219.

<sup>87</sup> William Evans, *Outline Study of the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1941), 42.

varied with the (so-called) dispensations. Their writings speak for themselves. They were, from the beginning, understood to be saying exactly that, even by originally sympathetic hearers. Their claims otherwise, such as Chafer's, are too equivocal. Indeed, Chafer's 1945 editorial digs his hole deeper. Daniel Fuller, in examining Chafer's teachings, concluded that "the Southern Presbyterians had not libeled Chafer."<sup>88</sup> He notes, "dispensationalists were long on making protestations that they believed in salvation by grace through faith in all ages but short on explaining how they could consistently affirm this along with their other essential affirmations."<sup>89</sup>

Denial of the problem does not make it go away. Like a dysfunctional family that wants to forget that dad used to be a drunk, so too dispensationalists who want to continue the denial only perpetuate the problem. Contemporary dispensationalists often mask this history. For example, Glenn R. Kreider's *Forged From Reformation* (2017) attempts to prove soteriological continuity by prioritizing secondary sources (Ryrie, Feinberg) over the founders' own assertions. This is improper historiography. Primary sources cannot be buried beneath a mountain of modern revisions.

Denying the primary sources of classical dispensationalism will not make them go away. Like a family in denial about a painful past, refusing to acknowledge the system's problematic roots only perpetuates the problem. To gain theological credibility, modern proponents must frankly admit that their progenitors taught a changing instrumental cause of salvation, even if the current system has evolved beyond it.

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<sup>88</sup> Fuller, *Gospel & Law*, 33.

<sup>89</sup> Fuller, *Gospel & Law*, 39.

GOING ROUND IN CIRCLES:  
TOWARDS UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING  
THE ESTABLISHMENT PRINCIPLE IN THE 21ST CENTURY

THOMAS DAVIS

For the Presbyterian Church in Scotland today, the issue of the Establishment Principle is one that seems to leave us endlessly going round in circles. Once a touchstone of Scottish ecclesiastical identity, for many today it is a relic of a bygone era that shows little sign of a return. Furthermore, the precise nature of the Establishment Principle is by no means clear; different people, and different periods, seem to define it in different ways. It is a principle that is being held onto by some but ignored by many. The many who ignore it frequently do not understand it, but the some who hold onto it are not unanimous on how to define it. Round and round the circles go.

Yet for many Presbyterians, it remains a principle to which we are deeply committed. The issue is particularly acute for the Free Church of Scotland (of which this writer is a pastor). The Free Church faces the constant tension whereby we believe in the Establishment Principle, but we are not an Established Church; we long to be an Established Church, but we see little or no prospect of that actually happening. For the Free Church, and for other Presbyterian denominations in Scotland, this principle is of the upmost constitutional importance, yet it feels today as though it holds hardly any practical relevance. Can this endless going-round-in-circles be solved?

The following paper is attempt to say, 'Yes, it can.' This paper aims to retrieve the definition of the Establishment Principle as it was understood in the years leading up to the Disruption of 1843 which led to the formation of the Free Church of Scotland. In doing so, it will be observed that, in the years since 1843, there has been divergence in the way in which the Establishment Principle has been defined and understood. In particular, there has been an increasing tendency to confuse, or even conflate, the Establishment Principle and the Principle of Spiritual Independence. The main thesis offered in this paper is that such a tendency is unhelpful and that any application of the Establishment Principle to the life of the Church today will be aided by a re-focus on the ways in which the Establishment Principle was understood by the men who took part in the controversies culminating in the momentous events of 1843.

The paper is divided in five sections. First, examples of diverging definitions of the Establishment Principle are observed and analysed.

Following this, Section Two aims to disentangle the Establishment Principle from the Principle of Spiritual Independence. In the third section, a model for understanding the Establishment Principle (as defined by Chalmers and his colleagues) is offered. Section Four then draws primarily on the writings of William Cunningham to unpack how Establishment works. Finally, a concluding section offers some points of application for the Church today.

One caveat to note at the outset; the focus of this paper is on the origins of the Free Church of Scotland. It does not, therefore, examine either Establishment as understood in the earlier centuries of Scottish Church history, nor the question of how Establishment has been defined and practised in other nations. To begin with then, in the context of the past 200 years in Scotland, how have definitions of the Establishment Principle diverged?

## 1. DIVERGING DEFINITIONS

Any discussion on the issue of Establishment immediately begs the question, What is the Establishment Principle? Such a question is obvious and expected. Answers in relation to the Scottish Church, however, are far from straight forward. Cited below are three answers that have been offered to this question in the past 200 years:

### ***Definition One: Thomas Chalmers***

In the spring of 1838, Chalmers delivered a series of lectures on Establishments in London, after which he was described by the then Duke of Cambridge as a “monstrous clever man.”<sup>1</sup> In his opening lecture, Chalmers defines a National Establishment as follows:

We shall assume, then, as the basis of our definition for a Religious Establishment, or as the essential property by which to specify and characterise it, — a sure legal provision for the expense of its ministrations. It is a question merely of nomenclature or of definition, and not of doctrine, wherewith we are at present engaged. Our single attempt at this moment is, not the statement of our belief, but the settlement of our language — that there might be a clear and common understanding of the terms used by us, in the course of our argument. We are not saying, at present, whether the legal establishment of religion be a good or a bad thing — we are only telling what we understand

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<sup>1</sup> William Hanna, *Memoirs of Dr Chalmers* (Vol. 2) (Edinburgh: Thomas Constable and Co., 1854), 409.

The lectures are found in Thomas Chalmers, *The Works of Thomas Chalmers* (Vol. 17) (Glasgow: William Collins, 1848) 187-356.

such an establishment specifically to be; and saying, that wherever we have a certain legal provision for the ministrations of Christianity, there we have an Establishment of Christianity in the land. It is this which forms the essence of an Establishment; and, as such, must be singled out from among all the other accessories wherewith it may happen to be variegated.<sup>2</sup>

**Definition Two: Church of Scotland Articles Declaratory**

However, not everyone turns to Chalmers for a definition of the Establishment Principle. Others<sup>3</sup> look to Article Six of the Church of Scotland Articles Declaratory:

VI. This Church acknowledges the divine appointment and authority of the civil magistrate within his own sphere, and maintains its historic testimony

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<sup>2</sup> Chalmers, *Works* (Vol .17), 195.

<sup>3</sup> In personal correspondence with Dr Doug Gay, Senior Lecturer (Theology & Religious Studies) at the University of Glasgow, directed me to this definition. Other recent definitions of the Establishment Principle echo the language of the Articles Declaratory. For example, on his personal blog, Dr Donald Boyd, leader of the Scottish Christian Party, offers the following answer to the question, What is the Establishment Principle?:

“The Establishment Principle is that biblical principle which states that God is sovereign over secular and ecclesiastical affairs, and that He has established a relationship between these two sovereign spheres in which the state and the Christian church are to acknowledge each other as divinely-appointed institutions, to mutually support and encourage each other, but not to interfere in each other’s God-given province. Instead of earthly rulers resisting Christ and His church, they should support it (Psalm 2).” Donald Boyd, “What is the Establishment Principle?” <https://donaldboyd.org/2018/09/19/what-is-the-establishment-principle/>. Online, accessed 17/7/23.

Likewise, the Reformed Books Online website, defines the Establishment Principle is as follows:

“Church and State are co-ordinate powers (on an equal level, with separate jurisdictions) under the authority of the Word of God, that the State has the obligation to profess, protect and promote the true religion, civilly uphold all 10 Commandments, and civilly establish (*circa sacra*, not *in sacra*) the true religion in the land. The Church, maintaining its existence and government by Divine Right, is to speak the Word of God to the State and keep it in check.” <https://reformedbooksonline.com/topics/topics-by-subject/civil-government/church-state-relations/the-establishment-principle/>. Online, accessed 17/7/23.

The same quotation also appears on <https://purelypresbyterian.com/2016/07/11/establishment-principle-1-what-it-is-what-it-isnt/>, Online, accessed 17/7/23.

to the duty of the nation acting in its corporate capacity to render homage to God, to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ to be King over the nations, to obey His laws, to reverence His ordinances, to honour His Church, and to promote in all appropriate ways the Kingdom of God. The Church and the State owe mutual duties to each other, and acting within their respective spheres may signally promote each other's welfare.

The Church and the State have the right to determine each for itself all questions concerning the extent and the continuance of their mutual relations in the discharge of these duties and the obligations arising therefrom.<sup>4</sup>

***Definition Three: Speech at the Free Church General Assembly, May 2021***

Other definitions have arisen since. At the 2021 General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland an overture came to the Assembly requesting that the General Assembly, “form a Committee to consider how the Church should interpret and apply the Establishment Principle in the 21st century and advise the Church accordingly.”<sup>5</sup> In a speech presenting the overture, the commissioner defined the Establishment Principle in the following terms:

The Establishment Principle is that principle in which Church and State recognise and respect their separate jurisdictions. The State recognises that the Church is free to define its doctrines, its mode of worship, and its practice of discipline without any interference from the State. In turn, the Church recognises and respects the responsibility of the State to legislate in matters outwith the spiritual sphere.<sup>6</sup>

***Summary***

These three definitions can be summarised as follows. Definition One describes a *unidirectional provision* made by the State, for the Church. Definition Two describes a *bidirectional relationship* of mutual duties whereby obligation and support moves between State and Church, and *vice versa*, while maintaining an awareness of each party's authority

<sup>4</sup> Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland. <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/about-us/church-law/church-constitution>. Online, accessed 17/7/23.

<sup>5</sup> Free Church of Scotland, 2021 General Assembly Reports, 98. <https://freechurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/General-Assembly-Reports-2021-1-1.pdf>, Online, accessed 17/7/23.

<sup>6</sup> Speech by Rev Ian Watson, 2021 General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFpqe8RxQHK&list=PLF73r3ezO-0oFWBaFO4-Vk7pVbdkVtLm0\\_1hr32min10sec](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tFpqe8RxQHK&list=PLF73r3ezO-0oFWBaFO4-Vk7pVbdkVtLm0_1hr32min10sec). Online: accessed 17/7/23.

within its own sphere. Definition Three focuses on a clear recognition of *separate jurisdictions* between State and Church whereby the freedom of each to operate within its own sphere without interference is recognised and respected. The first point to note for the purposes of this study is that these three definitions are different. In fact, they are very different.

And these differences in definition are crucial to recognise. Indeed, Definition One and Definition Three are almost antithetical; the former grounds the Establishment Principle in terms of a *connection* of support and provision from the State to the Church, the latter grounds the Establishment Principle in terms of a clear and firm *separation* between the State and the Church. These concepts of connection and separation are both key aspects of historic political theology in the Scottish Church. However, do they both describe the Establishment Principle?

The central thesis of this paper is that the answer to that question is No. Moreover, the paper will argue that Definition One, the definition articulated by Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption Fathers in the years leading up to the Disruption, is the most appropriate way of understanding the Establishment Principle. Indeed, it will be argued that a retrieval of this understanding of the Establishment Principle is crucial for applying the Principle in the present day. It is also suggested that Definition Three is not an accurate understanding of the Establishment Principle at all. Definition Three articulates a key truth of ecclesiology, but the doctrine it describes is not the Establishment Principle. To see this, it is necessary to go round some circles.

## 2. WHICH CIRCLE? ESTABLISHMENT PRINCIPLE OR THE PRINCIPLE OF SPIRITUAL INDEPENDENCE?

As an undergraduate student in the Church Principles class at the Free Church College, the present writer was given the following diagrammatic explanation of the Establishment Principle:

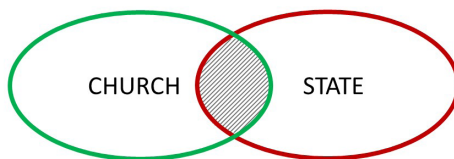


Fig. 1

Fig. 1 was said to represent the Establishment Principle. Each circle depicts the respective jurisdictions of Church and State. In an Establishment, these circles overlap to a certain extent, and the shaded area represents the areas of mutual responsibility and cooperation that an Establishment

allows. This was contrasted with Fig. 2 (below), which was said to depict an ecclesiology that insisted on the separation of Church and State.

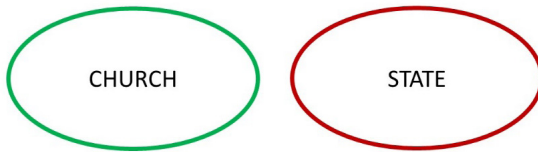


Fig. 2

It is the suggestion of this paper that, in terms of understanding the Establishment Principle as it was understood by Chalmers et al., the above diagrams are both inaccurate and unhelpful. This because these diagrams do not describe the Establishment Principle. They depict something else. They depict the Principle of Spiritual Independence. To see this, two points must be noted.

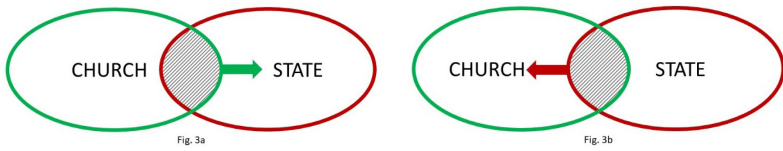
First, the relationship described in Fig. 2 is almost non-existent. That is because even in churches that argue vociferously for the separation of Church and State, there are still numerous areas in which the jurisdictions of Church and State overlap. Obvious examples today would be employment law, tax obligations, health and safety legislation, data protection, charitable status etc. All of these involve a relationship of some sort between the Church and State; they all fall into the shaded area on Fig.1, regardless of the particular church's position on the Establishment Principle. Granted, the shaded area may at times be bigger or smaller depending on context, but it is almost never non-existent. Strictly speaking, the only church that is represented by Fig. 2 is the one that is cut off from the outside world and allows no contact with the nation in whose territory it is situated.<sup>7</sup> For any mainstream church, Fig. 2 is an illusion. As William Cunningham observed long ago, "even in America they have not excluded altogether union or connection between Church and State."<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, as a depiction of the Principle of Spiritual Independence, Fig. 1 is immensely helpful. Indeed, it can be expanded upon. As, Figs. 3a and 3b show below, the area of mutual relationship between Church and

<sup>7</sup> Even in that context there is still arguably a relationship between that church and the State given that national security of that territory is provided by the State and enjoyed by that church.

<sup>8</sup> William Cunningham, "The Nature and Lawfulness of Union Between Church and State," in *Lectures on the Nature, Lawfulness, Duty and Advantages of Civil Establishments of Religion, with an Application of the Argument to the Parochial Economy of Scotland*, ed. James Buchanan (Edinburgh: Fraser & Co., 1835), 40.

State can be compromised when either party encroaches into the jurisdiction of the other:



Figs. 3a and 3b depict two tendencies which, to the historic Protestant in Scotland, are intolerable. Fig. 3b depicts a Church seeking to interfere with State responsibilities; the Church seizing from Caesar that which belongs to Caesar. Fig. 3b denotes a State meddling with the prerogatives of the Church; Caesar seizing that which belongs to Christ’s Church. Fig. 3b represents the situation that led to the Disruption, but both diagrams would have repulsed the Disruption Fathers. Indeed, the logical conclusions of Fig. 3a and 3b resulted in situations which were resolutely opposed by men like William Cunningham:

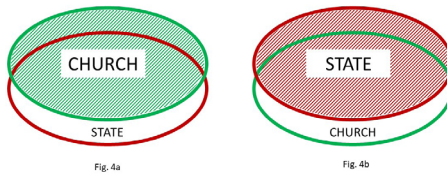


Fig 4a depicts what Cunningham called the ‘Popish System’, Fig 4b describes Erastianism. The former represents “the Popish extreme of the subjection of the civil to the ecclesiastical, and the other the opposite extreme of the subjection of the ecclesiastical to the civil.”<sup>9</sup> The Disruption Fathers insisted on an ecclesiology that maintained a clear recog-

<sup>9</sup> William Cunningham, *Historical Theology: A Review of the Principal Doctrinal Discussions in the Christian Church Since the Apostolic Age* (Vol. 2), eds. James Buchanan and James Bannerman (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1862) (Republished, London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 557. (Hereafter HT2).

See also James Bannerman, *The Church of Christ: A Treatise on the Nature, Power, Ordinances, Discipline and Government of the Christian Church*, (Vol. 2) (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1868), 102-6.

Note, that Fig. 4b can also be argued to describe the tragic situation where the Church is actively persecuted by the State.

nition of the mutual independence and separate spheres of jurisdiction granted by God to the Church and to the State.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the above diagrams are all immensely helpful in clarifying the Principle of Spiritual Independence. There will always be an element of overlap, but the respective areas of authority must be recognised, and the extremes of the historic civil headship of the Pope or of Erastianism are to be avoided.

The key point for this paper, however, is that none of the above diagrams represent the Establishment Principle as understood by Chalmers and his colleagues. Indeed, at this point, it becomes all the more clear that Definition Two, and especially Definition Three, in Section One, are not definitions of the Establishment Principle. They are definitions of the Principle of Spiritual Independence. As will be shown below, this confusion of the Establishment Principle with the Principle of Spiritual Independence is very unhelpful, both for understanding the Establishment Principle and for seeking to apply it today.

### 3. UNDERSTANDING THE CIRCLE OF ESTABLISHMENT

How then should the Establishment Principle be understood? How can it be depicted? The clearest answer comes by drawing a circle, but not the kind drawn above. Instead, the Establishment Principle (as understood by Chalmers) can be diagrammed in the following way:

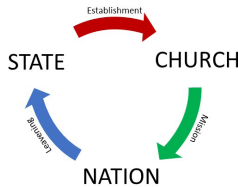


Fig. 5

There are several important points revealed in Fig. 5. First, it shows that the Establishment Principle is not bilateral. Instead, three parties are involved: the State, the Church, and the general population of the Nation. Secondly, it is crucial to observe the directions that the arrows point. Def-

<sup>10</sup> See also William Cunningham, *Discussions on Church Principles: Popish, Erastian, and Presbyterian*, eds. James Buchanan and James Bannerman (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1863). (Republished, Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1991). Cunningham writes that though the Establishment Principle may bring the Church “within the scope of [the State’s] care, it does not bring [the Church] within the sphere of his jurisdiction.” Cunningham, *Discussions*, 208-9.

initions Two and Three in Section One and the connection depicted in Fig 1 above all convey a bidirectional relationship where the Church and State give and receive from each other (to varying degrees). But Chalmers saw no such direct back-and-forth in the Establishment Principle. In terms of a Church existing as an Establishment, the movement is entirely unidirectional; the State supports the work of the Church, and the Church receives that provision. The clue, of course, is in the grammar. The State is the active voice who *establishes*; the Church is the passive voice who *gets established*. But, thirdly, that receiving on the part of the Church does not leave her unresponsive. The response to being established, however, is not directed immediately back to the State magistrate. Instead, it is directed towards the Nation, as indicated by the green arrow. Chalmers described the arrangement as follows:

The church receives from the state the maintenance of its clergy; and the clergy, in return, give to the subjects of the state a Christian education.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, the Church receives the provision of the State and uses that to aid the work of mission that Christ has commanded her to engage in. The result is a ‘Christianized’ nation; the church evangelises the population, it engages in discipleship as the masses are educated in the truths of the gospel, and the outcome is a nation leavened with Christianity. And there the investment of the Establishing State is realised; the Church has helped to build a nation shaped by the morality and hope of the gospel.

Thus, in Chalmers’ opinion, the *benefit to the State* was a population *in a far better state*. In a three-hour speech to the General Assembly of 1839, Chalmers described the beneficial outcome of the Establishment Principle for all parties:

The boon [of a National Establishment] on the one side [for the Church] was a maintenance for the Church’s labourers, who might be distributed over the length and breadth of the land, and act each as the herald of salvation on his own assigned portion of the territory. The return on the other side [for the State] was an immense blessing to the State – that best security, not for the temporal and eternal happiness of individuals only, but for the moral and political and the economic wellbeing of every community – a universal Christian education.<sup>12</sup>

A further and crucial point in regard to the above diagrams is to recognise that, in understanding the relationship between the Church and the State,

<sup>11</sup> Chalmers, *Works* (Vol. 17), 197.

<sup>12</sup> Hanna, *Memoirs of Dr Chalmers* (Vol. 2), 461.

the answer is not to make a choice between Fig. 1 and Fig. 5. The answer to recognise that Fig. 1 and Fig. 5 must always be held together because they represent two different things, both of which were vital to Chalmers and both of which form a key aspect of the historic understanding of how the ecclesiastical and the civil related in a Scottish context:

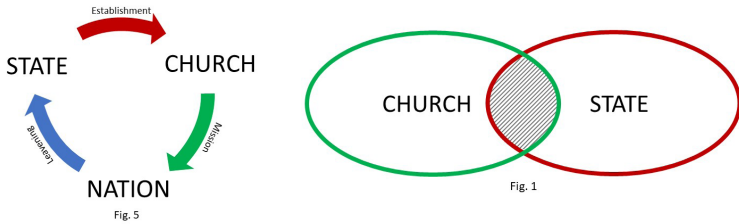


Fig. 5 depicts the Establishment Principle, Fig. 1 the Principle of Spiritual Independence. The former is primarily about the Church being *resourced*; the latter is about the Church being *respected*. Two important points must be noted.

First, to Chalmers and the Disruption Fathers, these two diagrams are *perfectly compatible with each other*. Chalmers repeatedly argued that a commitment to the Establishment Principle did not equate to a surrendering of the Principle of Spiritual Independence:

But the truth is, that, after many conflicts, the matter is now better understood; and the understanding is, that neither should meddle with the prerogatives of the other. The state may pay the church; yet without conceding to it one particle of temporal sovereignty. The church may serve the state; yet without the surrender of one spiritual prerogative. To teach the people Christianity — that is the church's service. To teach them no other than what itself judges to be the Christianity of the Bible — that is the church's prerogative. To deal out among our parish families the lessons of faith and of holiness — this is the church's incumbent duty. But that these shall be no other than what itself judges to be the very lessons of that Scripture whose guidance in things spiritual it exclusively follows, and that in this judgment no power on earth shall control it, — this is the church's inviolable privilege.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, James Bannerman argued that it is only with an accurate understanding of the Principle of Spiritual Independence that an Establishment is possible:

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Chalmers, *Sermons and Discourses* (Vol. 1) (New York: Robert Carter, 1844), 313-314.

There is one fundamental condition, then, essential to an alliance between the Church and state, and on which both parties in the alliance have equally the right to insist: the condition, namely, that the Church and the state, as distinct societies, shall be recognised as mutually independent in their existence and entire offices and functions. Without this, there can be no true or scriptural alliance.<sup>14</sup>

Translated into the framework of this paper, Bannerman is arguing that Fig 5 is only ever possible when there is an accurate understanding of Fig. 1.

Secondly, equally crucial to the Disruption Fathers was the fact that abandoning either of these diagrams was incompatible with the doctrine of the Headship of Christ. The basis for both diagrams is the Headship of Christ, over his Church and over the nations of the world.<sup>15</sup> That is why when the Spiritual Independence of the Church was compromised during the Ten Years' Conflict, men like Cunningham resisted because Christ is Head of his Church:

We still regard this great truth [the Headship of Christ over his Church] as warranting the whole course which we pursued in our contest with the civil authorities, as it is sanctioned by the law of the land as well as the word of God; and we still proclaim it to be the ground and basis of our peculiar standing and testimony in regard to the spirituality and freedom of the church, and its relation to Christ as its only head.<sup>16</sup>

And later in the nineteenth century, when the Free Church's commitment to the Establishment Principle was in danger of being abandoned in favour of union with the United Presbyterians, George Smeaton wrote in similar terms, again appealing to the Headship of Christ:

We are not ashamed to argue for supplementary grants from the national resources as the right, nay, as the duty of the Christian State; and to contend that national funds are not diverted from their appropriate object, when aid is given, from the national treasury, for the purpose of furnishing religious instruction to old and young, by means of Schools and Churches. This may

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<sup>14</sup> Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* (Vol. 1), 111.

<sup>15</sup> Thus, if anyone desires a biblical warrant for an Establishment, they need go no further than words of Christ's Great Commission at the end of Matthew 28. Christ has authority over the State, so they should honour him by supporting his Church. Christ has authority over the Church, so they must obey him by engaging in mission. And Christ's goal is for all nations to be discipled.

<sup>16</sup> Cunningham, *HT2*, 585.

be argued on many grounds. It may be put on the ground of Christ's authority, and of national responsibility to Him.<sup>17</sup>

In other words, Christ's authority means that Spiritual Independence must be maintained; at no point should the State encroach into the prerogatives of the Church. Christ's Church must be *respected*. And at the same time, Christ's authority means that States should be willing to invest in the Church, supplying material support to aid her in her mission. Christ's Church must be *resourced*.

A final point emerges when Figs. 1 and 5 are placed side by side. As Fig. 5 makes clear, any response from the Church to being Established is directed to the nation, not back to the State. In other words, the Church does not hold a government to account because she is established. An Established Church does not claim the right to speak to the government because she is Established, and the Establishment Principle gives her no such right. Does that mean that a Church should never speak to the State? By no means! But the crucial point is that the Church does not speak to the State because she is established; she speaks to the State because she is spiritually independent. The arrow in Fig 5 never points from Church to State. But the green circle in Fig. 1 insists that the Church has a right to speak on issues of faith, morality and truth. The prophetic voice is always a voice that speaks through the mouthpiece of spiritual independence. Prophets like Jeramiah did not speak to the king in Jerusalem because they were established. In fact, more often than not, the State sought to silence men like Jeremiah. Jeremiah and his colleagues spoke, not because they were established, they spoke because they were spiritually independent and never would they allow State to stop them from declaring 'Thus says the Lord'.

Disentangling the Establishment Principle from the Principle of Spiritual Independence is therefore crucial for understanding how the Disruption Fathers understood Establishment. Indeed, a helpful summary is found in an anecdote from a conversation with an American minister that Thomas Chalmers recounted when lecturing on Establishments in London:

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<sup>17</sup> George Smeaton, *National Christianity and Scriptural Union* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunert and Co., 1871), 56-57.

Cunningham makes the same point: "A friendly union, or alliance, between Church and State, between religion and civil authority, is a necessary consequence, that is, in point of right or duty, of Christ's supremacy, of his undoubted right to reign and be obeyed, not merely as King of Saints, but also as king of nations." Cunningham. "On the Nature and Lawfulness of Union between Church and State", 30.

In the course of that lecture<sup>18</sup> . . . Dr. Chalmers quoted a conversation which he had had with an American clergyman, who said to him, “If all you mean by an Establishment is an organized provision for a clergy, we should rejoice in it. The thing we deprecate is the authority of the civil magistrate in matters of religion.” “Now this,” said Dr. Chalmers, “this organized provision is truly all that we contend for. It is just, in other words, a legal provision for the support of a Christian ministry; an arrangement which might truly be gone into, and which actually is gone into, without the slightest infringement on the spiritual prerogatives of the Church, or the ecclesiastical independence of her clergymen.”<sup>19</sup>

#### 4. MEASURING THE DEGREES

Having recognised the three-point circle of Fig. 5 as the correct way to understand the Establishment Principle (as understood by Chalmers and the Disruption Fathers), further details can be added in terms of how that cyclical relationship works. Four important points arise.

First, Chalmers insisted that, for the mission of the Church to be accomplished effectively, *one particular church had to be selected by the State* to receive the privilege of being established. In summarising Chalmers’ view, William Hanna writes that, for an effective National Establishment to be possible, two things are required:

...first, that the State should select and employ some one Church for the accomplishment for this work; and, secondly, that it should adequately endow the Church, and progressively extend it.<sup>20</sup>

In the wider context of the post-Reformation Church, Chalmers highlights that that decision was frequently one that had to be made between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism.<sup>21</sup> But Chalmers goes even further. Even in the context of the numerous divisions within Protestantism, Chalmers insists that one denomination must be selected as the Established channel through which the nation is given a Christian education. For Chalmers, sharing responsibility between the different branches of Protestantism was impractical, resulting in a Presbyterian village here, a Methodist township there, and the territories of the nation shared between Baptist,

<sup>18</sup> “Lecture II: Vindication of a Religious National Establishment, in opposition to the Reasonings and Views of the Economists.” In Chalmers, *Works* (Vol. 17), 281ff.

<sup>19</sup> Hanna, *Memoirs of Dr Chalmers* (Vol. 2), 412-3. See also Chalmers, *Works* (Vol. 17), 221.

<sup>20</sup> Hanna, *Memoirs of Dr Chalmers* (Vol. 2), 410.

<sup>21</sup> Chalmers, *Works* (Vol. 17), 283-308.

Episcopalians and every other Protestant group.<sup>22</sup> To the single-minded Chalmers, such diversity was never going to work:

the attempt to combine the territorial principle with an equal treatment of all the denominations, must be given up as impracticable; and some one denomination must be singled out, for an establishment whose ministers are to be charged overhead with the Christian education of the whole country — and each in his own sphere to have an oversight and a certain responsibility laid upon him for the religious knowledge and habitudes of all the families.<sup>23</sup>

Secondly, the Disruption Fathers recognised that Establishment *can function in differing degrees*. This is explained by William Cunningham in his lecture “On the Nature and Lawfulness of Union between Church and State.” Cunningham points out that a Church might be Established ‘in a certain sense’ whereby the Church is given the support and sanction of the State but is not endowed, either because the State chooses not to, or because an endowment is not necessary at that time.<sup>24</sup> As Cunningham notes, “Constantine established the Church, but he did not endow it.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, Cunningham points out that the Church of Scotland was established before it was ever endowed.<sup>26</sup> Thus, Establishment can function to differing degrees, that may be a legal recognition of the Church, it may be the provision of certain resources and benefits to the Church, or it may be the full endowment of a particular denomination. National laws and the disposal of national wealth can be such that the mission of the Church is supported and helped.

For this reason, the arrow connecting State and Church in Fig. 5 can be made larger or smaller, depending on the level of support given to the Church by the State:

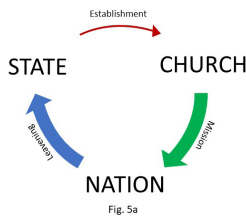


Fig. 5a

<sup>22</sup> Chalmers, *Works* (Vol. 17), 338.

<sup>23</sup> Chalmers, *Works* (Vol. 17), 341.

<sup>24</sup> Cunningham, “On the Nature and Lawfulness of Union between Church and State,” 6-7.

<sup>25</sup> Cunningham, “On the Nature and Lawfulness of Union between Church and State,” 7.

<sup>26</sup> Cunningham, “On the Nature and Lawfulness of Union between Church and State,” 7.

Fig 5a. depicts a situation whereby the State's support may be modest, but nevertheless does serve to benefit the Church. This observation is important because, arguably, this describes the situation experienced by the Church in Scotland today. Although no Church is endowed today, nevertheless, there are many national laws that benefit the Church, such as legislation around Charitable Status, and Gift Aid and other tax reliefs mean that some national wealth is still made available to the Church. Clearly, that is not to the extent of selecting one particular denomination for establishment as imagined by Chalmers, yet it is still an example of national laws and wealth being given to the Church in order for her to fulfil her mission. That, albeit to a very limited extent, is nevertheless an example of the Establishment Principle.

Thirdly, Cunningham argues that any Establishment arrangement *must be initiated by the State*:

...for if, as we have tried to prove, it is lawful, proper, and necessary, that there should be some union, or friendly connection, between Church and State, *the union must be formed by the State*. The Church is not so much called upon to act in this matter. The Church existed before the State thought of doing anything in favour of Christianity; and, in general, in propagating the Gospel over the world, it will happen, as it has in times past, that a Church will be formed, and have made some progress in a country, before the civil power acknowledge the authority and supremacy of Christianity. The Church, meanwhile, must be going on, evangelizing the land, preaching the gospel, and calling men to the discharge of their duties; and if, in process of time, those invested with civil authority, should come to feel their obligation to contribute, in every way, the promotion of the interests of Christ's Kingdom, they will naturally think of offering to the Church, by whom alone this object can be directly effected, whatever assistance their control over national laws and national wealth may enable them to render; while the Church has to consider whether or not the offers of the State are such as she can, consistently with the paramount duty which she owes to Christ, accept, and whether or not the acceptance of these offers would afford her any additional facilities for promoting the object which she is bound ever to aim at.<sup>27</sup>

This a crucial point, and it again highlights the passive grammar of being an Established Church. As far as Cunningham was concerned, the Church was not to demand establishment, initiate establishment, or cry out for establishment. Chalmers agreed, in forming a connection between Church and State, "the first movement was made by the State."<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Cunningham, "On the Nature and Lawfulness of Union between Church and State," 42-43. Emphasis added.

<sup>28</sup> Hanna, *Memoirs of Dr Chalmers* (Vol. 2), 460.

The red arrow in Fig. 5 always moves from State to Church. As Cunningham argues above, while the State decides what it wants to do, the Church has to get on with job of evangelising the nation, preaching the gospel and disciplining men and women. That is always her task, with or without the support of the State. But if the State does decide to initiate a friendly alliance, the Church is left with a decision.

Thus, fourthly, in the formation and ongoing functioning of an Establishment, *the Church must evaluate whether or not the State's offer of provision is going to help her fulfil her mission*. This is outlined in Cunningham's quote above; the Church has to decide "whether or not the offers of the State are such as she can, consistently with the paramount duty which she owes to Christ, accept, and whether or not the acceptance of these offers would afford her any additional facilities for promoting the object which she is bound ever to aim at."<sup>29</sup> And this, of course, was the issue that led to the Disruption. In the eyes of the Disruption Fathers, the Ten Years Conflict witnessed the encroachment of the State into the prerogatives that belong only to the Church (a violation of Fig. 1). The State's insistence that the Church comply with such terms was considered too high a price to pay for the privileges of being established. Therefore, "we were compelled, for conscience sake, to abandon our connection with the State, and our enjoyment of the temporalities of the Establishment."<sup>30</sup>

Thus, from the Church's perspective, it is helpful to draw a distinction between a 'privilege' and a 'right' in relation to the Establishment Principle and the Principle of Spiritual Independence.<sup>31</sup> The former is a *privilege*, and a healthy establishment was seen as the best means of leavening a nation with gospel. But the Spiritual Independence of the Church is a *right* that cannot be comprised on. The vitiated establishment that Chalmers his colleagues quit was one where the privilege of establishment required surrendering the right to spiritual independence. That was a price that the Disruption Fathers were unwilling to pay.

And this explains why the Disruption Fathers were able to "go out on the Establishment Principle."<sup>32</sup> Cunningham highlighted this long before the momentous events of 1843:

<sup>29</sup> Cunningham, "On the Nature and Lawfulness of Union Between Church and State," 42-43.

<sup>30</sup> Cunningham, *HT2*, 583.

<sup>31</sup> Note, of course, that although for the Church, Establishment was a privilege, from the perspective of the State, the Disruption Fathers would have viewed Establishment as a *duty*. But the obligation to fulfil that duty lies entirely with the State; whether the State recognises such an obligation is out of the Church's hands.

<sup>32</sup> Hanna, *Memoirs of Dr Chalmers* (Vol. 2), 647.

It is quite possible, nay, it is a fact actually realized amongst us, that men may hold the great general principles on which National Establishment of Religion rest, and can be fully vindicated, although there may be no particular Establishment in existence to which they can conscientiously attach themselves.<sup>33</sup>

In 1843, conscientious attachment to the Established Church of Scotland was no longer possible for Chalmers, Cunningham and their colleagues. But never for a moment did that mean that commitment to the Establishment Principle had been abandoned.

## 5. APPLYING THE ESTABLISHMENT PRINCIPLE TODAY

Where does all of this leave the Establishment Principle today? Is there any end to all this going round in circles? The following concluding points are offered.

First, it is clear that definitions of the Establishment Principle have changed over time. This has been recognised. Even as early as 1868, James Bannerman acknowledged that the way in which Establishment was understood during the Disruption was no longer current.<sup>34</sup> Others have observed the same; Doug Gay observed that in the nineteenth century, “The meaning of establishment, however, was changing. In this new era, establishment needed to be performed differently.”<sup>35</sup> Cranmer, Lucas and Morris are perhaps even closer to the truth when they say that Establishment is, “In practice an elastic term, its meaning is often stretched to accommodate the rhetorical purpose and policy preferences of particular writers.”<sup>36</sup> One consequence arises from these diverging definitions; if a denomination is going to apply the Establishment Principle today, then she must choose which definition to follow. And in the case of the Free Church of Scotland, in making that choice, why would she depart from the definition used by her founders?

Secondly, it is crucial that the Establishment Principle and the Principle of Spiritual Independence are kept separate. Indeed, the whole reason

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<sup>33</sup> Cunningham, “On the Nature and Lawfulness of Union Between Church and State,” 6.

<sup>34</sup> James Bannerman, “Letter on the Doctrine of the Confession of Faith anent Recognition and Endowment of the Church by the State.” In *The Church of Christ* (Vol. 2), 346.

<sup>35</sup> Doug Gay, *Honey from the Rock* (London: SCM Press, 2013), 174-5.

<sup>36</sup> Frank Cranmer, John Lucas and Bob Morris, “Church and State A Mapping Exercise.” (London: Constitution Unit, Department of Political Science UCL (University College London, 2006) 29–30. <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit/sites/constitution-unit/files/133.pdf> Online: accessed, 21/7/23.

the Disruption happened is because these principles were kept separate; the privilege of the former was not going to come at the expense of the latter. Indeed, had Cunningham been a commissioner at the 2021 Free Church General Assembly when the Establishment Principle was defined in the terms of Definition Three, it is easy to imagine him raising a point of order because, though he believed in everything described in that definition, to Cunningham and his colleagues, that definition does not describe the Establishment Principle.

Thirdly, the cyclical diagram represented by Fig. 5 helps the Church today to appreciate the benefits that she does receive from the government. Granted, the Church is rarely given a recognition different from other faith groups or charities, but nevertheless, there are still ways in which national laws and national wealth is used to help the Church. These are cause to rejoice and are a reminder that not everything about a secular government makes it an enemy. Things may change in the future, and the day may come when these privileges are offered only at the cost of our spiritual independence. Charity status may only come on the condition of endorsing moral positions outlawed in Scripture, tax reliefs may be removed unless the Church embraces a government's position on ethical questions, access to schools may be denied unless the Church preaches pluralism. The privileges the Church enjoys now may one day come at a cost that she cannot accept. On that day, we would do well to remember the convictions of the Disruption Fathers; the loss of privilege is worth it in order to remain free.

Fourthly, this study reminds the Church that a duty to speak to the State on matters of truth, morality and ethic remains, but it does not stand, and has never stood, on the Establishment Principle as its basis. That right and obligation to speak is grounded on the Church's Spiritual Independence. Indeed, a Church that speaks to a State only because that State supports her is a rather grotesque concept. Spiritual Independence ensures that the Church's voice is an unmanipulated voice. Indeed, Spiritual Independence reminds us that we speak even when what we say is not what the State wants to hear.

Finally, the question arises, what is the obligation for the Church in terms of the Establishment Principle? The answer is found in Fig. 5: Mission. Whether it is the fully endowed Establishment of the 1830s, or the lower case establishment of today where a few State privileges still come to the Church, or even if it is the persecuted Church that the State wants to stop, in all circumstances the Church has one great obligation: evangelise and disciple the people who live in our nation. It is a reminder that the Church should not concern herself with the size of the red arrow that runs from State to Church. The concern for the Church is the size of the green

arrow that runs from the Church to the Nation. Indeed, one further diagram offers a salient warning to the Church today:

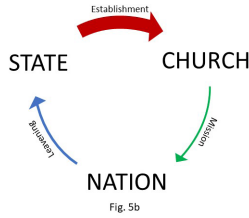


Fig 5b describes a Church that enjoys many privileges but which fails to put them to good use. In the history of the Scottish Church, such an arrangement has a specific name: Moderatism. And the consequences are serious. Even if the red arrow is small, the Church can still engage in her mission, with or without the support of the State. But if the Church's efforts are moderate, half-hearted or self-interested, if the green arrow is thin, the leavening of the nation with the gospel will never happen.

That work of mission is where the Church's obligation lies and where her focus must always remain. Let us never forget that on the day of judgment, the Head of the Church and the Head of the Nations will not ask us, 'Did you restore Establishment?' He will ask us, 'Did you make disciples of your nation?'

## ESCHATOLOGY AND ECO-ANXIETY: TOWARDS A HEALTHY AND HOPEFUL APPROACH TO ACTIVISM

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I first conceived of this paper while watching the World Cycling Championships in my home city of Glasgow and waiting for the cyclists to pass having been delayed by climate activists earlier in the route. Protest, by its nature should be disruptive, although as I sat in the sun, waiting on University Avenue outside the impressive Wellington Church of Scotland, I recalled a phrase from Luke Bretherton's *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*. Bretherton cites Charles Mathewes' article on agonism to suggest that 'Christians' attitude to political engagement should not be one of anxious grasping after control, but of relaxed playfulness.<sup>1</sup> When using the phrase, however, both "anxious grasping" and "relaxed playfulness" need careful consideration, especially how they might apply to Christians' response to climate change.

There are several clarifications to make at the outset. First, I am not a climate activist, therefore I am not reflecting on my experience of activism, but rather an eschatological framework that can frame activism. This paper is, therefore, by no means the last word on the issue and my hope is that activists and academics alike might engage with the ideas, pushback where needed, and refine them further, with the recognition that we are aiming at the same outcome – a world more hospitable for all. Second, there is no justification that care of creation is a Christian good – this is assumed and not argued. If you believe that actively bringing about creation's destruction to enact the new heaven and earth, then it is likely this paper will not resonate. I hope it will cause you to consider the extent to which humans can effect ultimate ends, but its purpose is not to argue for care of creation. Finally, implicit in the first and follows logically from the second, action on the care of creation is necessary and urgent. While the paper takes a critical approach to climate activism, the hope is for a sustainable approach to climate activism rather than advocating for a conservative indifference, which I admit, could be a potential interpretation.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 82 and Charles Mathewes, "Faith, Hope, and Agony: Christian Political Participation Beyond Liberalism", *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, Vol. 21, (2001), 125-150.

By making this admission early on, I hope I can avoid it in the discussion that follows.

The discussion will initially consider Mathewes' two phrases – “anxious grasping” and “relaxed playfulness” before broadening the scope to consider Mathewes' conversation with the Augustinian tradition alongside some warnings from Niebuhr's Christian Realism. Finally, the paper will set all these discussions in the context of climate activism to aim towards a healthy and hopeful approach to climate activism.

### “ANXIOUS GRASPING AFTER CONTROL”

According to Mathewes, Christians should relinquish their anxiety-induced desire to dictate the direction of history. The associated phrase, ‘anxious grasping after control’, appears in a section where Mathewes warns against ‘perfectionist energies’ and ‘utopianisms’ recognising the penultimate nature of the present.<sup>2</sup> In his footnotes, Mathewes points towards a Niebuhrian critique of liberationists, and so it is no stretch to suggest that he is thinking about Reinhold Niebuhr's comments on anxiety when he writes this advice. McCann comments that ‘by anxiety he [Niebuhr] meant something more profound in its implications, a universal mood ... a pervasive insecurity in the face of our own limits and possibilities.’<sup>3</sup> Our awareness of finitude and lack of control over ultimate outcomes causes us to grasp after control striving to gain certainty. Gilkey further explores Niebuhr's “antidote” to this anxiety:

Repentance at the continuing reality of their own sin and trust in the divine will for themselves and for the history in which they live are the inward, human bases for “renewal” in life, a new attitude of humility toward our own works – and social structures – and a new confidence in the future necessary to mitigate the inevitable anxiety about the future.<sup>4</sup>

Anxiety induced by human finitude is balanced against trust in God's sovereignty over creation's ultimate ends.<sup>5</sup> For Niebuhr this anxiety is a

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<sup>2</sup> Mathewes, “Faith, Hope, and Agony”, 139

<sup>3</sup> Dennis P. McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict*, (Orbis Books, 1981), 56.

<sup>4</sup> Langdon Gilkey, “Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology of History,” in Nathan A. Scott, Jr., ed., *The Legacy of Reinhold Niebuhr*. (The University of Chicago Press, 1975), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Quoting Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man Vol.1*, McCann further describes the paradox of anxiety as understanding human limitations while also recognising limitless possibilities – human nature is ‘at once both finite

deep-rooted part of human nature that exceeds a psychological condition with the remedy being an appreciation of God's providence. It is with this underlying approach that Mathewes' reading of Augustine makes sense. Mathewes invokes Augustine's *distensio* advocating that 'we should learn to live in suspense and resistance to closure' and cultivate contentment when feeling out of control over ultimate ends.<sup>6</sup>

Below an Augustinian eschatological framework will be more fully discussed, but at present it is worth commenting on the clause "grasping after control." Mathewes contrasts the 'apocalyptic imagination' with the 'eschatological imagination' where the former desires to bring history to an end and the latter realises that history 'must be endured, inhabited as a mystery ... which we cannot escape of our own powers. All we can know is that a living God is in charge of history.'<sup>7</sup> For Mathewes this is significant in his argument against agonism. The Christian tradition does not see the end of history in oppositional terms where good triumphs over evil in a cosmic struggle, but rather God is singular and all creation flows from Him and returns to Him alone. In an extended quote, Mathewes summarises this shift in thinking:

Most basically, then, the agonists misconstrue the nature of Christian hope, by characterizing it in immanent terms as hope for the this-worldly realization of the Kingdom of God. But true Christian hope's eschatological orientation precludes such desires for any such ending in time. Christians do not want to "win," because Christ has already won. Because of Christ's victory, Christians should not conceive of either history in general or politics in particular as essentially agonistic, essentially a struggle or a war, but as a pilgrimage.... Christians can imagine and approach moments of conflict in the eschatological conviction that "losing" and "winning" need not be objects of ultimate concern.<sup>8</sup>

It is this last phrase that helps Christians to release control – "winning" does not need to be of ultimate concern as Christ has already won.

Once again, this seems to draw on a Niebuhrian approach to history where God's self-communication in Christ is the disclosure of history rather than just a promise of what is to come.<sup>9</sup> Niebuhr is particu-

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and free.' McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 56. Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man, Volume 1*, (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 183.

<sup>6</sup> Mathewes, "Faith, Hope, and Agony", 139.

<sup>7</sup> Mathewes, "Faith, Hope, and Agony", 138-139.

<sup>8</sup> Mathewes, "Faith, Hope, and Agony", 138.

<sup>9</sup> See Gilkey, "Reinhold Niebuhr's Theology of History", 43.

larly aware of the persistence of sin in human history and thus warns against believing we can create a utopia. McCann observes that Niebuhr had reservations about collective utopian action: ‘no human association, Christian or otherwise, can claim to have established a perfect society – a kingdom of God – on earth. All such assertions are rejected as either “ideological” pretensions or “utopian” projections. In either case, they are emphatically not the meaning of Christian eschatology.’<sup>10</sup> Likewise Gilkey comments: ‘no historical order will perfectly incarnate such a society of love. And the more it claims to do so, or to represent the road to it, the more ... [it] will feel justified in their domination of the other vitalities in the community.’<sup>11</sup> Gilkey continues that humans can at best ‘relieve, mitigate, or decrease’ problems caused by human destruction but ‘cannot eradicate it once and for all.’<sup>12</sup> Not only is the pursuit of a utopia a false ideal, even the road to it does not give God’s sovereignty its due place.

There is, therefore, a warning for both ends of the spectrum. Whether it is humans that want to bring history to its climax by destructive action towards creation or those who think incremental progress will bring about full redemption of creation, Mathewes sees this as a vain grasping after control. While the utopian ideal is often a well-meaning but fruitless project, history is littered with utopian dreams that result in dystopian nightmares as they try to eradicate perceived flaws and impurities. Therefore, whether it is control in the form of well-meaning preservation of creation, or self-centred escape from creation, both perpetuate human domination.<sup>13</sup>

#### “RELAXED PLAYFULNESS”

If Mathewes’ first concern from the perspective of agonism is that Christian eschatology removes them from the day-to-day concerns of political engagement, then his second is an ‘indifference concerning politics’ aris-

<sup>10</sup> McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 73.

<sup>11</sup> See Gilkey, “Reinhold Niebuhr’s Theology of History,” 49.

<sup>12</sup> See Gilkey, “Reinhold Niebuhr’s Theology of History”, 52.

<sup>13</sup> Despite their criticisms of Niebuhr’s eschatology in favour of a more progressivist transformation, there is an interesting overlap with Hauerwas and Willimon’s *Resident Aliens*. Hauerwas and Willimon advocate that Christian non-violence derives from the knowledge that in the future God’s Kingdom will be non-violent rather than Christian peace-making being motivated from an ‘anxious self-interested protection of our world as it is.’ Both Mathewes and Hauerwas / Willimon see anxiety as the misplaced motivation for taking control. Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Abingdon Press, 1989), 89.

ing from a reputation that ‘Christians would rather be nice than win.’<sup>14</sup> He is aware, therefore, that using the language of “relaxed playfulness” will do nothing to appease this concern.<sup>15</sup> However, Mathewes points to two sources for insight into the playful element of the phrase – Huizinga’s *Homo Ludens* and Rahner’s *Man at Play*.<sup>16</sup> Rahner’s approach bridges the gap between an anxious grasping after control and Mathewes’ concept of relaxed playfulness. Rahner argues that playfulness stops a person from ‘distorting’ the world by avoiding approaching creation as controlled by humans. Instead, playfulness ‘sees the limits and inadequacy of all created things.’<sup>17</sup> Rahner’s approach holds in tension that creation should be held lightly knowing it belongs to God, while at the same time Christians must press creation to their heart because God the Creator can be seen in it.<sup>18</sup> Rahner draws on the concept of *eutrapelia*, notably used by Aristotle, which suggests a ‘gracious’ playfulness involving ‘a certain camaraderie centered on the pursuit of shared delights.’<sup>19</sup> In turn, fostering *eutrapelia* can help political and civil advancement because individuals become ‘aware of the importance of pleasant relations for the wellbeing of the political community.’<sup>20</sup> It is, however, Huizinga who best highlights what Mathewes has in mind with the phrase “playfulness”. Huizinga does not see playfulness as opposite to seriousness, in fact play can be very serious when it is a contest of skill or a high-stakes sporting event. Moreover, in play we view ourselves as play-ers (or, for examples, actors within a play) who participate within the action rather than simply as observers.<sup>21</sup> For Huizinga, playfulness does not diminish the importance of the event and invites us into it rather than standing-by on the sidelines. While “relaxed playfulness” may be critiqued on its appropriateness in relation to critical matters of human life and dignity, and though Mathewes moves the argument on quickly, his use of the phrase contrasts well with “anxious grasping” without meaning to indicate indifference.

In summary, Mathewes advice to relinquish the anxious grasping after control and replacing it with an attitude of relaxed playfulness is to

<sup>14</sup> Mathewes, “Faith, Hope, and Agony”, 136.

<sup>15</sup> Mathewes, “Faith, Hope, and Agony”, 140.

<sup>16</sup> Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955) and Hugo Rahner, *Man at Play or, Did You Ever Practise Eutrapelia?* (Burns and Oates, 1965).

<sup>17</sup> Rahner, *Man at Play*, 100.

<sup>18</sup> Rahner, *Man at Play*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Carli, Silvia, “Play a Little! Aristotle on Eutrapelia.” *The Review of Metaphysics* 74, no. 4 (2021): 495.

<sup>20</sup> Silvia, “Play a Little!”, 495.

<sup>21</sup> Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 15.

acknowledge humanity's finite existence and limited control over ultimate outcomes when viewed against God's sovereignty and the hope and confidence that brings. It is not a careless indifference to creation, but a call to participate in activities that reflect God's participation within creation.

#### MATHEWES' AUGUSTINIAN ESCHATOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Lying beneath Mathewes' advice is an Augustinian eschatological framework. Not only is this clear from Mathewes own work but in Bretherton's use of Mathewes, it is placed within a discussion of an Augustinian approach to political engagement. Bretherton distinguishes his approach from Niebuhr's (particularly on the role of the church in political life), but acknowledges there are resonances between both, especially related to an eschatological framework.<sup>22</sup> Thus like Gilkey above, Bretherton writes:

Augustine and Alinsky are anti-progressive, anti-utopian, and anti-ideological. History does not bear within itself its own resolution and so while the order of things can be improved in incremental ways, there is no inherent direction to history: things will not always get better (or worse). The non-progressive nature of history means that a perfect or true order of things is not realizable within history, so any human system or ideology that claims to provide the means of bringing about this order is a denial of the fallen and contingent nature of historical existence.<sup>23</sup>

Bretherton describes the underlying Augustinian eschatological framework helpfully, noting that the present situation in the *saeculum* is 'open, ambivalent, and undetermined.'<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, he highlights the balance of Augustine's eschatology as resisting triumphalism ('marked by an expectation of progress until the church would overcome the world') and separatism (caused by the belief that 'history is oriented toward regress or a movement away from God').<sup>25</sup> The present situation 'neither promises nor sets at risk the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is established, if not fully manifest, and the "end" of history is already achieved and fulfilled in Christ.'<sup>26</sup> It is with this Augustinian eschatological framework in mind that Bretherton sees a link to Mathewes' advice.

<sup>22</sup> See especially Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 88-91.

<sup>23</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 85.

<sup>24</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 81-82.

<sup>25</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 82.

<sup>26</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 82.

Bretherton takes much of his reading of Augustine from Markus' work *Christianity and the Secular*, which adds a helpful layer of understanding.<sup>27</sup> Markus describes Augustine's *saeculum* as secular (which is less of a tautology than it might appear). The *saeculum* is a middle-ground which is neither sacred nor profane and so resists any notion that the present situation is getting worse (more profane) or better (more sacred) or even that it can be taken over fully by either the sacred or the profane. In short, the *saeculum* is a neutral space with a mix of sacred and profane.<sup>28</sup> This leads Markus to conclude that 'in the most general terms, for Augustine political discourse is concerned, not with the ultimate realities of human fulfilment and salvation, but with what, in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's language, we might call the "penultimate".'<sup>29</sup> This is not to suggest that penultimate realities are not important or do not cause real suffering / joy, but rather they do not have an impact on the ultimate direction of human history. We can still bring relief to suffering or joy to despair within the *saeculum*, without those actions speeding up or slowing down the ultimate realities of Christian eschatology.<sup>30</sup> This is best summed up when Markus writes: 'For Augustine, no social arrangements, no human justice or ingenuity, could establish the Kingdom of God or bring us any closer to it; only God's saving acts could do that.'<sup>31</sup>

A key strand in this eschatological framework is the persistence of sin within the *saeculum*, the clarity of which arose by Augustine balancing two opposing streams of thought. On the one hand, once Augustine had turned his back on Manicheism, he set about to oppose their ideas; however, in part due to his robust rejection of Manicheism, the later Augustine defended himself against Pelagianism. Mathewes alludes to Augustine's middle way as a 'different ontology and cosmology' which rejects 'the received view of the cosmos as formed in an agonic struggle between two (or more) divine entities, replacing it with a cosmology of a single monarchic Deity from whom creation has tragically and inexplicably swerved.'<sup>32</sup> Forsyth develops this perspective commenting,

<sup>27</sup> Bretherton mentions Markus in text a number of times and several references to his work in the endnotes for his chapter. R. A. Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*. (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

<sup>28</sup> Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 37.

<sup>29</sup> Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 40.

<sup>30</sup> This sentiment resonates with Mathewes' ideas of 'apocalyptic longings' and 'utopian fantasies' as 'equally impatient desires to bring the kingdom of heaven to earth on our own terms.' Mathewes, "Faith, Hope, and Agony", 149 footnote 40.

<sup>31</sup> Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 55.

<sup>32</sup> Mathewes, "Faith, Hope, and Agony", 145.

there is no real battle between opposing forces since the substance of the one apparent force, evil, is illusory.... Though evil as substance may be illusory, its effects are very real, leading even to eternal damnation. What is more, argued Augustine, we are born with a sinful nature, in bondage to sin, and only grace can liberate us. Our own efforts are worth nothing, since they originate in sin.<sup>33</sup>

As with the language of ultimate and penultimate above, this is not to suggest that suffering is somehow to our benefit or does not exist, but rather it is not the overflow of a cosmic battle between good and evil beings.<sup>34</sup> By rejecting the Manichean dualism, Augustine defended himself against a charge of hypocrisy from the Pelagians by emphasizing the persistence of sin within creation alongside a doctrine of grace as a necessity for salvation. Forsyth concludes that Augustine 'was always in danger either of Pelagian optimism or Manichaeism' however 'both heresies denied the distance of man from God and thus failed to read correctly the situation of man within the cosmic structure.'<sup>35</sup> Thus, Augustine's eschatological framework rejects the agonistic struggle of the Manicheans so conceiving of the *saeculum* as a neutral space, which alongside the "end" of history fulfilled in Christ, means the *saeculum* is neither progressing towards a better future nor away from it.

However, addressing the Pelagian concern, the *saeculum* is still marked by sin and, therefore, has competing demands, some sacred, some profane, but all penultimate. We are neither helping creation's progress towards a utopia nor are we aiding its regression towards destruction. There are, of course, those who are orientated towards God and those who are orientated away from God, meaning humans sometimes contribute to the relief of suffering and sometimes the cause of it – all are marked by sin's corruption and all can be receptacles of grace. While no society can be wholly good in the degree of the eschatological City of God, this

<sup>33</sup> Neil Forsyth, *The Old Enemy: Satan and the Combat Myth*, (Princeton University Press, 1987), 405.

<sup>34</sup> Bentley Hart summarises this point concisely and eloquently in his excellent short book *Doors of the Sea*: 'Evil is born in the will: it consists not in some other separate thing standing alongside the things of creation, but it is only a shadow of turning of the hearts and minds of rational creatures away from the light of God back toward the nothingness from which all things are called. This is not to say that evil is somehow illusory; it is only to say that evil, rather than being a discrete substance, is instead a kind of ontological wasting disease.' David Bentley Hart, *Doors of the Sea: Where was God in the Tsunami?*, (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 73.

<sup>35</sup> Forsyth, *The Old Enemy*, 407-408.

does not preclude some societies being better than others. This is a matter of degree dependent on the objects of love that society holds in common (i.e. what is held to be most desirable for the society) – the more humane the objects are, the better the society will be and vice versa. Markus notes that though ‘Augustine removes civil society from the sphere where perfect justice can be realised, he does not remove it from the realm where moral norms are applicable. They are yardsticks by which its quality is to be assessed, not part of its meaning.’<sup>36</sup> Thus it is important for Christians to be involved in civil society so that they can contribute and advocate for common objects of love. Markus continues,

Augustine, as we have seen, defined the ideally perfect society in eschatological terms. Being totally transcendent, it was thus removed from the range of anything that could be aspired to as a goal to be aimed at. Actual societies are too disrupted by sin and always at the mercy of the play of power.... But though they cannot aspire to the peace and justice of the eschatological City, they can aim higher than the level of the den of robbers.<sup>37</sup>

Societies can be more humane and more caring when the objects of love for that society seek the common good for all humanity. This is the basis on which Bretherton can write that ‘forming common objects of love between the citizens of the two cities is a necessary condition of faithful witness to the Lordship of Christ over all things.’<sup>38</sup>

#### NIEBUHRIAN WARNINGS

While not conflating Niebuhr’s approach with the Augustinian eschatological framework, there are some clear parallels, indicated explicitly in Bretherton and implicitly in Mathewes.<sup>39</sup> Due to these parallels some criticisms levelled at Niebuhr should be considered especially as they criticise

<sup>36</sup> Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 64.

<sup>37</sup> Markus, *Christianity and the Secular*, 64. Markus makes an interesting claim that ‘a virtually wholly Christian society would be likely, in Augustine’s eyes, to encourage a dangerous delusion about its distance from the eschatological City.’ It is important to recognise the persistence of sin and thus the distance from the City of God, even in the most Christian of societies.

<sup>38</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 84.

<sup>39</sup> As mentioned above Bretherton addresses the similarities and differences with Niebuhr in Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 88-91. Mathewes, on the other hand, cites Niebuhr in his footnotes on several occasions as a good example of the eschatological imagination and of providing a good critique on liberation theology. See Mathewes, “Faith, Hope, and Agony”, 149 footnote 38; 40.

inaction or indifference. At the outset, I tried to ensure that inaction or indifference was not intended, and I have tried to lay the foundations for significant action as a penultimate goal, despite the Augustinian / Niebuhrian approach recognising human action has no effect on ultimate ends. However, two significant criticisms must be addressed. The first comes from Bretherton's critique that Niebuhr only ever foresaw political orientation as feasible on a personal level. This critique is particularly limiting when it comes to large-scale issues that have both individual and structural components. Bretherton writes that 'such an approach gives up any hope of the Spirit acting to irrupt anticipations and glimpses of the eschaton within the saeculum and renounces its vocation to bear witness to the world as it is in Christ within the world turned in on itself.'<sup>40</sup> Bretherton argues that through community organizing, churches can listen to both the needs of the community and God's *verbum externum* in order to participate in the common good as a vision of political life.<sup>41</sup> Nothing in this discussion should suggest political indifference beyond the personal and pursuing conversations about shared objects of love within society is a good place to start.

The second criticism comes from James Cone who sees Christian Realism as conservative and specifically leads to inaction. Cone contrasts Niebuhr's Christian Realism with 'what he [Niebuhr] regarded as naïve or idealistic optimism.'<sup>42</sup> The naïve optimism represents the Renaissance's confidence in human progress, which Niebuhr balanced against the Reformation's pessimism about the persistence of sin's corruption.<sup>43</sup> However, Christian Realism's (arguably correct) lack of confidence in human progress, Cone argues, stifles commitment to radical change. Cone illustrates the stifling effect of Niebuhr's approach by citing his 'gradualism' particularly in relation to racial injustice.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the lack of desire for radical change preserved the unjust status quo: 'Had [Niebuhr] turned on the radio or television, he could have heard the eloquent and powerful voice of Malcolm talking about the limits of the bourgeois civil rights movement and its leaders. Malcolm was not interested in proximate justice defined by liberal whites.'<sup>45</sup> Ultimately, it leads Cone to state

<sup>40</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 90.

<sup>41</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 91-106.

<sup>42</sup> James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, (Orbis Books, 2011), 33.

<sup>43</sup> See McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology*, 74.

<sup>44</sup> Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 39. Bretherton also alludes to Niebuhr's lack of commitment to radical racial equality through political institutions which he says Niebuhr thought was 'sentimental idealism'. Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 89.

<sup>45</sup> Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 48-49.

that ‘Christian realism was not only a source of Niebuhr’s radicalism but also of his conservatism.’<sup>46</sup> The criticism of Niebuhr’s position on racial equality is important and must be addressed by those who adopt his approach. Similarly, there is the potential lurking beneath the Augustinian eschatological framework to foster indifference towards radical social change. However, it need not be so if one heeds Markus’ advice that moral norms in society continue to be important. Christians must maintain the responsibility to influence the common objects of love within societies and, repeating Gilkey, ‘relieve, mitigate, or decrease’ suffering caused by patterns of human destruction.<sup>47</sup>

### CLIMATE ACTIVISM

How might an Augustinian eschatological framework impact Christian climate activism? As noted at the beginning, I am neither attempting to suggest practices nor criticise any practice. This is not my aim, nor would it be faithful to my experience (or lack of it). What I hope to articulate is an orientation towards climate activism that is healthier and more hopeful. Furthermore, I hope to show that climate activism is not driven by an appearance of relevance but comes from a faithful witness to the Lordship of Christ, which in turn can be a way to find common objects of love with those around us.<sup>48</sup>

In recent years burnout has been linked to climate activism and it is not difficult to understand the reason why. One definition suggests that ‘burnout is a result of stress accumulated over long-term involvement in situations that are emotionally demanding.’<sup>49</sup> Others speak of the urgency of climate activism and name the anxiety caused by apparent lack of progress as eco-anxiety.<sup>50</sup> Eco-anxiety is not simply worry but a preoc-

<sup>46</sup> Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, 48.

<sup>47</sup> Gilkey, “Reinhold Niebuhr’s Theology of History,” 52.

<sup>48</sup> Within this framework, climate activism between Christians and non-Christians may be a shared pursuit. I’m not suggesting that only Christians who witness to the Lordship of Christ can be activists, however, I am suggesting that because their motivations are different, the resulting attitude and psychological impact will be different.

<sup>49</sup> S. Burke and B. Wauchope, “Dealing with Burnout” *Australian Psychological Society (APS)*, available: <https://psychology.org.au/getmedia/994934a8-2916-4599-8806-aa3e0d2fd3c3/dealing-with-burnout-climate-change.pdf> [Last Accessed 09/10/2023].

<sup>50</sup> For example there is both personal reflections and research in the field of psychology that support the claim: S. Burke and B. Wauchope, “Dealing with Burnout” *Australian Psychological Society (APS)*, available: <https://psychol->

cupation that is ‘overwhelming and debilitating.’<sup>51</sup> While some research suggests activism can reduce eco-anxiety as an outlet for feelings of helplessness, the relationship between activism and anxiety remains complex. Fisk’s excellent “Reflections on a Healthy Prophetic Climate Movement” observes ‘our horror and fear at the current and future climate crisis is certainly what had led us on to action. On whether this was a *good* motivation for healthy forms of action is a question on which I am now more ambivalent.’<sup>52</sup> There is no denying the potential for anxiety initiated by the climate crisis and, while some activism may be beneficial, the motivation behind activism remains a complex area.

Can the Augustinian eschatological framework lead to a healthy foundation for climate activism? In response to the urgency of climate change, can “anxious grasping after control” be avoided and, instead, embrace “relaxed playfulness”? While relaxed playfulness does not reduce the gravity of the situation it can help Christians to foster a healthy attitude towards climate activism. Recalling Augustine’s *distensio*, Christians can cultivate an attitude of contentment recognising when ultimate ends are outside of our control. Combined with Mathewes’ eschatological imagination, Christians can learn to accept that history, including our present time, is to be endured, knowing that ‘a living God is in charge of history.’<sup>53</sup> As alluded to above, the modern fascination with creating utopia often results in destructive dystopia. Fisk notes that where modernism met Christianity it resulted in a ‘Christian obsession with the end of days [that] fed into colonialism and industrial capitalism, which has led to the

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ogy.org.au/getmedia/994934a8-2916-4599-8806-aa3e0d2fd3c3/dealing-with-burnout-climate-change.pdf [Last Accessed 09/10/2023]; S. Morris, “Burned Out on a Burning Planet: Reflections from a disillusioned climate activist”, *Common Home: Georgetown University*, available: <https://commonhome.georgetown.edu/topics/climateenergy/burned-out-on-a-burning-planet/> [Last Accessed 09/10/2023]; Schwartz, S.E.O., Benoit, L., Clayton, S. et al. “Climate change anxiety and mental health: Environmental activism as buffer.” *Current Psychology* 42 (2023), 16708–16721; Latkin C, Dayton L, Scherkoske M, Countess K, Thrul J. “What predicts climate change activism?: An examination of how depressive symptoms, climate change distress, and social norms are associated with climate change activism.” *Journal of Climate Change Health* Vol.8. (Oct 2022), np.

<sup>51</sup> Yale Sustainability, “Yale Experts Explain Climate Anxiety”, *Yale Sustainability*, available: <https://sustainability.yale.edu/explainers/yale-experts-explain-climate-anxiety> [Last Accessed 09/10/2023].

<sup>52</sup> Anna Fisk, “Reflections on a Healthy Prophetic Climate Movement (1)”, available: <https://annafisk.com/2021/06/26/reflections-on-a-healthy-prophetic-climate-movement-1/> [Last Accessed 09/20/2023]

<sup>53</sup> Mathewes, “Faith, Hope, and Agony”, 138-139.

situation we are not in.’ She continues that the urgency created by time-based climate campaigning as a cipher for progress is unhelpful, suggesting that ‘such a continuation of modernity’s grand narrative of history as progress dissolves in the face of the realities of the Anthropocene.’<sup>54</sup> Climate activism encourages an urgency to respond before time runs out.<sup>55</sup> While this motivation is logical and to some degree truthful, a Christian can relinquish anxiety by accepting that God is sovereign, rather than grasping to control the preservation of creation. This is not fatalism but relinquishing the responsibility for ultimate concerns.

Instead, Christian activism can be playful. They are not comical or without consequence, but, recalling Huizinga, they are playful because humans are not observers but participants, actors within creation. Furthermore, Christians do not sit by idly, but as Rahner suggests, playful actions recognise the tension between holding creation lightly because it ultimately belongs to God; and not allowing it to be destroyed because God is reflected in creation. In essence, Christians can cultivate an attitude releasing them from the deep-rooted anxiety that stems from their own finitude, while still embracing the call to action as participants within a creaturely order marked by a Creator God.

If eco-anxiety is one obstacle to sustainable climate activism, the other is the closely related idea of “doomism”. Doomism is where a person is overwhelmed with a problem to the degree that they are paralysed to respond. In the context of the climate crisis ‘presented with the idea that the planet that gives us life might be dying, parts of our brain shut down. We are unable to think logically.’<sup>56</sup> While some churches may be indifferent due to apathy, others may be battling doomism. In an interview, Michael Mann, a climate scientist, comments, ‘I think there are a lot of

<sup>54</sup> Anna Fisk, “Reflections on a Healthy Prophetic Climate Movement (2)”, available: <https://annafisk.com/2021/06/26/reflections-on-a-healthy-prophetic-climate-movement-1/> [Last Accessed 09/20/2023]

<sup>55</sup> Fisk helpfully observes that such an approach to the climate crisis shows that ‘the climate crisis is a racist crisis’ on the grounds that it has been a matter of urgency for non-Western countries for a lot longer but only now, as it begins to affect the West, has the urgency been felt more keenly. “Reflections on a Healthy Prophetic Climate Movement (2)”, available: <https://annafisk.com/2021/06/26/reflections-on-a-healthy-prophetic-climate-movement-1/> [Last Accessed 09/20/2023]

<sup>56</sup> Eric Holthaus, “Stop scaring people about climate change. It doesn’t work.” Grist, available: <https://grist.org/climate-energy/stop-scaring-people-about-climate-change-it-doesnt-work/> [Last Accessed 09/10/2023]. This post links to academic journals to support the claim but is helpful in summarising the overall argument.

really good, well-meaning, well-intentioned, good-hearted people who fall into doom and despair. And they are not the enemy!<sup>57</sup> Mann observes that framing the climate crisis as hopeless (wrongly in his opinion) demotivates people from acting with the antidote being to re-energise climate activism with hope.

Mathewes' Augustinian eschatological framework is, at its heart, hopeful. As noted above by both Gilkey and Bretherton, in light of Christ's resurrection, the direction of history in an ultimate sense is not getting better or worse. This is not to diminish the real suffering caused by the climate crisis, which is only increasing, nor is it to suppress climate activism, but it does frame activity in a different way. Christians have a dual responsibility in responding to the climate crisis. The first, as already indicated, is to be present to advocate for the care of creation as a shared object of love within the *saeculum*. In other words, Christians should be at the forefront of campaigning for creation care, not because it will save the world, but because it is how Christians can foster what is best for creation and all its creatures within the present age. It is, as already noted, an act of 'faithful witness to the Lordship of Christ over all things.'<sup>58</sup> Responding to the climate crisis is not a matter of jumping on the bandwagon of relevancy, but rather an act of faithfulness that should transcend the current crisis. Even if creation was flourishing, therefore able to disregard the current crisis, Christians should be advocating for creation care as a common object of love for all society. The second responsibility is to relieve suffering and act to prevent further suffering caused by the climate crisis. While the *saeculum* will never be the perfect eschatological Kingdom of God, and to imagine it as nearing such is damaging, it can aim to be more than "a den of robbers." By God's grace, Christians orientated towards the City of God, can act in ways that acknowledge the world is not as it should be. Therefore, there is no place for immoral indifference in the climate crisis within this Augustinian eschatological framework.

Actions are more hopeful because they are not motivated by an ultimate end goal. Christians who recognise that their actions do not bring the Kingdom nearer (nor our missteps distance the Kingdom), are more hopeful because they act in faith rather than to achieve a certain outcome. While modernism's progress tried to find hope by imagining a world moving forward, the Augustinian eschatological framework finds

<sup>57</sup> Michaela Barret, "'Urgency and Agency': Michael Mann on Conquering Climate Despair." *Behavioral Scientist*, available: <https://behavioralscientist.org/urgency-and-agency-michael-mann-on-conquering-climate-despair/> [Last Accessed 09/10/2023]

<sup>58</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 84.

hope from ‘the “end” of history [being] already achieved and fulfilled in Christ.’<sup>59</sup> In short, when acting out of faithfulness, hope arises from the in-breaking of the Spirit in the present, rather than from any perceived outcome to be achieved. Regardless of whether the world is getting better or worse, it does not matter when our actions arise out of a concern for the present. The antidote to doomism is hope-filled, grace-inspired action.

In summary, the Augustinian eschatological framework is not simply a fatalistic, indifferent, “leave it to God” attitude. Christians have a very real responsibility to advocate for the care of creation as a common object of love and a responsibility to care for creation because God cares for creation. Furthermore, Christians have a responsibility to care for creation to relieve the suffering of those affected by climate change and catastrophic climate events. However, if Christians believe they can save the world this brings with it overwhelming and unrealistic expectations and, if hope comes from success, this can easily lead to despondency when successes are few and far between. However, if Christians recognise their actions are important, vital even, but of penultimate value, they are released from the unrealistic expectations and associated anxiety and instead infused with a hopefulness despite evidence to the contrary, because they hope in God’s sovereignty and his ultimate ends.

## REMAINING QUESTIONS

There are (at least) two remaining questions and one practical consideration that strike at the foundations of the framework. I started by acknowledging that the aim is to promote onward discussion, not to be a final word and so these questions are raised with that aim in mind. While I am persuaded by the Augustinian eschatological framework as a means of promoting a healthier and more hopeful approach to climate activism, I recognise that there are other theological approaches to eschatology. Noting Cone’s response to Christian Realism, I wonder whether the Augustinian eschatological framework is too conservative a model for a crisis of this scale. At the risk of contradicting myself, a more progressive eschatological framework, one which acknowledges that sin may be resisted rather than persist, may lead to more radical transformational action. Can there be a radical transformational approach that also fosters healthy and hopeful activism in the terms described above? I hope the Augustinian eschatological framework could facilitate radical transformation, but I acknowledge that some may still perceive it as inadequate.

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<sup>59</sup> Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 82.

The second question is whether the climate crisis is an ultimate or penultimate concern? It is penultimate in the sense that humans created the crisis and therefore, in theory, could be the ones to overcome the crisis. However, I suspect the failed project of modernity's progression towards perfection, must lead us to the conclusion that at the heart of the climate crisis is the persistence of sin on a systemic level, perhaps even an ontological level, which lends itself more to categorising the climate crisis as a problem of ultimate concerns. While on the one hand humans must do all we can to relieve the suffering caused by the climate crisis, on the other I am hesitant to suggest that even with our best-efforts humans could solve the climate crisis in a way that frees creation from bondage.

Although the scope of the discussion did not include the "how to" there is one significant practical hurdle that is relevant. While it is straightforward to mentally assent (or not) to the above ideas, simply telling someone that they should not be anxious when faced with an overwhelming problem is generally ineffective. Like any good piece of theological reflection, this is not the end of the conversation, but merely a provocation to reflect further. As indicated at the beginning, the next step must be in conversation with activists and churches alike to move the theory into practice and once more reflect upon the experience. In the meantime, may we have the grace to act for a better world for all.

THE WOUNDS THAT REMAIN  
ESCHATOLOGICAL MEMORY AND THE WOUNDS  
OF THE RISEN CHRIST

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1. INTRODUCTION: “I WILL NEVER BELIEVE”

Thomas was in the upper room eight days after the resurrection. The other disciples had told him the news, to which he responded with the strongest possible negation: *I will never believe* (*ou mē pisteusō*) (John 20:25). It is the language of someone protecting himself from being hurt again. Whatever else Thomas’s refusal conveyed, it bore the weight of his memory: memory of pain, loss, and trauma that he had witnessed at the cross. When Jesus finally appeared to Thomas, he held out his wounds.

That gesture—the risen Lord still bearing the marks of crucifixion—names the question this essay will pursue. What is the eschatological future of painful memory? When the new creation comes and “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev. 21:4), what becomes of the memory of the tears themselves?

In *The End of Memory*, Miroslav Volf has offered what is perhaps the most theologically rigorous answer in recent literature: such memories must finally be relinquished. After right remembering has done its work, after injustice has been named and forgiveness offered, Volf argues that an eschatological non-remembrance awaits even the most grievous memories of harm, and indeed the memory of the cross itself will be remembered no more.<sup>1</sup> This essay contests that conclusion.

I will argue that the eschatological *telos* of memory is not its erasure but its transformation. Divine forgiveness, on the account I will defend, does not consign painful memories to oblivion. It summons them, calls them, and grafts them into the story of Christ’s death and resurrection, where they are given a new context within which they bear different meaning. The ontological foundation for this is union with Christ: because the believer is incorporated into Christ, the believer’s life, including her memory, is genuinely emplotted within his. The biblical warrant is the body of the risen Lord, who returned to his disciples not unmarked but bearing wounds. The view is also supported by the testimony of the

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<sup>1</sup> Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

patristic and medieval tradition concerning the bodies of the martyrs in glory.

The argument proceeds in four stages. Section 2 establishes a working account of memory, drawing Herman Bavinck and Paul Ricoeur into conversation in order to show that memory is neither mechanical reproduction nor free invention but narrative reconstruction with a debt to the past. Section 3 surveys three Christian models of the healing of painful memory, arguing that the Volf-Tran debate maps a real fork in the road. Section 4 develops the *yobi-tsugi* model and shows how union with Christ supplies its metaphysical anchor, answering Volf's worry that mere re-narration is insufficiently Christological. Section 5 argues from the wounds of the risen Christ to a positive account of resurrected memory.

## 2. MEMORY AS NARRATIVE RECONSTRUCTION: BAVINCK AND RICOEUR

Any theology of forgiveness worthy of the name must rest on an account of memory more careful than the popular slogan “forgive and forget” can supply. The phrase implies that memory is a discrete deposit which the will, properly disciplined, can simply discard. That picture is mistaken about both memory and forgiveness.

Herman Bavinck's *Foundations of Psychology* offers a useful place to begin. Bavinck wrote against the materialism of his day, which held that “all psychic life” could be explained “in terms of metabolism in the brain,” with representations leaving “traces” that resurfaced under various stimuli.<sup>2</sup> Against this, he treated memory as an activity of the soul: not the passive storage of impressions but a set of activities undertaken “for the purpose of preserving the representations, forming them anew, reproducing them in changed form, ordering them logically.”<sup>3</sup> He distinguished memory proper from *recollection*. Memory is the soul's continuing consciousness of earlier representations; recollection is the intentional act of retrieving and reproducing them. Animals, he thought, possess memory in an involuntary sense, but only humans recollect. “By means of pondering, reflecting, and meditating,” he wrote, we are able “by means of our will to guide our thoughts.”<sup>4</sup> This distinction maps closely onto Aquinas's earlier distinction between *memoria* and *reminiscentia*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Foundations of Psychology*, trans. Jack Vanden Born, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Christian's Library Press, 2018), 138.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 78, a. 4.

Bavinck's account is right where it matters: memory is not mechanism. But his contrast between *recollection*, which he describes as the bringing forth of "unaltered" memory, and *imagination*, which alters, is too sharp. Bavinck himself acknowledges, almost in the same breath, that memory often fails to be a "truthful representation," especially under the pressures of stress or age. The deeper truth is that recollection is *seldom* simple reproduction. Even in mental health, the act of bringing a memory to consciousness is an act of selection, framing, and narration.

This is the insight Paul Ricoeur develops in *Memory, History, Forgetting*. For Ricoeur, memory is both selective (we recall some things and not others) and interpretive (we connect what we recall into a coherent story). To remember is inevitably an act of narration. But this does not collapse memory into fiction. Memory, Ricoeur argues, owes a "debt" to the past—what he calls an "unavoidable correspondence between the narrative and what really happened."<sup>6</sup> Memory can either be a faithful witness or a false one, and we are answerable for which. Volf's appropriation of Ricoeur, in the early chapters of *The End of Memory*, makes this point a moral demand: we owe the dead, and the living wronged, a remembering that is truthful as an act of justice.<sup>7</sup>

This conjunction of narrative and debt is what makes memory a theologically intriguing category. Memory is not raw data to be stored or deleted; it is a story *being told* in the present, with fidelity owed. Hence, to a certain extent, memory is a story open in principle to being told differently, to being re-emplotted within a larger narrative without ceasing to be a faithful witness to what occurred.

### 3. MEMORY AND HEALING: FORGETFULNESS, NON-REMEMBRANCE, AND TRANSPOSITION

If memory concerns the narration of the self, what does it mean for painful and traumatic memories to be 'healed'? One way is to view healing in terms of forgetting—the erasure of painful memories. Such thinking is sometimes seen in the popular but morally bankrupt phrase "forgive and forget." This view has obvious problems pastorally, as it can easily resort to whitewashing of injustice and toleration of evil.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); see also Ricoeur, "The Reality of the Historical Past," Aquinas Lecture 48 (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1984), 25–26.

<sup>7</sup> Volf, *End of Memory*, 55.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory Jones names such "forgive and forget" mentality as modes of therapeutic forgiveness, which he considers to be an unchristian mode of forgive-

Against such a simplistic view, Volf's *End of Memory* articulates a sophisticated view of how painful memories are healed. Volf separates non-remembrance from forgetfulness and conditions both on a long process of 'right remembering.' The first half of *The End of Memory* is a sustained defence of remembering: of the moral debt of truthful witness, of memory as a form of justice. Only after injustice has been named, forgiveness offered, and the perpetrator's repentance received does Volf turn to the question, "How long must we remember?"<sup>9</sup> His answer is that there comes a moment at which the memory of harm need no longer occupy the foreground of consciousness. This is *non-remembrance*, not amnesia: not the loss of capacity but the cessation of memory's haunting of one's identity. Volf grounds the move in the divine economy. When God promises a new covenant in Jeremiah 31:34—"I will remember their sins no more"—he is not confessing ignorance but committing to a posture: a determination not to recall the fault.<sup>10</sup> Hence Volf's model can be said to be a combination of 'right remembering' (hence not mere forgetfulness) with the hope of eschatological non-remembrance, where the memory of pain will no longer be recalled.

Here, I wish to explore another model, a view that treats the healing of memory as eschatological transposition rather than non-remembrance. Rowan Williams gives it an early articulation in *Resurrection*: "If forgiveness is liberation, it is also a recovery of past in hope, a return of memory, in which what is potentially threatening and destructive, despairing is transformed into the ground for hope."<sup>11</sup> What memory teaches us, irreducibly, is the irreversibility of the past. No amount of reframing can make a thing not have happened. If we are to remember faithfully, we cannot alter the past. But memory can still be redeemed: its meaning can be transposed into a new key. This is what happened to the disciples' memory of Good Friday. Before Easter, the cross was a memory of catastrophic failure; after Easter, the same event has become the hinge of cosmic redemption. The traumatic memory of Christ's death is not forgotten but transposed into an eschatological horizon of new creation. The Gospels themselves can be said to be products of this transposition—what Richard Hays has described as a retrospective re-reading, the reading of the Old Testament, and hence Israel's collective memory of pain, "back-

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ness. See L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 35–69.

<sup>9</sup> Volf, *End of Memory*, 131–151.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>11</sup> Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel*, rev. ed. (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2002), 32.

wards” through the resurrection.<sup>12</sup> Jones puts the conclusion theologically: “the vision of the kingdom is a vision of wounds and brokenness fully healed rather than erased.”<sup>13</sup>

Jonathan Tran’s essay “Emplotting Forgiveness” gives this model its sharpest philosophical articulation. Drawing on Ricoeur, Tran argues that divine forgiveness operates by re-narration. “Forgiveness,” he writes, “presages eschatological destiny as it engrafts sinners into the larger story of God’s redemption of all things, giving new stories.” In that engrafting, “memories of horror become parts of a grander narrative called ‘the memory of redemption.’”<sup>14</sup> According to Tran, the healing of memory consists in our narratives being ‘re-emplotted’ by being integrated into an eschatological *telos* of Christ making all things new.

Volf has objected to such an account on serious theological grounds. Re-narration, he worries, does too little.<sup>15</sup> To say to a victim “your memory of horror is not all that you are” or to a perpetrator “you are better than your sins” stops short of what Christian forgiveness has classically claimed. For Volf, Christian forgiveness involves *remission*—the actual driving out of sin, the de-coupling of the sinner from the deed.<sup>16</sup> This means that the eschatological hope, for Volf, does not lie in memory’s re-narration but in its non-remembrance.

#### 4. UNION WITH CHRIST AND *YOBI-TSUGI*

Volf’s objection has force. A theology of memory that consisted only in helpful re-description would be vulnerable to the charge of narrative therapy in pious dress. But the charge holds only if re-narration is just that—a re-framing without anchor in reality. Christian re-emplotment of memory, however, speaks not merely of re-narration but of a deeper truth, a reality Paul names with his most characteristic phrase: the believer is “in Christ.”

The phrase, or its close variants (“in the Lord,” “in him”), occurs over one hundred and fifty times across the undisputed Pauline let-

<sup>12</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Theology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014), 1–17.

<sup>13</sup> L. Gregory Jones and Célestin Musekura, *Forgiving As We’ve Been Forgiven: Community Practices for Making Peace* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 98.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Tran, “Emplotting Forgiveness: Narrative, Forgetting and Memory,” *Literature and Theology* 23, no. 2 (2009): 228, 231.

<sup>15</sup> In the revised edition, Volf directly objects to Tran’s account along the same lines. See Volf, *End of Memory*, 256–257.

<sup>16</sup> Volf, *End of Memory*, 188–191.

ters.<sup>17</sup> Its meaning is plainly more than locative shorthand. The believer is described as having been “baptized into Christ Jesus” and so “baptized into his death” (Rom. 6:3); as having been “buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead... we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4); as one whose “old self was crucified with him” (Rom. 6:6). The grammar is consistently participatory rather than imitative. Paul does not say that the believer *emulates* Christ’s death and resurrection, or *benefits from* them at a distance. He says she has been *united with* them; she has been buried *with* him, raised *with* him, crucified *with* him. The same logic governs the wider epistolary corpus: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20); “you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3); “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

Pauline participation language has been considered the linchpin for soteriology. For instance, Calvin states the relevant claim plainly at the head of Book III of the *Institutes*: “as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us.”<sup>18</sup> Calvin’s purpose in context is soteriological—he is explaining how the benefits of Christ become the believer’s—but the underlying observation is simple: what is true of Christ becomes, in some real and not merely fictitious sense, true of those who are in him.

Union with Christ and Paul’s participation language have been at the centre of debate in much recent biblical scholarship and modern theology.<sup>19</sup> Those debates are not the concern of this essay. The argument here borrows from Paul’s “in Christ” language a single, modest entailment:

<sup>17</sup> The standard count of “in Christ” and cognate phrases in Paul is given by Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), who argues that the constellation of expressions is structurally central to Pauline theology rather than a stylistic tic.

<sup>18</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), III.1.1.

<sup>19</sup> For a biblical-theological argument, see Michael J. Gorman, *Participating in Christ: Explorations in Paul’s Theology and Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019). For an alternative view, see Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For a retrieval of Calvin’s grammar of participation in Christ, see J. Todd Billings, *Calvin, Participation, and the Gift: The Activity of Believers in Union with Christ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). For a recent analytic participatory account of the atonement, see Oliver D. Crisp, *Participation*

that to be in Christ is to be incorporated into a particular life, and so into the embodied history of that life. And this minimum is what is needed to answer Volf, because it is enough to underwrite the claim that re-employment of memory in Christ is more than mere re-narration: it tracks a real participation in Christ's history.

Two consequences for memory follow. First, if the believer's life has been drawn into Christ's in the way Paul's language indicates, then the self that remembers is now a self that remembers 'in Christ.' As §2 above traced, to remember is to narrate the past in a first-person register. When the soul's centre of gravity has been displaced into Christ ("your life is hidden with Christ in God," Col. 3:3), what is recollected is recollected by a self that has been re-located. The fragments are still remembered, but by someone newly placed. Second, because the body of Christ is itself a body that bears memory—a body that returned from the grave with its wounds intact—participation in *that* body is participation in a memory-bearing whole. The life into which the believer is incorporated is not an immaterial story; it is the lived history of a particular person whose own resurrected body keeps the marks of his past. To share in *that* life is to remember our own wounds in accordance with the wounds of Christ, with the eschatological expectation that what has happened to Christ will happen to us—that the wounds of the cross will become the hallmarks of the resurrected body.

The Japanese craft of *kintsugi* repairs broken ceramics with seams of gold or silver lacquer, illuminating rather than concealing the breaks. The technique has become a familiar metaphor for reconciliation in recent theology, not least through the work of Makoto Fujimura.<sup>20</sup> But it is a particular variant of this craft, *yobi-tsugi* ("calling-into mending"), that I want to use here as an illustration of what it means for our memories to be re-emplotted in Christ. In *yobi-tsugi*, when the original fragments of a broken vessel cannot be recovered or are missing entirely, fragments from another vessel—often from a later period and a quite different design—are summoned to fill the gaps.<sup>21</sup> The mended piece is no longer self-identical with the original, the foreign fragments visibly foreign in their seams of gold; and yet it is no longer two pieces but one—a new artifact in which fragments that did not begin together now belong together.

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*and Atonement: An Analytic and Constructive Account* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Makoto Fujimura, *Art and Faith: A Theology of Making* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020).

<sup>21</sup> See *Ibid.*, 49.

Several features of the technique make it apt as an illustration of memory transformed in Christ. First, the breaks are not denied; the cracks remain, traced now in gold. The memories of the painful events are not erased but kept, the wound visible. Yet, the missing fragments are not recreated *as if* they had been there all along—they come, openly, from elsewhere. So with memory: what redeems the meaning of the painful event is a story that comes from outside the self, the story of Christ's death and resurrection, into which the believer has been drawn. And finally, the resulting piece is genuinely a single artifact; the foreign fragments now constitute part of the self, becoming what the vessel now is. So, with our identity in Christ. We are, in some real way, truly incorporated into a life of Christ. If memory inevitably involves re-narration, the new context in which the painful memory now stands is Christ's resurrected body, the firstfruits of our own resurrection.

## 5. THE WOUNDS THAT REMAIN

This still leaves Volf's strongest argument, which is eschatological rather than ethical. Even granting that, this side of the *eschaton*, transformation rather than oblivion is the right account of what divine forgiveness does to memory, Volf can still maintain that the *final* state is non-remembrance. Some memories, on his account, are too atrocious to be redeemed; their only fitting eschatological resolution is forgetting. To articulate this point, he cites Augustine as corroborating evidence.

In *City of God* XXII.30, Augustine describes the saints in the heavenly city as "freed from all evil and filled with all good, enjoying unflinchingly the delight of eternal joys, forgetting all offences, forgetting all punishments."<sup>22</sup> They will have, in his memorable phrase, "no sensible recollection of past evils."<sup>23</sup> Volf takes this as warrant for his own position and presses it with characteristic boldness: even the memory of the cross, he argues, must finally be relinquished, "swallowed in [Christ's] own divine life as one of the Holy Three who are the Holy One."<sup>24</sup> On Volf's logic, since redemption is real and final, even the memory of what was redeemed *from* falls away.

Yet, there is one important factor to consider: the fact that the resurrected Christ bore physically visible wounds, wounds that carried the traumatically painful memory of the cross. This is significant because scripture portrays Christ's resurrected body as the first fruits of our res-

<sup>22</sup> Augustine, *City of God* XXII.30.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Volf, *End of Memory*, 177.

urrection. When Paul declares in 1 Corinthians 15:20 that Christ is risen as “the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep,” he is making a claim about more than the fact that Christ was numerically the first one to be raised. The resurrection of Christ is both the ground and revelation of our own resurrection to come. The resurrection of believers constitutes an organic whole—a single harvest separated only in time. Bavinck saw this clearly. “The physical resurrection of Christ,” he wrote in *The Wonderful Works of God*, “is not an isolated historical fact. It is inexhaustibly rich in meaning for Christ himself, the church, and for the whole world.”<sup>25</sup> In the *Reformed Dogmatics*, he insists that “in this resurrection the identity of the resurrection body with the body that has died will be preserved,” and that “Jesus arose with the same body in which he suffered on the cross and which was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.”<sup>26</sup> What is true of Christ’s resurrection is, *mutatis mutandis*, true of ours.

This means that the manner of Christ’s risen body is theologically diagnostic. And the manner is unambiguous: he returned bearing wounds. “Put your finger here, and see my hands,” he says to Thomas, “and put out your hand, and place it in my side” (John 20:27). This is not, I want to suggest, an incidental detail. Wounds are bodily memories. They are the past inscribed on the present. When Christ tells Thomas to place his finger in the marks, he is offering him his own memory of the cross. He knows what those marks mean because they are precisely what they appear to be: the lasting register of Friday on a body that has come through Sunday.

Some, of course, have read the wounds otherwise. John Calvin, in his commentary on John, argued that Christ’s wounds were merely temporary and pedagogical. They were retained “until the apostles were fully convinced that he was risen from the dead”; to suppose that Christ’s glorified body still bears wounds, Calvin says, would be “absurd.”<sup>27</sup> On Calvin’s view, the wounds belong to the era of the post-resurrection appearances, not to the body of glory.

But Calvin’s reading is the minority report. Peter Widdicombe has documented at length how the patristic and medieval tradition arrived at a different conclusion.<sup>28</sup> Augustine, in his *Tractates on John XXXVI.12*,

<sup>25</sup> Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God*, trans. Henry Zylstra (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), 367.

<sup>26</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 695–696.

<sup>27</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, trans. William Pringle, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 265 (on John 20:20).

<sup>28</sup> Peter Widdicombe, “The Wounds and the Ascended Body: The Marks of Crucifixion in the Glorified Christ from Justin Martyr to John Calvin,” *Laval*

says that the Son will judge “in the form in which he suffered, and rose again, and ascended into heaven,” for “He shall come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”<sup>29</sup> Widdicombe rightly observes that, for Augustine, the wounds are not a temporary teaching device but the visible warrant for the justice of the judge: the marks on the body of the slain are themselves the basis for the right of the slain to render verdict on his slayers.<sup>30</sup>

Aquinas is more explicit still. In the *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 54, a. 4, he directly addresses the question whether Christ’s body in glory continues to bear its wounds. The objection he answers is exactly the one Calvin would later voice: wounds belong to corruption and imperfection, and so must surely have been removed when Christ assumed his glorified state. Aquinas replies that the scars belong “neither to corruption nor defect, but to the greater increase of glory, inasmuch as they are the trophies of His power.”<sup>31</sup> His conclusion is unequivocal: “the scars which Christ showed on His body after His Resurrection, have never since been removed from His body.”<sup>32</sup>

This patristic and medieval reading is not arbitrary. It coheres with the picture in the book of Revelation, in which the figure on the throne is “a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain” (Rev. 5:6). The angelic acclamation is “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Rev. 5:12). The book of life is the book “of the Lamb that was slain” (Rev. 13:8). The slainness is not erased in glory; it is, on the contrary, the title of glory. The memory of the slaughter is not absent from the new creation. It is, rather, transposed into the very content of its joy.

The most striking witness, however, comes from Augustine himself. The same author Volz cites for eschatological non-remembrance writes, in the same book of *City of God*, that “the love we bear for the blessed martyrs makes us desire to see in the kingdom of heaven the marks of the wounds which they received for Christ’s name; and it may be that we shall indeed see them. For this will not be a deformity, but a badge of honour, and the beauty of their virtue.”<sup>33</sup> This passage is striking because

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*théologique et philosophique* 59, no. 1 (2003): 137–154.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* XXXVI.12, trans. John W. Rettig, *Fathers of the Church* 88 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1993), 96.

<sup>30</sup> Widdicombe, “The Wounds and the Ascended Body,” 147.

<sup>31</sup> Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 54, a. 4, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 2nd rev. ed. (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1920).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, ad 3.

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *City of God* XXII.19, trans. Dyson, 1153.

Augustine speaks not of the resurrected Christ, but of the visibility of the wounds of the martyrs in heaven. The hope Augustine confesses presupposes exactly what Volf denies. If the martyrs in glory bear visible marks of their martyrdom, and if those marks function as honour rather than as shame, then memory of the martyrdom is preserved in the new creation, but transformed: not remembered as wound but as glory.

While there are tensions between Augustine's two passages, they are not ultimately in contradiction. The reconciliation lies in the preposition 'as.' The saints will have "no sensible recollection of past evils" *as evils*; what was wound will not be remembered as wound. But the events themselves are not erased from the heavenly memory—they are recontextualized. The cross is remembered, but as victory. The martyrdom is remembered, but as honour. The wound is seen, but as beauty. This is precisely the *yobi-tsugi* logic at the eschatological scale: the fragments are not discarded but summoned into a larger whole in which their meaning is reset.

If this reading is correct, the resurrection of the body, on the testimony of Christ's own body and of the tradition's reading of it, includes the persistence of memory's marks. What changes is not whether they are there but what they mean.

#### CONCLUSION: MY LORD AND MY GOD

The doctrine of the resurrection is sometimes treated in tandem with the eschatological promise that all tears will be wiped away (Rev. 21:4), as though all memories of pain are likewise to be wiped clean. Yet this essay has argued that the glory of the resurrection lies not in the erasure of memory but in its transposition. The proper Christian hope for memory is neither the cheap forgetting of "forgive and forget" nor the eschatological non-remembrance Volf has proposed, but the transformation of memory within the story of Christ. Painful memories are summoned into a larger story than the one in which they were broken. They are not erased; they are recontextualized. Such recontextualization rests on the ontological reality of the believer's union with Christ, in which her life can now be re-narrated from this new identity.

A note of epistemic honesty is owed in conclusion. To say that memories of pain will be transformed is not to say that we now know how. Makoto Fujimura has put it well: "our brokenness, in light of the wounds of Christ still visible after the resurrection, can also mean that through making, by honouring the brokenness, the broken shapes can somehow be a necessary component of the New World to come."<sup>34</sup> *Somehow* is the

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<sup>34</sup> Fujimura, *Art and Faith*, 51.

right word. We do not know how the memory of atrocity is to be transposed into joy. Volf is correct, against any glib triumphalism, that some memories are at present irredeemable. The temptation to premature meaning-making, to telling sufferers some version of what Kate Bowler has named the lie of “everything happens for a reason,” must be refused.<sup>35</sup> The responsible theological reply would be to refuse both the cheap closure of false meaning and the cheap closure of mere forgetting, and to wait on a transformation that has been promised in the resurrection of one wounded saviour and is not yet visible in our histories.

Thomas, in the upper room, was held there by Christ’s memory. He had refused his fellow disciples’ news—*I will never believe*—with the absolute-ness of a man who had already lost too much to risk losing more. When Jesus came and held out his hands, he gave him his own wounds, evoking the painful memory of the cross. The fragments of Thomas’s traumatic memory were summoned in that moment, into the larger story without his knowing it. He had remembered the cross as ending; he had now to remember it as beginning. The single confession he answered with—*my Lord and my God*—is what the transformation of memory sounds like, on the lips of someone who has been present to it. It is the language of a memory not erased but resurrected.

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<sup>35</sup> Kate Bowler, *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I’ve Loved* (New York: Random House, 2018), xv–xx.

## REVIEWS

*Exodus and Exile: A Concise Biblical Theology.* Karel Deurloo. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press. ISBN: 978-1-4813-2330-7; hb. xxxv + 103pp. \$42.99.

Treatments of Old Testament theology have a reputation—well deserved—for being weighty tomes. The classic twentieth century treatments of von Rad and Eichrodt took two volumes each, as did that of Horst Dietrich Preuss. Significant statements by James Barr and Walter Brueggemann were over 700 pages each; Waltke needed more than 1,000 pages; Goldingay's three volumes each breached 900 pages. Others might be mentioned. But there were, at the same time, a number of valuable contributions which were much more constrained. Perhaps for that reason, their impact felt more sharp: one thinks of the modest but perceptive volumes by John Rogerson, Erhard Gerstenberger, or Walter Moberly, for example.

Karel Deurloo's subtitle, 'A Concise Biblical Theology', signals an even more rigorously minimalist approach. Published originally in Dutch in 2003, it was part of a short series by Kok entitled 'Kleine Bijbelse Theologie', other volumes attending to themes such as kingship, or creation (these are cited on p. xxix at n. 23). This is important context for this first volume of that series: while comprehensive in scope, it remains suggestive rather than exhaustive. It is just the first phase of a circumambulation around its object of interest, a theological appreciation of the Christian scriptures.

Context for this slender book is amply provided in the volume itself. It begins with a 35-page introduction from Colin Cornell and Joep Dubbink (who acknowledge also the important contribution of Mirjam Elbers in bringing this English translation into being). This not only provides an appreciation of the book's leading themes, but prefaces this with a worthwhile account of 'theological interpretation' and adjacent theological streams ('dialectic' and 'postsupersessionist' theology) which inform Deurloo's approach. They conclude with a brief biography (Deurloo died in 2019), which sets this study within the context of Deurloo's wider career (It is a sign both of the thoughtfulness of the introduction and the nature of the body of the study that the footnotes of the former vastly outnumber those of the latter).

As explained in the introduction, the English version of this slender book was many years in gestation. Was it worth it? The short answer is: yes, definitely. There is much to appreciate in this work. Deurloo's discussion invites the reader to participate in a vision of the nature and action of the Bible's God through its narrative and poetic structures that is coher-

ent and compelling, and benefits also from the brevity of the work as a whole.

The title clearly signals Deurloo's approach. The very fabric of Scripture, Deurloo argues, is rooted in the divine action of 'causing to go out' ('exodus') which bears witness to the revelation of God's Name, that is, his character. This takes place not only at the momentous constitution of the nation in the 'going up' and out from Egypt, but in the answering action of exile and restoration which frames the great narrative of Genesis to 2 Kings, and which then finds further echoes through Scripture. Embedded within this sweeping story is the giving of the Law ('torah') with its attendant expectations for obedience on the part of this God's covenant people. In part, too, this is bound up with what it is to be in right relationship with this King of kings, and which demonstrates what was wrong with languishing in Egypt. There is an inevitability of service in the creaturely condition, and servitude in Egypt was misplaced service to a false king, not the life-giving flourishing that comes in service of the Creator. Israel failed in this, however, and exile was the result. The prophets, and Jeremiah in particular, speak to the possibility of restoration which finds a precise counterpart in exodus, and this hope and its realisation find a response in the Writings of the Jewish Bible: notably Lamentations, but also in two sets of psalms: the Egyptian Hallel (Pss 113–118) and the Songs of Ascents (Pss 120–134). Along the way, Deurloo is alert to the ways in which New Testament writers also participate in this great account of God's ways with God's people, with the exception of the last element, the 'response' of the Writings.

In brief compass, then, Deurloo provides an impressionist portrait of the life of God and his people which is pan-biblical in scope. Like the greatest impressionist portraits, there is a vibrancy and vitality conveyed in the bold strokes of colour and contrast deployed to such striking effect. Readers will be enriched by the perceptiveness of the vision which Deurloo puts on display.

Of course, detail often goes missing in the impressionist approach, and something like this also appears to be the case here. Deurloo is keen to bring biblical vocabulary to bear on God's character, for example, but his handling of *hesed*, *hanûn*, and *rahûm* for example (traditionally 'steadfast love'—for which Deurloo prefers 'solidarity'—'grace', and 'mercy') shows some confusion. I also wondered whether his claims for 'liberation' in the story of the exodus is over-played. There is language of 'freedom' or liberation in Exodus (*hopšî*), but it is never used for exodus or restoration, but rather with labour relations and debt servitude—and Deurloo himself comments at one point: 'the exodus is never described as liberation'

(p. 37). (Jon D. Levenson's 'The Exodus and Biblical Theology', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 25.4 (1995): 152–60 makes this point powerfully.)

I was also nervous about Deurloo's translation of *wēhiglētī* as 'I will lead you into exile' (pp. 51ff.) which seems tendentious in context. Whether this arises more in the English version than the Dutch original I am unable to say. And it is also the case that some lexica will offer a gloss of 'lead into exile' for the *hiphil* of the root *glh*. Still, translations ancient and modern lack this nuance. Rather, the sense is that of deportation or being sent into exile. This is not fatal for Deurloo's discussion in Chapter 5, but rather reinforces the sense of an 'impressionist' handling when a bit more fidelity to the source would, I believe, have served the argument equally well.

Readers of *SBET* may also want to be aware of Deurloo's stance regarding God's actions in history. My characterisation of his historical commitments sees them as 'post-critical': that is, a reading worked out in awareness of and in agreement with 'critical' conclusions, but working beyond those to the meaning of those events in which the critical stance is relativised. Some will not find this orientation satisfactory, although it empowers a certain freedom for Deurloo to make constructive theological connections across the canon.

In sum, Deurloo's pithy and accessible study will inform and enrich readers keen to engage the broad contours of Scripture. It is the work of a scholar, but makes a valuable contribution to the life of faith.

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*New Perspectives on Old Princeton, 1812-1929.* Kevin De Young, Paul Kjosso Helseth, and David P. Smith (eds.). London: Routledge. ISBN: 9781032316963; hb. viii + 264pp. £116.00.

On both sides of the Atlantic (and beyond) the contribution of Princeton Theological Seminary (founded 1812) continues to fascinate a range of Christians. For theological progressives, the seminary—from its founding until its reorganisation in 1929—represents a paradigm of original good intentions leading to unforeseen disappointing results. On the other hand, for theological conservatives, this seminary—certainly from its founding until 1929—represents the ideal of fidelity.

At the outset, a question worth asking is, 'Is there any other theological institution in the world, with its peak influence exerted in the 19th century, still generating such lively debate about its past?' There is something highly unique about the ongoing debate over the abiding value of early Princeton Seminary. This *New Perspectives* volume is continuing an ongoing discussion; lines are already drawn.

It is worth noting that no contributor to this symposium is an alumnus of Princeton. None are connected to the denomination which this seminary exists to serve. The common factor uniting the contributors is a shared concern to maintain Princeton's foundational role in the heritage of American evangelical Protestantism in the period to 1929. Many (but not all) of the contributed chapters take issue with historians (notably the late Sydney Ahlstrom, d. 1984) who challenged the legacy of this seminary by claiming that early Princeton—in trying to repel unwholesome Enlightenment influences—became beholden to another philosophy (Scottish Common Sense) and, in so doing, drifted towards rationalism.

In many instances, the contributors are drawing on their own earlier doctoral research. The range is from John Witherspoon (1723-1794) to Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921). The reader initially encounters the assertion by Paul Kjoss Helseth (chap. 1) that early Princeton professor Samuel Miller largely kept himself free of Enlightenment influences that were so prevalent in the age of the early Republic. The same is the case in the argument made by Kevin DeYoung that early Princeton stood solidly in line with older Reformed theology on the question of what may and may not be known of God who is manifested in the natural world (chap. 2). A strong chapter (3) by Michael Plato examines founding professor Archibald Alexander's very measured utilisation of the Common Sense philosophy.

This reader was pleasantly surprised to find a distinctive chapter (Robert W. Caldwell III, 4), on old Princeton's appraisal of the theology of Jonathan Edwards; this asserted that the nineteenth century Princetonians were mistaken in their appraisals of Edwards (though not necessarily so regarding his disciples). This candour was refreshing, appearing in a collection of essays almost entirely devoted to upholding old Princeton's probity. Similarly, Gary L. Steward's chapter (5), which explores Princeton Seminary's stance on political questions confronting pre-Civil War America, found that the dominant Princeton view was one of careful non-alignment. Several of the early faculty members (including Miller and Alexander) even declined to exercise their right to vote.

A further chapter (J. V. Fesko, 6) offers a careful comparison and analysis of the views of Charles Hodge with those of Francis Turretin, whose theological textbook, the *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (3 vols. 1679-1685), Hodge used as a text until the publication of his own lectures. The writer found the two to be in agreement about the scope of divine revelation in the natural world; still, it was acknowledged that allowances must be made for changes of word-usage over time. Each theologian was faithful to the Reformed confessions maintained in their churches.

A succeeding chapter (Annette G. Aubert, 7) is devoted to the exposure of Charles Hodge to German theological rationalism during his extended period of European study (1826-1828). This shows that Hodge reached his definite conclusions about the dangers posed by rationalism as this was displayed by the German theologians whose lectures he attended. We find also an interesting chapter (Alan D. Strange, 8) probing the history of the idea of the spirituality of the church, i.e. the question of what mandate the church has in society to address civil and social questions. Theologians Charles Hodge and James H. Thornwell are customarily represented as occupying opposite poles on the question, though it is shown that less distance separated them than is usually supposed.

A following chapter (Jeffrey A. Stivason, 9) takes up the theme of theology's task and the question of whether we may speak of progress in doctrinal theology. Given Princeton Seminary's association with the idea of an unchanging orthodoxy, it is illuminating to learn that B.B. Warfield articulated ideas about the ways in which systematic theology could and should advance. Andover Seminary (Massachusetts) was identified by Warfield as an example of a claimed progress in theology which was, in fact, regressive. Given this chronological setting of the late nineteenth century, the author of this chapter *might* have drawn comparisons between Warfield's concept of progress in theology and the contemporary efforts of Kuyper and Bavinck in the Netherlands to re-state the Christian faith in an orthodox but contemporary manner.

A subsequent chapter by David P. Smith (10), also focusing on Warfield, draws attention to his conviction that theology must take into account both God's revelation in the natural world as well as His revelation given in words by human spokesmen and His incarnate Son. By both, God 'gives knowledge of Himself'.

Against the stereotypical view that 19th century Princeton was impervious to change, the follow-on chapter by Bradley J. Gundlach (11) highlights the openness exhibited by various faculty members (most obviously Warfield) to divinely-guided evolutionary processes. The Princeton faculty were far-seeing enough to admit the case for such providentially-guided development without granting the appeals of contemporary theologians that the Christian faith is itself subject to evolutionary change and stands in need of modification. The chapters conclude with a fine survey by Donald Fortson III (12) of Presbyterian and Princetonian thinking about the removal of slavery in the half-century prior to the Civil War. The advocacy of gradual emancipation favoured by the seminary faculty appears, in hindsight, to have been time-serving. The African colonisation schemes, also attractive to faculty members, seem in hindsight to have represented an opposition to a multi-racial society.

The chapters are followed by a response from the respected Mark Noll, who, by his own admission, had earlier joined in the critique of 19th century Princeton led by Sydney Ahlstrom. Noll grants that *some* warranted correction of the Ahlstrom viewpoint has been achieved by the authors; but he is not entirely won over. He reminds contributors that the critique of Princeton's alleged rationalism extends back into the first half of the 19th century; it did not wait for Ahlstrom.

This reviewer returns to the question posed initially: why does the vindicating of 19th century Princeton so motivate the authors of these chapters? While there is, admittedly, a question of historical interpretation warranting investigation, is this sufficient to warrant such a collection of essays? The reviewer does not find this explanation convincing. What undergirds this collection is the veneration of 19th century Princeton so firmly espoused by conservative evangelicalism. Even for those who have never set foot on the turf at Princeton, this school's first century exerts a powerful ideological grip. Reprints of these professors' works circulate very widely. Let us all ensure that our ongoing assessments of early Princeton include voices that march to additional drumbeats.

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*Nobody's Mother: Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament.* Sandra L. Glahn. Downers Grove: IVP Academic. ISBN: 9781514005927; pb. 200pp. \$25.99.

I enjoyed this book even though it turned out to be a study very different from what I anticipated. As a student of Acts, the subtitle 'Artemis of the Ephesians in Antiquity and the New Testament' caught my eye. I picked it up hoping to find a detailed and enlightening (con)textual discussion of 'The Demetrius Episode' in Acts 19, which is the source of the phrase 'Artemis of the Ephesians', and the only place within the New Testament where the goddess is named. Turns out, the foundational scripture passage upon which this study is built comes instead from the pastoral epistles: 1 Timothy 2:8-3:1. The link is found in 1 Timothy 1:3, where (pseudo) Paul (My designation. Glahn never openly questions Pauline authorship of 1 Timothy or entertains interpretive possibilities that reading 1 Timothy as a reception of Paul opens up.) states he asked Timothy to remain behind in Ephesus to straighten out the erroneous teachings and disruptive behaviour of certain men within the *ekklesia*.

*Nobody's Mother* is the fruit of many years of study and reflection, the type of book Glahn wishes she had had access to in her younger life (p. 14). The book unfolds in two phases. The second flows directly out of

the first but the two parts are distinct. The introduction, the first phase, is more than the prelude found in most books. It is a memoir of Glahn's journey growing up and coming to faith as a woman within American evangelicalism. From her earliest childhood, the contours of her life and the expectations placed upon her were shaped by a patriarchal social and theological framework. With succinct clarity and deep humanity, Glahn chronicles her journey through infertility to seminary then on to an academic teaching career. All the while she strives to honour her faith even as her educational and life experiences push against the centripetal forces exerted by the conventions and prescriptions of that faith tradition.

Chief among the questions that needled away at both her intellect and her soul: what does (pseudo)Paul mean when he writes that 'a woman/wife should learn in silence, have no authority over a man/husband but keep silent in full submission, and that she will be saved through child-bearing' (2:11-15)? And what does all this mean for women like her who cannot conceive, or women who do not conceive for a variety of reasons and circumstances? These questions form the slip road to the second phase: her detailed and systematic study of Artemis, whose outsized influence on the city of Ephesus, Glahn suggests, can provide valuable insight into understanding (pseudo)Paul's perspective in 1 Timothy, if we can thoroughly and accurately understand her cult.

What follows is the scholarly heart and strength of *Nobody's Mother*: four chapters engaging with previous scholarship on Artemis, reviewing what the New Testament contains (here we get a short discussion of Acts 19), and the assembling of a detailed survey of the extant primary evidence (in English translation). for the cult of Artemis in Ephesus: literary, epigraphic, artistic, and architectural. What Glahn has compiled here is a gift to any student within any discipline who wants to understand how Artemis of the Ephesians was conceptualised and worshipped in Ephesus and beyond.

The final chapter circles back around to revisit the questions from phase one in light of the evidence gathered and assessed in phase two. Many will find her conclusions overly speculative and unsatisfactory in their indeterminacy. In my view, her circumspect analysis testifies to her academic integrity in not making decisive assertions where the evidence does not allow for it. At the same time, Glahn is still operating within a 'high view of scripture' scaffolded by the very theological framework she is attempting to loosen and enlarge but not fully dismantle. In fact, she states openly that those who share her scriptural perspective are her intended audience (p. 14). Others who read with a different hermeneutic may wonder if at times she pulls up short when she could push further.

Nevertheless, I would commend *Nobody's Mother* to everyone. It is an academic work but written in a mostly non-academic style that should make it accessible to lay readers as well as scholars, pastors, and divinity students. The study can offer insights to those reading the Bible on different levels and for a variety of purposes. Beyond the content itself, *Nobody's Mother* exemplifies why reading scripture in the biblical languages is vital to earnest and honest interpretation. As Glahn points out, how we translate (pseudo)Paul's statements in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 directly impacts how we understand and wrestle with their meaning (p. 11, in detail pp. 128-146).

I would specifically recommend this book to men, and especially men within the conservative evangelical world. Men need to hear the story of Glahn's journey. Men need to see the intentionality with which she attempted to live faithfully according to the specific and often conflicting expectations placed upon her as a woman. Men need to hear the pain and the confusion that resulted when circumstances beyond her control prevented her from fulfilling those expectations. All with ears to hear need to hear the honest and observant questions she asks about the 1 Timothy text, about its widely accepted meaning within certain theological and hermeneutical frameworks, and then allow the cogency with which she presents her argument speak for itself.

1 Timothy is, of course, not the only, or even the primary, thing the Bible has to say about women (pp. 15-6). The appeal of (pseudo)Paul's admonition for women to remain silent holds for men in positions of authority is obvious. It is a hermeneutic of convenience that simplifies leadership by sanctioning their superior status and muting a multitude of voices. For those quick to privilege this teaching in 1 Timothy over and above other aspects of the biblical witness concerning women, chapter 1 provides a concise and helpful primer on women's active leadership in the early centuries of the Christian movement and reasons why that changed (pp. 21-5). Most importantly, *Nobody's Mother* is yet another in a long line of examples that demonstrate why women *need* to speak and be heard within the church. Our understandings of God, scripture, life, and so much more are all greatly enriched by the insightful observations and probing and problematising questions scholars such as Glahn bring to the table.

*Rev Dr Todd Thomason, PhD Candidate, University of Edinburgh*

*Jesus and Other Sons of God: Luke's Christology and Mediterranean Myth.*

Daniel B. Glover. Waco: Baylor University Press. ISBN: 978-1-4813-2208-0; hb. xiii + 300pp. £64.99.

The uniqueness of Christ is embedded not only in the creedal affirmations of the church, but confessed in worship; as Reginald Heber's trinitarian hymn professes of Jesus: 'Only thou art holy; there is none beside thee.' Thus, the title of Daniel B. Glover's new book *Jesus and Other Sons of God* is bound to raise some eyebrows. As Glover states, 'We religious-theological types usually want the objects of our veneration to be unique' (p. 223), but Graeco-Roman (henceforth GR) literature is replete with examples of deification; Jesus is not the only figure to be described as a 'son of God'. Glover admits that he is possibly 'wading into dangerous territory' (p. 3) with this bold comparative piece of scholarship, but this is for the purpose of understanding 'the ways that Luke weaves together several different concepts of divinity through his use of discrete deification motifs in his portrait of Jesus' (p. 13), which Glover argues shows Luke communicating something fresh about Jesus in his context. Noting the validity of deification parallels in GR literature might seem to run against the grain of much Lukan scholarship and popular theology, Glover is not an innovator in this regard. The early apologies of Justin Martyr and Origen took these for granted. Those who have read the author's earlier *Patterns of Deification in the Acts of the Apostles* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022) will find themselves in similar scholarly territory, though each volume advances a distinct argument.

The introduction situates Luke within his cultural milieu. Engaging the history of scholarship on early Christology—especially the work of Larry Hurtado and Richard Bauckham—Glover argues that, while placing Luke within a Jewish context has been fruitful, it has also insulated him from his GR environment. Glover also proposes that Luke's audience consisted of a literary exchange of 'literate peers' (p. 19), with discourse on deification operating according to shared conventions.

The first chapter explores the multifaceted nature of divinity in the ancient Mediterranean world, arguing that 'ascribing divinity to a human was a transgressive act that relocated the one ascribed in a distinct ontological sphere, rather than higher along a linear spectrum' (p. 27), and provides a useful taxonomy of deification; Glover is to be thanked for doing the hard graft of collation and categorisation of the primary sources. This chapter will be an essential resource for scholars. The next three chapters undertake comparative work. Chapter two places Luke's infancy narrative alongside those of Greek and Roman demigods; figures such as Heracles and Dionysius were 'begotten', and Luke deliberately

participates in this discourse. Chapter three shows the transfiguration and Christophanies to be epiphanic narratives. This is not to the exclusion of the obvious Mosaic intertexts, but he shows how these are comprehensible within the GR *milieu*. Chapter four examines ‘lord’ (κύριος) and ‘saviour’ (σωτήρ) language. Similar to Teresa Morgan’s methodology concerning the language of faith/trust (πίστις), Glover shows how Luke’s deification images function within a wider Mediterranean ‘language game’ of deification. Chapter five compares the resurrection and ascension with traditions about ancient heroes (e.g., Cleomedes of Astypalaea, Heracles). Against N.T. Wright’s claim that bodily resurrection is a uniquely Jewish concept, Glover argues otherwise, stating that ‘Luke would have known how his account of Jesus’s bodily resurrection, disappearance, and heavenly assumption would evoke the familiar literary topoi’ (p. 199). Heroisation, he suggests, allows Luke to present Jesus’s life as exemplary in his Gospel, which is subsequently ratified by the actions of his followers in the Book of Acts.

The conclusion draws these strands together, presenting Luke’s Christology as an intensification of multiple deification motifs: ‘no individual category is capacious enough to capture Jesus and his divinity’ (p. 221). The cumulative effect of these motifs is not merely additive but amplificatory, producing a portrait in which familiar categories of divine status are stretched to their limits. Glover briefly gestures toward the theological implications of this reading, drawing on Colin Cornell in conversation with Karl Barth and Franz Rosenzweig, and suggests that such patterns may bear meaning beyond the intentions of the Evangelists or their earliest audiences. An appendix further strengthens the volume’s contribution with a careful defence of the longer reading of Luke 24:51, handling its textual complexities with commendable clarity.

The detail and care with which Glover marshals the primary sources is exemplary. The argument that Luke participates in ancient Mediterranean discourse on deification is convincing; Glover allows the sources to speak for themselves. Just as deification parallels were recognised by patristic writers, we do not need to shirk from them today (or leave them to be misconstrued by ‘Jesus Mythicists’). The clustering of deification motifs strengthens the case (contra Jacob Jervell) that Luke depicts a divine Jesus. Beyond its central thesis, the book also challenges the tendency to insulate ‘the text and its influences from its so-called pagan environs’ (p. 60). Such insulation risks producing an essentialised view of early Judaism or imposing anachronistic understandings of monotheism. Glover instead adopts an integrative approach, recognising both Jewish and GR influences; his reading of the transfiguration as drawing on both Mosaic and epiphanic traditions is a good example. He also makes a sig-

nificant shot across the bow for New Testament scholars more generally concerning appeals to the Septuagint. Glover reminds those in the guild that our tidily bounded Rahlfs' edition is a composite text that reflects later Christian editorial revision; the use of κύριος for YHWH is absent from all undisputedly Jewish Old Greek manuscripts. It is an important reminder against a one-dimensional handling of the Septuagint.

An important feature of Glover's argument is his fresh proposal to reconsider the audience of the Luke's *Doppelwerk*: he argues that the ideal readers 'would have been the initial circle of literate peers' (p. 18), and Luke himself should be understood as 'an elite, literate cultural producer' (p. 14). This is a compelling argument while we are focused on Luke's deification imagery, but perhaps less obvious beyond that thematic dataset. For example, when taken in isolation, Acts 6:1-6 could suggest an ideal audience divided over ethnic, linguistic issues; Luke 24:53, Acts 2:46, 3:1-10, 21:26, 22:17, 24:1-18, and 25:8 might suggest that the ideal audience had a preoccupation with the legitimacy of Jewish ritual for Jesus followers. Moreover, ample epigraphic, numismatic (coinage with *Divus Augustus*), and monumental artwork (the Arch of Titus, the Sebasteion reliefs at Aphrodisias, the Temple of Hathor at Dendera) suggests that deification motifs had popular traction beyond exclusive literary circles. The hybridity of deification imagery, as Glover demonstrates with regard to the transfiguration, might equally have been intelligible to an urban Diaspora audience (as proposed by Gregory Sterling, uncited in this volume). None of this undermines Glover's proposal, but the ideal audience he identifies appears less obvious across the whole of Luke-Acts. This raised additional questions for this reader: in what way is Luke's sustained attention to ethics, wealth, and community life (e.g., Luke 4:16-30; 6:20-49; Acts 2:42-47) relevant, or even of interest, to this primary circle of elite literary peers? Does Luke write for more than one audience, and if so, how do we determine which one was primary?

While a book cannot be criticised for not addressing questions beyond its scope, the conclusion is tantalisingly open in its proposition that 'God could "mean" something by the ancient patterns of deification beyond what the Evangelists or their earliest audiences could have understood' (p. 228), and that in this 'lies the path to the creeds and orthodox confession of Christ' (pp. 228-9). The question of how this 'path' might be navigated (or found) is intriguing and I found myself wanting more on this point. Perhaps prompting further reflection by biblical scholars on how their research relates to theology is enough, as it is so often bracketed out of the conversation entirely.

This is an exciting piece of new scholarship that shows there is much to be gained from considering wider GR sources as we read Luke (and the

rest of the New Testament) within its broader socio-historical and literary context. Some readers might find the title provocative, but Glover demonstrates that there is nothing to fear and much to be gained by appreciating how Luke engages with his world, drawing on existing tropes to communicate something novel about the divinity of Jesus. For many, the analysis might make Luke feel 'strange' (here I am reminded of Matthew Novenson's aim to 'make Paul weird again'), but it ultimately offers a richer appreciation for the extraordinary intensity of Luke's presentation of Jesus as the divine Son of God.

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*Trauma and Recovery in Early North African Christianity.* Scott Harrower. Boston, MA: De Gruyter. ISBN: 9781501518904; hb. xii + 220pp. \$115.99.

In the wake of traumatic experiences people require recovery of what was lost, and the ancient Christian martyrdom accounts can speak into current psychological research in this recovery process. Scott Harrower aims to bring contemporary psychological research on trauma recovery and early Christian theological reasoning together. In other words, Harrower's cross-disciplinary book aims to interpret early Christian martyr accounts through the lens of contemporary trauma psychology and to bring early Christian martyrologies to the table of modern psychological research on trauma recovery. He focuses on three texts: *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity* (hereafter *PPerp*), *The Life of Cyprian of Carthage* (hereafter *VCypr*), and *The Account of Montanus, Lucius, and Their Companions* (hereafter *PMon*). Harrower begins by explaining and defending his methodology, i.e., in which he assuages the concerns raised by David Wilhite regarding the dangers of anachronistically psychoanalysing these ancient texts (p. 1). He then shows how the four parts of trauma recovery (i.e., self, safety, story, and community), as per contemporary psychological understanding, are depicted in these texts. The book argues that 'these documents promoted attachment to God and his transformative power as the basis for recovering a sense of safety in the midst and aftermath of trauma; a sense of safety that anchored reparative perspectives on the believer's sense of self, story, and community' (p. 196).

The first two chapters focus on defining trauma, particularly religious struggles, and connecting martyr texts to the framework of trauma recovery narratives. The central purpose is to show how the ancient martyr texts 'promote religious witness and coping after violent trauma' (p. 22). He overcomes the anachronism problem (i.e., of forcing modern psychologi-

cal analysis on ancient texts), by arguing for a universal nature of trauma, which is what Harrower seeks to focus on with regard to expositing *PPerp*, *VCypr*, and *PMon*. The universal nature is that through trauma, the survivor has now lost a sense of safety, selfhood, community, and the trauma event is the focal point of their life's story (pp. 22-30). Harrower notes the particular aspect of religious adherents' loss due to trauma, wherein the divine power/person on which they depended has now become impotent. 'Attachment to God and beliefs about God may undergo profound change in the aftermath of trauma, and for some this results in a distressed relationship with God and poor mental health' (p. 35). In other words, God should have prevented this disaster, but he did not, therefore he is not trustworthy. The recovery process is where the narratives come into play. Harrower suggests there is an affinity between ancient martyrdom texts and contemporary superhero narratives, in that, both depict someone supernaturally enduring trauma in ways that invite the reader to suffer and recover vicariously with the figure(s) in the story (pp. 44-52). Harrower shows that these texts come from intense trauma and he then takes the next five chapters to show how they convey aspects of the four points of trauma recovery, namely, safety, self, story, and community.

Because the concept of recovering safety and self are a significant part of trauma recovery, Harrower dedicates three chapters to them. He first focuses on the notion of attachment to God wherein the trauma survivor is able to reestablish their sense of self in the safety of God's promises. Harrower presents examples of the protagonists, and their Christian community, receiving God's providential care and thus cementing their sense of attachment to God. Such as when the soldiers attempted to inspire terror in the prisoners by leading them through dark passages, 'instead the believers found their surrounds illuminated by the light from the Spirit' (p. 80; *PMon* 4.2-3). This attachment to God supports the believer's allegiance to God, based on Matthew Bates's 'allegiance model of faith' (p. 89), which promotes religious autonomy and thus a recovered sense of self as belonging to God. Harrower shows how this plays out in Perpetua resisting Satan's attacks through her father urging her to deny Christ, even to the point of using her infant son as leverage (pp. 92-5; *PPerp* 3.3; 5.1-6; 6.2-8; 9.2-3). Finally, having developed the notions of attachment and allegiance to God, Harrower explains how the protagonists are empowered by God in trauma. One example is how God granted Cyprian's request to delay his martyrdom 'so that he could get the affairs of the church in order' (p.116; *VCypr* 12.6-8).

After demonstrating the recovery of the sense of safety and self, Harrower then turns to the concepts of story and community. Much of the problem with trauma is the loss of a sense of control, and a recovered

story reframes the person's perspective to be able to recognize God's sovereignty and goodness. Ultimately, the recovered story necessitates prioritizing a different element, in that a trauma survivor naturally views everything through the lens of the trauma. In order to recover a sense of story, as per Harrower's analysis of these martyrdoms, requires placing God's gifts (e.g., eternal happiness) as the focal point through which all life is seen, including the trauma (pp.159-60). In other words, instead of viewing life through the trauma, the recovered story involves viewing the trauma through eternal joys. In so doing, for *PPerp*, *VCypr*, and *PMon*, the terror of being executed became a source of joy and seen as a divine gift. In the context of a renewed story, Harrower then shows how these accounts depict a sense of community. He notes Perpetua's seemingly callous rejection of her earthly family, only to find support and connection in her new Christian family (pp.163-4; *PPerp* 5.2). Even Cyprian's exile 'community' of two (i.e., himself and Pontius: *VCypr* 12.3; 19.3-4) was enough for this aspect of trauma recovery (pp. 169-70). This recovered community is showcased as involving more than those immediately present, i.e., it also includes the local, distant, and dead Christian groups, such as Cyprian's visit to Flavianus to support those about to be martyred (p. 192; *PMon* 11.1-3; 13.1). Harrower shows how the four elements of trauma recovery (safety, self, story, community) function in these ancient accounts, and that they can, and should, be recognized as a voice in contemporary psychology on trauma and recovery.

Harrower does an excellent job of walking his reader through his argument and presentation of the evidence. He addresses Wilhite's anachronism concerns well and presents textual evidence from these works in the framework of universal trauma concepts. He even suggests points for further research (pp. 199-200), namely applying this analysis to medieval hagiographies, taking this multidisciplinary model further into other psychological research, i.e., with ancient hagiographic writings. A central point is that his work emphasizes the contemporary value of these ancient texts. For Harrower, this value applies specifically to the martyr accounts; although, his model can apply to many ancient textual genres. This point speaks to the limits of Harrower's book, namely, his aim is primarily to show that this type of cross-discipline analysis is possible (pp. 195, 201), not necessarily to present results or positive examples of such analysis applied in current psychological research. Thus, hopefully there will be more work building on Harrower's monograph, highlighting the importance of listening to these ancient voices.

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*Understanding the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Forms, Features and Functions* by Douglas F. Huffman. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024. 978-1-5409-6640-7. 268pp. £24.99

Like this reviewer, the reader may be excused for thinking, when given a book on how the NT uses the OT, ‘Another one!’ However, this would be a mistake, as Huffman’s book stands out in the glut of works published over the last thirty years, balancing detail with accessibility to provide one of the best introductions today on this subject and a new approach to it.

The relationship of the NT to the OT is one of the oldest questions in Christian theology, stretching back to Jesus Himself and His conversation with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). However, identifying quotations and allusions in the NT is more difficult than it first appears, with little agreement at either the precise number or what counts as a quotation or allusion. Other auxiliary questions include what exegetical methods the first Christians used, whether they were influenced by Jewish hermeneutics and, more controversially, whether these methods are illegitimate (certainly when compared to modern historical-grammatical criticism). Behind these questions lie more metaphysical issues like the extent and role of the canon, prophecy and divine authorship, which, since the Enlightenment, have been heavily contested. Huffman’s primary aim is to bring clarity by proposing several taxonomies to 1. Identify more precisely when the NT quotes or alludes to the OT, 2. Describe how that quotation or allusion is used, and, most importantly, 3. Analyse why the NT writers are using that quotation or allusion. Or, in Huffman’s words, ‘Form, Framing’, and ‘Function’.

In chapter one, Huffman introduces the subject of the NT use of the OT, providing a brief historical overview, summarising the main issues and setting out where he believes there is still work to be done. In chapter two, Huffman categorises the various forms that the OT takes in the NT. What is distinctive in his approach is that instead of arranging the forms linearly, Huffman uses a two-dimensional grid to group the eight forms, according to whether the references are introduced (or explicit and implicit) and whether the wording is the same, similar or different. In chapter three, Huffman proposes the criteria to classify each reference according to the forms set out in chapter two. In chapter four, he describes how the NT writers use the OT, for example, if they are midrashic, allegory, or typology, and compares and contrasts them with Jewish exegetical practices. In chapter six, Huffman analyses the various ways the NT uses the OT, utilising another taxonomy of ten functions arranged under five headings. Finally, in chapter six, Huffman tests his taxonomic approach by applying it to Luke-Acts. He also includes two

appendices, the first of which discusses fourteen citations that appear to have no apparent OT reference, and the second is a select bibliography of key works on this subject published since the 1950s.

The word 'taxonomy' may raise reservations in the minds of some readers about whether Huffman's methodology will be too restrictive and rigid, forcing complex phenomena into a predetermined theory. This reviewer found Huffman's methodology to be the precise opposite, as he balances a sensitivity for how the NT appropriates the OT with methodological rigour. Huffman repeatedly states that although his taxonomies capture most of the quotations and allusions, he also acknowledges that the boundaries are fuzzy, with some examples, for example, paraphrase and typology, overlapping with form, framing, and function (p. 74). This reviewer found Huffman's analysis of the ten functions especially helpful as he arranged them under five broader headings, which overlapped, allowing the reader to follow his argument without getting lost in the detail.

Other helpful features of Huffman's analysis are his interaction with the work of other scholars in the field, including Hays, Carson and Beale, Goldingay, and Marshall, where Huffman maps his approach over theirs, enabling the reader who is familiar with those scholars' work to see where Huffman's methodology follows or differs from theirs. Numerous diagrams and tables set out the taxonomies visually to enable the reader to see clearly what Huffman is describing. There are several sidebars where Huffman discusses related issues such as intertextuality, multiple referents and *sensus plenior*. This reviewer found the clarity that Huffman brings to a complex topic particularly refreshing, for example, taking time to define terms such as midrash, peshet, and allegory.

In conclusion, Huffman's work is an excellent example of how to summarise an existing field and take it forward. The most significant benefit from his classification is that the reader has a greater appreciation for the varied ways that the NT writers used the OT and the reasons why. Huffman also does a good job of clearing up a lot of confusion and common myths surrounding Christian hermeneutical practices, such as their use of allegory and how indebted they were to Jewish hermeneutical practices. If the proof is in the pudding, chapter six ably demonstrates how functional Huffman's taxonomic approach is to illuminating the text, for exegetes, teachers and preachers. Alongside Greg Beale's *Handbook on the NT Use of the OT: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Baker Academic, 2012), Huffman's book will become the standard introductory text for many years.

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*The Prophet's Anthem: The Song of Deborah and Barak in the Narrative of Judges.* Michelle Knight. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press. ISBN: 9781481321600; pb. 182pp. \$39.99.

Michelle Knight, Associate Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at TEDS (joining the faculty of Wheaton College as Associate Professor of Old Testament in Autumn 2026), shines as a writer and professor, modelling her scholarship of the Former Prophets in both technical evaluation (via semantic/lexical analysis and narrative criticism) and in practical and theological application. Her work is well-suited for those diving deeper into biblical narrative and seeking to comprehend how poetry intersects with biblical narrative.

*The Prophet's Anthem* is a solid specimen that commendably demonstrates how the poetry of Judges five intersects with the whole narrative corpus within Judges and thus amplifies its prophetic message. Utilising narrative criticism, Knight focuses on the song's position, effect and function as a unified narrative (with Judges four) and then explicates how its themes extend into the messages and characterisation within the book of Judges. Knight provides language, supported by notable sections of analysis, that effectively relays the paradigmatic quality and relevance of the song.

Knight posits how 'the prophetic song provides a unique opportunity for a character in the microplot to reflect on issues related to the macrop-plot...' (p. 76). As the work addresses aspects of the song in the narrative cycle, and how it plays a role in narrative characterisations of the following chapters, Knight demonstrates the way it is: 'transitional between the first three narrative cycles and those to follow, introducing the evaluative scheme that dominates the remainder of the book ... and that the song is a lynchpin in the characterisation of Israel, complicating its otherwise monolithic portrayal and highlighting the budding trend of hesitancy in battle and irreverence for its Sovereign's battle cry.' (p. 87) It is both revelatory and evaluative, cataloguing Israel's downward trajectory (p. 138). When this is placed alongside later encounters with Israel's oppressors, 'the song solidifies and capitalises on the narrative pattern offering opportunities to reflect on the theological significance of Israel's victory over an oppressor.' (p. 104) The unit that reveals where the structure and plot of the song are situated (pp. 124-5) serves as an excellent example of this. Knight constructs a solid foundation and infrastructure to evidence and demonstrate the multi-faceted points that accentuate the song.

After laying the introductory foundations in Chapter One—outlining Knight's synchronic approach, her formal analysis of Judges 5, and her interpretive framework—she goes on to elaborate on the song as an

embedded genre, 'that discern[s] its function as a genre distinct from its prose surroundings and embedded in this precise narrative context, including its implied authorship and setting.' (p. 23) This point propels a reader to follow the narrative markers (characterisation, plot, thematic sequences) accentuated by Knight within chapter one. In these, she unveils her technical acumen and research in several areas, which bolster consideration for the next chapters.

Chapters two and three become the crux of the proposition, evaluating the unified narrative of Judges four and five in its narrative cycle. Being espoused as a more prophetic rendering, the areas of plot, characterisation and theme focus the song's content onto key theological concerns. Knight's most substantial focus is her analysis of how each character in Judges four and five (Israel, Deity, Jabin, Sisera, Deborah, Barak, Jael) is characterised. This is bridged with the characterisation of Israel, the Judges, the Oppressors and YHWH in the following chapters and provides an excellent series of textual correlations. Despite the wealth of content that could be elaborated in this chapter, Knight's succinct summary identifies the continuity and discontinuity within the stories (and the mixed responses of most characters in the narratives). Knight expresses the effect of the characterisations in Judges four and five, that the song explicitly interprets the theological significance of the event and challenges God's people to renewed covenant faithfulness in the events ahead. The line, 'Perhaps because the song is not primarily a retelling but instead a pedagogically motivated reflection, the song's focus on Israel is limited to assessing its people's response...' (p. 79) soundly notes the implications for a reading of the cycles of Judges.

Chapters four and five explore the cycles of Judges 3:7-16:31 and track how the song and its characterisations are simulated (or averted) in the Plot and Themes. This places Deborah's song alongside the other declarations of YHWH present in Judges (2:1-5, 20-2; 6:10-12; 10:11-14). The song of Deborah finds its space among a shift in God's divine activity and the people's refusal to heed the truth of YHWH's saving power (pp. 128-9) and makes important contributions to the themes of forgetting YHWH, the test of YHWH and generational degradation (pp. 130-7). A short and focused conclusion encapsulates the whole of the work and asserts Knight's emphasis: that Judges 5 is the culmination of God's revelatory activity in the early cycles (p. 142), offered with an opportunity to correct this theological deficit and embrace God afresh.

Knight's work in *The Prophet's Anthem* supplies an integration of relevant research (see, for example, her assessment of Frolov and Wong, pp. 23-5), a strong sense of intertextual and inter-biblical connections, and thorough lexical work (a strong example on pp. 67-73). The percep-

tive observations of the song challenge readers to consider what may be missed (e.g., Deborah's gender causing one to miss other important underdeveloped dynamics, p. 50) or how to see the echoes and expansions of characters like Deborah in the other cycles of Judges. The argument is smoothly presented and rhetorically builds towards a well-defined validation of the song's effect.

Even with these notable strengths, several minor critiques may be noted. First, Knight's structural overview of the content of Judges, while functional for a dissertation, could be moderated or placed in the appendix like the text-critical analysis notes. Sufficient space within the work engaged the book's structure. I was torn as it was appreciated but perhaps superfluous. Secondly, it would have served Knight to provide a brief section with clear markers on how she identified characterisation in the text. This could be a short list of what techniques and tools were used in the observation and how they were consciously applied. Like other examples in works on Old Testament narratology, the tendency is to just explain the application or observations without sharing how one can understand their construction. It would be of great value to glean from her insights on characterisation as she displays her acumen, and this provision would amplify the work. Lastly, when Knight shifts the angles in chapter three to Saviour-oppressor-deity, the points become repetitious. Like many explorations, there is always the question of 'how many examples are sufficient to make the point?' Again, this is a point of personal ambivalence, as I would equally desire to show the examples of this throughout the whole of the narrative cycle.

For any student of the Former Prophets and biblical narrative, *The Prophet's Anthem* is a resource definitely worth engaging, as it exhibits the fruit of distinctive and informed analysis. I find myself inspired to reengage biblical narrative with the same attentiveness.

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*Heaven, Hell, and Hope: A Biblical and Theological Exploration of Universal Salvation.* Chris Kugler. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic. ISBN: 9781540965158; pb. 144pp. \$22.99.

In 1897, the Scots theologian, James Orr, gave lectures later published as *The Progress of Dogma* (1901). He maintained that various Christian doctrines have received their definitive articulated form in different epochs of the history of the church, with some doctrines waiting longer than others to receive careful statement. So, for example, in the age of the Reformation the doctrine of salvation through Christ, appropriated in faith

under the influence of the Holy Spirit, received overdue careful statement. Looking ahead, Orr predicted that it would be questions of eschatology that were next in line to receive definitive statement.

If anything, the new century proved Orr wrong. Blundered pronouncements about the day of the Lord's return; efforts to equate menacing world leaders with sinister biblical figures; then more recently, a spate of books urging readers to consider the likelihood of universal salvation. No one will call this dogmatic progress.

Chris Kugler has seen some of these misfires for himself. His response to what many Christians acknowledge *is* a problem is to maintain that we have expected too much clarity in the realm of 'personal eschatology', i.e. the question of the destiny and conditions of existence of humans, after death. He does not believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments intend to offer us the level of clarity we have been assuming they provided. This is not the kind of clarification we would have hoped for! How does he build this argument?

He does so initially in an 18-page preface. He draws from the true fact that God has accommodated Himself when communicating His mind and will to finite and fallen humans, the questionable inference that any revelation given will necessarily be constrained by the thought forms and vocabulary of the culture which is dominant at the time. As this pertains to eschatology, Kugler means that the biblical writers who received divine revelation bearing on the future of the world and of the individual construed what was entrusted to them in the dominant Greek and Jewish fashion of their day. This way of putting things is interesting; but one must ask: 'Does this adequately recognize the divine initiative in providing revelation and the level of divine superintendence provided by the Spirit of God to those who conveyed the dreams, oracles and teachings entrusted to them?' Kugler lacks clarity here. And he seems to veer dangerously near to the old 'history of religions' approach to biblical interpretation, by which Christian biblical interpretation was to be carried out in reliance on the sacred writings of then-contemporary religions. Both Jews and Greeks had eschatological ideas of their own.

The upshot of such an approach is that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament are implied to have much less to tell us about 'last things' (and other matters) than we had been led to expect. These writings may indeed constitute a *kind* of record of revelation, but they offer precious few details on the subject of any future division of humanity, of what is the criterion to be met for entering the future kingdom of God, or whether the destiny of the wicked will be one of enduring torment or extinction. Recorded revelation is, on this understanding, low-yield. The central rev-

elation of the Christian era is the Christ-event; the NT Scriptures only constitute revelation secondarily.

Such a low-expectation approach must face the test posed by well-known New Testament writings, which—on the face of them—contain numerous direct statements bearing on personal eschatology. To this task Kugler turns in the second and major portion of this book. It is one thing to grant that a Scripture such as Matthew 24.30 employs apocalyptic language and that it may not require literal interpretation. But the general approach taken by Kugler is to suggest that the Synoptic Gospels (John is significantly passed over) and the balance of the New Testament mainly recycle ideas common in the Graeco-Roman and Jewish cultures of the time. The biblical evidence is judged not to support unambiguously the customary options of eternal damnation, annihilation or universal salvation. The statements and parables of Jesus are ‘not directly translatable into a doctrine about the eternal destiny of distinct individuals’ (p.41). A further rapid survey of the Epistles and of Revelation is carried out which purports to confirm this indeterminacy. The reader will likely not be satisfied that these writings have been adequately handled.

Paul’s writings (including letters the author believes were penned by his associates) receive five pages. Kugler is intent on showing that passages such as 2 Thess. 1.5-10 (which make reference to the return of Christ and a consequent division of humanity) are much less direct in their teaching than most readers will suppose. Passages such as Gal. 5.19-23 and 1 Cor. 6.9-10 which describe human choices and conduct that will, if persisted in, exclude a human from God’s kingdom, are taken by Kugler as general descriptions of the traits avoided by those who *will* inhabit the coming kingdom.

To come to the point, one is relieved to find, by the end of the work, that Kugler—as much as he is attracted to universalism—does not find this unambiguously taught in the majority of relevant Scriptures (p. 82). But this is small consolation. This author’s efforts have worked towards a negating objective, i.e. convincing the reader that the Scriptures are much less definite than we have supposed in what they say about the afterlife, the world to come, and any impending division of humanity. This glass is always half-empty. Clarity could have been introduced by a fuller attention to what the New Testament positively reports: such as the sayings of Jesus recorded in John’s Gospel (5.24-30; 11.25) and the recorded proclamation of the Apostles (e.g. Acts 17.31; 24.25) all of whom were eyewitnesses (Acts 1.21; Gal. 1.12; 2 Peter 1.18; 1 John 1.1-2). The claim of the New Testament is that Jesus Christ has ‘abolished death and brought life and immortality to light in the Gospel’ (2 Tim. 2.10). This is not a

mere recirculation of concepts already in circulation in the Graeco-Jewish world.

James Orr evidently got it wrong in predicting the imminent arrival of eschatological clarity. Has Kugler in any way advanced clarity? Perhaps it could be said that he has attempted to achieve this by subtraction, but the positive result is minor.

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*Reformed Covenant Theology: A Systematic Introduction.* Harrison Perkins. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic. ISBN: 9781683597339; hb. 520pp. \$49.99.

There was a time in Scotland, and indeed the wider Reformed world, when Covenant Theology was the keystone subject of spiritual conversations and theological libraries. As the doctrines of grace were cherished and explored by the Reformers and the generations who followed them, the framework of covenant became the great unifying principle of Systematic Theology. But history never stands still, and what was cherished in the 17th and 18th Centuries became increasingly overlooked in the 19th and, by the 20th century, Covenant Theology was no longer the keystone of systematics; to many, it had become a troublesome millstone of outdated dogmatism that needed to be cast aside. Thankfully, the later 20th and early 21st centuries have seen a renewal of respect for, and a revival of interest in, Covenant Theology. Much of this has emerged hand in hand with a greater appreciation for Biblical Theology. As theologians explore the unfolding of Redemptive History, the place of covenant in that redemptive narrative is undeniable. The result has been many valuable works that explore Covenant Theology using a methodology that broadly follows God's historical covenantal dealings with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, all culminating the New Covenant inaugurated and consummated through Christ. But what has hitherto been missing is a fresh examination of Covenant Theology according to the traditional categories of Systematic Theology. It is to this gap that Harrison Perkins' *Reformed Covenant Theology* makes a welcome, and wonderful, contribution.

Perkins structures his book around the historic three-part framework of the Covenant of Works, of Redemption and of Grace. His order is deliberate; while the Covenant of Redemption has its origins in eternity, it is the Covenant of Works that places humanity in need of redemption. Thus, the book sequentially sets out the condemning plight of humanity, the redemptive plan of God, and the gracious provision of Christ.

Part One, the Covenant of Works, looks at God's covenant with Adam and explores its legal character, its implicit reward, and its implications both for establishing humanity's guilt and for explaining what Christ must accomplish for our justification. Here Perkins effectively demonstrates that starting with systematic categories does not mean jettisoning Biblical Theology. On the contrary, what is learned about Adam in Genesis 1 and 2 is integrated superbly with the rest of Scripture, both Old Testament and New.

Part Two examines the Covenant of Redemption, which remarkably could today be classified as a somewhat neglected subject. Perkins carefully leads the reader deeper into the counsels of eternity. In doing so, he makes clarifying connections with Trinitarian theology, yet at the same time respects the inescapable need for the theologian to be content with mystery. Again, the categories of systematician are the companion of the biblical theologian and Perkins repeatedly draws stimulating connections to the New Testament revelation of Christ as the Last Adam.

The Covenant of Grace is the subject of Parts Three and Four. The former explores the substance of the Covenant of Grace and presents a compelling argument for the unity of that covenant across its various administrations. Christ is either anticipated in the Old, or apprehended in the New; thus, the Covenant of Grace is *united*. But furthermore, the Covenant of Grace is *unifying*, and Perkins effectively shows how Covenant Theology connects, and indeed elucidates, key aspects of the *ordo salutis*. Part Four then discusses the administration of the Covenant of Grace. Here the reader is taken from Adam to Moses and from Moses to Christ. Significant attention is given to the Mosaic Covenant and Perkins offers a balanced and thorough articulation of the view that the covenant at Sinai, in a typological sense for the nation of Israel, is a republication of the Covenant of Works.

Part Five then considers living in God's Covenant of Grace. Here there is a rich and stimulating discussion of the church as a covenant community, and the role of preaching and the sacraments within her.

Finally, the book closes with a short summary offering six theses on Covenant Theology. These have the potential to be five of the most helpful pages on Covenant Theology that have been written, and without doubt, they will be shared and discussed in seminaries all across the Reformed world.

Throughout the book, Perkins writes as a first-rate theologian and a pastor. Each chapter ends with reflections on the pastoral relevance of the subject under discussion. Moreover, his tone throughout the whole book is exemplary; here is the work of an author who desires to honour God but who has no wish to denigrate a brother. The book also offers fre-

quent exegesis of key biblical passages, thorough explanation of doctrinal categories and terminology, and sprinkled throughout the book are many memorable and helpful illustrations (most of which involve ice cream!).

One word that describes the approach of the whole book would be *precision*. Throughout each chapter, you read the work of a meticulous theologian who has provided the church with an articulation of Covenant Theology that sits securely within the boundaries of the Reformed Confessions and which stands on the shoulders of the giants of historic Covenant Theology. On occasions, that precision may come at an unavoidable cost; a minor constructive comment might be that one or two chapters may be said to prioritise technical detail over literary ease. Moreover, another key strength of the book is that it is rooted in both exegesis of Scripture and in interaction with the riches of historical theology. Indeed, Perkins is undoubtedly one of the world's leading experts in the great works of the covenant theologians and this book leaves the reader well acquainted with some of the most important theologians of the last five hundred years. Such a historical grounding is a key strength of the book, but that has perhaps left little space for interaction with recent works. Perkins is clearly well acquainted with these, but he avoids much direct analysis of recent authors. Some readers will greatly appreciate this avoidance of potentially niche polemics, but other readers may have hoped that more was said about how Perkins' more classical methodology compares to recent works of a more biblical theological emphasis. Furthermore, from a Scottish perspective, it would have been fascinating to have seen how Perkins would have tackled the writings of the Torrance brothers (perhaps the arch-critics of many aspects of historic Scottish Covenant Theology).

The above comments are very minor and they run the risk of expecting Perkins' book to do everything, which of course is an unrealistic expectation of any book. Overall, *Reformed Covenant Theology* offers a superb introduction to Covenant Theology from the standpoint of the systematic theologian. This book would be of great value to all readers, and it is surely essential reading for students at a seminary. It is impossible to read this book without learning and, more importantly, it is impossible to read it without marvelling at the astonishing grace and goodness of God, revealed through his majestic covenants.

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*Under the Olive Tree: Palestinian Christian Theology from the 1980s to the Present.* Maayan Karen Raveh. Waco: Baylor University Press. ISBN: 9781481323710; pb. 240pp. \$39.99.

After an introduction that outlines the author's premise, methodological approach, and the study's limitations, including its all-male clerical authorship, the volume is organised into four substantive sections. The first explores the political context within which the author argues has led to the development of Palestinian Christian theology and how this shapes national and religious identity. The second section has a detailed and well-referenced discussion of post-Holocaust and post-colonial theology which explores significant theological figures internationally plus several methodological structures and tools. This is then applied in section three where the purported friction between these theological approaches is outlined when applied to the Palestinian populace. In the final section, the author seeks to explore the formation of the Palestinian Christian narrative through the lens of 'witness' applied from theological and historical standpoints.

The author seeks to explore the context and theoretical frameworks that define and describe Palestinian Christian theology with her focus only on those who identify as Palestinian, have acquired official clerical accreditation, and who operate and publish within the Holy Land. Her main argument is Palestinian Christian theology defines Christian national identity and guides their understanding of both their connection to Christ and to the physical Holy Land.

This is a well-researched and clearly structured book exploring an important and relevant topic. The careful referencing and historical sweep make this a useful publication alongside a description and discussion of differing frameworks and tools used to develop theological perspectives. Many of the arguments made are clear and helpful for us to understand the development of theology and, in particular, Palestinian Christian theology. This is also a rapidly developing area, in part due to the huge political upheavals that have led to terrible conflict and finally to what is accepted by most international bodies as a genocide in Gaza.

However, the author moves from theological exploration and discussion to making critical judgements that are at best unhelpful. There is a concerning tendency to conflate the strong arguments of Palestinian Christian theologians which highlight injustice and oppression against a political ideology, namely Zionism, into a fight with Judaism and even with Jews. Suggesting Jews are the enemy of Palestinians is completely counter to the writing of the theologians quoted. Indeed, many Jewish writers are also anti-Zionist, including the New Historians such as Avi

Shlaim and Ilan Pappé. Writing since the Nakba in 1948, they strongly support the argument that Zionism is a settler-colonial project which is political in nature and not religious. Edward Said in *The Question of Palestine* (Vintage, 1978) argues the principal characteristic of Palestinian history is the ‘traumatic national encounter with Zionism’. Post-colonial theological principles and developments reflect a significant challenge to the Western-centric view of the world which has in turn influenced biblical understanding. It is therefore entirely appropriate that a post-colonial approach is a significant part of Palestinian Christian theological writing, especially in English.

It is also well acknowledged that the lived experience of oppression and injustice drives a rethinking of theology. In turn, it is not surprising that Arabic-language Palestinian Christian theological writing emphasises other issues given the differing worldviews and experience rather than any attempt to confuse the message. These further challenges the premise of the author that Palestinian Christian theology is primarily written to counter Western-centric views but rather it offers its own unique perspective that has global relevance. The author posits a tension between post-colonial and post-Holocaust approaches, but presents no evidence for it. As framed, the claim risks introducing a contrived dichotomy absent from Palestinian Christian theological discourse. The texts quoted, instead, outline the facts which support the indigeneity of Palestinians and their historical roots in the Holy Land which reach back to the time of Christ and the early church. These roots include both Jews and Gentiles who came together in the early church as Followers of the Way; later to be called Christians. It affirms the Christ-centric emphasis of Palestinian Christian theology and their deep concern and assertion that Christian Zionism abandons this centrality. Rather than a tension, Palestinian Christian theologians present this as a source of strength and depth in the perspective they elucidate, together with an invitation to attend to the witness and resilience of the ‘living stones’ of the Holy Land, which they understand as bringing hope and calling forth deeper faith and radical love. A recent statement, ‘Kairos 2: Faith in a Time of Genocide’ (Nov 2025), part of the Global Kairos for Justice movement, describes itself as a cry against genocide, ethnic cleansing, and forced displacement, and rejects all forms of Zionism, whether originating in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam.

Other recent publications are exploring the imperative presented by Palestinian Christian theology and indeed calling for a seminal moment in theological thinking and understanding post-Gaza in a similar way to post-Holocaust theological reflection. *Theology after Gaza: A Global Anthology* (Cascade, 2025) brings in authors from across faiths and across

settings and has grown out of the work of the Council for World Mission. Newer publications such as *The Cross and the Olive Tree: Cultivating Palestinian Theology Amid Gaza* (Orbis, 2025) include definitions of the theology that are rooted in community, and which also challenge gender assumptions and norms.

Perhaps this focus on lived theology, of faith, resilience and resistance will further encourage a wider perspective for theological definitions which may be more rooted in Eastern, Global South and collectivist societies and in those who have faced oppression and injustice.

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*The Conflict Between Faith and Experience and the Shape of Psalms* 73-83. Stephen J. Smith. New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark. ISBN: 9780567702760; pb. 224pp. £28.99.

In 2007, Joel S. Burnett wrote that ‘Arguably the most significant development in Psalms scholarship in recent decades has been attention to the shape and shaping of the Psalter. Nevertheless, one feature of this biblical book’s larger structure and meaning that continues to baffle is what scholars call the Elohist Psalter,’ referring to Pss 42–83 (Joel S. Burnett, ‘A Plea for David and Zion: The Elohist Psalter as Psalm Collection for the Temple’s Restoration’, in Joel S. Burnett, W. H. Bellinger Jr., and W. Dennis Tucker Jr. [eds.], *Diachronic and Synchronic: Reading the Psalms in Real Time: Proceedings of the Baylor Symposium on the Book of Psalms* [New York: T&T Clark, 2007], p. 95). Stephen J. Smith’s new work, *The Conflict Between Faith and Experience and the Shape of Psalms* 73–83, the published version of his doctoral dissertation under Duane A. Garrett, offers some clarity on the so-called Elohist Psalter that straddles books 2 and 3 of the Psalter.

Inspired by Craig C. Broyles, *The Conflict of Faith and Experience in the Psalms: A Form-Critical and Theological Study*, JSOTSup 52 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), Smith, Assistant Professor of Biblical Studies and Christian Ministries at Belhaven University, sees Psalms 73–83 as a collection that answers ‘a multidimensional collision between “faith” (i.e., various core Israelite beliefs about God) and “experience” (the individual/community’s current experience of God)’ (p. 2). Smith’s thesis is that Psalms 73–83 are a distinct unit with a ‘singular theological message: God is *still* good to Israel—despite the conflicting evidence,’ that is, the Temple’s destruction around 586 BCE (p. 2, italics original).

Smith's work impresses in its rigour; from the start Smith reminds us that method determines results, and so lays out the particular way his study discerns editorial critical insights (pp. 2–3). For example, he notes that the shared 'Asaph' superscriptions in both Codex Leningradensis (MS B19<sup>A</sup>) and the LXX bring Psalms 73–83 together 'on a purely formal level,' which provides a basis for looking for further literary unity (p. 3). Anyone interested in venturing into editorial criticism of the Psalter should note Smith's methods, as he interacts with sceptics of editorial criticism, such as David Willgren, Eva Mroczek, and Alma Brodersen (pp. 4–8). Smith argues that his research satisfies their objections to editorial criticism, writing of the manuscript data on these psalms, 'To borrow Willgren's terminology, we see both textual stability *and* paratextual stability' (p. 12, italics original). Likewise, Smith's approach to editorial criticism, also called *Psalterexegese*, is synchronic; he views the collection as resulting 'from a single creative act (not a diachronic process) in the wake of the Temple's destruction in 586/587 BCE' (p. 13). Thus, at least one person was behind the 'deliberate literary correspondence that exists' in Psalms 73–83 (p. 16).

How does an editorial critic discern unity among psalms? Smith asserts that "Psalms exegesis" is prior to, and an essential precondition for, *Psalterexegese*' (p. 18). In other words, the individual parts that make up a psalm must be examined before asking questions about how each psalm relates to each other in the larger whole. This must be the case given that the Psalter is a collection of smaller units. The parts and the whole must be taken into account: 'At least in principle, *Psalterexegese* and "psalms exegesis" are not in competition; they are compatible' (p. 18). The overall meaning of a psalms collection cannot 'contradict or otherwise do "violence" to the meaning of any one psalm in the sequence' (p. 19). Here Smith's careful attention to method disarms those who might dismiss his project simply because of other, less careful editorial critical studies (e.g., see p. 67).

Smith's introduction lays out more details of his method, such as an emphasis on parallelism (pp. 21–5). He builds on Michael Snearly's observation that parallelism can be observed not only on the level of a 'line' but between psalms (pp. 22–3). Applied to his project, Smith notes echoes of Psalm 73 in the psalms that follow, an observation that others have made but not fully analysed (p. 35). This leads to an 'in stereo' effect, with Psalm 73 presenting the heading of the conflict of faith and experience, with the following psalms in the grouping taking up elements of Psalm 73 and discussing them from other angles (p. 36).

Smith's next chapter outlines and interacts with the various views that editorial critics have taken regarding the psalms in question. Worth

noting is the ‘tendency...to essentially collapse “psalms exegesis” into *Psalterexegeese*,’ which includes reading two discrete texts ‘as if they are virtually a single continuous psalm’ (p. 69). Smith is wisely cautious of approaches that take one psalm’s placement next to another as permission to overrule the content of that psalm (p. 70).

Chapters 3-8 present Smith’s argumentation related to Psalms 73–83. First, Smith discusses the conflict between faith and experience in Psalm 73, noting that ‘Whatever the catalyst at the temple,’ by the end, ‘the psalmist’s confidence in God’s goodness had been restored’ (p. 76). His findings agree that faith clings to God’s self-revelation despite experiences that might suggest otherwise, per Ingvar Fløysvik, *When God Becomes My Enemy: The Theology of the Complaint Psalms* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1997), 176 (p. 80). Second, chapter 4 suggests that ‘Psalms 74–76 is the first of four psalm sequences/pairings that stand in a deliberate parallel relationship with’ Ps. 73. In Smith’s opinion, Ps. 74 wrestles with the seeming inaction of God (e.g., 74:10–11) related to enemies (p. 83). Ps. 75, likewise, wrestles with the same question but maintains that God will intervene eventually (p. 87). Smith has less to say about Ps. 76, but asserts ‘significant thematic correspondence’ between these three, Pss. 74–76, and Psalm 73 (pp. 88–97). This means that Pss 74–76 are a distinct literary unit, and Psalm 73 ‘is thus something of a hermeneutical key that unlocks the interpretive significance of their repetitions’ (pp. 98–9). These psalms reinforce that despite conflicting evidence, God is not defeated or indifferent to his people (p. 100).

Smith’s fifth chapter examines Psalms 77–78, which he takes as a second unit in the collection. Despite these having different genres, lament and history, both allude to Ex. 34:6–7 and share an ‘analogous network of parallels’ (pp. 109, 112). Ps. 77 mirrors Pss. 73 and 74, Smith argues, with a conflict between faith and experience (p. 111). Likewise, ‘The transition to Psalm 78 marks a radical shift in perspective that mirrors the inner-psalm progression to verses 18–28 in Psalm 73’ (p.111). While some of the links Smith perceives between Pss. 73 and 77–78 seem subjective (e.g., ‘a reflective tone,’ p. 118), his evidence is substantial. These parallels are analysed in chapter six, where Smith challenges major scholars’ viewpoints, such as both McCann’s argument that ‘the sequence’s arrangement points singers/readers away from Zion theology as a basis for hope,’ and Hossfeld and Zenger’s emphasis on Ps. 78 as having a ‘central theological and/or literary position’ (pp. 133–4, italics original).

The final two chapters,’ Smith explains, ‘are a combined argument for the literary unity of Psalms 79–82’ (p. 143). Following the pattern of previous chapters, Smith suggests literary correspondence between Ps. 73 and Pss. 80–81; ‘Like the first two psalm groupings... this psalm sequence

also mirrors the major literary progression of Psalm 73's two halves' (150). After presenting argumentation, Smith concludes chapter 7 by stating that the theological message of these two psalms, with Ps. 73 in view, is that 'Faith clings to God's self-revelation amid conflicting evidence' (p. 157). Lest we forget Ps. 79, Smith returns to it in chapter nine, wherein he agrees with Hossfeld and Zenger that 'Psalm 79 engages with the destruction of the Temple and the fundamental crisis brought on in and by that event' (p. 160). Ps. 79 is paired with Ps. 82 'though separated by two intervening psalms' (p. 166). Smith views the intervening psalms 80–81 as the centre of an 'editorial chiasmus' (p. 171). The significance of this being that 'the entire sequence of Psalms 74–82... is organised to engage and resolve a singular crisis,' that is, God's perceived absence in the destruction of the Temple (p. 176). Likewise, 'God is *still* good to Israel' (179, italics original). Psalm 83, for Smith, 'concludes the collection by embodying the resolution that each of its constituent groupings has promoted: trust in God's self-revelation' (p. 183).

*The Conflict Between Faith and Experience and the Shape of Psalms 73–83* should be read as a model of contemporary Psalms scholarship, combining both exegesis and editorial criticism. While it is less exegetical and more focused on the shared vocabulary and topics of the psalms considered, this work provides a very helpful explanation of the *Asaph* psalms. I do wonder if Smith avoids the very concern he is keen to avoid, namely, not reading too much from the collection back into each of its parts. On balance, it does not seem to say too much to conclude with Smith that 'full appreciation of these psalms requires taking into account *both* levels of context' (p. 187, italics original). I highly recommend this work.

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*A Heavy Yoke: Theology, Power, and Abuse in the Church.* Selina Stone. London: SCM Press. ISBN: 9780334066699; pb. vii + 192pp. £16.99.

This is an important book—a book that needed to be written and needs to be read. It is a book that some (perhaps more than some) Christians, especially within conservative evangelicalism, whether they sit in the pews, stand behind pulpits, or hold academic chairs, may be reluctant to read. I would contend the more resistant you are to the idea of reading *A Heavy Yoke*, the more important it is that you do so.

The source of such resistance is not simply the book's subject matter but its methodology: probing evangelical theologies for understandings of power that, while they do not cause abuse directly, create conditions conducive for abuse to occur. A detached, non-invasive academic mon-

ograph on abuse within evangelical Christian churches would be much more palatable but far less impactful.

Theologies, of course, are things we hold dear. For many Christians, theology is more or less equivalent to faith itself. To question one is to challenge the other and even to jeopardise one's salvation. Many of us are taught that ascribing to the 'right' theology, the correct doctrine, is essential. And yet, as Dr Stone observes, 'it is telling that what so many abusers of power in the Christian world have in common is... a particular notion of orthodoxy' (p. 8).

That insight is what makes this book threatening but also so potentially liberating. Dr Stone does not frame theology as solely problematic. She both prescribes and models healthy theological work as a fundamental part of the solution. Thus, in *A Heavy Yoke*, Selina Stone offers us so much more than a report documenting the evidence for and raising awareness of the alarming rate of a particular malignancy within evangelical bodies of Christ. She presents us with the theological equivalent of a bone marrow biopsy: an investigation into the generative source of the malignancy, a quest to understand its permutations, and an invitation to collaborate in developing effective treatments.

This compact but richly edifying book unfolds across seven chapters, each chapter 'dealing with a particular theme and theological problem which relates to power' (p. 12). Chapter one considers power as breath given by God and how that understanding can help us define abuse within churches. Chapter two explores the power of words within charismatic traditions, with special attention given to the concepts of 'calling' and 'gifting' as markers of authority and how manipulative preachers can use words from the pulpit to aid, abet, and excuse abuse. Chapter three looks at the concept of God as omnipotent and the dynamics of how authority figures within the church, especially preachers, either project for themselves or have projected onto themselves similar conceptions of power. Chapter four addresses the concept of 'principalities and powers' and how the hard line that is so often drawn between 'the church' (holy, good, trustworthy) and 'the world' (ungodly, defiling, dangerous) impedes the ability of those inside the church to think critically and honestly about the church. Chapter five investigates how theologies of suffering and sacrifice can be (and are) used to sanctify violence. Chapter six considers how two developments, the rise of vulnerability as a virtue and the promulgation of 'servant leadership' as an ideal, have combined to create an environment abusers exploit. Finally, chapter seven puts forward discernment, applied to the material covered in the preceding chapters, as an intentional practice to help identify 'green flags' as well as 'red flags' in

various aspects of church life, including congregational dynamics of worship, culture, and governance.

In certain chapters, Dr Stone employs lessons and examples from Jesus's parables that invite the reader to rethink / reimagine the problematic power dynamic under review. For example, in chapter three, she uses the story of 'The Widow's Mite' as a foil for the capitalistic impulses, assumptions, and trappings that underpin various flavours of the prosperity gospel and ground a particular charismatic understanding of God's almightiness (the wordplay between 'mite' and 'might' is intentional and effective). In others, she weaves case studies into her discussions of power, such as John Smyth's spree of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse at the Iwerne Camps, detailed in chapter five. These 'high profile' cases are not included for sensational effect but because the attention they have attracted has generated multiple interviews, reports, court filings, and other materials to examine (p. 10). They effectively illustrate particular and painful ways certain theologies coupled with problematic power structures lead to abuses of authority that result in the abuse of people. Especially when combined with anecdotes from her own faith journey, these examples provide a meaningfully enflashed dimension to Dr Stone's theological work.

My one critique of *A Heavy Yoke* is the somewhat inconsistent structure of the seven chapters. Some contain case studies, some contain specific scriptural counterpoints, some contain both. I would have loved a few more of the 'Widow's Mite/Might' type explorations. That said, all seven chapters are substantive and engaging as they stand. There is no shortage of insights to be gleaned from this bold theological study. Dr Stone acquits herself as a first-rate theologian and a skilled writer capable of communicating nuanced theological ideas without the jargon or overwrought prose that all too often confines serious theological discussion to academic circles. This book is accessible to lay persons as well as clergy, divinity students, and professional theologians. It deserves to be read and discussed widely.

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*Discovering Christianity: A Guide for the Curious.* Rowan Williams. London: SPCK. ISBN: 9780281090631; pb. 128pp. £10.99.

Rowan Williams has long had the rare gift of making the reader feel that the most searching theological questions are, in the end, questions about reality: what is there, what is given, what is not negotiable, and what sort of speech is truthful in its presence. *Discovering Christianity* is a small book that carries that characteristic weight lightly. Its aim is disarmingly

direct—to speak to anyone, whatever their beliefs, who wants to get to the heart of Christianity—and it largely succeeds by refusing both defensiveness and oversimplification. Three chapters rework material from Williams’s earlier SPCK book (*What Is Christianity? A Little Book of Guidance*, 2015), but the material lives afresh within a new structure and with a sharper focus.

The book unfolds in eight compact chapters—What is faith? What is Christianity? What is theology? Why church? Why Scripture? Why tradition? Why reason? Why does it matter?—each followed by questions for discussion or reflection. These are not an afterthought but a second mode of expression, often distilling a chapter’s burden into a memorable phrase. Particularly telling is the definition offered alongside chapter three: theology is ‘the process of “making Christian sense”’ (p. 91). Characteristically Williams-like—economical and quietly profound—it names theology as responsible attention, and hints that Christian sense-making can become nonsense when it shrinks the world or shrinks away from it.

The opening chapter sets the tone by distinguishing ‘toxic’ from ‘healthy’ religion with a bracing litmus test: ‘The test of true faith is how much more it lets you see, and how much it stops you from denying, resisting or ignoring aspects of what is real’ (p. 3). Faith is often cast as private preference or defiance of evidence; so Williams’s counter-definition is quietly subversive. True faith enlarges the world, making one more available to reality, not less. The point is not merely apologetic: faith is tested not by intensity of feeling but by increased receptivity—by loosened denial.

That theme deepens in Williams’s Johannine gloss on ‘glory’: glory as ‘radiance’, as ‘utter unselfishness at the heart of everything’, even as ‘a divine letting go’ (p. 12). This captures what Christian tradition means by glory when stripped of its triumphalism. Glory is not God’s need to be noticed but the self-diffusive generosity of divine life. Here, in miniature, is the Williams found across his work: a theology of divine self-giving, close to prayer, committed to truthful speech, and wary of religious (or any) ego.

The chapter on Christianity itself—revised from a talk for a non-European Muslim audience—offers a practical route into trinitarian faith. The Trinity appears not as puzzle to be solved but as the grammar of prayer: ‘Probably the most important Christian belief is that people are given the right to speak to God in exactly the same way that Jesus did ... because the life, the power, the Spirit that filled Jesus is given to us also’ (p. 16). Doctrine here names a lived possibility: praying ‘with Jesus’ voice’ because his Spirit is shared.

Chapter three is anchored in Paul as a canonical character and the pressure Christian thought feels in relating Jesus and the Spirit. As Williams puts it, theology's initial impetus lies 'in the pressure to think more deeply about how and why Jesus and the Spirit are connected', yielding 'a radically fresh understanding of who and what human beings are' (p. 37). Theology is work demanded by the gospel's claim on human identity. Williams shows why doctrine matters by showing what it does.

The chapters on church, Scripture, tradition, and reason model compression without distortion. The church chapter is anchored in the dominical sacraments (Baptism and Eucharist), and Williams's account of the latter is both direct and broadly resonant: it is 'how we are present in heaven while still being on earth—because we are at our closest to Jesus, praying with his voice, receiving his life' (p. 46). Rather than settling eucharistic debates, this reveals why they matter: the church's life is re-situated in Christ's.

On Scripture, Williams says just enough. Scripture 'records a process of God taking time with human beings, in a cumulative story of breakthroughs, setbacks, continuity and discontinuity... regularly being reworked and reimagined as the sheer scale of what is being shown about the nature of the limitless God becomes clearer' (p. 51). This honours the densely-textured nature of the Bible without turning it into either wax nose or rigid code. Revelation appears as movement: God 'taking time', resisting fantasies of instant mastery.

The chapter on tradition is gentle and wise. Williams defines heresy as 'saying less about God than the God who had acted in Jesus and the Spirit deserved' (p. 60) — a memorable, pastorally shrewd take. Orthodoxy becomes not boundary-policing for its own sake but refusal to impoverish divine generosity. His nuance on the Reformation is equally measured: vernacular Scripture mattered so people could read it together (p. 64). Tradition is corporate practice, not private inspiration. 'Traditionalism', by contrast, is tradition detached from its living context: 'the ongoing process of reading Scripture' (p. 66).

Chapter seven prefers 'reasoning' to 'reason', wary of an abstract universal faculty, and presents it as conversation between Christ, church, and world (p. 73). Christian rationality is located within discipleship: reasoning as participation, the church learning to speak truthfully in the world God loves.

The final chapter traces the human consequences of such faith: 'realism and perspective', 'a way of valuing what's around us', and a 'natural' life of giving and receiving intimacy (pp. 80-81). The book's beginning and end thus clasp: glory as divine self-giving, and human flourishing as participation in that exchange.

A mild reservation concerns the book's genre. Those seeking a detailed map of contested doctrinal terrain will not find it here; nor should they. This is a guide for the curious, trusting that curiosity grows through truthful, spacious description rather than exhaustive argument. What it offers instead is a compelling vision of Christianity as a school of attention to reality, a participation in the divine 'letting go' at the heart of all things.

It is a vision I find convincing and would gladly claim. For readers curious, hesitant, wounded by 'toxic' religion, or simply hungry for a Christianity that is neither evasive nor aggressive, Williams provides light and life. The discussion questions make the book especially suited to reading groups and settings where Christian speech must be both honest and hospitable. For theologians, it offers something academic work sometimes forgets: a reminder that making Christian sense is, finally, about learning to see.

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