

EDITORIAL

With this issue, the Journal of Grace Theology enters its fifth year of publication. I continue to be impressed with the articles submitted to the Journal and hope this ministry continues to encourage academics, pastors, and Bible teachers.

The first article in this issue is a lengthy piece by Arthur Garrison on the authenticity of Scripture. Garrison considers this an important issue since the authenticity of the Bible has been challenge by vehement opposition. His article therefore offers an apologetic defense of the authority of the Bible by using a hermeneutical method of comparing Scripture with Scripture.

Professor of Worship Arts Kayleen Bobbitt offers an essay on “Three Historical Examples of Romans 12 Worship.” She examines three models of incarnational living which demonstrate “imagery of living sacrifice portrayed in Romans 12.” Bobbitt concludes these models are worthy of emulation since they “faithfully demonstrate incarnational living through personal surrender to God.”

Bruce A. Sabados pastors First Baptist in Holland, Michigan. He shares some of the results of his D.Min work at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School on assessing the impact of expository preaching. His project quantified a specific congregation’s response after he preached a series expository sermons addressing church discipline. Each sermon was followed by short public discussion which clarified aspects of the sermons for the hearers. His study reinforces the need for expository preaching since it is effective in generating the response God desires of his people.

Anumbondem Joseph Asong is the Chief Academic Officer at Malawi Grace Bible Schools. His article focuses on Henri Nouwen’s contributions to a discussion of contemplative silence. Asong argues there is a need to adapt Nouwen’s ideas to the “demanding life of dispensing theological

education today.” Asong believes there is a spiritual heritage embracing the “holiness of the everyday.”

Pastor Timothy Board of Friendship Congregational Bible Church in Friendship, Wisconsin offers a challenge to evangelicals to “faithfully seek the peace of the city” while continuing to affirm evangelical values. He interacts with research from David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons confirming an exodus of young people away from the church. Board exhorts his readers to live in good faith so that a world in need of the spiritual health, healing, and wholeness will encounter the Gospel.

The book reviews in this issue include several recent publications of interest to pastors and Bible teachers. I have a number of books to offer for review, including several pastoral leadership books. If you are interested in writing a short review of a book please contact me. It is important for pastors and Bible teachers to be constantly reading and developing but it is very difficult to keep up on the avalanche of new literature published each year. By writing a book review you are helping other busy pastors to prioritize their study and personal development.

Similarly, I want to encourage pastors to consider sharing what they are doing in their teaching and pulpit ministry. Each issue of the JGT has included a few shorter articles on a particular text or a theological observation. For many readers, a short book review written from the perspective of a pastor or teacher in a local church is an important contribution and is always appreciated by others in the ministry.

Finally, the Journal always needs your support by means of a continuing subscription. The subscription covers the cost of printing and mailing each issue. If you have allowed your subscription to lapse, please consider renewing to support our continued publication. You may also consider a gift subscription for your pastor. See the back page of this issue for subscription information.

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A HERMENEUTICAL PROOF OF THE BIBLE

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Abstract: This article makes two propositions. First, through the scientific method of hermeneutics, the authenticity of the Bible can be established. Second, after academic and objective study of the Bible, the utilization of faith that the Bible is the inspired living word of God completes the full understanding of the Bible and its authenticity. It will be asserted these two propositions can be supported by the utilization of literal, grammatical, historical, and contextual hermeneutic principles applied to the biblical text.

INTRODUCTION

“All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”¹ Thus the Bible has utility for scholarship and defining human behavior, and as such the Bible should be read literally. Read literally means unless a passage is clearly allegorical or hyperbolic (symbolically or figuratively),

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¹ 2 Timothy 3:16. All cited Scripture is NKJV unless stated. As Solomon wrote, the word of God could be known and it provided a source of all knowledge, wisdom, and understanding (Prov 1:1-7). The Scriptures assert Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived; “I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you” (1 Kings 3:12 and 1 Kings 4:29-31).

the text should be read with the assumption the words used are used in their ordinary sense and meaning and are intended to assert a specific and single idea, thought, principle, and/or concept. The application of hermeneutic principles requires the reading of the words of a particular text, in context, to determine the specific and singular meaning of those words. Hermeneutic principles provides a method which allows for the objective determination of those specific and singular meanings through an analysis of the literal, grammatical, historical, and contextual use of words in the text. The science of hermeneutics defines a text by its comparison to other parts of the same text being studied. Thus the meaning of one verse of the Bible is defined by the context of the chapter and book where it is located as well as by the nature and structure of the Bible itself as a whole. This scientific utilization of hermeneutics supplements a primary assumption regarding the Bible – that the Bible is the Word of God.

THE BIBLE IS INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

The hermeneutical truth of the Bible, although written through the hands of multiple people in different times, places, cultures, and languages, is established by its internal continuity and coherent message and purpose through all sixty-six books. From the beginning, the Bible makes clear it is the word of God not of men, but it was relayed through men. As God said, through Moses, in the beginning of Scripture,

Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I teach you to observe, that you may live, and go in and possess the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you. You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal Peor; for the LORD your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor. But you who held fast to the LORD your God *are* alive today, every one of you.

Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess. (Deut 4:1-5)

God also said, through John, at the end of the Bible:

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of

this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book (Rev 22: 18-19)

The Bible is timeless (Rev 22: 18-19) and is not the work of men. Paul wrote in his defense of the gospel and his assurance to the church that the gospel could be relied upon exclusively through faith:

But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal 1:11-12)

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. (Eph 3:1-7)

Peter, testifying as a first person eyewitness regarding the truth of the gospel of Jesus, wrote to the church regarding the truth of the Bible:

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. . . . For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed. . . . (2 Peter 1:12-19)

John the Baptist, testifying as a first person eyewitness regarding the presence of Jesus at the Jordan river, said:

Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and He remained upon Him. I did not know Him, but He who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘Upon whom you see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’ And I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God. (John 1:29, 32-34. Cf., John 3)

The author of the Bible is the Holy Spirit. The Bible, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was written through the hands of men. It was written over a period of 1500 years (from 1400 B.C. beginning with Moses and ending in 90 A.D. with John) in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) spanning over multiple generations of empires and kingdoms. The Bible says regarding its origin: “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets” (Heb 1:1) the “gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets [resulted] in the Holy Scriptures” (Rom 1:1). In explaining the gospel, Peter wrote as

an apostle of Jesus Christ . . . in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ... (1 Peter 1:1)

...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke *as they were* moved by the Holy Spirit. (1 Peter 1:21)²

Paul wrote:

But we speak the wisdom of God . . . which none of the rulers of this age knew . . . [For] eyes have not seen, nor ears heard, nor entered into the hearts of man, the things God has prepared for those who love Him. But *God has revealed them to us through His Spirit [for] no one knows the things of God except [by] the Spirit of God.* Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which *the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.*(1 Cor 2:7-8, 10-13, emphasis added)³

² Compare 2 Samuel 23:22 (“The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue.”), Jer 1:7, 9 (“And whatever I command you, you shall speak. . . . Then the Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: “Behold, I have put My words in your mouth.”), Exodus 4:14-15 (“He said . . . And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what you shall do.), Isaiah 51:16 (“And I have put My words in your mouth.), and Deut 18:18 (“I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.”)

³ Cf., 1 Corinthians 14:37 “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.” The writings of Paul are considered equal with the Scriptures; “as also our beloved brother Paul . . . as also in all his epistles . . . which untaught and unstable people twist . . . as they do also the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15-16).

For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (1 Cor 1:17-18)

Paul wrote that he being “an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)” (Gal 1:1) was sent to bring the word of God to both the Gentiles and the Jews (Acts 9:10-17), and that word is not open to change, not even by himself.⁴ Paul wrote:

But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:8-9)

I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught *it*, but *it came* through the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal 1:11-12)

Now *concerning* the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie. (Gal 1: 20)

The Holy Spirit, the hand and spirit of God, made clear to the writers of Scripture what was from *him* and what was not. As Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, “Now to the married I command, *yet* not I but the Lord . . . But to the rest I, not the Lord, say . . .” (1 Cor 7: 10, 12). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God who brings perfect wisdom and understanding⁵ as well as

⁴ “Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision . . . ‘Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel.’ . . . And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.’” Acts 9:10, 15, 17.

⁵ For example see the story of David and the temple of God (1 Chron 28:12). David, upon giving his son Solomon the plans for the building, said “the plans for all that he had by the Spirit” were so perfect as to the measurements and specifications of “the temple, when it was being built, was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that no hammer or chisel *or* any iron tool was heard in the temple while it was being built” (1 Kings 6:7). On the power of God to bring wisdom and understanding to men, it is written of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, “*God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature*

testifies of the truth of God. For those who accept salvation through Jesus, the Holy Spirit “makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:27) and the knowledge provided by the Spirit makes up for the human “weaknesses” and ignorance of those He works through. Paul, the other apostles, and the prophets before them understood what words were and were not of the Lord (2 Peter 3:15-16) and that provides the consistency and authenticity of the Bible.

The Scriptures, the Bible, are “revealed by the Spirit to his Holy apostles and prophets” (Eph 3:5). Nothing God wanted in the Bible was lost, because the apostles and before them the prophets had a helper, of whom Jesus said, is “the Spirit of truth . . . the Holy Spirit . . . [and] he will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:16-17, 26).⁶ As Jeremiah wrote, “The Lord put forth His hand and touched my mouth and the Lord said to me ‘Behold I have put My words in your mouth’” (Jer 1:9). For “you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall witness . . . to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The writings of the apostles, in aggregate, under the leading of the Holy Spirit became the New Testament which when matched with the writings of Moses and the prophets forms *The Bible*.

HERMENEUTIC PRINCIPLES AND UNDERSTANDING THE AUTHENTICITY OF THE BIBLE

1. The Bible is the Product of the Holy Spirit: God Works in Affairs of Men

As to the historically correct observation men decided what Scriptures would and would not be included in the Bible, they were all aware of the Scripture, “you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor

and wisdom . . . [and] the king interviewed them, and among them all none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah [Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego]; therefore they served before the king. And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.” (Dan 1:17, 19-20).

⁶ John 14:16-17, 26 See also Acts 1:4, 8. See the manifestation of this promise in Acts 2:3-4 (“Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.”)

to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith” (1 Tim 1:3-4). They also knew the warning of teaching false doctrine to believers, for as Jesus admonished, “whoever causes one of these little ones who believes in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea . . . woe to that man by whom the offense comes!” (Matt 18:6-7).⁷ The point being that when the books of the Bible were compiled, the goal was to select the true writings from false traditions and other writings which occurred after the rise of Christianity. The Holy Spirit worked through the decisions of men to make sure the selections were correct. The problem of separating the wheat from the chaff is not new, for as discussed in First and Corinthians, Galatians, and Second Peter, the problem of false teaching and apostates were present in the days of Peter and Paul. In the days of Jesus, he himself warned of false teaching and that it would exist next to true teaching and in the order of time the truth would be separated from false teachings. This is the meaning of the parable of the wheat and the tares.

So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn.”’

He answered and said to them: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked *one*. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age. The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. (Matt 13:27-30, 37-41)

⁷ See also Galatians 1:8-9 (false teachings of God brings a curse) and Deuteronomy 18:20 “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.”

Although the modern construction of the Bible as we have it today is reflective of the ecclesiological desires of the politics of King James (1611) and before him the politics of the Roman Emperor; nonetheless the Bible is authentic because it is the result of the Holy Spirit working in the affairs of men to secure the result He desired. The proof that the selection of the various Scriptures available during the assemblage of the Bible is correct and it is as the Holy Spirit required it to be, lay in the consistency of the Bible from Genesis through Revelation. The authenticity of the Bible is in the objective hermeneutical examination of what was excluded in toto and what was included in toto.

The authenticity of the Bible is found in the consistency of stories and principles of the Bible which is written over 1500 years. In other words, its authenticity is in the commonality among the stories of the Bible in relation to God and His relationship with mankind and how He acts within the affairs of men to secure His purposes. As God told Elijah that He had seven thousand men who would serve Him in the face of an evil king (1 Kings 19:18). The Scriptures make clear that the Holy Spirit works in the hearts, affairs, and politics of men to get the result on earth that He desires. Consider some other famous examples: God used the treachery of Joseph's brothers to make him Chief Minister over Egypt to rescue the Jews from famine (Gen 37, 39-45); God used a famine and the tragedy of the deaths of Naomi's husband and two sons to put a Moabite woman in the maternal line of David, Solomon and Jesus (Ruth); God used the weakness of King Saul to give David the opportunity to destroy Goliath and later elevate him to the throne of Israel (1 Samuel 16-17); God used the arrogance of a drunk king and the assassination conspiracy towards the same King to elevate Esther to the position of Queen and Mordecai to Prime Minister of the Persian empire resulting in the rescue of the Jewish people from the holocaust plans of Haman (Esther); God used the arrogance of King Nebuchadnezzar and the statue of himself to elevate Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego to high administrative office over his kingdom in Babylon (Daniel 3); God used the treachery and politics of the royal court of King Darius to elevate Daniel over all of the governors of Persia (Daniel 6); and God used the criminal justice system of Rome to make sure that of all the possible condemned criminals in Judea, the one next to Jesus would use his dying breath to testify that Jesus was crucified unjustly (Luke 23: 41-42).

The book of Acts is replete with stories of God working through men to achieve His objectives. For example, God sent Ananias to Paul to free him from blindness and baptize him so that Paul could bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to both Gentiles and the Jews (Acts 9:10, 15, 17); God sent an angel to send Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-40); God sent Peter to the home of Cornelius, after telling Cornelius to send for Peter, to prove to the Jews that the Gentiles can receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 10); and God used the plots of Jewish mobs and assassins in Jerusalem, and the Roman criminal justice system to get Paul to Rome (Acts 22-23, 23:11, 25:9-12, 26:30-32). These examples, and others, give meaning to the observation of Paul, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

As King Solomon observed, “The king’s heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *like* the rivers of water; He turns it wherever He wishes” (Prov 21:1). As Joseph proclaimed to his brothers who sold him into slavery, “you planned evil against me, *but* God planned it for good, in order to do this—to keep many people alive—as *it is* today” (Gen 50:20 LEB). As in the book of Esther it was argued to Queen Esther, herself a Jew, regarding the plans of Haman to cause a holocaust of the Jews, that the Lord allowed “you [to] have come to a royal position for a time such as this” (Esther 4:14, LEB). As the Holy Spirit worked through the politics and treachery around the lives of David, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-Nego, Joseph, and Queen Esther to achieve his desired end, the Holy Spirit worked through the politics and decisions of the men who constructed the Bible to make sure the right decisions were made, that myths and fables which created falsehoods were not included, and only those doctrines that fostered the administration of faith remained. As reflected in 1 John, the anointing of the Holy Spirit brings knowledge (1 John 2:20) and “the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you [and] teaches you concerning all things [that are] true, and is not a lie” (1 John 2: 27). When the Bible was constructed, the Holy Spirit made sure through the works of men, any stories or writings (2 Peter 1:16-18) that did not reflect that Jesus was the Christ were seen as not authentic and were not included in the Bible.

With regard to understanding the resistance to the Bible, both as to its authenticity and that it is the actual word of God, the Bible itself explains

the resistance. When his disciples asked Jesus why he taught in parables, “He answered and said to them, ‘Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given’” (Matt 13:11). The giving of understanding comes from the Holy Spirit through the desire to understand. As Jesus said to Peter, “Blessed [happy, spiritually secure, favored by God] are you, Simon son of Jonah, because flesh and blood (mortal man) did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven” (Matt 16:17 AMP). The Bible makes sense as the word of God through the decision to want it to make sense. That desire provides room for the Holy Spirit to open the understanding of the reader. The wisdom of the Bible will be magnified upon acceptance of its truths and the rejection of the truths of the Bible will magnify ignorance to its truths. It’s a choice. The truth of the Bible is eternally settled without repentance (Rom 11:29) or change (Heb13:8) but the understanding the Bible comes through a choice to seek its truths and gain its understanding.

It is God’s intent for all to understand him through the Bible, but the experience and physical manifestation of understanding him is the sole result of individual choice. As Jesus said to his disciples, “For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him” (Matt 13: 12). In other words, whoever has the desire for understanding, more understanding will be given; but whoever does not have desire, the little understanding he has will be of no utility. “The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One *is* understanding” (Prov 9:10; cf., Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7)

The wisdom and understanding of the Scriptures, as well as the authenticity, comes through the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote regarding the truths of the gospel,

God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor

can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:10-14).

Spiritual understanding of the Bible requires spiritual faith while simple cognitive understanding requires only an approach of scholarly reading. Cognitive reading without more allows for skepticism of the authenticity of the Bible or regulating it to the moral equivalence of Shakespeare. “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). “For since . . . the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe” (1 Cor 1:21).

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual *people* but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able *to receive it*, and even now you are still not able; for you are still carnal. For where *there are* envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men? (Heb 5:12)

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need *someone* to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes *only* of milk *is* unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil. (1 Cor 3:1-3)

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby . . . (1 Peter 2:1-2)

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*. But God has chosen the foolish things . . . the weak things . . . that no flesh should glory in His presence. (1 Cor 1:26-27, 29)

The flesh he refers to is the carnal wisdom and nature of mankind.⁸ When asked by religious leaders to show them a sign to prove himself, Jesus said, “A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no

⁸ Romans 8:1-8, Galatians 5:19, and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. As Paul wrote, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled” (2 Cor 10:3-6).

sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah” (Matt 16:4). The carnal mind is directed by the physical senses not faith, and as such, the carnal mind requires physical proof and cannot accept truth by faith. As Jesus said to the religious scholars of his day who possessed scholarly command of the Scriptures but did not honor its meaning and elevated secondary sources to be equal with the Scriptures themselves in order to give meaning to the Scriptures,

Rightly did Isaiah prophesy about you . . . As it is written [in Scripture], ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. . . Teaching the precepts of men as doctrines [giving their traditions equal weight with Scriptures].’ You disregard *and* neglect the commandment of God, and cling [faithfully] to the tradition of men You are experts at setting aside *and* nullifying the commandment of God in order to keep your [man-made] tradition *and* regulations (Mark 7:6-9 AMP).⁹

Consider the utility of scholars who know all Scripture and the history thereof, even to know and opine on the original Hebrew and the Greek, yet question its eternal authenticity. Of such God asks, “Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge” (Job 38:2). As Stephen said to a religious mob holding stones as an answer to his assertions that the Scriptures are true and were fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus:

You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers, who have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it. Acts 7:51-53)

As Jude wrote to the church that suffered from false teachers:

For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . But you, beloved, remember the words which were spoken before by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ: how they told you that there would be mockers in the last time who would walk according to their own ungodly lusts. These are sensual persons, who cause divisions, not having the Spirit. (Jude 4, 17)

As John warned regarding how to test teachers (“spirits”) regarding

⁹ Cf., Matthew 23 and Luke 13 (Woe to the Scribes and Pharisees) and Acts 7 (Stephen’s Address).

Scripture and what they teach:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)

We [who teach God's word] are from God [energized by the Holy Spirit], and whoever knows God [through personal experience] listens to us [and has a deeper understanding of Him]. Whoever is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know [without any doubt] the spirit of truth [motivated by God] and the spirit of error [motivated by Satan]. (1 John 4:6, AMP)

As discussed below, a full understanding of the Bible, after objective and academic hermeneutical study, requires faith that it is from the Holy Spirit who provides understanding through the “comparing spiritual things with spiritual . . . because” the higher and deeper truths of the Bible “are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). As Paul observed:

For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor 1:22-25)

The foolishness of God begins, as it is written in the Psalms, with the observation “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps 14:1). Put simply, the truth of the Bible (“the message of the cross”) is supposed to be “foolishness to those who are perishing” because they view the Bible with a carnal mind (. . . and not with the Spirit of Truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him . . .) (John 14:17, emphasis added) and not with a mind led by or open to the Holy Spirit. As Paul wrote:

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God ordained before the ages for our glory . . . But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. . . . Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. . . . These things we also speak, not in words

which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know *them*, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor 2:6-14).

A mind led by the Holy Spirit is what the Bible refers to as discernment (Rom 12:2). Discernment is the ability, through the Holy Spirit, to recognize the meanings of the Bible beyond the mere historical text. It is to understand the *rhema* word of God which undergirds but begins with the *logos* word of God. The *logos* is what is written, the *rhema* is what it means and why.

2. The Full Understanding of the Bible, after Scholarly Review, Does Require a Spiritual Act of Faith

“But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6) and “whatever *is* not from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23). Admittedly, there is level of understanding of the Scriptures which requires what the Bible describes as a child-like acceptance (Matt 18:1-4), a faith and confidence, that the Bible is true and is from the Holy Spirit, the mouth of God (Rom 1:1-6, Heb 1:1-4; Acts 1:1-3; 2:1-4).

I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation [from His wrath and punishment] to everyone who believes [in Christ as Savior], to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed, both springing from faith and leading to faith [disclosed in a way that awakens more faith]. As it is written and forever remains written, ‘The just and upright shall live by faith.’ (Rom 1:16-17 AMP)

Accepting the authenticity of the Bible requires at a certain point, after academic study, simple faith¹⁰ the Bible is from God not from man (1 Cor 14:37). It requires faith that “the Scripture . . . which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David” (Acts 1:16) was fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As Jesus said, “search the Scriptures . . . which testify of Me” (John 5:39). A successful (full and complete) understanding of the Bible requires faith in God and the singular redeeming power of Jesus

¹⁰ “By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.” Hebrews 11:3. Cf., Luke 19:9, John 8:39, Romans 4:16, Galatians 3:9, and Galatians 3:7.

Christ, His Son,¹¹ who as the Son of Man (1 John 4:2) defeated the devil as a man so all mankind could have salvation (Col 2:13-15, Rom 6:8-10).

The authenticity and coherence of the New Testament is in the understanding of who Jesus was (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13) by his life, death (Gen 3:15), and resurrection (Luke 24:46-52; Rev 1:18).

3. *The Bible Can Be Supported by Modern Science and Logic*

Paul wrote that the Bible is foolishness to those who seek to apply earthly wisdom to the Bible *exclusively*. It is foolish to those who seek wisdom without God. Why did David write it is foolishness to say there is no God? Because “[e]ven the demons believe—and tremble” (James 2:19) at the knowledge and presence of God (Job 1:6). For “[t]he heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Ps 19:1). As God said to Job, “*who* shut in the sea with doors . . . I fixed my limit for it, and set bars and doors; When I said, ‘This far you may come, but no farther, and here your proud waves must stop!’” (Job 38:8, 10-11). David and Paul were asserting that existence itself, viewed honestly, proves there is a God. Consider how the science of biological chemistry confirms *his* handiwork. The Laminin protein, *a cross shaped structure*, is:

a glycoprotein localized specifically in basement membranes [and] has diverse biological activities which include stimulating adhesion, migration, growth, and differentiation of various cells . . . induces neurite outgrowth and . . . binds cells through cell surface receptors and interacts with other components of basement membranes. . . . *Laminin is one of the key extracellular matrix components which influence tissue development and function.*¹²

¹¹Twice, God Himself identified and claimed Jesus as His Son. First when Jesus was baptized (“When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”) Mat 3:16-17, Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22. CF., Matt 12:18. Secondly, when Jesus was on a mountain (“Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain apart by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. . . . And Elijah appeared to them with Moses, and they were talking with Jesus. . . . And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves.”) Mark 9: 2,4,7-8. CF., 2 Peter 1:16-18, Matt 16:16-17.

¹² Makoto Sasaki, Hynda K. Kleinman, Hans Huber S, Rainer Deutzmann

Laminin, the major glycoprotein component of basement membranes, is a potent *modulator of cell function*. The extensive list of its functions includes the ability to alter cell growth and motility, promote epithelial differentiation, modify leukocyte function, and stimulate neurite outgrowth. The common denominator of these functions is that they are initiated by the interaction of laminin with specific cell surface receptors. [The diversity in the structure of laminin itself, as well as an array of receptors, contribute to this multitude of laminin-regulated cell functions.¹³

Laminin is the protein which holds all other cells in the body together. As John wrote:

In the beginning [before all-time] was the Word (Christ), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God Himself. He was [continually existing] in the beginning [co-eternally] with God. All things were made and came into existence through Him; and without Him not even one thing was made that has come into being. In Him was life [and the power to bestow life], and the life was the Light of men. The Light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness did not understand it or overpower it or appropriate it or absorb it [and is unreceptive to it]. (John 1:1-5 AMP)

In Colossians Paul explains, “He Himself existed *and* is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. [His is the controlling, cohesive force of the universe]” (Col 1:17 AMP). This truth is reflected in one protein that modulates and holds every cell of the human body together. “For ever since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through His workmanship [all His creation, the wonderful things that He has made], so that they [who fail to believe and trust in Him] are without excuse *and* without defense” (Rom 1:20 AMP).

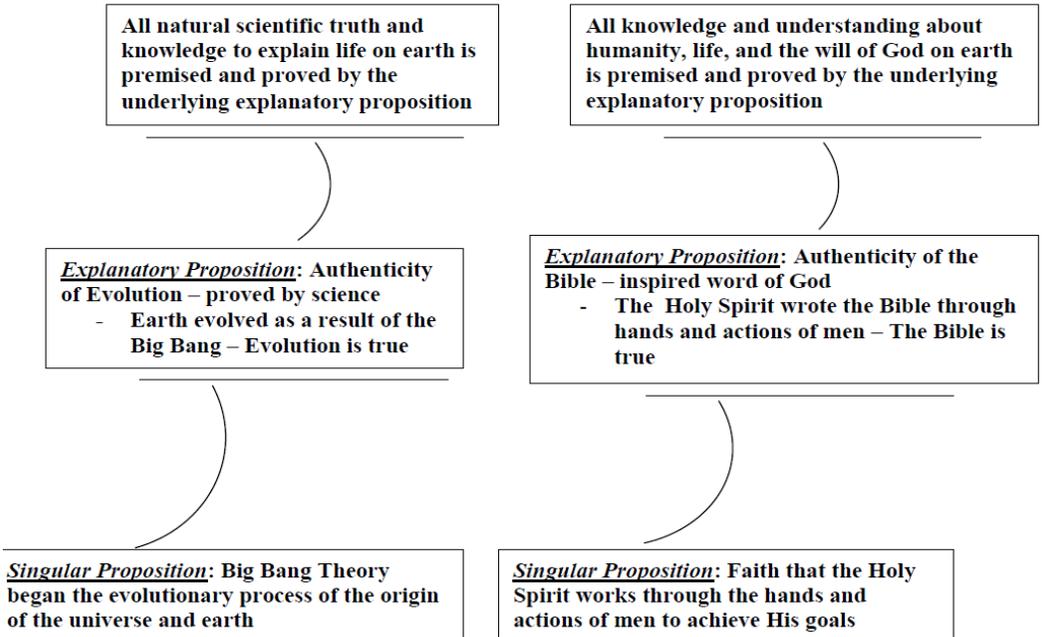
Consider the authenticity of the Bible in light of the assertions of the Big Bang theory and evolution. Both are supported by a logical syllogism. The Bible can be supported by the same logic. As an academic and scholarly matter, it is neither new nor novel to assert an explanatory proposition which requires acceptance of a singular proposition for that explanatory proposition to be accepted and then allow that explanatory proposition to support other scientific assertions. For example, evolution is an explanato-

and Yoshihiko Yamadall, “Laminin, a Multidomain Protein,” *The Journal of Biological Chemistry* 263 (1988), 16536, 16541. Emphasis Added.

¹³ Arthur M. Mercurio, “Laminin: multiple forms, multiple receptors” *Current Opinion in Cell Biology* 2 (1990): 845. Emphasis Added.

ry proposition which is used to prove almost everything in the natural sciences. In turn, evolution requires the acceptance of the singular proposition of the Big Bang theory to explain the formation of the universe.¹⁴

Comparison of Two Syllogisms of Asserted Truth



¹⁴ For example, it has been asserted that “the Big Bang theory has gained general acceptance The theory states that the expansion of the universe began at a finite time in the past, in a state of enormous density and pressure. As the universe grew older it cooled and various physical processes came into play which produced the complex world of stars and galaxies we see around us.” George Rhee, *Cosmic Dawn: The Search for the First Stars and Galaxies* (Springer, 2013), 37. “The path to the origin of life on Earth commenced with a dense, compact hot universe that with a Big Bang event expanded, forming elements heavier than hydrogen at a high temperature, followed by gradual cooling of the universe. At this point it is hypothesized that a singular force was present that separated into the four known forces: gravity, electro-magnetism, strong nuclear and weak nuclear.” J. T. Trevors, “The Big Bang, Superstring Theory and the origin of life on the Earth” 124 *Theories in Biosciences* 403, 403-404 (2006). See also, Andrew Parker, *In The Blink Of An Eye: How Vision Sparked The Big Bang Of Evolution* (2004) and P. V. Sukumaran, “Cambrian Explosion of Life: the *Big Bang* in Metazoan Evolution”, September *Resonance* 38-50. Sukumaran at 43 (emphasis in original).

The same syllogism can be used for the Bible. The explanatory proposition the Bible is the authentic, inspired written word of God (by analogy the explanatory proposition evolution) requires acceptance of the singular proposition the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible through the hands of men and that he works through the affairs of men to achieve his goals (by analogy the singular proposition of the Big Bang theory).

As shown by the chart above, just as the singular proposition of the Big Bang theory upholds the explanatory proposition of evolution which is the proposition used to uphold all other natural scientific truth and knowledge; faith in the fact the Holy Spirit works through the hands of men is the singular proposition that upholds the explanatory proposition that the Bible is the authentic and inspired word of God which is used to uphold all knowledge and understanding about life and the will of God.

4. The Bible is Applicable to the Rules of Hermeneutical Analysis

Although a complete understanding of the Bible *concludes* with spiritual acceptance that it is from the mouth of God, it does not have to *begin* with that acceptance. Luke, being a doctor and a student of the various letters, writings, and accounts which would become the New Testament, wrote to a friend:

Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. With this in mind, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, I too decided to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught. (Luke 1:1-4 NIV)

The Gospel of Luke is important in the validity of the Bible because he summarizes and details the stories of what would become the New Testament after serious investigation of firsthand accounts as well as research of those stories to affirm those stories are congruent with the Old Testament.

Biblical understanding is based on the assertion that it is historically accurate. Secondary sources should support interpretation of the Bible not define it. This classical principle of biblical interpretation is asserted by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI).¹⁵ As professor Nor-

¹⁵ This is known as the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, originally

man L. Geisler explains, the ICBI document spoke favorably of “taking account of its literary forms and devices” in interpreting the Bible (CSBI, Article XVIII), it made two important distinction: First, such genre should not be used to “dehistoricize” biblical narratives. Indeed, they declared at the end of their summit: “We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claim to authorship” (CSBI, article XVIII, emphasis added in these citations).

Second, the genre the ICBI framers spoke of was internal to the Bible (like, parables, poetry, and symbols), not external. Indeed, they insisted the “Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis . . . and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture.” Indeed, they said emphatically, “We deny that generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual” (Article XIII). The official ICBI commentary on this article declares “The denial is directed at an illegitimate use of genre criticism by some who deny the truth of passages which are presented as factual.” It adds, “Some, for instance, take Adam to be a myth, whereas in Scripture he is presented as a real person. Others take Jonah to be an allegory when he is presented as a historical person and so referred to by Christ (Mt. 12:40-42). This denial is an appropriate and timely warning not to use genre criticism as a cloak for rejecting the truth of Scripture” (CCSBI, Article XIII). ICBI did refer to the legitimate use of literary forms in understanding of genre in the interpretation of a text (CSBI, Article XVIII). Nonetheless, it opposed the misuse of genre to deny the historicity of biblical narratives or in allowing contradictions.¹⁶

The assumption the Bible is historically accurate and is to be taken literally, meaning the words in the Bible have a meaning asserted by the writer, is centuries old; dating back to the third century.¹⁷ The abandonment of “the old way”¹⁸ of reading the Bible, writes Donald Williams, in which its

published as “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy,” *JETS* 21 (1978): 289-296. <http://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI.shtml>

¹⁶ Norman L Geisler, “Defining Biblical Inerrancy: Unmuddying the waters” *Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics* 9 (2016): 11-40; 33-34

¹⁷ Ibid, 11-12.

¹⁸ Donald T. Williams, “Discerning the Times: Why we Lost the Culture

meaning is not derived from the author is the belief that “readers *create* meaning *in*, rather than *receiving* it *from*, the text.”¹⁹ In other words, not believing the Bible is from the Holy Spirit and the meaning of the Bible is derived from what he wants the words to mean – the Bible becomes whatever the reader wants it to mean. Utilizing this “epistemological skepticism of Post-Modern hermeneutics” approach, Williams explains, “Readers, not authors, are the source of meaning. Authors have no authority.”²⁰ The Bible has a completely different utility if the Holy Spirit’s authorship has no authority as to meaning or is disputed in the first place.

The acceptance of the Bible as the Word of God does not prohibit the application of academic and scholarly techniques to test its veracity and utility, as the reaction of the scholars of Berea to the teachings of Paul demonstrated. “They were entirely ready *and* accepted *and* welcomed the message [concerning the attainment through Christ of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God] with inclination of mind *and* eagerness, searching *and* examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. *Many of them therefore became believers*, together with not a few prominent Greeks” (Acts 17:11-12 AMP). The scholars of Berea retained an open mind and subjected the teaching of Paul to a known truth, the Scriptures, to determine if what he said was objectively accurate and in concordance with the Scriptures. The same method is used in understanding the Bible as a whole. As discussed above, through the scientific method of hermeneutics (the science of interpretation of written texts), the Scriptures are compared and defined by other Scriptures to (1) establish meaning, textual harmony, and context, (2) to test for consistency and confirmation, and (3) develop theological doctrine. As Paul wrote, “Study *and* be eager” in the word of God, “correctly analyzing *and* accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth” (2 Tim 2:15 AMP).

The authenticity of a document is determined by the consistency of its specific texts compared to other texts and the entirety of the document. The Bible has a logical construction in which the sixty-six books provide the reader with various contexts in understanding the relationship between

War, and How to Make a Comeback,” *Journal of the International Society of Christian Apologetics* 9 (2016):4-11.

¹⁹ Ibid, 6.

²⁰ Ibid.

mankind and God. The Old Testament broadly provides a history of the relationship between God and mankind and specifically his relationship with the Jewish people. The books of the Old Testament can be divided into five genres: (1) The Law - Genesis through Deuteronomy, (2) the historical accounts - Joshua through Esther, (3) poetry and wisdom - Job through the Song of Solomon, (4) the Major Prophets - Isaiah through Daniel, and (5) the Minor Prophets - Hosea through Malachi. A Christological hermeneutic approach to the Bible interprets these five genres as a reflection of the ultimate plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Old Testament provides a context for the New Testament. The New Testament is made up of (1) the four gospels, Matthew through John, (2) the history of the early Christian Church, Acts, (3) the Epistles, Romans through Jude and (4) the apocalypse, Revelation. The four gospels which are about the life and ministry of Jesus each have a different perspective and purpose. Matthew was written to the Jewish people to prove that Jesus was the Messiah that the Old Testament promised. Mark chronicles the ministry of Jesus. Luke provides a detailed chronological summary of the ministry and humanity of Jesus. John was written to show the divinity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God. All sixty-six books, although with different context and purpose, share the combined harmony of the presence of God in the history of mankind and the need for salvation from sin. In the Old Testament salvation came through obedience to the written Law of Moses and teachings of the Major and Minor Prophets. In the New Testament salvation came through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Through the application of Christological hermeneutics, all of the books of the Bible written over a period of 1500 years have a congruency and continuity that authenticates the Bible *in toto*.

The authenticity of the Bible is also proven by the universality of its basic principles. For example, Colossians asserts all truth regarding God is known by the nature of things itself without formal teaching. This truth was confirmed when Paul visited Greece. When Paul went to Athens, he noted they were religious for they were known to worship various gods. The Greeks were unschooled in the word of God – the Old Testament. Although the Greeks did not have the Old Testament, they had a sense of right and wrong which mirrored the Law of Moses as given to the Jews.

As Paul observed:

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing them. (Rom 2:14-15)

To the Jews God gave the law. To the Gentiles God gave an internal nature of knowing there was a God who ordered the universe with universal rules that defined right from wrong before the advent of government. This is what in western philosophical and legal tradition is called natural law.²¹ The end result of both the law and the internal nature was God giving both Jews and Gentiles a foundation that would allow both to accept the truth of the message of redemption through Jesus. This is confirmed by the writings of Isaiah, Hosea, and Paul.

I was sought by *those who* did not ask *for Me*; I was found by *those who* did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation *that* was not called by My name. (Isa 65:1)

And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people; For the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious. (Isa 1:10)

Surely you shall call a nation you do not know, and nations *who* do not know you shall run to you, Because of the LORD your God, And the Holy One of Israel; For He has glorified you. (Isa 55:5)

I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth. (Isa 49:6)

Then I will say to *those who were* not My people, ‘You *are* My people!’ And they shall say, ‘You *are* my God!’” (Hos 2:23)

²¹ Augusto Zimmermann, “The Christian foundations of the rule of law in the West: a legacy of liberty and resistance against tyranny” *Journal of Creation* 19 (2005): 67-73; Idem “The Darwinian roots of the Nazi legal system” *Journal of Creation* 22 (2008): 109-114; Idem “God, Locke and Montesquieu: Some Thoughts Concerning the Religious Foundations of Modern Constitutionalism” *The Western Australian Jurist* 1 (2010): 1-13; Arthur H. Garrison, “The Traditions and History of the Meaning of the Rule of Law” *Georgetown Journal of Law & Public Policy* 12 (2014): 565 and Idem, “The Rule of Law and the Rise of Control of Executive Power” *Texas Review of Law & Politics* 18 (2014): 304.

Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, 'It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.' (Acts 13:46)

When Paul visited Athens he saw an altar with the inscription, "to the unknown God", Paul said to them:

The One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you: God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. . . . And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord. . . for in Him we live and move and have our being . . . [W]e ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead. (Acts 17:23-24, 26-27,29-31)

Mankind is without excuse in the decision not to acknowledge God because the existence, operation, and nature of world, in addition to the resurrection of his Son, prove there is a God. The significance of acknowledging God is not the acknowledgement itself, but what the acknowledgement means. If there is a God, then who is he? How does he act and why? These questions lead to the question why did he create man and earth? Which leads to the question what is the nature of man, the creation of God, and what is the relationship between man and God? These questions lead to his Son Jesus.

The Bible reflects Jesus in the Old Testament and testifies of him directly in the New Testament. It is this hermeneutical contextual dynamic that authenticates the Bible. The Bible has a coherency and consistency through all sixty-six books written over thousands of years when viewed through the understanding the Bible is about God reconciling himself with man through his Son Jesus.

5. Bible Hermeneutical Understanding through the Lens of Jesus as the Son of God

Paul Timothy to “study *and* be eager” in the word of God, “correctly analyzing *and* accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth” (2 Tim 2:15 AMP). The Christological hermeneutic²² approach to interpretation of the Bible includes (1) a pre- and post- Jesus on the cross perspective, (2) understanding the distinction between the Old and New Testaments and (3) an understanding of purpose of both the Old and New Testaments in relation to God’s plan for relationship with mankind.

The Old and New Testament together explains that God sees individual human failure and establishes restoration for it. Both the Old and New Testaments share the redemption of mankind from sin; redemption in the Old Testament came through the Law of Moses and in the New it came through grace and mercy through Jesus (John 1:17). In Exodus when redemption, through the law, fell upon mankind, three thousand died (Exod 32:28). In the book of Acts when redemption, through grace after the resurrection of Jesus, fell upon mankind through the Holy Spirit, three thousand were added (Acts 2:41). This symmetry of meaning regarding both events is symbolically confirmed by the fact that both the period between the resurrection of Jesus and Pentecost (a New Testament story), and the period between Israel reaching Mount Sinai and Moses returning from the mountain with the two tablets and writings (an Old Testament story) is both fifty days.²³ Consider the symmetry of the Old and New Testaments regarding the Great Commandment. Deuteronomy says,

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. [Y]ou shall love your neighbor as yourself. (Deut 6:4-5)

Affirming the Great Commandment (Luke 10:27-28, Matt 22:35-40, and Mark 12:28-31), Jesus said on the night of His betrayal, “A new command-

²² For additional discussion see, Steven B. Cowan, “Is the Bible the Word of God?” pages 429-463 in *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013).

²³ Joseph A Fitzmyer, “The Ascension of Christ and Pentecost” *Theological Studies* 45 (1984): 428.

ment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another” (John 13:34). Both the Old and New Testaments share the desire of God for mankind: peace and love towards each other.

The meaning and promises of the Old Testament are manifested in the New Testament. As it is written in the New Testament regarding the stories in the Old Testament, “Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Cor 10:11). “For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4). The Old Testament is the foreshadowing of the promises and nature of God which are fulfilled in the New Testament. For example, see how the writings of Isaiah are given full context by the writings of Peter regarding the significance of Jesus on the cross, the dividing line in the Bible between the types of relationships God has with mankind. The cross represents Jesus being the perfect sacrifice for man and the atonement for sin. Isaiah wrote:

Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. But He *was* wounded for our transgressions, *He was* bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace *was* upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (Isa 53: 4-5)

And Peter wrote:

. . . . because Christ also suffered for us . . . who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2: 21, 24)

John wrote:

Jesus answered and said to him “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil

hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God.” (John 3:10, 16-21)

The condemnation of man is not for individual sin, but the individual rejection of Jesus who atoned for all sin in order to reconcile the relationship between man and God. The correct interpretation of the Scriptures involves understanding the distinction between the relationship between man and God under the law (pre-cross)²⁴ and then under grace (post-cross).²⁵ The cross gave God legal authority to exercise justice over the law through mercy and grace.²⁶ The pre-post cross interpretation is reflected in how mankind reacts to God and how he relates to mankind. Consider when in Exodus when God spoke from the mountain and gave the Ten Commandments:

Now all the people witnessed the thunderings, the lightning flash-

²⁴ After the book of Exodus, the relationship between God and mankind, based on grace alone, did not return until coming of Jesus and his resurrection (“For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ, John 1:17). Compare this to Exodus 32:28 (God’s law falls on the heads of men); Acts 2:41 (when God’s spirit falls on the heads of men); Numbers 14:18 (“The LORD is longsuffering and abundant in mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation”); Exodus 20:5 (“For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me”). But in Acts 16:16-34 Paul simply says “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your household.” (Acts 16:31).

²⁵ The significance of the law vs. grace is shown by the treatment of the children of Israel after they were brought from Egypt. From the time of Exodus 12 (Passover) through the travel through the desert and arrival at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19) God provided for them and never punished them for any unbelief or act of disobedience. Grace abounded. But when the children of Israel, in pride, said to God that they were able to meet God’s commandments by their own abilities (Exodus 19:8), the law of requirements and death for failure to obey the law came between God and His people (“You shall set boundaries for the people. . . whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.” Paul explained the purpose of the Law in Galatians 3:19.

²⁶ For more discussion on biblical definitions of law and justice and the requirements of both, see Arthur H. Garrison, “Defining the Meaning and Purpose of Justice, Law, and Criminal Justice: A Hermeneutical Judeo-Christian Biblical Perspective” 55 *Journal of Catholic Legal Studies* (2016): 1-86.

es, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood afar off. Then they said to Moses, 'You speak with us, and we will hear; but let not God speak with us, lest we die.' And Moses said to the people, 'Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.' So the people stood afar off, but Moses drew near the thick darkness where God was. (Exodus 20:18-21)

In the story of the transfiguration reported in Matthew God again came down and spoke directly through a bright cloud and said:

'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!' And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, 'Arise, and do not be afraid.' (Matthew 17:5-6)

Consider the story of when a town saw Jesus condemn the evil spirit Legion and ordered them out of a man and into a herd of pigs and upon entering them the pigs panicked and drowned themselves in the sea. When the town saw this they only focused on Jesus as the "Son of the Most High God" and they were afraid. Because they were afraid "they began to plead with Him to depart from their region" (Mark 5:1-17). When John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, saw Jesus in His full glory as God, "I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, 'Do not be afraid'" (Rev 1:12-17). In the Old Testament there was no relief from the physical fear of the power of God and his voice, but under the New Testament, the touch of Jesus is all that was required to relieve men of the fear of power of God's presence.

The Christological hermeneutic approach also provides a context for the nature of sin and how God seeks to address it. Consider how post-cross interpretation of the Bible answers the following proposition: The Bible makes clear there is a hierarchy of sin in the eyes of God and some sins will prevent entrance into heaven.

There are five books in the New Testament which discuss sin before God. First, in 2 Corinthians Paul says, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God" (2 Cor 6:9-10).

Second, in Galatians it says, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh . . . Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:16, 19-21).

Third, in Romans the list continues, “all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents covenant breakers implacable, unmerciful” (Rom 1:29-31).

Fourth, in Ephesians we are told to put away, “lying . . . do not let the sun go down on your wrath . . . Let him who stole steal no longer . . . Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth . . . Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph 4:25-32).

Lastly, in 1 Timothy 1:8-10 Paul tells his protégé that, “we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine.” Paul concludes the matter when he wrote regarding the power of grace through faith in Jesus regarding the nature of sin:

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved). (Ephesians 2:1-5)

It is clear from these five lists no one is perfect and all sins are equal as being abominations before the face of a perfect God. As James explains, “For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all. For He who said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ also said, ‘Do not murder.’ Now if you do not commit adultery, but you do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law” (James 2:10-13). He admonishes that obedience to the law was an all or nothing proposition, “If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.” (James 2:8-9). The proposition that there is a hierarchy of sin is false when the proposition is assessed by comparing Scripture to Scripture within context. As reflected in the gospels it is written in the epistles that all are guilty under the law.

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.” But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evidentBut the Scripture has confined all under sin we were kept under guard by the law Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor (Gal 3:10-11; 22-25).

As Jesus said, “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Matt 5:28). According to Jesus, harsh words towards another, unjust dislikes of people or failure to settle unpaid debts are all sins before God (Matt 5:21-26).

The Bible makes clear the purpose of the Law is to prove that no one is perfect. “There is none righteous [none that meets God’s standard], not even one. . . . Now we know that . . . all the world may be held accountable to God [and subject to His judgment]. For no person will be justified [freed of guilt and declared righteous] in His sight by [trying to do] the works of the Law” (Rom 3:10; 19-20 AMP). In God’s economy and judgment of sin, God looks to the heart of person (1 Sam 16:17) and not to his actions alone. Because sin is a heart issue God told the children of Israel, “Now, therefore, says the Lord, ‘Turn to Me with all your heart . . . rend your heart, and not your garments’” (Joel 2:12-13).

The Bible makes clear no one can walk into heaven and stand in the face of God and say, “I sinned not before you all the days of my life, thus let me

in, I deserve it.” As John wrote of the vision of heaven that he received at Patmos, “But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Rev 21:27). All sins are equal before God at the gate of heaven because no sin, no matter how big or small we may think it is, is acceptable to enter heaven and thus all need the redemption of Jesus. It is this understanding that provides a consistent reading for all New Testament Scripture, including the dynamics and significance of sin. Jesus is the perfect and only door into heaven, “I AM THE LIVING GOD, the Way and the Truth and the Life; no man comes to my Father but by me alone” (John 14:6 ABPE). This also explains why Old Testament Scripture is based on redemption through obedience while the New Testament is based on redemption through faith. The New Testament, post cross, is God’s better answer for salvation and dealing with the sinful nature of mankind. No one can stand perfect before a perfect God and any imperfection will prevent entrance into heaven is the point of the lists. The Bible warns all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23) and in regard to sin, the Bible makes clear that God says, “And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).

The Christological hermeneutic approach makes clear Christianity is not about condemnation of sinners. Christianity, under the Bible, is about redemption and God seeking a way to deal with all sins not just special types of sins. When Jesus was confronted with a person who committed a sexual sin, he faced down a rock wielding religious mob and said, those of you without sin may cast the first stone and then he said to the target of the mobs arrogance your sins are forgiven you, go and sin no more (John 8:1-12). When another person of sexual immorality fell at his feet and cried for forgiveness with so much passion she did not utter a word; Jesus publically rebuked the arrogance of the condemning religious priest for all to hear and then said to the sinner at his feet, again for all to hear, – your sins which are many are forgiven (Luke 7:43-50). When Jesus was confronted with a group of friends who lowered their crippled companion through the roof for healing, he saw *their faith* and said to the crippled man – your sins are forgiven. When the religious priest said in their hearts this was blasphemy, Jesus said:

‘Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Rise up and walk”? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins’—He said to the man who was paralyzed, ‘I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.’ Immediately he rose up before them. (Luke 5:14-25).

In understanding sin, Jesus throughout the gospels was concerned with the sinner who begged mercy – and to them they received it – but to the arrogance of those who placed themselves above others who sinned by claiming holiness under the Law of Moses – for them Jesus said, Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! (Matt 23).

When Jesus was confronted with those “who trusted in themselves and were confident they were righteous [posing outwardly as upright and in right standing with God], and who viewed others with contempt” Jesus told them a parable of two men who entered a church and prayed before God. The first was a man who obeyed the Law and he “prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector’” but rather I obey the Law in tithes and fasting. The second man “standing at a distance, would not even raise his eyes toward heaven, but was striking his chest [in humility and repentance], saying, ‘God, be merciful and gracious to me, the [especially wicked] sinner [that I am]!’” And Jesus ended the parable saying, “I tell you, this man went to his home justified [forgiven of the guilt of sin and placed in right standing with God] rather than the other man; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself [forsaking self-righteous pride] will be exalted” (Luke 18:9-14 AMP) When Jesus told the famous story of the Great Samaritan, the backdrop to the telling of the story was when Jesus was confronted with a lawyer “wishing to justify himself” (Luke 10:29) for obeying the Great Commandment (Deut 6:4-5 and Lev 19:18).

As John wrote, Jesus himself said, “For I did not come to condemn the world, but to save the world” (John 12:47). When Satan demanded the soul of Peter because of his past sins and for what he knew Peter would do for the church of Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus, Jesus prayed for Peter and prophesied to him after he had sinned and repented he would be restored (Luke 22:32). Jesus prayed Peter’s faith would not fail as he knew Peter would. While both Peter and Judas both betrayed Jesus, Peter’s faith

in Jesus did not fail and he repented and was restored. When Judas knew he had betrayed innocent blood, he committed suicide because he did not have faith. He did not have the faith to believe Jesus would stand between him (and his sin) and God and leave him room to repent. Job prayed for a mediator who could stand between God and himself (Job 9:33; 16:21), and in the New Testament that prayer was answered in the person of Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). The Bible records, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23), and because of this the Bible also records, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). As Paul summarized:

The kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:4-7)²⁷

This is why salvation in the name of Jesus comes through a simple act. “That if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (Rom 10:9-10).

This Christological hermeneutic approach provides support for the conclusion that in the biblical Christian message there is no hierarchy of sin in which some sins are disqualifying while others are only bad judgment. The only sin that is “unpardonable” is the rejection of Jesus witnessed by the Holy Spirit. As is explained in Hebrews:

For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment. . . . Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy. . . . [W]orse punishment. . . will he [receive] who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood. . . a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. And again, ‘The Lord will judge His people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:26-31).

²⁷ Cf., Acts 4:12; Hebrews 2:17; 4:14-16; 12:2. According to Hebrews 7, Jesus is of the “order of Melchizedek.”

The context of the unpardonable sin in Matthew 12:31-32, Mark 3:28-29 and Luke 12:10 is the rejection of the truth of Jesus as the Son of God given by the Holy Spirit. All other sins can be forgiven because they are covered by the acceptance, belief, and faith in redemption through Jesus. But sin not covered by the grace and redemptive blood of Jesus has only one alternative, adjudication under the law of Moses and the vengeance of God. There are no multiple ways to reconciliation with God. As Jesus explained, the road to reconciliation with God is narrow because its exclusive, and all other roads lead to destruction (Matthew 7:13-14).

The biblical Christian message is all have sinned and justification before God does not occur through works and entrance into heaven is not a reward earned by human activity, it's a gift (Eph 2:8-9). It is a gift made available to mankind because the heart of God is one of love and reconciliation with mankind.

The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, Slow to anger and great in mercy. The Lord is good to all, And His tender mercies are over all His works. . . . The Lord upholds all who fall, And raises up all who are bowed down. . . . The Lord is near to all who call upon Him . . . He also will hear their cry and save them. (Ps 145:8, 15, 18-19)

CONCLUSION

The Bible can be considered true because it was written over 1500 years, in multiple languages, in multiple and separated locations, with one coherent theme. It's the coherence of the text that proves its authenticity. The Bible, subjected to the objective science of textual interpretation, maintains historical accuracy.

The authenticity of the Bible is also proven by the lives of those who died defending it. Those who defended what they saw and taught in the first century after the death and resurrection of Jesus all died for doing so, and the Scriptures and writings of their lives and testimony became the New Testament in the Bible. When Peter and John faced down the Sanhedrin, under pain of being beaten, and were commanded not to speak of Jesus "Peter and John answered and said to them, 'Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard'" (Acts 4:19-20). When Stephen, a deacon in the church of Jerusalem, was falsely accused of blas-

phemy before a religious council, he testified on the meaning of Scriptures dating back to Abraham and how they were fulfilled in Jesus. After telling the council the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures, he condemned their rejection of them (Acts 7:51).

After Stephen spoke he was dragged outside by a religious mob led by Saul, who later would become Paul and the writer of majority of the epistles of the New Testament, and was stoned to death. As Paul repentant for his actions would later write regarding the gospel he once persecuted,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘the just shall live by faith.’ (Rom 1:16-17)

The original twelve disciples and Paul and the generations who followed did not risk their lives and freedom and go to their deaths²⁸ in defense of religious fables.²⁹

Like evolution, the Bible is built on a singular proposition from which all other premises for explaining all creation and existence are premised. As evolution is not rejected because it is built on a singular proposition (the Big Bang theory) neither can the Bible be rejected for being supported by a singular proposition (the authorship of the Holy Spirit).

This tradition includes freedom of religion, the freedom to believe and the freedom to believe nothing. As the Supreme Court held in 1944:

[To] the question of the truth of the representations concerning respondent’s religious doctrines or beliefs should have been submitted to the jury . . . we do not agree that the truth or verity of respondents’ religious doctrines or beliefs should have been submitted to the jury. . . [T]he First Amendment precludes such a course . . . The First

²⁸ According to Christian tradition all of the disciples, the exception being John, were killed for proclaiming the birth, death, resurrection and deity of Jesus. See also Acts 12:1-2 (“Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.”) See also the story of Peter’s arrest and beating in Acts 5, Peter’s imprisonment and release by an angel of God in Acts 12, and Paul’s arrest and his multiple trials for sedition before Jewish mobs, the Sanhedrin, King Agrippa, Governor Felix, and being sent for his final trial in Rome (Acts 21:28 through Acts 26).

²⁹ “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16).

Amendment has a dual aspect. It not only forestalls compulsion by law of the acceptance of any creed or the practice of any form of worship, but also safeguards the free exercise of the chosen form of religion.

Thus, the Amendment embraces two concepts: the freedom to believe and freedom to act. The first is absolute but, in the nature of things, the second cannot be. Freedom of thought, which includes freedom of religious belief, is basic in a society of free men. It embraces the right to maintain theories of life and of death and of the hereafter which are rank heresy to followers of the orthodox faiths. Heresy trials are foreign to our Constitution. *Men may believe what they cannot prove.* They may not be put to the proof of their religious doctrines or beliefs. . . .

Many take their gospel from the New Testament. But it would hardly be supposed that they could be tried before a jury charged with the duty of determining whether those teachings contained false representations. The miracles of the New Testament, the Divinity of Christ, life after death, the power of prayer are deep in the religious convictions of many. If one could be sent to jail because a jury in a hostile environment found those teachings false, little indeed would be left of religious freedom. The Fathers of the Constitution . . . fashioned a charter of government which envisaged the widest possible toleration of conflicting views. Man's relation to his God was made no concern of the state. He was granted the right to worship as he pleased, and to answer to no man for the verity of his religious views. . . .

With man's relations to his maker and the obligations he may think they impose, and the manner in which an expression shall be made by him of his belief on those subjects, no interference can be permitted, provided always the laws of society, designed to secure its peace and prosperity, and the morals of its people, are not interfered with. So we conclude that *the District Court ruled properly when it withheld from the jury all questions concerning the truth or falsity of the religious beliefs or doctrines of respondents.*³⁰

Modern traditions of Christian faith establishes that the state has no authority to regulate or adjudicate the meaning of religious faith. Nor can issues of faith be litigated in criminal trials. That is why the trials of Stephen, Paul, Peter, and Silas and the later persecutions of Christians in the Roman colosseum could not occur under American law.

³⁰ *United States v Ballard*, 322 U.S. 78, 85-88 (1944) (internal quotation marks and citation omitted; emphasis added).

Finally, the authenticity of the Bible can be found in its historical acceptance and in the vehemence of its opposition. No other book is so hated by some and revered by so many. If the Bible had no power of absolute truth, the disputers of it would not be so committed in its opposition. If it were not true, who cares if people believe it? The Bible answers this question by saying of itself, its purpose is “for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5). “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12 KJV). The resistance to the Bible also lays in its asserted exclusivity in which it says, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

THREE HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF ROMANS 12 WORSHIP

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INTRODUCTION

In this article I will address three models of incarnational living which demonstrate the imagery of living sacrifice portrayed in Romans 12: the Order of Widows from the first three centuries of Christianity, the *Devotio Moderna* (or Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life) of the late medieval and early Reformation eras, and the modern Keswick movement which began in England in 1875 and continues to the present. These models, so worthy of our emulation, faithfully demonstrate incarnational living through personal surrender to God.

THE ORDER OF WIDOWS

An inscription from ancient Rome bears the words “To the matron Octavia, a widow of God.”¹ Indeed God proclaims himself “a father to the fatherless, a defender of widows” (Ps 68:5, NIV). God issues a curse upon those who abuse widows: “Cursed is anyone who withholds justice from the foreigner, the fatherless, or the widow” (Deut 27:19, NIV).² As Leonard Swidler notes, Jewish women during the early Christian era were grouped with slaves, children, and even animals and property in regulatory documents. In fact, their status was markedly lower than Greco-Roman women of their day, who were enjoying a gradual improvement of condi-

¹H. E. Fox, *Christian Inscriptions in Ancient Rome* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1920), 45.

²Charles C. Ryrie, *The Place of Women in the Church* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 81.

tions during this time.³ Jewish girls were typically betrothed by parental arrangement between the ages of twelve years and twelve and a half years, at which time the girl would become a woman with the option to refuse a marriage proposal.⁴ Such early marriage predisposed a Jewish woman to early widowhood with the possibility of no financial support.

Although non-Jewish women in imperial Rome may have fared slightly better than Jewish women, they were also at the mercy of a patriarchal society. When the Greco-Roman woman married, she remained a member of her father's household under a system called *patria potestas* and thereby retained any property she had acquired except for the dowry paid to her husband by her father or guardian.⁵ A Greco-Roman widow could only inherit property from her husband if he had left her a legacy, and it could not exceed the amount left to his heir (adopted or born child).⁶ Augustus legislated that a childless widow between the ages of 20 and 50, with a deceased husband between the ages of 25 and 60, could only inherit a tenth of her husband's property.⁷ Because of the imperial need for a constant supply of soldiers, Roman legislation required childless widows between 20 and 50 years of age to remarry within two years of their husbands' deaths.⁸ Older widows, however, could find themselves in dire financial situations with little or no inheritance or prospect for remarriage.

By the time of Christ, the Jews had implemented a relief system administered through the temple for widows and orphans.⁹ This system was probably the model for the relief program of the early Christian church. Acts 6 records a daily distribution of food (verse 1) and a dispute which arose between two groups of widows—the Hellenistic Jewish widows and the Hebraic Jewish widows—regarding a perceived inequality of distribution (verse 1). Seven men were then elected to attend to the duties of providing

³Leonard Swidler, *Women in Judaism: The Status of Women in Formative Judaism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1976), 118, 167.

⁴Swidler, *Status of Women*, 141.

⁵David C. Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, SBI Dissertation Series 71 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1981), 39.

⁶J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Roman Women: Their History and Habits* (London: The Bodley Head, 1962), 222.

⁷Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 222.

⁸Balsdon, *Roman Women*, 90, 177.

⁹Bonnie Bowman Thurston, *The Widows: A Women's Ministry in the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 29.

food for the widows (verse 5). The Acts 6 widows may well have been predecessors of the enrolled widows described in 1 Timothy 5:3-16, who were dependent upon the church for sustenance. From the text, it is apparent that limitations had become necessary in order to relieve the Ephesian church from undue financial obligation. Apparently, some families were neglecting their rightful duties in the care of parents and grandparents (verse 4), so Paul restricted eligibility for enrollment to real widows: (1) widows must really be in need (verse 3); (2) they must be over sixty years of age (verse 9); (3) they must have been faithful to their one and only husband (verse 9); and (4) they must have a reputation for good deeds such as child-rearing, hospitality and charitable acts (verse 10).

The text of 1 Timothy 5 provides some evidence this New Testament enrollment of widows may have been the first Order of Widows, an ecclesial but not monastic movement which flourished during the second and third centuries A.D. For example, the term *tima* (honor) in verse 3 can also mean pay or compensation, according to Bonnie Thurston; she cites Sirach 38:1 as evidence for such usage: "Honor [*tima*] the physician with the honor [*tima*is] due him."¹⁰ The mention of enrollment in verse 9 and of a first pledge in verse 12 could also indicate an already established order.¹¹ The pledge would have been a vow of chastity, which was expected of widows enrolled in the relief program. Whether or not the widows in I Timothy 5 are the first official Order of Widows, they exhibit the characteristics common in the Order: the real widow surrenders herself to God for service to others, puts her trust in God alone, and prays continually, seeking God's help.

Not only were social circumstances difficult for widows of the first three centuries, but for all Christians in general. As early as 64 A.D., Nero began to persecute the Christians, whom he blamed for the great fire in Rome on July 19 of that year.¹² Sporadic persecutions continued under Domitian (81-96 A.D.), Trajan (98-117 A.D.), Marcus Aurelius (161-180 A.D.), and Septimus Severus (193-211 A.D.).¹³ It seems likely that in this context, the widows' prayers were greatly valued and desired by the Church, an evaluation supported by writings of certain church fathers and a document of

¹⁰Thurston, *The Widows*, 44-45.

¹¹Thurston, *The Widows*, 44.

¹²W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 109.

¹³Thurston, *Widows*, 56-57.

church order from the first three centuries of Christianity, the *Didascalia Apostolorum*.¹⁴ These early sources provide rich insight into the duties and nature of the Order of Widows.

Of particular interest to our purposes in this chapter is a letter written by Polycarp to the Philippians around 155 A.D.:¹⁵

The widows likewise teach that they be sober as to what concerns the faith of the Lord; praying always for all men; being far from all detraction, evil speaking, false witness; from covetousness, and from all evil. Knowing that they are the altars of God, who sees all blemishes, and from whom nothing is hid; who searches out the very reasonings, and thoughts, and secrets of our hearts.¹⁶

According to Thurston, the word “sober” comes from a verb meaning “to be in one’s right mind” or “to think sensibly or seriously” (*sophroneo*);¹⁷ the same word which appears in Romans 12:3 in the context of living sacrifice imagery. It is apparent Polycarp had this imagery in mind when writing concerning the widows. According to Jean Laporte, “The comparison of widows to the altar of God reflects their dedication to God, their mission of prayer for all, and the necessity for them to avoid the defilement of external or internal sin.”¹⁸ What better imagery could describe these women who had totally committed themselves to God and to their communities of believers?

The third century was when “the widows reached their highest official position in the hierarchy of the church,” according to Thurston.¹⁹ Patristic evidence seems to concur with this evaluation. In his *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Tertullian rails against a bishop who has admitted a virgin of less than twenty years old into the Order of Widows. In this discourse, we can learn much about this Order at the beginning of the third century:

¹⁴*The Didascalia Apostolorum in English* (trans. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *Horae Semiticae* II; London: C. J. Clay and Sons, 1903).

¹⁵Mary Lawrence McKenna, *Women of the Church* (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1967), 50.

¹⁶Polycarp, *Epistle to the Philippians* (Hartford: Parsons & Hill, 1834), 94.

¹⁷Thurston, *Widows*, 68.

¹⁸Jean Laporte, *The Role of Women in Early Christianity* (New York, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1982) 60.

¹⁹Thurston, *Widows*, 79.

A virgin-widow! The more portentous indeed, that not even as a widow did she veil her head; denying herself either way; both as virgin, in that she is counted a widow, and as widow, in that she is styled a virgin. But the authority which licenses her sitting in that seat uncovered is the same which allows her to sit there as a virgin: a seat to which (besides the ‘sixty years’ not merely ‘single-husbanded’—that is, married women—are at length elected, but ‘mothers’ to boot, yes, and ‘educators of children;’ in order, forsooth, that their experimental training in all the affections may, on the one hand, have rendered them capable of readily aiding all others with counsel and comfort, and that, on the other, they may none the less have travelled down the whole course of probation whereby a female can be tested. So true is it, that on the ground of her position, nothing in the way of public honour is permitted to a virgin.²⁰

This passage indicates the widows were seated in a place of honor because they had proven themselves worthy through a lifelong commitment to God and others. They had reached the age of at least sixty years, had been the wife of one husband only, and had reared and educated children. They were now in a position to comfort and counsel others, and were to be honored above virgins. From this document, it appears the widows’ responsibilities had been extended beyond prayer to aspects of pastoral care within the church.

For further information regarding the duties of the third-century widows, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* proves helpful. A church order based on the earlier *Didache*²¹ and dating from the first decade of the third century, the *Didascalia Apostolorum* was probably written in northern Syria.²²

²⁰Tertullian, “On the Veiling of Virgins,” chapter 9, in *Fathers of the Third Century: Tertullian*, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe, Ante-Nicene Fathers 4, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York: Scribners, 1926), 33.

²¹*The Didache: Text, Translation, Analysis, and Commentary* (ed. Aaron Milavec; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2003).

²²Thurston, *Widows*, 96.

In examining chapters 14 and 15 of the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, we see the age for admission to the honored Order of Widows has now been lowered to fifty years:

Let widows then be appointed; she who is not less than fifty years of age and over, in order that by reason of her years she may be removed from the thought of having another husband. If you appoint one who is a girl to the place of a widow, and she doth not support her widowhood because of her youth, she will take a husband, and bring disgrace upon the glory of widowhood.²³

In this document, the bishop is instructed on how to administer material aid:

Therefore those who bring gifts are not to give to the widows with their own hands, but are to offer to thee on their behalf, as thou art well acquainted with those who are straitened, that thou mayest distribute to them like a good steward . . . and when thou distributest tell them the name of the giver, that they may pray for him by his name.²⁴

Chapter 15 of the *Apostolorum* states the behavioral requirements of widows and provides a glimpse into the duties of the third-century widow:

It is required, therefore, of every one who is a widow that she be humble, peaceful and quiet; and also that she be not wicked nor angry, nor a great talker, nor lift up her voice when she speaks, and that she have not a long tongue, nor love quarrels; and that when she sees or hears anything that is hateful, she be as though she saw and heard it not. Let the widows care for nothing else, but to pray for those who give, and for the whole Church.²⁵

The *Apostolorum* forbids widows to teach others except through basic testimonies to faith and righteousness for fear they will be discounted and mocked as mere old women who would aspire to teach on serious doctrinal matters:

When she is asked for an explanation by any one, let her not give an answer in haste, unless it be about righteousness alone, and about the faith of God, and let her send those who wish to be instructed to the authorities . . . for women were not appointed to teach, especially not a widow, but that they should make prayer and supplication to the Lord God.²⁶

²³*The Didascalia Apostolorum in English* (trans. Margaret Dunlop Gibson, *Horae Semiticae* No. 2; London: C. J. Clay, 1903), 70.

²⁴*The Didascalia Apostolorum*, 71.

²⁵*The Didascalia Apostolorum*, 72.

²⁶*The Didascalia Apostolorum*, 72.

Polycarp's image of the Altar of God appears again, but this time as a means to discourage the widows' own solicitation of material support from patrons:

But let the widow know that she is the Altar of God, and let her constantly sit in her house; let her not wander and gad about among the houses of believers in order to receive; for the Altar of God doth not wander and gad about anywhere, but remaineth in one place. . . . But the widow who wishes to please God sits within her house, and meditates in the Lord by day and by night, without ceasing, at all times offering prayer and supplication, praying purely before the Lord, and receiving whatsoever she asketh, because all her mind is set upon this, and her soul is not greedy to receive, nor is her desire great to make great expenses, nor doth her eye wander about to see and desire anything and impede her mind.²⁷

To her workload has been added that of spinner—an occupation which does not interfere with her office as stationary Altar of God but allows her to earn her keep:

Who sitteth in her house and worketh with wool and flax, that she may provide something for those who are straitened, or make return to others and not receive anything from them. . . .²⁸

In a passage of reproof to greedy widows, the *Didascalia* inadvertently provides evidence that the duties of widows of the third century included caring for the sick:

But thou, O widow who art without discipline, thou seest the widows thy companions, or they brethren, in sicknesses, and thou carest not to fast and pray for thy members, to put thy hand and to visit them; but thou makest thyself as if thou wert not in health, or as if thou wert not sufficient, and with others who are in sins or who have gone out from the Church, because they give much, thou art ready to go joyfully and to visit them.²⁹

According to Thurston, though the Order of Widows survived well into the period of imperial Christianity, it was steadily losing influence by the ascent of the office of deaconess, which would largely replace the widows in both duty and honor.³⁰ The strict limitations imposed on widows by the clergy and ecclesial orders and the thankless nature of their duties undoubtedly drove many of the widows to true self-surrender and dependence upon

²⁷*The Didascalia Apostolorum*, 74.

²⁸*The Didascalia Apostolorum*, 74.

²⁹*The Didascalia Apostolorum*, 75.

³⁰*The Didascalia Apostolorum*, 114.

God. Their lives of intercession for and service to others in the community were indeed representative of the incarnational living symbolized by the living sacrifice imagery of Romans 12. Within a context of personal, cultural, political, and social hardship, the Order of Widows provides an example worthy of our study and emulation as we interact sacrificially with one another as Christians and with unbelievers in our own twenty-first century context of personal, cultural, political, and social turmoil.

THE *DEVOTIO MODERNA*

Grace and peace in Christ. Honorable, wise, esteemed Lordships! It has come to my attention that some would force the Sisters and Brethren to give up their manner of life and their dress, and live hereafter according to the formula of the parish priest and of the pastor. . . . Since the Brethren and the Sisters, who were the first among you to receive the Gospel, lead upright lives and conduct an honorable and well-ordered community, and also teach and practice faithfully the true Word, it is my friendly wish that your Lordships will not permit them to experience unrest and disappointments in this matter, but that they be permitted to use clerical garb and practice ancient usages when these do not contravene the Gospel. For such monasteries and Brethren Houses please me beyond measure. And would to God that all monasteries were like these, for then would all parishes, cities, and lands be well served and advised.³¹

This quote from a letter written by Martin Luther on January 31, 1532, and addressed to the city council in Herford,³² reflects Luther's respect for and endorsement of the sacrificial work of the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life at Herford. Indeed, evidence indicates that the young Martin Luther himself may have been instructed by the Brethren of the Common Life in Magdeburg.³³

The *Devotio Moderna* (or Modern Devout) movement has its roots in the last quarter of the fourteenth century, a time of great political, ecclesial,

³¹Martin Luther, "Letter to City Council of Herford," as cited in William M. Landeen, "Martin Luther and the *Devotio Moderna* in Herford," *The Dawn of Modern Civilization* (ed. Kenneth A. Strand; Ann Arbor, Mich.: Ann Arbor Publishers, 1962), 155.

³²William M. Landeen. "Martin Luther's Intervention in Behalf of the Brethren of the Common Life in Herford," *AUSS* 22 (1984): 89-90.

³³R. R. Post, *The Modern Devotion: Confrontation with Reformation and Humanism* (Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought; Leiden: Brill, 1968), 628-629.

and social unrest. The plague, which erupted in the middle of the fourteenth century, had been periodically terrorizing the population of Europe. At the same time the Roman Church was engaged in a battle over who should be the rightful pope—a controversy which divided France and Italy and resulted in the reigns of two and, at one point, three simultaneous popes during the period from 1378 to 1423.³⁴ Into this caldron of turmoil, a man named Geerte Groote was born on October 16, 1340 in the city of Deventer of the bishopric of Utrecht in Holland.³⁵ Orphaned by the Black Death in 1350 at the age of 10, Groote was sent to live with his uncle, where he attended Latin grammar school until age 15 at the renowned collegiate chapter of St. Lebuinus in Deventer.³⁶ He was further educated in philosophy, theology, astronomy, medicine, canon law, Greek, Latin, and Hebrew at schools in Aachen, Paris, Cologne, and Prague.³⁷ As a professor of philosophy and theology in Cologne, and with two clergy stipends (from Aachen and Utrecht), he had “the means of leading a worldly life and enjoying all that goes with it,” according to Joseph Malaise.³⁸ At age 34 illness seems to have shaken Groote to the point that he had a change of heart³⁹ and he began a search for a way to practically live out the will of God in his life. After a period of five years of searching, three of which were spent at the Carthusian monastery in Monnikhuizen, he obtained a preaching license as a deacon in the diocese of Utrecht in 1379.⁴⁰ His preaching career was cut short by a general ban on lay preaching and his early death in 1384 from the plague.⁴¹

Groote’s abrupt change of heart generated a decision in 1374 to give his own house in Deventer as a home for destitute single women, keeping

³⁴J. P. Arthur, Preface to *The Founders of the New Devotion by Thomas à Kempis* (trans. J. P. Arthur; London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1905), xvii-xix.

³⁵John Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna, Basic Writings* (ed. John Farina; New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 36.

³⁶Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 36.

³⁷Joseph Malaise, *Preface to The Following of Christ* (ed. Joseph Malaise; New York: America Press, 1937), xi.

³⁸Malaise, *Preface to The Following of Christ.*, xii.

³⁹Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 37.

⁴⁰Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 37.

⁴¹Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 38.

only a few rooms for himself.⁴² This home became the first residence for the future Sisters of the Common Life. Groote's colleague Florens Radewijns was instrumental in founding the Brethren of the Common Life. After Groote's death in 1384, Radewijns became the leader of the Modern Devout until his death in 1400.⁴³ Eventually these individual houses spread throughout Holland, northern and southwestern Germany, and Belgium.⁴⁴ A third phase of the movement involved the building of a monastery, under the rule of St. Augustine, for Brothers of the Common Life; thus, the Windesheim Congregation of Canons Regular⁴⁵ was founded in 1387 with the approval of the Bishop of Utrecht.⁴⁶

Since the Brothers and Sisters of the Common Life did not depend upon the church for financial support, each member worked to help support the house in which he or she belonged. The brothers were typically copyists of medieval manuscripts, and the sisters were weavers; earnings were held in common in each home.⁴⁷ In addition, the brothers served as priests and confessors for the sisters' houses and mentors to community school boys⁴⁸ as well as local community preachers on Sunday and feast day afternoons.⁴⁹ No vows or dowries were required for admittance, but chastity was expected.⁵⁰ The members had a communal mindset toward spirituality unlike the cloistered-away mindset of the typical monastery. As Van Engen notes:

Sisters and Brothers lived in an intricate balance between apartness and interaction, interior examination and exterior example. They abandoned family and personal property to enter a communal spiritual life, while dwelling still in the middle of densely populated towns and reaching out to others in written texts, spoken exhortations, and personal guidance.⁵¹

⁴²R. R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 259.

⁴³R. R. Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 317.

⁴⁴Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 12.

⁴⁵Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 20.

⁴⁶William C. Creasy, Forward to *The Imitation of Christ by Thomas à Kempis: A New Reading of the 1441 Latin Autograph Manuscript* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1989), xlv.

⁴⁷Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 13-14.

⁴⁸Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 21, 31.

⁴⁹John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers of the Common Life: The Devotio Moderna and the World of the Latter Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2008), 281.

⁵⁰Post, *The Modern Devotion*, 262-263.

⁵¹John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers*, 267.

Groote, who was said to have had a “custom of offering himself up to God many times a day,”⁵² wrote in a letter to a troubled brother of the Modern Devout:

What more divine, what richer than to conform to the will of God? There is nothing in heaven above or hell below that is able to overthrow us if we deny our own will and commit ourselves entirely into the hands of God.⁵³

Such imagery of self-surrender pervades the literature of the Modern Devout, members of whom, according to John Van Engen, had a “remarkable drive to write. The Devout took extraordinary care in manuscript production as a way both to nourish the spirit and profit the house.”⁵⁴ Each brother and sister kept a personal spiritual portfolio called a *rapiarium*, which contained personal notes, hand-copied Scripture passages and spiritual readings, and other gleanings intended to further each person’s spiritual development.⁵⁵ An example of such writing exists in *The Imitation of Christ*, a book which originally constituted four separate manuscripts, the first of which appeared in 1424 and all four by 1427.⁵⁶ No author’s name appeared on the first manuscripts until 1447, when the name of Thomas à Kempis appears.⁵⁷ As William Creasy has noted, “...A high degree of probability is the best we can do: Thomas à Kempis probably [wrote] the *Imitation of Christ*.”⁵⁸

As a child, Thomas à Kempis lived and studied with the Brothers of the Common Life in Deventer, later entering a house of the Brothers in Zwolle.⁵⁹ His grave in Zwolle is inscribed with these words: “To the honor, not the memory, of Thomas à Kempis, whose name will endure longer than a monument.”⁶⁰ Indeed, the book for which he is so well-known has “undoubtedly proved the most influential devotional book in Western

⁵²Theodore R. Van Zijl, *Gerard Groote, Ascetic and Reformer (1340-1384): A Dissertation* (Studies in Medieval History NS 43; Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 328.

⁵³Geerte Groote, *Letter 66*, quoted in Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 88.

⁵⁴John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers*, 6.

⁵⁵John Van Engen, *Sisters and Brothers*, 278-279.

⁵⁶Creasy, *Imitation*, xxi.

⁵⁷Bernard Bangle, *Growing in His Image* (Wheaton, Ill.: Harold Shaw, 1983), 152.

⁵⁸Creasy, *Imitation*, xx-xxi.

⁵⁹Bangle, *Growing*, 154.

⁶⁰Bangle, *Growing*, 155.

Christian history,” according to John Van Engen, having endured in about 750 hand-written copies and about 3,000 printed editions since its appearance.⁶¹

References to self-surrender and self-sacrifice abound in the pages of the *Imitation of Christ*. A few examples will serve to illustrate this theme. In book 3, chapter 23, an excerpt places the following words in the voice of Jesus:

Jesus: ‘Strive, my friend, to do another’s will rather than your own; always prefer to have less than more, always seek the lower place and be submissive in all things, always wish and pray that God’s will may be entirely fulfilled in you, for you see, the person who does all this enters into a place of peace and rest.’⁶²

In book 3, chapter 37, another excerpt contains this dialogue between Jesus and a disciple:

Jesus: ‘My dear friend, abandon yourself, and you will find me. Give up your will and every title to yourself, and you will always come out ahead, for greater grace will be yours the moment you turn yourself over to me once and for all.’

Disciple: ‘Lord, how often shall I resign myself, and in what ways am I to abandon myself?’

Jesus: ‘Do so always and at all times, in small things as in great. I make no exceptions, but wish to find you stripped of everything. How else can we belong to each other unless you are stripped of all self-will, both inside and out? The sooner you do this the better, and the more completely and sincerely you do it, the more you will please me and the more you will gain.’⁶³

Book 4, chapter 8 contains this passage of self-surrender:

Jesus: ‘With my hands outstretched on the cross and my body naked, I freely offered myself to God the Father for your sins. Nothing was left in me that was not given to God. In the very same way—with all your strength and love—you too should willingly offer yourself to me each day ... as a pure and holy offering.’⁶⁴

⁶¹Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 8.

⁶²Creasy, *Imitation*, 81.

⁶³Creasy, *Imitation*, 96-97.

⁶⁴Creasy, *Imitation*, 142.

Book 4, chapter 15 contains this excerpt:

As soon as you yield yourself to God with your whole heart, not seeking this or that for your own pleasure or will but placing yourself entirely in his hands, you will find yourself quickly at one with God and at peace. Nothing will give you greater happiness or please you so much as being obedient to the divine will.⁶⁵

These excerpts illustrate the centrality of self-surrender in the life of the spiritual Christian and though they were written centuries ago, they still ring true to us today. We, too, have benefits to reap from this mindset of self-surrender. The genius of the Modern Devout was their willingness to balance personal attention to continuous self-sacrifice with a life of service to others in their communities and surrounding towns and cities. In this sense, they were truly living the incarnational lifestyle portrayed in Romans 12. This intention is poignantly summarized in the words of “A Customary for Brothers” of the Zwolle community, attributed to Dirk of Herxen (1410-1457):

Faithful people founded and endowed our house so that devout men, priests, and clerics might live in common, leading a modest life supported by the work of their own hands. . . . We seek in this way to offer God a pleasing and acceptable service, not only through our own upright way of life but also by the conversion and salvation of others whose hearts are moved to remorse by our warnings and example. True progress in the spiritual life requires purity of heart; lacking that, we strive in vain for perfection, which consists in love.⁶⁶

THE KESWICK CONVENTION

“In any given year, tens of thousands, possibly hundreds of thousands, of people meet somewhere in the world for a Keswick Convention,” write Charles Price and Ian Randall in a 125th anniversary memoir of Keswick.⁶⁷ Such meetings derive from one man’s desire for holy living; that man was Rev. T. D. Harford-Battersby, vicar of St. John’s Church in Keswick.

Since 1875, in the beautiful Lake District of England, an annual ecumenical convention has called Christians from across the world to come

⁶⁵Creasy, *Imitation*, 81, 153.

⁶⁶Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna*, 48.

⁶⁷Charles Price and Ian Randall, *Transforming Keswick* (Carlisle: OM Publishing, 2000), 11.

together to study and apply self-surrender in their personal lives and ministries. This convention is called the Keswick Convention after the small town in which it is held. In the words of Keswick historian Herbert Stevenson, the movement was born in the “afterglow of the Revival of 1857,” being “fanned into living flame by the missions of Moody and Sankey.”⁶⁸ Many clergy and devout laypersons in England were unsatisfied with their own personal experience of Christian living, and were seeking a way to progress more rapidly and effectively in the process of sanctification.

Steven Barabas traces the roots of this movement to the ideas of Walter Marshall, who published *Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* as early as 1692.⁶⁹ Marshall viewed holiness as “a free gift received by faith, an act of the mind and soul,” and presented it as the key that would enable the believer to “walk in love to the saints” and to “exercise forgiveness to [one’s] enemies.”⁷⁰ Another influential book circulating among devout British Christians in the second half of the nineteenth century was W. E. Boardman’s *The Higher Christian Life*, published in 1859.⁷¹ Boardman’s premise is summarized below:

But what shall we tell the young convert about the higher life? . . . Tell him simply to abide in Jesus. As he has received him, so to walk in him. Give himself to Jesus, soul, body and spirit. Commit the keeping of his soul to Jesus. Commit the purifying of his soul to Jesus. Commit all the affairs of life to Jesus. Cast all his cares upon Jesus. Take Jesus as all in all, and find all in him.⁷²

A third catalyst to the search for practical holiness in Britain at this time was the ministry of Pearsall and Hannah Whitall Smith, an American couple devoted to personal holiness.

⁶⁸Herbert F. Stevenson, ed., *Keswick’s Triumphant Voice* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1963), 13.

⁶⁹Steven Barabas, *So Great Salvation: The History and Message of the Keswick Convention* (Westwood, N. J.: Revell, 1957), 16.

⁷⁰Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1954), 224, 247. This book was originally published in 1692.

⁷¹Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 16.

⁷²W. E. Boardman, *The Higher Christian Life* (New York: Garland, 1984), 329. This book was originally published in 1858.

In *Holiness through Faith*, published in 1870, Pearsall Smith writes:

Take Jesus now for all that He presents Himself to you as able to do, yielding yourself without the smallest reservation a living sacrifice, made holy by the altar on which your thank-offering is laid. When you have done this, do not shrink from owning yourself among the holy brethren.⁷³

Hannah Whitall Smith's book, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, also calls Christians to a life of service through personal holiness:

And to this I would answer in short, that He bestows it [holiness] only upon the fully consecrated soul, and that it is to be received by faith. Consecration is the first thing. . . . In order for a lump of clay to be made into a beautiful vessel, it must be entirely abandoned to the potter, and must lie passive in his hands.⁷⁴

The impetus for Keswick began at Cambridge in 1874 during term time, according to Barabas, when a group of university men "found partial blessing in some meetings for consecration."⁷⁵ This group blossomed into several holiness conferences attended by academics, clergy, and aristocrats. The Broadlands meetings held in the summer of 1874 were followed by the Oxford Convention in late summer of 1874 and the Brighton Convention in the spring of 1875.⁷⁶ The soon-to-be founder of Keswick, Rev. T. D. Harford-Battersby, was in attendance at the Oxford Convention and experienced a quickening of his spirituality which he described as follows:

It was when I heard a dear brother clergyman speak of the faith of the nobleman whose son was healed that the truth flashed on my mind, and afterwards God enabled me to trust and make a full surrender.⁷⁷

Plans were made at the Brighton Convention by Canon Battersby and his Quaker friend, Robert Wilson, to hold a convention at Keswick where Battersby was vicar at St. John's. The first Keswick meeting was held on

⁷³Pearsall Smith, *Holiness through Faith*, in *The Devotional Writings of Robert Pearsall Smith and Hannah Whitall Smith* (New York: Garland, 1984), 63.

⁷⁴Hannah Whitall Smith, *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, in *The Devotional Writings of Robert Pearsall Smith and Hannah Whitall Smith* (New York: Garland, 1984), 43.

⁷⁵Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 19.

⁷⁶Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 19-21.

⁷⁷Thomas D. Harford-Battersby, *Memoir of T. D. Harford-Battersby* (London: Seeley, 1890), 160.

June 19, 1875 in a tent with an attendance of 300 to 400 people.⁷⁸ The meetings were heralded as “Union Meetings for the Promotion of Practical Holiness,” and Christians across all denominations were invited to attend.⁷⁹ From this modest beginning, the movement has flourished and remains active to the present.

According to William Combs, Keswick teaching centers on a “crisis act of dedication or total surrender that is spoken of in Romans 12:1-2.”⁸⁰ Writings and sermon transcriptions of speakers throughout the years provide ample witness to this emphasis. Barabas states, “Keswick teaches that the Bible is first of all a practical book, and that when it is taken seriously life is revolutionized.”⁸¹ Speakers place the act of surrender as a gateway to effective Christian ministry, whether it be as layperson, clergy or missionary. Barabas states that from the beginning, the Holy Spirit has been hailed as the Leader of the meetings, as the one “given by the Father as the Director of the affairs of the Church, [who] knows what is best for it.”⁸² In his message “What We Teach,” (1887), Rev. Dr. J. Elder Cumming, while refuting the possibility of sinless perfection in this present life, described a “blessed life of faith” as follows:

Hence I go on to say, positively, that one element of the new life to which the Christian has come, is the absolute surrender to God, so far as the soul knows, of everything. This is what is meant in Scripture by the words ‘yielding unto God’ which occur frequently (Rom. 6:13, 16, 19); by ‘presenting’ ourselves or our bodies to Him (Rom. 12:1; Col. 1:22); and by ‘submitting’ ourselves to Him (James 4:7; Heb. 12:9). The truth is that God searches out in our hearts impure and evil things of which we were ignorant, or careless, or afraid; brings us to conviction about them; and then comes the great crisis of holiness for the soul—whether we ‘yield’ to God, and depart from such things, for His sake.⁸³

In 1908, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan preached a sermon entitled “The Christian Conflict,” in which he defined surrender in relation to obedience

⁷⁸Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 25-26.

⁷⁹Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 25-26.

⁸⁰William W. Combs, “Romans 12:1-2 and the Doctrine of Sanctification,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 11 (2006): 7.

⁸¹Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 30.

⁸²Barabas, *So Great Salvation*, 37.

⁸³Herbert F. Stevenson, ed., *Keswick’s Triumphant Voice* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1963), 20.

as follows:

What is absolute surrender to Christ? I am not talking to the man outside, who has never yet come into relationship to Christ, but to the man and the woman who share His life. What does absolute surrender to Christ mean? It is not admiration. You may admire the perfect beauty of the glorious Lord, and yet never become like Him. Not patronage. But can there be such a thing? I am afraid there can be. I patronise Him when I speak of His glory in the pulpit, unless I answer my speech in my life of obedience. . . . What is it? Beloved, it is just surrender. . . . It is absolutely handing over of the life to the Christ.⁸⁴

In his 1918 sermon, “The Message of Keswick,” Bishop H. C. G. Moule also spoke of self-surrender as the means of incarnational living:

‘Holiness by faith:’ Christ our power for internal simplicity and cleansing, as He is received in submissive trust, as the soul trusts Him and entrusts itself to Him, so that He shall have His way, and do His work. . . . Would we know the Christ in us in His power? Would we find how gracious and how good is the overlordship: how it is slavery and yet liberty—slavery because we have given ourselves unreservedly to His domain, so far as we know; and liberty, because precisely this has set us free from the bondage of self-will and the dungeon of the selfish soul.⁸⁵

Keswick has remained true to its teaching regarding self-surrender in a life of holiness for service to God and others. Pastors, laypersons, and missionaries around the world have been inspired to offer themselves to God as living sacrifices. In 2000, Keswick reaffirmed its commitment to five purposes: (1) the careful exposition and application of Scripture for holy living; (2) the teaching of submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ in individual and corporate life; (3) the teaching of dependence upon the Holy Spirit for transformation; (4) a commitment to God’s mission in the world; and (5) the training of disciples in “godliness, service and sacrificial living.”⁸⁶ For 140 years this Christian movement has steadily presented the appeal of St. Paul in Romans 12:1-2 to Christians across the world in a call for incarnational living to carry out God’s mission in the world.

The Order of Widows, the *Devotio Moderna*, and the Keswick movement provide three historical models of incarnational living through self-surrender to God as described in Romans 12. May we as twenty-first

⁸⁴Stevenson, *Keswick’s Triumphant Voice*, 255-256.

⁸⁵Stevenson, *Keswick’s Triumphant Voice*, 42.

⁸⁶Price and Randall, *Transforming Keswick*, 265.

century followers of Christ emulate their example and serve our fellow believers and our communities through our own incarnational living as characterized by the self-sacrificial worship outlined in Romans 12.

MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

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Abstract: While the measurement of the faithfulness of a series of well-focused expository sermons can be readily assessed, it is more difficult to measure the effectiveness of such a series. While all preaching pastors accept by faith that Biblically and theologically faithful sermons are ultimately effective in accomplishing the purposes of God, is it possible to measure the actual resultant movement in the lives of individuals and congregations? The answer of this writer is an unequivocal “yes.” The research for this article is derived from the writer’s recent and successful Doctor of Ministry project, accomplished at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. The project quantified a specific congregation’s response through the preaching of a short series of seven expository sermons addressing the difficult doctrine of church discipline. Identical Likert scales comprised of thirty-nine statements were administered prior to and following the series establishing corporate baseline and subsequent movement. Measurements from the two Likert scales did indeed reflect a change of viewpoint by the congregation. Each sermon was followed by short public discussion which clarified aspects of the sermons for the hearers, and at least anecdotally recorded their responses to what they heard.

INTRODUCTION

The apostle Paul reminds all expository preachers everywhere “God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe;” “Christ crucified” being the content of who and what is preached (1 Cor. 1:21b, 23a).¹ And, while the public proclamation of Christ is not the sole means by which his saving work is communicated to humanity,

¹Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the New International Version of the Bible.

the preached Word of God appears to be the primary vehicle through which God communicates his person and accomplishes his purposes for all people in general and the church in particular. As the result, John Calvin expresses the commitment and confidence of all expository preachers when he writes: “I do not say that wherever the Word is preached there will be immediate fruit; but wherever it is received and has a fixed abode, *it shows its effectiveness* (italics added).”² Calvin is certainly correct in his claim.

But the question is, “Is it possible to objectively measure Calvin’s claim in relation to the effectiveness of the week in, week out preaching of expository sermons?” Based on this writer’s research for a recently completed Doctor of Ministry project, the answer is an unqualified “yes.”

The project, described below, examined the corporate response of one specific congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan to a short series of seven expository sermons addressing one specific facet of that congregation’s life; the preparedness and willingness of that congregation to practice church discipline as instituted by Christ himself if and when it became necessary to do so (Matthew 18:15-20). Given the parameters of length, this article will primarily address the matter of preaching. The subject of congregational church discipline will only be discussed in relation to the ministry of preaching.

DEFINITIONS

Expository Preaching

Since the project sought to measure the effectiveness of the preached Word of God, the research conducted addressed primarily the discipline of preaching. For the purposes of that research and this paper, the definition of expository preaching utilized is as follows: “Expository preaching is the communication of a Biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers.”³ This definition, offered by

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Vol. II, (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles: Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1024.

³ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1980), 20.

Haddon W. Robinson, calls attention to a given text's single, unifying concept, or "big idea" as he calls it.⁴ Further, the above definition emphasizes two essential ingredients of true biblical preaching; content and application. In relation to these two distinguishing marks of expository preaching, T. H. L. Parker asserts: "Expository preaching consists in the explanation and application of a passage of Scripture. Without explanation it is not expository; without application it is not preaching."⁵ To further define what is meant by preaching, both the project and this paper utilize the following restriction. Preaching is "the administration of the Word in the assembled congregation of Christ."⁶ Expository preaching, for the purposes of the project and this article, occurs primarily within and for the benefit of the local church.

It is evident both the Old and New Testaments place great emphasis on the activity of preaching. Noah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist and Jesus, and Paul are but a few examples of heralds of the almighty God who are called by him to declare his Word in a public context. Samplings of their sermons can be located in both Testaments. It should be noted those sermons recorded in either Testament are wide in their scope in terms of their intended audience. That is, the sermons reach beyond the local church.

For example, the sermons of Jeremiah are more covenantal in nature; they call Judah back to covenant faithfulness to YHWH. The preaching of John and Jesus tends to reflect "to the Jew first," though Jesus' preaching gains a wider hearing among Gentiles. The preaching of Noah also reaches to a wider audience as he anticipates the temporal judgment of God as realized in the flood. The preaching of Paul reflects an apologetic and evangelistic intent to both Jews and Gentiles as recorded in Acts. None are truly expository in nature, at least as defined above. But the more restricted definitions of Robinson and Anthony Hoekstra do find warrant in the New Testament in the document we know as To the Hebrews.

⁴ Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 33.

⁵ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1992), 79.

⁶ Anthony Hoekstra, cited by Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scripture: Preaching Historical Texts* (Toronto: Wedge, 1970), 7.

In terms of expository preaching, Albert Vanhoye writes concerning Hebrews: “From beginning (I, 1) to the end (13, 20-21) it belongs to the genre of preaching. In fact, it is the only example which we have in the New Testament of the text of a sermon which has been preserved in its entirety.”⁷ If the term “word of exhortation” (13:22; cf. Acts 13:15-41) is a technical term for the act of public proclamation, then the document known as Hebrews may itself be an example of expository preaching directed to a specific congregation for the express benefit of that congregation.

In general, the scope of the ministry of public proclamation is great, as is the rich biblical vocabulary used to convey the practice of preaching. For example, Gerhard Friedrich offers a list of thirty-three verbs employed in the New Testament to denote the activity of preaching.⁸ Despite this emphasis, Peter Adam helpfully reminds the reader: many other forms are reflected in the Bible and in contemporary Christian church life. It is important to grasp this point clearly, or we shall try to make preaching carry a load which it cannot bear; that is, the burden of doing all the Bible expects of every form of ministry of the Word.⁹

In light of this caution, David L. Larson offers a more expansive list of thirty-seven verbs used by the writers of the New Testament to express the diversity of modes used to communicate God’s Word, of which preaching is but one form.¹⁰ Carl B. Hoch identifies forty-one verbs used to communicate the good news in the New Testament.¹¹ Hoch writes: “They [the early believers] used every verbal means available to accomplish these goals:” that is, the goals of evangelism and edification.¹² So, while expository preaching is not the sole way the gospel is sown, it appears to play a

⁷ Albert Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1989), 3.

⁸ Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III, (ed. Gerhard Kittel; trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley: Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1965), 703.

⁹ Peter Adam, *Speaking God’s Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996), 59.

¹⁰ David L. Larson, *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues in Preaching Today*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 1998), 52-53.

¹¹ Carl B. Hoch, *All Things New: The Significance of Newness for Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1995), 229-31.

¹² Hoch, *All Things New: The Significance of Newness for Biblical Theology*, 231.

dominant role in shaping the community of believers.

Effectiveness

The *New Oxford American Dictionary* helpfully provides the following definition of effectiveness: “The degree to which something is successful in producing a desired or intended result (*italics added*).”¹³ In relation to intended outcomes and results, James W. Thompson has argued “ministry [of which preaching is an aspect] is participation in God’s work of transforming the community of faith until it is ‘blameless’ at the coming of Christ (*italics original*)”¹⁴ More specifically, Thompson writes: “Preaching is the central activity for creating a corporate consciousness,” a consciousness which reflects and aids its progressive transformation into the image and likeness of Christ.¹⁵ The preached Word is intended by the triune God to bring the congregation to an ever-increasing maturity until Christ returns and completes and finalizes the transformation for all eternity. Such a transformation clearly accomplishes the purpose of Christ, who intends his church ultimately to be “without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless” (Eph. 5:26-27). Christ’s purposes inform Paul’s own rationale for preaching: “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ” (Col. 1:28). Therefore, effective expository preaching accomplishes its aim as the hearers edge ever closer to reflecting the image of Christ in faith and practice.

Church Discipline

For the purposes of both the project and this article, congregational church discipline is defined as “the ministry of discipling a Christian brother or sister whose spiritual health and life are endangered by a particular act or attitude.”¹⁶ In this definition, Marlin Jeschke helpfully reminds the reader the purpose of church discipline is not primarily punitive in its intent. The intervention is best considered as corrective, restorative, and formative, since the relevant biblical instruction includes all three dimen-

¹³ Erin McKean, *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 540.

¹⁴ James W. Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry according to Paul*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2006), 19-20.

¹⁵ Thompson, *Pastoral Ministry according to Paul*, 158.

¹⁶ Marlin Jeschke, *Discipling in the Church*, 3rd ed., (Scottsdale, Penn: Herald, 1988), 17.

sions. While excommunication and expulsion from the church may be an outcome, it will occur only if the erring individual remains unrepentant. The value of Jeschke's definition is that it places church discipline under the more hopeful and constructive rubric of discipleship.

THE PROJECT: THE METHODOLOGY OF MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING

As earlier stated, the project sought to objectively measure the effect that a short, well-focused series of seven sermons might have on a specific congregation as it relates to one specific facet of that congregation's corporate experience. In this case, the corporate experience addressed is congregational church discipline. As such, the project sought to establish whether seven expository sermons addressing the difficult decision to confront an errant and at least initially unrepentant brother or sister would influence a congregation, or individual members of the congregation, to practice the rule of Christ in an effort to restore that one to fellowship with Christ and his church if and when it became necessary to do so.

The first phase of the project required the researcher to identify seven biblical texts that would provide the general framework which would in turn allow the specific topic of congregational church discipline to be placed into a proper theological and ecclesiological context. The choice to select seven passages was somewhat arbitrary but based on the following viewpoints.

First, current viewpoints in relation to the length of a series on a given subject vary, from "four to six weeks,"¹⁷ to "eight to twelve weeks,"¹⁸ to "a few months at a maximum."¹⁹ Various reasons are offered, but a thematic series of sermons addressing the practice of church discipline would be limited by the Biblical corpus in any case. So, seven Biblical texts were selected.

¹⁷ Andy Stanley and Lane Jones, *Communicating for a Change: Seven Keys to Irresistible Communication*, Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 2006), 196.

¹⁸ Tony Evans, "Preaching God's Names: An Interview with Tony Evans," *Preaching* 30, no.1:12-14 (2014): 12.

¹⁹ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1994), 59.

Second, in the context of professional counseling, Everett L. Worthington writes: “Much change occurs briefly.”²⁰ He offers: “Most modern psychotherapies last less than ten sessions, and virtually all last less than a half year.”²¹ Likewise, in the context of pastoral counseling, Jay E. Adams offers that a period of eight to twelve weeks of well-structured interaction will provide adequate time for an individual to experience lasting change in a specific behavior.²²

The seven biblical texts selected for the preaching series were Exodus 34:1-9; Hebrews 12:1-11; Ephesians 4:7-16; Matthew 18:15-20; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 2:5-11; and 1 Timothy 1:18-20. The texts were preached in this order. In brief, the contribution of each text to the whole is as follows:

- The character of God as both loving and holy.
- God cultivates his family image in his people by disciplining and training them, particularly in the quality of holiness.
- Holiness, and indeed any quality or characteristic, is best cultivated in the context of a particular, localized body of Christ.
- Congregational church discipline is a resource that Christ has given to his church as his instrument by which the training of his people is accomplished.
- Discipline is mandated for all believers whose practice reflects the work of the flesh.
- Church discipline, although perceived to be unloving and harsh, is indeed effective when exercised as intended.
- Even excommunication, when it becomes necessary, is intended by God to be remedial, even if restoration does not quickly occur.

These seven texts were chosen because, taken together, they locate the practice of church discipline in a wider framework that establishes its relationship to the beauty of the Triune God and his purposes and will for his people. Additionally, the seven texts, taken together, reframe the common perception concerning the practice of church discipline as something harsh and unkind, perhaps even antithetical to the love of Christ. Instead, they demonstrate church discipline is a function of love and familial care.

²⁰ Everett L. Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling: A Guide to Brief Therapy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), 23.

²¹ Everett L. Worthington, *Hope-Focused Marriage Counseling*, 22.

²² Jay E. Adams, *Shepherding God's Flock: A Handbook on Pastoral Ministry, Counseling and Leadership*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1975), 176-80.

Two weeks before the expository series began, participants, both voluntarily and anonymously, completed a Likert scale consisting of thirty-nine statements requiring one of the following six responses: strongly agree, agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, disagree, strongly disagree. Each possible response was assigned a numerical value of six, five, four, three, two, or one, respectively. Responses to each individual statement were totaled and averaged, thus assigning a corporate score for each statement. This, in turn, established the baseline for the congregation as a whole before the sermon series was preached. It also allowed the researcher to track individual change between the two scales. This survey also included two scenarios which asked participants to provide a longer written response.

The seven expository sermons were successively preached over eight Sundays. The one-week break reflects a pre-planned congregational event. Each individual sermon was followed by a twenty-minute conversation with the listeners asking a series of specific questions that were repeated each week, and which also provided the opportunity of participants to ask specific questions raised by their hearing of the particular sermon.

At the conclusion of the sermon series, each participant was asked to complete a second, identical Likert scale. This survey included the same thirty-nine statements in the same order with the same range of possible responses as the first. Again, responses were totaled by statement and averaged, thus providing both an individual and corporate score. This score allowed the researcher to objectively measure the change the sermon series evoked. Depending on how the statements were worded, positive change was measured by either an increase or decrease in the average. This, in turn, allowed the researcher to gain some sense of the effectiveness of the preached Word of God in the lives of the hearers over time.

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS ON THE LIKERT SCORING BY CATEGORY

In order to organize the data, the thirty-nine statements included in the final Likert scale were grouped into seven basic categories reflective of certain themes. For reporting purposes, the researcher began with what proved to be the most emotive category, namely relationship. A clear majority of participants have or had a family member, friend, or acquaintance

who no longer attended church as the result of the effects and trajectory of sin in that person's life. When asked if the situation was perceived to have been preventable or correctable with timely intervention, the majority responded affirmatively. Whether such intervention was attempted was not always known by the respondents. If some intervention was privately attempted, in no case did that intervention come to include the entire congregation in terms of hearing, exhorting, and, if necessary, excluding.

The second category of statements addressed the concept of the church, and the role the community of faith plays in the lives of the participants. There existed a very strong consensus that the local church plays an important role in the spiritual maturation of the believer. There also exists a very strong consensus that if church discipline is to be effective when utilized as a means of corrective discipleship, individuals must know that they are loved and valued in Christ by the local church before any such discipline is administered. The corollary, not specifically queried, is the one so disciplined must also love and value the body of which they are a part.

There was much less consensus in relation to how often sermons addressing some facet of ecclesiology were preached. The aggregate average following the pre-test was 3.92, while the aggregate score following the post-test actually dropped slightly to 3.62. That is, the respondents became slightly more certain sermons addressing corporate, congregational life were preached less often than sermons addressing the individual needs of believers. This was also reflected in the post-sermon discussions. For example, several participants had never been exposed to the reciprocal relationships expressed by the particularly Pauline use of ἀλλήλων and their attendant mutual responsibilities for care for one another in the body of Christ.

The third category of statements presented in the Likert scale addressed three common objections to the practice of church discipline: perception by those outside of the church, possible litigation, and pastoral confidentiality. In relation to the wider community's perceptions, participants were in strong agreement the behavior of professing believers does influence the response of unbelievers to Christ. Aggregate scores for both tests were identical: 5.46, indicating they either agreed or strongly agreed. Further, participants did not agree the practice of church discipline would deter un-

believers from visiting the church. Aggregate scores moved downward between the two Likert scales, from 2.54 to 2.38, thus indicating an increased comfort level regardless of the public perception of the practice.

In relation to possible litigation in the event of public discipline, the participants again demonstrated remarkable consistency. Aggregate scores remained constant at 3.00, though the individual scoring did reflect movement between the pre- and post-tests. Confidentiality was a concern for participants both before and after the sermon series. Almost all expressed they would, at least to some degree, feel betrayed if the church board and wider congregation were made aware of a significant, unresolved matter of sin in their lives.

The fourth category of statement presented in the Likert scale is the need for a written policy to guide the process of discipline if it became necessary. It was further expressed such a policy be prepared and ratified by the entire congregation before the need developed. A somewhat serendipitous outcome of the project is that such a policy was crafted and ratified by the church body.

The fifth category into which the Likert statements were placed was the Sunday sermon. These statements primarily addressed the awareness of the biblical teaching concerning church discipline as communicated by the sermonic text. The clear majority opined their understanding of the nature and purpose of church discipline has been primarily formed through sermons, and they felt prepared to explain the purpose of church discipline to someone else, if necessary. Scores rose for each statement following the sermon series. Further, the participants viewed or came to view discipline as a positive action as the result of the sermons they heard. Aggregate scores for this statement rose from 4.08 to 5.00. However, post-sermon discussion indicated in this latter area discipline was not always positively viewed as constructive by the younger participants, though the stance moderated as the series progressed.

The sixth category into which the Likert statements were placed was that of church discipline proper. Sixteen statements comprised this category. Most basically, participants came to view church discipline as a positive resource given by Christ to the church that, when properly exercised, is in the best spiritual interest of the one so disciplined. Post-test scores rose from 5.61 to 5.69 (Statement Nine). Participants also decided if they, as

individuals, were struggling with some specific sin, they would positively respond to their pastor's intervention.

Further, participants agreed church discipline is best reserved for biblical violations and not matters of preference unless one's penchant became a matter of contention within the congregation. And, participants agreed discipline should probably be confined normally to observable action and not to an attitude. And, in terms of observable action, participants tended to agree discipline should normally be exercised only in cases of sexual immorality. However, the aggregate score for this particular statement (Statement Twenty-seven) dropped somewhat following the second Likert scale, thus reflecting the view one's attitude in a given circumstance might also warrant some level of intervention.

One of the general objections to the practice of church discipline is that it may not work in terms of the reconciliation and restoration of an erring brother or sister in Christ. The aggregate post-test score reflected a non-pragmatic stance: the practice of church discipline is biblically correct regardless of its outcome in relation to the response of the one being corrected, even to the point of excommunication from the body. In terms of preparedness and willingness to actively participate in the process of church discipline if called on to do so, respondents expressed agreement they could and would do so. All respondents felt better prepared to do so following the sermon series.

In relation to the stated purpose of discipline as "always the reconciliation and restoration of the erring believer to both God and the church," the aggregate response dropped between the first and second Likert scale. This implies at least at some level both the glory of God and the well-being of the wider body were also considerations. The seventh and final category by which the Likert statements were considered was of a more generalized and theological nature. Statement Eleven asserted "Passing judgment on a member of the church seems diametrically opposed to the mercy and grace of God." Participants initially positioned themselves close to *somewhat disagree*, but following the sermon series moved closer to *disagree* (2.85 to 2.31).

Participants were next queried concerning the activity of God himself in the correction of his people as opposed to the activity of the church as his agent in such matters. The aggregate score for the first scale was 3.08, but dropped to 2.85 following the sermon series, reflecting an increased comfort with the concept of the church as proactive in matters of faith and practice. Participants also tightened their response to the statement discipline is best left to the Holy Spirit alone. Aggregate scores from the two scales were 2.08 and 1.92.

THREE SIGNIFICANT FINDINGS WHICH HELP ESTABLISH THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EXPOSITORY PREACHING AND ENCOURAGE ITS PRACTICE

The seven texts chosen for this project can certainly be characterized as hard sayings of Jesus contained within both Testaments. A hard saying may be described as a teaching difficult to understand due to the scarcity of information available to the reader. Genesis 6:1-8 is such a passage. A hard saying may also be one creates some level of difficulty because it appears to stand in contradiction with some other biblical instruction. Hebrews 6:1-8 and 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 provide an example. Last, a hard saying may be difficult because of the personal demand it places on the hearer. It asks more than the hearer can bear. Because of this, the practice of church discipline falls into the category of a hard saying. While the practice of church discipline can be easily understood and reconciled with all other biblical texts on a cognitive level, it continues to be a hard saying on the affective level. This is so because of the type of action it requires of individuals and congregations.

The project discussed above offers a way forward for both preaching pastors and congregations. The writer will offer three preaching directions suggested by the results of the study that can be extrapolated from the project and applied to a different congregation.

Preach the Hard Texts

First, preach the hard texts. One statement in particular may serve as the impetus to do so. Likert Statement Nineteen queried: “Sermons I have heard on the subject of church discipline have influenced me to view the practice as a positive action after I heard those sermons.” The congregational average score rose almost one entire point, from 4.08 to 5.00, and shifted the corporate response from “somewhat agree” to “agree.” Not only did the series of sermons provide biblical answers for pre-existing uncertainties concerning the exercise of church discipline,

the preached Word of God reduced the level of mental and emotive resistance to its practice, at least to some degree. This was evidenced by the congregation's subsequent decision to draft, refine, harmonize with its basic constitutional statement concerning discipline, and ratify a policy to guide the exercise of church discipline when if and when it becomes necessary. As such, the effect of the preached Word of God is to foster the willingness to act, which certainly reflects the volitional intent of God for his people.

In the estimation of this writer, one does well to conceive of the hard texts related to church discipline as preventative and formative as well as corrective in nature. Helpful here is the congregational response to Likert Statement Nine: "Church discipline, properly practiced, is always in the best spiritual interest of the individual so disciplined."

Aggregate scores again rose following the sermon series, from 5.61 to 5.69, nudging the response closer to a "strongly agree" position. For the researcher, subsuming the concept of discipline under the larger rubric of discipleship, as Jeschke proposes, reframes the topic and presents the subject of church discipline in a more positive and constructive manner than is normally done. While the final exclusion of an unrepentant individual may be the acceptable outcome of a disciplinary action, the greater purposes of reconciliation, restoration, and growth in Christlikeness are perceived to be beneficial to both the body of Christ and to the one so disciplined. In short, those biblical texts which specifically address the practice of church discipline no longer need to be viewed as texts of terror that seem only to serve the purposes of violating one's privacy, exposing one to shame and humiliation and passing harsh judgment on the individual so disciplined, followed by exclusion from the assembly. Rather, each text can be preached in the context of care for an errant brother or sister in Christ. Consequently, preaching the practice of church discipline becomes somewhat easier for a congregation to hear and respond more positively. This is particularly true in advance as preparatory to its actual use. Thus, the preacher is well advised to include the subject of discipline in his or her preaching schedule on a periodic basis.

One of the benefits of the project for this researcher has been the opportunity to preach the subject of church discipline in a wider context than often occurs. This is a demonstrable value of a short series addressing the subject of church discipline. Such a series allows the preacher to connect a range of relevant and interrelated theological dots.

The dots that can be connected include the nature of the Triune God as simultaneously holy and loving, and of his discipline as a function not only of his holiness

but also of his love. Closely related is the truth God will himself at times directly chasten his children but will at other times use a mediate means such as the local church. It has been demonstrated over a seven-week period that it is possible to develop a theology of discipline which will prepare and guide a congregation to exercise this form of care if and when it became necessary. It has also been beneficial to develop such a series at a more leisurely pace than is often permitted. That is, without the actual presence of a circumstance that may require intervention, particularly if which circumstance is already known by the congregation.

As it relates to preaching the difficult texts of the Old Testament, Elizabeth Achtemeier helpfully writes: “We are required to wrestle with these difficult texts until we can come to some peace with them. We are not to bring our views of God to the texts; rather, we are to let the texts shape our views of God and his workings.”²³ Presumably, this is also true of the preacher’s approach to the New Testament and its texts addressing church discipline. As several respondents suggested, some preachers fail to this, for whatever reasons. For example, Respondent Number Six offered in writing on the initial Likert scale “what I learned [about church discipline] wasn’t from sermons.” While discipline constitutes a hard teaching, reframing the conversation is possible and productive in forming the congregational culture.

It is helpful for the preaching pastor to recall Aristotle’s rhetorical insight concerning the significance of the preacher’s ethos as it relates to preaching the hard texts dealing with church discipline. Aristotle postulates three primary components of any communicative effort necessary in order for a speaker to successfully persuade his or her audience of an argument: *logos*, *pathos*, and *ethos*.²⁴ The latter seems particularly relevant here. According to Aristotle, *ethos* has to do with the audience’s perception of the speaker’s character, integrity, and trustworthiness; what the speaker is saying is believable because it is observable to some degree in his or her own life. It also includes the perception the speaker’s concern is for that which is in the best interest of the hearers. In the context of preaching an emotionally-laden topic, this is particularly significant. While addressing a somewhat different theme, Jeffrey D. Arthurs writes: “Listeners will receive even an authoritative word if they know, respect, and like the communicator. *Ethos* is still the

²³ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching Hard Texts of the Old Testament*, (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1998), xiii.

²⁴ Aristotle, *The Art of Rhetoric*, (trans. H. C. Lawson-Tancred: London: Penguin, 2004), 74-75.

most powerful means of persuasion.”²⁵ Arthurs and Aristotle are not wrong. The presence, or absence, of the element of ethos continues to provide the hearer with a clear sense of the preacher’s pastoral care for the flock, himself or herself included. Timothy Keller reminds the preacher a congregation “can sniff you out if you are more concerned about looking good or sounding authoritative than you are about honoring God and loving them.”²⁶

Preach the Beauty of the Body of Christ

From the earliest days of the church, it became clear the teaching of Christ recognizes the corporate nature of biblical Christianity. That is, while conversion is individual and personal in nature, at conversion that same individual is incorporated into the wider body of Christ, both in its local and universal expressions (1 Cor. 12:12-14). Statements made by the church fathers as to the significance of the church range from Cyprian’s famous (and controversial) dictum: “*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*,” (“outside the Church there is no salvation”) to the declaration included in the Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 AD: “We believe . . . in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church,” to the Apostles’ Creed: “I believe in . . . the communion of saints.”

For our purposes, it will be helpful for the preacher to proclaim the beauty and importance of the local church as the main venue in which the Christian life is cultivated. One finding of the research is sermons addressing the role of the local church in the believer’s experience lagged behind those addressing the more personal and private concerns of the individual Christian. For example, the aggregate score for Statement Eighteen, “My pastor specifically preaches on some facet of the church as often as he preaches on some aspect of individual salvation or sanctification,” actually *decreased* following the second survey. This is not entirely surprising. Michael F. Bird writes: “Now it is no secret that evangelicals have not been known for their ecclesiology.”²⁷

²⁵ Scott M. Gibson, *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2005), 196-97.

²⁶ Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, (New York: Viking 2015), 167.

²⁷ Michael F. Bird, *Evangelical Theology: A Biblical and Systematic Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2013), 701.

John Stott further comments:

One of our chief evangelical blind spots has been to overlook the central importance of the church. We tend to proclaim individual salvation without moving on to the saved community. We emphasize that Christ died for us “to redeem us from all iniquity” rather than ‘to purify for himself a people for his own.’ We think of ourselves more as ‘Christians’ than as ‘churchmen,’ and our message is more good news of a new life than of a new society.²⁸

Both Bird and Stott are correct.

The researcher offers that following the sermon series, the congregation came to better understand the role of the church in spiritual formation. The appearance of a more robust ecclesiology in one’s preaching could cultivate the congregation’s understanding of the corporate nature and value of the church.

In terms of sermonic subject matter, Likert Statement Eighteen queried: “My pastor specifically preaches on some facet of the church as often as he preaches on some aspect of individual salvation or sanctification.” Aggregate scores for this statement decreased following the sermon series, from 3.92 to 3.62, nudging the corporate response closer to “somewhat disagree[ing]” that this is the case. The researcher suggests evangelicalism’s failure on the whole to address the concept of the church in our sermons only serves to inadvertently foster an interest in the self.

Preach the Goodness and Love of the Triune God

In terms of the New Testament teaching on discipline, the *locus classicus* remains Matthew 18:15-20. But this text is not God’s only Word on the subject. This is one of the values of systematic theology, which provides a summary statement of the totality of God’s teaching on a given subject. Here, Matthew 18:15-20 must be carefully balanced with Hebrews 12:4-11. As the preacher unfolds both texts for the congregation, they will better understand both the methodology and rationale for the practice of church discipline.

²⁸ John Stott, *The Message of Ephesians: God’s New Society*, (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986), 9.

Through the careful exposition of Hebrews 12:4-11 the congregation will better understand and appreciate God's love and Fatherly discipline are not mutually exclusive. Rather, as God is simple, he is simultaneously loving and holy. The careful development of the seven texts utilized in this study demonstrate this, that God's correction and discipline of his people is a function of his love and not his anger and wrath. Notice how the writer holds the love and holiness of God together: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son" (Hebrews 12:5b-6). Good theology leads to good living, even when we are asked by him to do the hard thing, as in serving as instruments in the spiritual development of his people.

CONCLUSION

John Calvin is correct in asserting the preached Word of God is indeed effective in accomplishing his purposes. Whenever a preacher opens the Bible and preaches even the hard sayings of the Old and New Testaments, he or she can do so in faith, being confident the Word of God will do its work. As the result, all preachers everywhere can be faithful instruments of the Triune God as he slowly but surely conforms the church into the image and likeness of his dear Son, Jesus Christ (Romans 8:28-30). The aforementioned doctoral project's statistical evidence, along with the subsequent ratification of a disciplinary policy, generated by a careful hearing of the preached Word of God, provides some objective measure by which to claim expository preaching is indeed effective in generating the response God desires of his people

SPIRITUALITY HAPPENS IN EVERYDAY LIFE:
A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF HENRI NOUWEN'S VIEWS
ON CONTEMPLATIVE SILENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF
THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION TODAY

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THESIS: While Henri Nouwen has made valuable contributions to the discussion on contemplative silence, there is a critical need to adapt the applicability of his ideas to the demanding life of dispensing theological education today.

ABSTRACT: Henri Nouwen was a busy Roman Catholic priest from the Netherlands who wore many hats. His accomplishments are numerous and many turn to his publications for wisdom on countless subjects. One area where his contributions are well known is contemplative silence. Because of his valuable contributions in this area, it is important to listen to him carefully. And cautiously! Cautiously, because not all of Nouwen's ideas are grounded in Scripture and reality. While Nouwen himself does not use explicit Bible passages to support his ideas on the subject, close study does reveal some of his beliefs are scriptural while others are merely philosophical. Attention must therefore be given to other voices on the subject who have broadened the discussion to include complementary ways of cultivating spirituality in the midst of not-so-silent contexts such as theological education spaces.

1. INTRODUCTION

Henri Nouwen has made valuable contributions to the subject of contemplative silence. His ideas on the subject were shaped by the nature and circumstances of his life and hence his background is needed to understand him properly. Against that background a brief summary of his beliefs and practices in contemplative si-

lence will be offered. Nouwen's *The Way of the Heart* will be the primary source of his thoughts.¹ Since this paper focuses on the interaction between Nouwen's ideas and theological education, it is very important to scrutinize Nouwen in the light of Scripture. Theological education is informed by a theology of theological education and this theology has the Bible as basis. Finally, a few suggestions will be tabled as to how Nouwen's ideas can inform theological education today, not in isolation but side by side with Holy Writ and other important voices on the subject.

2. A BRIEF HISTORICAL SKETCH ON NOUWEN

Nouwen was born in Nijkerk, Holland, in 1932² and became a priest in 1957.³ After his ordination as priest he spent many years studying psychology and theology. He taught psychology at Notre Dame and also taught at Yale.⁴ It is reported that his ten years at Yale (1971–1981) were the most productive years of his life. During his last year there he held a number of seminars geared at researching the contribution of desert fathers and mothers to ministry and education. His findings eventually inspired one of his most well-known books which he finished by 1981. It was *The Way of the Heart*, and it examines the subjects of silence, solitude and prayer. This book is the main source of information for Nouwen's views on contemplative silence as will soon be summarized in this paper. After Yale, Nouwen taught at Harvard.⁵

For Nouwen, academic institutions were frustrating because of their emphasis on competition and the way people were emotionally disengaged. In addition to this, Nouwen did not have the ability to stay in one place for too long. He was always searching for new experiences.⁶ During his lifetime he visited and lived in several places, mostly in Europe, South America and North America⁷. While at Harvard, in 1986, Nouwen received an invitation to be the pastor at Daybreak, Toronto. This was a very positive experience for him as he felt that it was the first real divine call in his life.⁸ Ellsberg reports that the last ten years of Nouwen's life were

¹ Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God Through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence* (New York: Harper Collins, 1981).

² Michael Higgins, "Priest, Writer, Mentor, Misfit: Understanding Henri Nouwen," *Commonwealth* 20 (2016), 14.

³ Higgins, "Priest, Writer, Mentor, Misfit," 14-15.

⁴ Arthur Boers, "What Henri Nouwen Found at Daybreak," *Christianity Today* 38, no. 11 (03 Oct. 1994), 30-31.

⁵ Boers, "What Henri Nouwen Found at Daybreak," 31.

⁶ Higgins, "Priest, Writer, Mentor, Misfit," 15.

⁷ Boers, "What Henri Nouwen Found at Daybreak," 30.

⁸ *Ibid.* 31.

probably the most remarkable, and were spent at Daybreak, the L'Arche community in Toronto, Canada.⁹ These communities keep people who are disabled, together with those with the ability to assist them.¹⁰

Nouwen was a priest, writer, professor, and pastoral mentor.¹¹ By the time he died, he is believed to have influenced more people through his writings on Spirituality than any other author in the subject area. He wrote about forty books! People responded well to his writings because he openly shared about his own weaknesses, needs and failures. He had many of these, and they were deep. He sought the love and approval of others too much and was not always sure of his identity. Although he was good at making friends and building community, his life was hardly focused on just one thing. Yet, he always sought God's will regarding God's plans for his life.¹² Nouwen's death was sudden and it happened through an episode of cardiac arrest on September 21, 1996, in his home town of Amsterdam.¹³

3. NOUWEN ON CONTEMPLATIVE SILENCE

Nouwen first began to seriously think about the contemplative life when he was teaching at Yale. During a seven-month sabbatical while at Yale, Nouwen visited the Trappist Abbey of the Genesee around Rochester, New York.¹⁴ It was there that he began to develop his views on silence. The silence that Nouwen talks about is not that which is characterized by nothingness and negative emotions. Rather, it is the silence full of love and of the presence of God.¹⁵ According to Nouwen, "Silence of the heart is much more important than silence of the mouth,"¹⁶ Nouwen laments that all of life has become so overwhelmingly full of words to the extent "They form the floor, the walls and the ceiling of our existence."¹⁷ Words are no longer valuable and effective in communication.¹⁸ It is therefore understandable when Nouwen places so much importance on silence.

For the Desert Fathers, words were associated with the present world whereas

⁹ Robert Ellsberg, "Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen, and the Living Gospel," *Merton Annual* 19 (2006), 340-354; 347.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 347.

¹¹ Higgins, "Priest, Writer, Mentor, Misfit," 14.

¹² Ellsberg, "Thomas Merton, Henri Nouwen," 346.

¹³ *Ibid.* 346, 348.

¹⁴ Higgins, "Priest, Writer, Mentor, Misfit," 16.

¹⁵ Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 45.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 46.

the secrets of the future world belong to silence.¹⁹ The less we speak the less we sin, and vice versa (James 3:2).²⁰ Through words we develop an unhealthy interest in the things of this world and become more earthly than heavenly minded.²¹ But the work of the Holy Spirit within us is fanned and preserved through silence.²² Hence, “A word with power is a word that comes out of silence.”²³ Even God himself spoke out of his silence, and the Word he spoke was so forceful as to create and shape the universe. Jesus Christ, the living Word of God, is therefore manifested through the silence of God. Jesus Christ has therefore assigned us to minister to others by leading them to the silence of God. We are not to call attention to ourselves through our words but we are to point people to God and his hidden truths.²⁴ Ultimately, however, Nouwen contends what matters the most in the spiritual life and in ministry is love and not silence.²⁵

On the subject of theological education, Nouwen observes the goal of theological education is to “bring us closer to the Lord our God so that we may be more faithful to the great commandment to love him with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, and our neighbour as ourselves.”²⁶ Unfortunately, this goal is hardly realized in theological education because theological schools too are characteristically flooded with words that have become distractions rather than instruments to bring students closer to God.²⁷ Theological education spaces focus more on complicated conversations *about* God rather than on conversations *with* God. Rather than wholeheartedly committing to the Word, participants in theological education have chosen instead to pursue words as the expression of their intellectual prowess. While there is a place for the use of words to express intellectual and theological depth in theological education, such words become useless when they fail to point back to the Word from heaven.²⁸

4. SCRIPTURE AND NOUWEN

While Nouwen himself does not use explicit Bible passages to support his ideas on the subject of contemplative silence, close study does reveal some of his beliefs

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 49.

²⁰ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 50.

²¹ *Ibid.* 51.

²² *Ibid.* 52.

²³ *Ibid.* 56.

²⁴ *Ibid.* 58, 59.

²⁵ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 64.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 47, 48.

²⁸ *Ibid.* 47.

are scriptural while others are merely philosophical. Nouwen uses only nine biblical references in his twenty three pages on silence (Psalms 39:1; Proverbs 10:19; Matthew 22:37; John 14:2-3; 14:10; 16:28; 1 Corinthians 13:1; James 3: 3, 6; James 3:2).²⁹ And all these references do not address the subject of contemplative silence explicitly. Maybe he was not trying to make a biblical point! Or maybe he thought the biblical support for his ideas was obvious. Whatever the case was, in Scripture we see silence as a common human response when people encounter the majesty of God. It is not the only response but it is an important one.³⁰

Several places in the Bible show that words are not able to adequately describe who God is. In Habakkuk 2:20 and Zechariah 2:13, the prophets instruct everyone to be silent before the Lord. In Job 40: 1-3, Job becomes silent before God in recognition of his own foolishness. This is in stark contrast to the previous tone of the book where Job asks so many questions of the Lord. In Revelation 8:1 we learn of a “silence in heaven.”³¹ This probably describes the wonder humans experience when they encounter God’s presence.³² When silence is seen from this biblical angle, it ties in with Nouwen’s mention of the way the Desert Fathers viewed silence. They believed words are to be used in the present world whereas the secrets of the future world belong to silence. Thus, silence is related to the mystery of God. This mystery is the notion words will always fall short of fully conveying the essence of God’s being.³³

Furthermore, the famous “Be still and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10) is clearly a call to contemplative silence. Other Old Testament passages (Ps 131: 1-2; Ecc 3:1, 7b; Lam 3:26-28) unmistakably point to contemplative silence as a normal part of the experience of believers. Simply put, “Waiting for God in silence, being still so that God may reveal his presence, is part of the teaching of the Scriptures.”³⁴ In the New Testament, Jesus is seen to value silence. In Mark 6:31-32, after a season of very active engagement in ministry, Jesus invites his disciples to “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place.” But it is equally important to note in Mark 6:33-44 that even before Jesus and his disciples got to this quiet place, people got there before them, and Jesus did not send them away. Instead, he had

²⁹ *Ibid.* 44, 47, 50, 51, 56, 58, 59.

³⁰ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 107.

³¹ *Ibid.* 107.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Benignus O’Rourke, *Finding Your Hidden Treasure: The Way of Silent Prayer* (Luton: Andrews, 2013), 29.

compassion on them and began to teach them many things. Here, Jesus placed active engagement over silence. This seems to be the same case in Mark 1:35-39.

Luke 5:15-16 is important in that, unlike in Mark where Jesus interrupts or even cancels quiet time for the sake of ministry, it is observed as his constant practice to withdraw from ministry needs in order to pray in solitary places. While most of this agrees with Nouwen, it is worthy to point out Nouwen fails to recognize the fact sometimes the better path is to sacrifice silence for active participation in ministry. As Plummer has so aptly pointed out, “In studies of silence and solitude, there is a neglect of apparent contradictory voices in Scripture. Texts are ignored which seem to laud a lifestyle not of silence and solitude, but communication and community.”³⁵ Citing Paul as an example of someone whose life was so full of activity (2 Corinthians 11:26-28), Plummer cautions “such texts remind us that there is a complexity to this topic that cannot be resolved by using a few narrative texts as paradigms or by citing a litany of proof texts.”³⁶ His caveat is worth embracing!

5. SPIRITUALITY IN THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Is there a place in theological education today for Nouwen’s ideas on contemplative silence? Yes, there is! But that place must be scrutinized through the lens of Scripture and grounded in the reality, as Miller-McLemore points out, chaos is part of life,³⁷ and teaching is characterised with a “cacophony of demands.”³⁸ Firstly, theological education today will benefit from contemplative silence for many of the reasons presented by Nouwen and supported by Scripture. Even theological educators and students can sin through the overuse of words! And because of the busy nature of the life of theological educators and students, they particularly need the benefits that may come from contemplative silence. Writing purely from an educative perspective, Zimmermann and Morgan support D. Lewin’s assertion “Perhaps schools, colleges, and universities should do more to encourage quiet times, pauses, reflections, and silences, to create spaces or attention and contemplation.”³⁹ Besides this plausible educational benefit that can come from contemplative silence, both theological educators and students will do well if they

³⁵ Robert L. Plummer, “Are the Spiritual Disciplines of ‘Silence and Solitude’ Really Biblical?” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 2 (2009):101-112; 108.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 108.

³⁷ Miller-McLemore, “Contemplation in the Midst of Chaos” 59.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 49.

³⁹ Ana Cristina Zimmermann and W. John Morgan, “A Time for Silence? Its Possibilities for Dialogue and for Reflective Learning,” *Studies In Philosophy And Education* 35 (2016): 399-413; 400

enhance their own spiritual lives and worship through the practice of silence.

From St. Benedict to the Desert Fathers to Thomas à Kempis, Christian leaders have placed high value on the role of silence in the spirituality of individuals and in the execution of ministry.⁴⁰ Charles Spurgeon could not have said it any better: ‘Time spent in quiet prostration of soul before the Lord is most invigorating.’⁴¹ Ultimately, if Jesus Christ who is God took time off from active engagement in order to seek God the Father in solitary places, every Christian leader today ought to follow suit.

Secondly, spirituality in theological education spaces today must not be limited to the practice of contemplative silence. Furthermore, the radical suspicion over the use of words in theological education must be properly qualified. Also, it must be noted the virtues of contemplative silence are not absolute. The call to silence must be narrowed within proper contexts. The contributions of Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore are well worth embracing in this regard.⁴² Miller-McLemore, a mother and theological educator, argues the busy life of motherhood and teaching can also produce contemplative spirituality.⁴³ Using the examples of Jesus Christ in Mark 6:31-34 and Mark 1:35-39, and those of Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:26-28, one can see that active engagement in the affairs of life is actually presented as the norm. Is it not but wise, then, that ways of promoting spirituality in the daily grind be sought? Miller-McLemore actually discusses Nouwen, pointing out his contributions (as limited to *The Way of the Heart*) to spirituality is a good example of the challenges posed by laid down spiritual practices which erect barriers to the understanding there can be religious and vocational merits in the busy-ness teachers experience.⁴⁴

There is actually a spiritual heritage that embraces the “holiness of the everyday.”⁴⁵ Ignatius of Loyola, Martin Luther and St. Benedict are examples of Christian leaders who embraced this reality.⁴⁶ Miller-McLemore contends outer forms of

⁴⁰ Shuji Moriichi, “Re-discovery of Silence in Pastoral Care,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 63 (2009), 4.

⁴¹ Cited by Plummer, “Are the Spiritual Disciplines of ‘Silence and Solitude’ Really Biblical?”, 103.

⁴² Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore “Contemplation in the Midst of Chaos: Contesting the Maceration of the Theological Teacher,” in *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of Theological Teachers* (eds. Gregory Jones and Stephanie Paulsell; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001), 48-74.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 60.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 91.

⁴⁶ Miller-McLemore, “Contemplation in the Midst of Chaos,” 91.

spirituality surrounding areas such as the human body, family and community life are being undermined. On the other hand, spirituality continues to be misconstrued as something that pertains solely to life within.⁴⁷ Conventional spirituality draws a sharp line between silence and chaos; it is either one or the other. It is therefore difficult for current spirituality trends to embrace the idea that the busyness of a teacher's life can be viewed as contemplative.⁴⁸ Miller-McLemore's goal is not to castigate the need for silence, solitude and rest. They are welcome spiritual disciplines. But they are not the only ways of doing spirituality. Her goal is to enlarge the concept of spirituality to include the busy life of parenting and teaching.⁴⁹ She therefore proposes "relational connection" and "authentic conversation" as spiritual companions to silence and solitude in the chaos of life.⁵⁰ Words can certainly lead to sin and silence can certainly keep us as pilgrims. On the other hand, "silence can also lead to stagnation and words can build a home."⁵¹ More than a home, actually. Words make Christian leaders and words also promote spirituality!

5. CONCLUSION

Henri Nouwen has made significant contributions to the discourse on contemplative silence and many of his ideas concur with the Bible and are relevant for theological education today. However, some of his beliefs and suggestions for practice on the subject are simply philosophical and must be complemented by other relevant voices on the subject as they tackle the reality of the demanding task of doing theological education today.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 91-92.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 93.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 95.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 95, 96.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 96.

SEEKING THE PEACE OF THE CITY

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Evangelical Christians are exiles living in an ungodly pagan culture described as a modern-day Babylon (Jer 29:4-14) (Kinnaman, 2016, 253). This resonates with Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher, who once described the challenge of the human condition as the dilemma of fish in water. Their only experience is life in water therefore they do not even understand that they are wet. This condition is also an apt description of many American Christians. Dr. R. Albert Mohler, Jr., president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY, speaking of this cultural milieu affirms we are indeed Aristotle's fish, and says, "We are swimming in one of the most complex and challenging cultural contexts ever experienced by the Christian church" (Mohler, 2011, xv). Distilling our faith down to love for God and love for people, he explains "We must first understand our culture and its challenges because we are to be faithful followers of Christ and faithful witnesses to the gospel" (Mohler, xvii). This faithfulness ought to be demonstrated in thinking deeply about the critical issues of our day and responding faithfully out of our love for the One who loved us first and gave himself for us (Eph 5:2; 1 John 4:19). Out of the overflow of the love of God in our hearts, we are also called to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt 22:37-39; Rom 13:9-10). This love for the people composing our communities is demonstrated when "we care about marriage, sexuality, children, the dignity of human life, and a host of related issues" (Mohler, xviii). Good faith Christians must therefore faithfully seek the peace of the city by upholding a firm evangelical center yet with a soft practical edge, standing with the church as the pillar and ground of doctrinal truth, trusting Almighty God to bring his promises to pass in his time, and cultivating old-fashioned Christian graces while living in exile as ambassadors of the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

FIRM CENTER, SOFT EDGES

David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons present a sound case for this paradigm as they rightly affirm “good faith Christians are grounded in Scripture and practice the art of seeing people” (Kinnaman, 2016, 219). Living good faith means believers understand the importance of biblical authority, doctrinal integrity, theological consistency along with a heart for practical application is translated into a perspective of faith sees people as precious souls for whom the royal blood of Christ was shed (Acts 26:18; Col 1:13-14).

Decline of Legacy Christians

Cutting-edge research from Barna is showing those who self-identify themselves as Christian is rapidly decreasing with each successive generation (Kinnaman, 223-224). These are defined as “people who select ‘Christian’ from a list of religious affiliations” (Kinnaman, 278). This is certainly cause for alarm because God’s heart has always been for his people to faithfully transmit his truth from one generation to another (Deut 6:4-9; Ps 78:1-8). Yet at the same time, “the nominal Christian middle where people play church” is evaporating, writes Jonathan Morrow of the Impact 360 Institute (McDowell, 2016, 184). This “is “actually a really good thing” because it forces believers of good faith to personal ownership of the truth and engage culture accordingly (McDowell, 184).

Memorial Stones Forgotten

It is fascinating to note after the Lord miraculously stopped the Jordan River so Joshua could lead the children of Israel across and into the promised land of Canaan he instructed the men to set up a group of twelve memorial stones in order to commemorate this historic event for the sake of their posterity (Josh 4:19-24). The horrifying reality settles in when this narrative is contrasted with the account in Judges where it is recorded a generation later “another generation arose after them who did not know the LORD nor the work which he had done for Israel” (Judg 2:7-13). What the Lord had intended to be a multi-generational legacy of faithfulness was unfortunately short-circuited when the torch of faith was not successfully passed on to the next generation.

Departure of Young People

David Kinnaman speaks to this issue in his timely work, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*, where he documents how “millions of young adults leave active involvement in church as they exit their

teen years” with some of them never to return while others do (Kinnaman, 2011, 19). The decline of legacy Christians can also be seen as a good thing because genuine Christian faith is not simply the result of selecting “Christian” from a religious a la carte menu. It is not surprising such a superficial façade is not sustainable any longer in the current cultural context of a modern-day Babylon.

Biblical Authority Questioned

Evangelical fundamentalism is rooted in a firm allegiance to the Bible as the inspired, inerrant, and authoritative Word of God (Smith, 2014, 39, 53). Kinnaman notes “widespread skepticism” is a significant trend evidenced in “an increasing percentage of Americans who say the Bible is just another book written by men, not the inspired Word of God” (Kinnaman, 2016, 225-226). Morrow affirms this by poignantly saying we no longer live in a “the Bible says so” world because “the Bible may be special and have sentimental value, but it is no longer considered unique, authoritative, and true” (McDowell, 2016, 183). This disbelief in the Bible is really a continuing salute to human autonomy as the philosophical product of eighteenth century enlightenment rationalism, which fed right into nineteenth century modernism. David Smith notes while enlightenment scholars acknowledged God as Creator to some degree, “they rejected the idea that he would intervene in the natural order with a special revelation. Nor was such a revelation really needed, for their view was that the human mind had not been badly contaminated by sin and that human reason was sufficient to determine ultimate truth” (Smith, 2014, 6). If the Bible is not the Word of God, then it is not the first and final authority for doctrinal matters of orthodoxy and practical issues of orthopraxy. This trend is absolutely devastating to Christian faith “because reduced trust in the Bible has the same impact as removing the foundation from under a building. Everything starts to crumble” (Kinnaman, 226). God’s Word affirms this reality, “If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Ps 112:2 NKJV).

Bible vs. Science

Jettisoning belief in the Bible as the Word of God has been the diabolical agenda of an assault launched against its foundation, namely the book of beginnings, Genesis, which records the origin of all things by the Creator himself. “It is true that the literal events of Genesis are foundational to all doctrine” because “ultimately, every single biblical doctrine of theology, directly or indirectly, is founded in the historical account given in Genesis 1-11” (Ham, 2009, 102). Biblical authority has been undermined by generations of autonomous human reason being indoctrinat-

ed into the hearts and minds of young people through evolutionary philosophy. Speaking of the foundational nature of Genesis, Ham notes “if one undermines this history, or reinterprets it, or tries to claim it is myth or symbolic, then one undermines the foundation of the rest of the Bible, including the gospel” (Ham, 102). In *You Lost Me*, David Kinnaman cites the perceived dichotomy between Christian faith and science as a contributing factor to the departure of young people from the church; “Millions of young Christians perceive Christianity to be in opposition to modern science” (Kinnaman, 2011, 131). The Bible is certainly not antithetical to science. Many of the founders of our modern scientific disciplines, like Sir Isaac Newton were devout believers in Christ and the Word of God (Kinnaman, 146-147). Unfortunately, science is oftentimes equated as being synonymous with Darwinian naturalism. In light of this, several years ago Answers in Genesis, the world’s largest apologetics ministry, hired America’s Research Group to conduct a major survey in order to collect data on the mass exodus of young people from the church. This work was extensively documented in Ken Ham’s 2009 book *Already Gone: Why Your Kids Will Quit Church and What You Can Do to Stop It*. This research indicates evolutionary philosophy, whose deep time scale is antithetical to Scripture, is a primary factor contributing to the departure of two-thirds of young people (who grew up in conservative churches) from the faith and a jettisoning of the Bible as the Word of God (Gen 1:31; Ex 20:11; Mat 19:4-5) (Ham, 2009, 167-180).

Skeptical Questions Answered

Every generation is responsible to intentionally transmit the torch of faith to the next by cultivating a comprehensive biblical worldview. This is an understanding the Bible is our starting point for making sense of everything in life and the lens through which we view the world as it is as well as what it ought to be. The late Chuck Colson explains this paradigm in his magnum opus, *How Now Shall We Live?*, by unfolding the reality of what genuine Christianity is in being “more than a relationship with Jesus, as expressed in personal piety, church attendance, Bible study, and works of charity. It is more than discipleship, more than believing a system of doctrines about God. Genuine Christianity is a way of seeing and comprehending *all* reality. It is a worldview” (Colson, 1999, 15). This worldview includes interpreting science through the lens of Scripture and not vice versa. Every generation must be raised to know what they believe, why they believe it, and also know how to give intelligent answers to the skeptical questions of the day in an exiled context of a culture increasingly hostile to biblical Christianity. Philosophies,

falsehoods, traditions, and “base-line cultural narratives” are not in captivity to the obedience of Christ and the absolute authority of the Word of God are strongholds that must be demolished and eradicated from the worldview of the next generation (2 Cor 10:3-5; Col 2:6-10; Keller, 2015, 129).

Seeing People as Precious

“When we have soft edges and firm centers, we can see people Jesus dearly loves” (Kinnaman, 2016, 232). The author recounts an opportunity he had along with some 150 others to preview Oprah Winfrey’s television miniseries called *Belief* on the diverse spiritual lives of people worldwide (Kinnaman, 229). Afterwards, while enjoying an exquisite experience of culinary excellence at her home in Santa Barbara, he tells of her making the rounds at the many tables of the spectacular outdoor veranda and describes how “an image of her as a ten-year-old popped into my head—a little girl longing to do good in the world” and he at that time saw her as “a woman created in God’s image, dearly loved by her Creator, and hungry to know him” (Kinnaman, 231). God’s Word affirms the sanctity of human life when it teaches men, women, boys, and girls among all nations worldwide are uniquely created in the image of God and therefore have inherent value, dignity, and inestimable worth as precious souls (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8:6-8; 139:13-16). Just as our Savior “practiced the sacred art of seeing people” as precious souls, good faith Christians “lead the way when we have confidence in what we believe and practice seeing those who believe differently” (Kinnaman, 232-233).

CHURCH IN A BRAVE NEW WORLD

This brave new world of a modern-day Babylon where evangelical Christians have been exiled as Christ’s ambassadors is a secular yet spiritually pagan culture that is increasingly hostile to the exclusive truth claims of biblical Christianity. A case in point example of this is the vitriolic rhetoric of Spencer Fildes, chairman of the Scottish Secular Society, in response to an article published in a Dundee newspaper titled, “Faith in Scotland Offers Hope to Christian Group,” which detailed some of Barna’s recent research (Kinnaman, 236). Despite the antagonism of our culture, good faith Christians must understand the Body of Christ as the pillar and ground of doctrinal truth is by definition a counterculture led by Spirit-filled leaders who have been commissioned to herald the message of our Head, Master, and King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Growing Inward & Facing Outward

Local churches are called by God to embrace both dynamics as Scripture teaches a “both-and” paradigm rather than an “either-or.” Churches composed of good faith Christians “are called to hold these two in tandem, to live in the necessary, perpetual tension between knitting together a community of disciples and going out to bless the world” (Kinnaman, 238). Growing inward spiritually is foundational to facing outward to engage our communities for Christ as “we must cultivate the health of our church and our souls” (Kinnaman, 243). The biblical precedent is that we cannot build high apart from being rooted and growing deep into the fertile soil of the Word of God (Col 2:7). From this doctrinal foundation and a dispensational framework we understand who God is and who he has made us “in Christ” which empowers us by his Spirit to boldly proclaim this reality in the public arena to the praise of his glory (Col 1:27-29). Facing outward should be holistic as “it is also disarmingly powerful when churches serve their communities in unexpected ways” (Kinnaman, 239).

The Way of the Third Fool

Os Guinness speaks to the importance of facing outward in *Fool's Talk: Recovering the Art of Christian Persuasion* when he observes as evangelicals “we can see things as they are; we also know the way things ought to be, and sometimes the difference makes us laugh and sometimes it makes us cry” (Guinness, 2015, 75). It is through the lens of a comprehensive Christian worldview rooted in Scripture that we see people in the categories of what Guinness describes as the “Three Fools.” First of all, those who reject all forms of reverential fear of who God is and live as practical atheists are to be regarded as “the fool proper” (Ps 14:1; Guinness, 66). The second type of biblical fool “is *the fool bearer*, the person who is not actually a fool at all, but who is prepared to be seen and treated as a fool—the ‘fool for Christ’s sake’” (Guinness, 67). The third type of fool in the Bible is “the fool maker” who in this case is God himself who made Christ the supreme fool bearer as the ultimate object of man’s mockery and scorn as he became sin and bore the Father’s undiluted wrath (2 Cor 5:21) (Guinness, 72). As a result of growing inward, may we be faithful to reach outward and gladly bear the label of “fools for Christ’s sake” as “the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things” along with our Savior who was “despised and rejected” as “a man of sorrows” himself (1 Cor 4:10,13; Isa 53:3).

COMFORT THE AFFLICTED & AFFLICT THE COMFORTABLE

The above old adage “is a decent summary of the prophetic authority inherent in a pastoral calling” (Kinnaman, 248). Apostle Paul’s last will and testament bequeathed to his protégé in the faith, Timothy, is found in his second epistle to this young pastor. Therein, he charges the youth to consider his accountability before God to be faithful in discharging his duty as an under-shepherd in the Savior’s service. His exhortation is to “preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching” (2 Tim 4:2). He goes on to explain there will come a time when people “will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4). Regardless of the circumstances, God’s mandate upon the lives of pastoral leadership stands as they have been entrusted with a stewardship responsibility before the Almighty to preach “Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery” and the Word of God according to the dispensational hermeneutic of “rightly dividing the word of truth” (Rom 16:25; 1 Cor 9:16-17; 2 Tim 1:13-14; 2:15 cf. Isa 61:1-2; Luke 4:16-21).

Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism

Tim Keller describes three levels of Word ministry communication which are complimentary to one another as we endeavor to be good faith Christians in a modern-day Babylonian exile. He says all believers in Christ ought “to understand the message of the Bible well enough to explain and apply it to other Christians and to his neighbors in informal and personal settings (level 1)” (Keller, 2015, 4). Level 2 communication is also a very organic form which “may include writing, blogging, teaching classes and small groups, mentoring, moderating open discussion forums on issues of faith, and so on” (Keller, 4). Level 3 is, of course, “the public preaching of Christ in the Christian assembly” which sets up opportunity for the first two levels while “the skilled and faithful communication at levels 1 and 2 prepares people to be receptive to preaching” (Keller, 7). David Kinnaman emphasizes Christian leaders are teachers to the world, “pastors are ambassadors and guides to the good faith way of life” (Kinnaman, 2016, 246). Intelligently articulating the Christian faith in a fashion that is winsome is the responsibility of every believer and not just pastors, “that’s why we must relearn the sacred art of meaningful, spiritual conversations that point people to Jesus” (Kinnaman, 241).

Communicating Shalom in an Age of Hostility

Communications expert Quentin J. Schultze describes this kind of communication as that which “enables us all to co-create the kind of culture that celebrates shalom” (Schultze, 2000, 30). This intangible dynamic is said to be “an ancient Hebrew word that suggests the presence of God in our everyday relationships” (Schultze, 26). This paradigm was exemplified in Paul’s ministry among the saints at Thessalonica as described in this touching passage, “So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us” (1 Thess 2:8).

CHURCH AND FAMILY AS A COUNTERCULTURE

Pillar and Ground of Truth

God has divinely ordained his Church as “the pillar and ground of the truth” vested in the gospel of his grace in Christ Jesus (1 Tim 3:15). With this high calling, local churches are not only to be countercultural catalysts toward positive change in the public arena but as theologian Robert Lewis Wilken writes, “The Church is a culture in its own right. Christ does not simply infiltrate a culture; Christ creates culture by forming another city, another sovereignty with its own social and political life” (Kinnaman, 249-250). This distinct culture is demonstrated through 1. Our commitment to Christ and the Word of God, 2. Our commitment to one another in the Body of Christ, 3. Our lifestyle of countercultural rhythms of work, play, and worship, 4. Our management of digital technology in valuing relationships and real people, and 5. Our stewardship of life as a calling from God (Kinnaman, 250). Genuine Christianity really is an entire world and life view through which we understand all reality (Colson, 1999, 15). President of the Southern Baptist Convention’s International Mission Board, David Platt, emphasizes countercultural living for the sake of the gospel which he describes as “the lifeblood of Christianity, and it provides the foundation for *countering culture*” (Platt, 2015, 1). In rejecting the priorities, pursuits, and passions of the world, he says it is the gospel that “not only *compels* Christians to confront social issues in the culture around us. The gospel actually *creates* confrontation with the culture around—and within—us” (Platt, 1). Local churches everywhere ought to indeed be countercultures and “shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life” (Phil 2:15-16).

Distinct Christian Family Culture

Good faith Christians living as exiles in a modern-day Babylon ought to be very

deliberate in “forming communities and institutions (churches, schools, networks) that remain at a distance from mainstream culture” (Kinnaman, 2016, 251). These distinct environments beginning in the home are “to be spaces where holy and righteous living are modeled, practiced, and taught in order to prepare our children to follow Jesus and engage the wider world” (Kinnaman, 251). Parents must prioritize the discipleship of their children beginning with the inculcation of godly character and demonstrating themselves what this looks like through Christ-like conduct by honoring the Lord in our actions and attitudes. The Word of God provides a beautiful picture of this intentional transmission of truth in Deuteronomy where the Lord instructed Hebrew fathers (and mothers) to hear and heed within the context of a distinct family culture (Deut 6:4-9 cf. Ps 78:1-8; Eph 6:4). In challenging Christian parents to not abdicate their responsibility, Ken Ham pleads with them to understand “regardless of what’s happening in the Sunday school, youth groups, pulpit, and Bible studies of your church, the responsibility for ministry to our kids has never been removed from parents” (Ham, 2009, 50). One of the most practical vehicles to facilitate this kind of life-on-life discipleship is home-based parent-led education otherwise known as homeschooling. May good faith Christians indeed be the Church in a brave new world for the glory of another vested in our sovereign King and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 11:36; 1 Tim 1:17).

FAITHFUL IN EXILE

The modern-day Babylonian exile experienced by faithful Christians who are doctrinally sound, theologically consistent, and culturally savvy in their application of a comprehensive biblical worldview is a tremendous opportunity for good faith. These believers understand their identity as ambassadors for Christ in a foreign land which was formerly their home and are faithful in this exiled state through confidence in God’s power and purposes to bring his promises to pass in his perfect timing according to the eternal counsel of his will.

Cause for Hope-Filled Rejoicing

With this kind of backdrop, it would be very easy to be filled with an utter sense of despair and despondence thinking that there is absolutely no hope for seeing positive change. Kinnaman certainly has not given up hope but is rather “more hopeful about the future of the Christian community, even in this most complicated and accelerated of contexts” (Kinnaman, 2016, 255). Irrelevant and extreme is how the world labels Christians who bring their faith out into the public arena and this is also how they can oftentimes feel (Kinnaman, 262). Despite this sentiment,

good faith Christians have cause for hope-filled rejoicing because “embracing the exile metaphor means that we retain at least two theological views: that God is sovereign and that God has plans for his people” (Kinnaman, 256).

Ezekiel’s Valley of Dry Bones

Ezekiel was a sixth century B.C. priest and Hebrew prophet of Yahweh who received bizarre visions and revelations from the Lord while living in exile in Babylon along with the rest of the nation of the Jews. In chapter 37 of his prophecy, the Holy Spirit inspired account records the Lord’s instructions to him regarding the valley of dry bones representing the whole house of Israel. Any hope for the bones to live was completely absent, but the agency of hope for them to do so was in Ezekiel’s call to preach the word of the Lord in submission to Holy Spirit power. When the impossible and miraculous transpired at the hands of an unlimited God, the resurrected army served as a living demonstration of God’s power to restore his covenant promises to Israel vested in the prophesied millennial kingdom of heaven to be established on earth by Yahweh’s anointed one, the Lord Jesus Christ himself (Ezek 37:1-14). As Kinnaman so winsomely said, “When we maintain the belief that God knows where all this is headed—toward his ends and purposes—we don’t have to worry about the direction of culture. We just need to be faithful to God and to his calling” (Kinnaman, 256).

Good Faith in Exile

Another exiled prophet of God, Daniel, demonstrated what good faith looks like in practical reality. The authors calculate the formula of engaging culture with good faith as an equation: “love + believe + live” (Kinnaman, 232). Love is described as a combination of the power of actions, language, and respect which Daniel understood as he “was confident and assertive but delivered the bad news with utmost respect” (Kinnaman, 258). Belief is a dependence on the power of God and his truth to make a relevant difference in a hostile culture which Daniel exemplified (Kinnaman, 259). Live is a stewardship vision for the power of vocation as a calling from God which Daniel embodied as the “secretary of state for one of the most pagan civilizations in human history” (Kinnaman, 260). Regardless of the circumstances, “the Christian community is called to be a counterculture for the common good” in every arena of life (Kinnaman, 261). This is living good faith in a world desperately in need of the spiritual health, healing, and wholeness which the gospel produces in life beginning right at home in our marriage, family, and friendships.

CYCLES OF POVERTY & DRUG ADDICTION

Good faith Christians understand the power of home and intentionally engage the needs of their communities with hearts full of ministry-driven compassion through such things like cultivating the old-fashioned Christian grace of hospitality.

Our society has experienced a dramatic increase in drug addictions in tandem with a generational cycle of poverty. The economically underprivileged and trapped often feel as if they have nowhere else to go in coping with the challenges of life than substance abuse. Such highly addictive drugs like heroin are not only remarkably accessible to them but incredibly inexpensive. All this forms a diabolically insidious web of deception that enslaves their bodies and ensnares their souls in a hopeless pit. Sadly, overdose deaths are rampant and the criminal justice system is perplexed as to how best to help people on the road to recovery.

Adams County Drug Treatment Court

Our county's judge approached me last summer at the County Fair to inquire about my interest in serving as the clergy representative on the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC). After prayerful consideration, my wife and I agreed that this would be a positive opportunity to make a difference in our community by being involved with other leaders and professionals with a vested interest in people's well-being. This entity was originally formed to facilitate the coordination of the various criminal justice services involved in the Adams County Drug Treatment Court. The CJCC is composed of such individuals like the county judge, district attorney, public defender, county sheriff, clerk of courts, director of health and human service, and superintendent of the school district. Interestingly enough, their struggles directly parallel the statistics of our county being one of the least churchied counties in the state of Wisconsin. For example, the struggle facing many on the road to recovery is that they do not have a safe and healthy place to live apart from being surrounded by addictive substances. These same people also do not have any healthy influences in their lives in the form of morally responsible adults who are holding down a job. The fact our local government is asking for help with housing these individuals and also providing them with mentors in healthy living is a ripe opportunity for good faith (Matt 24:34-46; Titus 2:11-14). Just as Darren Patrick of the Journey Church in St. Louis and the Acts 29 Church Planting Network affirms, it is my prayer we can "be a blessing to the city" by seeking its spiritual, economic, and social welfare (Patrick, 2010, 232-233).

Cultivating the Grace of Hospitality

Gabe Lyons recounts a beautiful experience his family enjoyed in being blessed to partake of the old-fashioned grace of hospitality at the home of the Robertson family of Duck Dynasty fame (Kinnaman, 137). He speaks of the dynamic power of the ambiance of a home consisting of great Cajun food and robust conversation (Kinnaman, 137). Describing the latter, he says “one way to practice hospitality is to express interest in others” because “it is easy to talk about yourself,” but “asking more questions than you are asked in your conversations” expresses a genuine interest in the well-being of others by investing in their lives in this way (Kinnaman, 136). The parallels to the needs of the Adams Country Drug Treatment Court are manifold. Scripture speaks of the intangible dynamic of the power of Christian family culture as “through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches” (Prov 24:3-4). Good faith understands the value of home and deliberately shares it with those in need of practical help for today and bright hope for tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

As exiles living in a modern-day Babylon, Christians must by all means faithfully seek the peace of the city by doing these things as empowered by the Spirit of God for renewal, one heart and life at a time. Good faith upholds a firm evangelical center yet soft practical edge in seeing people as precious souls. It also stands with the church as the pillar and ground of doctrinal truth and trusts in a sovereign God to bring his promises to pass in his time. Finally, good faith cultivates the old-fashioned graces of hospitality wielding the power of home, family, and friendships as exiled ambassadors of the King of kings, the Lord Jesus Christ.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Osborne, Grant R. *Ephesians: Verse by Verse*. Osborne New Testament Commentaries; Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham Press, 2017. 267 pp.; Pb. \$19.99.

Osborne, Grant R. *Philippians: Verse by Verse*. Osborne New Testament Commentaries; Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham Press, 2017. 243 pp.; Pb. \$19.99.

Osborne, Grant R. *Colossians and Philemon: Verse by Verse*. Osborne New Testament Commentaries; Bellingham, Wash.: Lexham Press, 2017. 222 pp.; Pb. \$16.99.

These three new commentaries on Paul's Prison Epistles from Lexham Press target a general readership rather than a scholarly audience. Like the popular The Tyndale Commentary Series, these three volumes are brief yet scholarly, targeting a wide range of readers.

As Osborne says in his preface, the commentaries in the series should be used for devotional Scripture reading. Since the commentaries are based on the NIV translation a reader can use this commentary as a supplement to their daily Bible reading. A second related goal is for these commentaries to be used in Church Bible studies, perhaps in a small group or Sunday school context. But pastors and teachers will find the commentaries useful as they prepare sermons on the text of the Bible. Osborne says he wants "to help pastors faithfully exposit the text in a sermon." Osborne attempts to balance a deep reading of the text with a practical application for the Bible student.

Commentaries on these four books often begin with a discussion of authorship. Scholarship has questioned whether Paul wrote Ephesians and occasionally Colossians. Osborne briefly summarizes these challenges in his introductions and concludes there is no reason to reject the claim of

each book that Paul is the author. The theological themes of Ephesians are consistent with Paul's other letters and there is really no problem with parallels between Ephesians and Colossians, especially if they were written about the same time.

Since Paul implies he is in prison in each of these four letters, the second issue commentaries on the Prison Epistles usually treat is "from which of Paul's many imprisonments did he write these letters?" In the Ephesian commentary Osborne evaluates the two main alternatives, Caesarea (Acts 24:27, A.D. 59-60) and Rome (Acts 28:30-31, AD 61-62) and concludes the Roman imprisonment is better, primarily because there is little evidence of ministry while Paul is in Caesarea. He does not engage with the suggestion Paul wrote Philippians from an implied imprisonment during his lengthy stay in Ephesus. Osborne suggests all four Prison epistles were written over a three or four month period and delivered by Tychicus.

Each commentary suggests a few primary purposes for the letters. Ephesians was a circular letter to all the churches in the Roman province of Asia, likely including the seven churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3, Colossae and Hierapolis. As such, Ephesians is a general letter dealing with doctrine and practice with very little "Jew-Gentile tensions" which appear in Paul's other letters. Philippians thanks the church for supporting Paul while he is in prison. Paul informs them of his situation in order to encourage them, but he also addresses some theological issues perhaps in response to an opponent in Philippi. Writing to a church Paul did not found, Colossians deals with a particular teaching threatening the church. Philemon's purpose is clear: Paul writes a letter of recommendation for an escaped slave who has now become a Christian.

For Philippians and Colossians Paul engages an opponent, or perhaps as many as three opponents. In Philippians 1:18 Paul mentions those who "preach the gospel out of impure motives," rival teachers from within the church. In Philippians 3:2 Paul surprises the reader with a warning to watch out for "those dogs, mutilators of the flesh." Osborne suggests the opponents are similar to (or even the same as) the opponents in Galatia, the Judaizers (*Philippians*, 118). But there are also hints of a third group, pagan persecutors of the church (1:27-30).

For Colossians, commentaries usually devote significant space to the “Colossian Heresy.” This opponent is in some aspects Jewish (2: 16, 18 21; food laws and festivals), but in other ways they are Gentile, described as a philosophy (Col 2:4, 8) For Osborne, this is a “proto-Gnostic” teaching which devalued Christ (and perhaps over-valued angels).

Osborne also deals briefly with the literary features of the letters. It is currently fashionable to read Paul’s letters in the light of Greco-Roman rhetoric. Osborne recognizes some value in studying these features, but for Ephesians he concludes “this is not Hellenistic rhetoric, but a Jewish homily and letter” (*Ephesians*, 7). For Philippians, he discusses the genre of the letter (friendship letter, word of exhortation) as well as the common suggestion Philippians is a compilation of several short letters from Paul. The multiple-source theories are “artificial and unnecessary” (*Philippians*, 3).

For Philemon, commentaries often are bogged down with long background sections on slavery in the Roman world. Osborne’s entire section on Philemon is barely forty pages and only touches on this cultural background. He does engage in a discussion of four potential reconstructions of the situation behind the letter before offering his own view (which he works out in the short commentary).

Finally, each introduction concludes with a short summary of the theology of the book. Although there are some unique elements in each letter, Osborne observes the work of Christ in each of these four letters as well as what each letter contributes to our understanding of the church in Pauline theology. Reading these three volumes at the same time highlights the consistency of the theology of the Prison Epistles.

The body of each commentary moves through paragraphs based on the outline provided in his introductions. Occasionally Osborne will refer to a Greek word, but these only appear in transliteration and do not distract readers who have not studied Greek. Footnotes are rare in the commentary, occasionally pointing to another scholar for additional information or to a series of cross-references. The commentary concludes with a glossary of key terms (indicated by bold lettering in the text), a short bibliography, Subject/Author index and a Scripture index.

Like Osborne’s commentaries on Galatians and Romans in this series, these three volumes achieve the goal of providing ample resources for read-

ing the text. Osborne intentionally writes to be understood by the layperson as well as to assist a busy pastor preparing to preach or teach the Prison Epistles. There are more technical exegetical commentaries available, but Osborne's commentaries fill the need for a short, readable commentary accessible by all students of the Bible.

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Bruce, F. F. *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, Notes*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2018. 425 pp. Pb; \$30.

This commentary on John by F. F. Bruce is not new, but it is the first of nine commentaries in the new *Eerdmans Classic Biblical Commentaries* series. Some of these Classic commentaries were NICNT volumes replaced by new commentaries (Verhoef was replaced by Mignon Jacobs, Murray on Romans was replaced by Douglas Moo, for example). Eerdmans recognizes the ongoing value of these older commentaries and modern printing technology makes it possible for publishers to keep older works in print. As the series preface observes, these commentaries have been used by pastors, teachers, seminary students, and are cited literary thousands of times by later works.

Eerdmans plans to republish these the following commentaries by the end of the year:

- The Books of Haggai and Malachi, Pieter A. Verhoef
- Romans (Shorter Commentary), C. E. B. Cranfield
- The Epistle to the Hebrews, F. F. Bruce
- The Epistle to the Romans, John Murray
- A Commentary on the Revelation of John, George Eldon Ladd
- The Gospel of John, Herman Ridderbos
- The Epistle to the Romans, Leon Morris
- John, Merrill C. Tenney

The first in the series is a 1983 commentary on the Gospel of John by F. F. Bruce. The text of the book is identical to the earlier edition so this is a true reprint rather than a second edition. Bruce had been studying the Gospel of John for more than thirty years when he wrote this book and now the book is another thirty years in the past. Although this means the bibliography is obviously out of date, few modern students of John's Gospel

interact with much of this secondary literature on John.

The body of the commentary offers short paragraphs on one or two verses at a time. Bruce provides his own translation of each verse and then comments on the text. Where Greek appears it is always transliterated. The minimal endnotes cite other major commentaries. In his preface, Bruce acknowledges his debt to C. H. Dodd and Barnabas Lindars appears often in the notes as well. One element of the commentary which may seem dated is the use of rabbinic sources in the endnotes. On a number of occasions Bruce cites the Talmud, the *Exodus Rabbah*, etc (p. 187, for example). In more modern commentaries these might be omitted since it is impossible to state that any given saying in these late sources has relevance for a first century Jewish context.

What is striking about the body of the commentary is how brief Bruce's notes are. But this is the way commentaries were written at the time. It is refreshing to read a simple, well-written commentary which does not get bogged down in parallel literature, hunting for intertextual allusions or reception history. Also missing are homiletical pointers or attempts to "bridge the gap" between an ancient writer and a modern reader. This is what helps Bruce's commentary to retain its value over the years. Bruce offers what is necessary to illuminate the text and allows the reader (pastor, teacher) develop appropriate application in their own context. It is refreshing to sit and read a commentary without the distraction of hundreds of notes to other literature. Although Bruce is not as minimal as J. B. Lightfoot's John commentary, it will seem light to anyone who has read Craig Keener first. There is a place for the exhaustive commentary or for a commentary which traces reception history, or a commentary which closely studies Greek syntax and rhetorical features. It is, however, refreshing to read a clear and concise commentator like F. F. Bruce.

It is fair to question the relevance of a thirty year old commentary which has been replaced, but each volume of this new *Eerdmans Classic Biblical Commentaries* series is worthy of staying in print. Each generation of Bible student ought to have the chance to read the work of these scholars.

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Snodgrass, Klyne R. *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2018. 892 pp. \$58, Hb.

When the first edition of Klyne Snodgrass's *Stories with Intent* was published in 2008, I happened to visit the now-closed Eerdmans Bookstore in Grand Rapids. Alan, manager of the Bookstore approached me and handed me a copy of the book and said "You are going to buy this book." For those who knew Alan, if he told you to buy a book, you bought it because it was going to be an excellent book. And indeed it was. The first edition of *Stories with Intent* won the 2009 *Christianity Today* Award for Biblical Studies and was almost immediately considered by many to be the best book on parables written in the last fifty years. Since I regularly assign papers on parables in my Gospels class, my syllabus states: ignore Snodgrass at your own peril. I was therefore quite excited to see the announcement of a new edition of this important book.

Stories with Intent is a comprehensive commentary on every parable of Jesus. Although the commentaries may have similar content, Snodgrass includes parables from each synoptic gospels and includes two or three versions of the parable when this occurs (The Mustard Seed in Matthew 13:31-32, for example). Snodgrass includes two chapters of introduction to parables (sixty pages) where he defines and classifies parables and discusses interpretive strategies. He recognizes some parables have allegorical elements, but these do not give the interpreter warrant to allegorize anything and everything in a parable (p. 17). In the body of the commentary, he often interprets some element of a parable without resorting to the kinds of allegorical interpretation found in ancient commentaries or popular preaching. For example, the lamps and oil in the Parable of The Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-12) does not "represent" the Holy Spirit. Commenting on the two sets of servants in the Parable of the Banquet (Matthew 22:1-14), any interpretation that makes these two sets of servants into pre-Easter mission to the Jews and a post-Easter mission to the Gentiles is "merciless allegorizing" (315). Snodgrass is consistent in this methodology.

What makes this book an especially rich resource for parables interpretation is the collection of parallel material for each parable. While there are collections of rabbinic parables or parallels to early Christian literature, Snodgrass conveniently places the text of these parallels alongside

his commentary on the parable. Sometimes these parallels seem strained, but since the goal of the volume is a “comprehensive guide,” this is understandable.

The book is now about 35 pages longer than the first edition, the main difference being one additional chapter on recent contributions to parable research (pages 565-600). The page numbers from the first edition have not changed and there appear to be no differences in the endnotes. This is convenient since references to pages in the first edition will be the same pages in the second. The index of authors is greatly expanded (from just short of four pages to nearly eight pages). The bibliography has been updated to include the books appearing in the new chapter. The bibliography appears to use a slightly smaller font and spacing since it is several pages shorter than the first edition although the content is nearly the same.

The title of the book is important. Snodgrass was dissatisfied with reader response approaches to the parables since they ignore the author’s intent and make the parables say anything. Some literary approaches to the parables completely ignored what Jesus said in favor of creating a new meaning which was somehow more modern and provoking. For Snodgrass, when Jesus spoke a parable he did so with a specific intention, and to ignore that intention is to miss the point of the parable. Although taking into account the literary features of parables as well as the literary context of its place in a gospel, he does not engage in the fanciful reader-response type application of parables. This requires the interpreter to understand the historical, social, and literary context of each parable and to consciously read that parable in that proper context.

Other books on parables are more concerned with reconstructing the original forms of parables or determining what the historical Jesus may (or may not) have said. This was the driving force in John Meier’s 2016 *Probing the Authenticity of the Parables*. Using the criteria of authenticity Meier concluded only four parables go back to the historical Jesus. As Snodgrass observes, these criteria have been challenged and for many Jesus scholars they no longer have any value at all. Snodgrass does engage with scholarship on the authenticity of the parables, but his goal is to set the parable into a context where Jesus’s original intent can be heard. *Stories with Intent* his is not a historical Jesus study.

The parables are grouped thematically (parables of the present kingdom, parables about discipleship, etc.) For each parable Snodgrass collects any parallels in canonical writings, early Jewish literature, rabbinic literature and early Christian writing. He includes the text for most of the non-canonical texts, which is extremely useful for some of the more obscure rabbinical sources. He then asks questions and creates lists of things needing attention for students and teachers who want to interpret the parable accurately. Sometimes he does not address all of these needs in his explanation, but for the most part a mini-commentary on the parable compares and contrasts several approaches to the parable and draws conclusions. He provides a section on cultural background when applicable. For each parable he offers a short comment on how to adapt the parable for contemporary use in teaching and preaching. Each parable concludes with a short bibliography, although these have not been updated since the 2008 edition of the book.

In his new chapter for the second edition of the book Snodgrass observes that in the ten years since *Stories with Intent* was first published, more than twenty-five books on parables have been published. This does not include journal articles, but the number seems small to me, especially in comparison to other more burning issues in New Testament studies over the same time. Compare this trickle of parables research to the avalanche of books written in the New Perspective on Paul. Perhaps the publication of this massive commentary on all the parables discouraged some scholars from contributing their own monograph on the parables.

Snodgrass divides recent parables research into several categories and offers a short summary of their contribution to the study of parables. He begins with a short comment on his non-use of the *Gospel of Thomas* in *Stories with Intent*. This was a critique of the first edition in the original round of book reviews. For some scholars, *Gospel of Thomas* is an early witness to the Jesus tradition and is useful for interpreting the parables. Snodgrass agrees with Simon Gathercole and Mark Goodacre that the *Gospel of Thomas* is dependent on the Synoptic Gospels and dates to the second century. In a footnote he dismisses April DeConnick's suggestion that Thomas is a "rolling composition" with a kernel of early Jesus tradition as "speculative and unconvincing" (note 2, 807). Although Snodgrass includes *Gospel of Thomas* in this parallel texts on the body of the com-

mentary, he is clear that *Thomas* will not provide “an early window into Jesus’s parables” (566).

There are only a handful of new books on Old Testament and Rabbinic parables, and Snodgrass includes a few Bible Study type books as well as a few monographs on specific parables. In his section on New Testament parables he includes David Gowler’s book on the reception of the parables in Christian art and other literature. He groups several studies under the heading “Social Science” approaches. In his summary, Snodgrass indicates these studies see the parables as political and economic stories rather than theology. They assume anyone who is rich in a parable is a negative character. Snodgrass is not convinced politics was Jesus’s intent. Although the ethical concerns are important, Snodgrass sees these approaches as open to criticism. If Jesus was were entirely political in orientation, how did the early church get them so wrong when they collected them as theological statements? Commenting on Stephen Wright’s *Jesus the Storyteller*, Snodgrass concludes “If Wright is correct, why were these stories remembered at all?” (588)

Conclusion. Stories with *Intent* is certainly the “first off the shelf” book on parables. Some will object to his rejection of parallels in *Thomas* or his rejection of most of the faddish approaches once popular in parables research. Nor is there much here on reception history of the parables, partly because Snodgrass soundly rejects allegorical interpretations of the parables and most of church history allegorized them extensively. Snodgrass consistently provides sufficient background material to read the parables in the context of Jesus’s ministry, but also to adapt the parable to the contemporary situation.

If you have the first edition of this book, it may not be necessary to replace it with this second edition. However, if you are going to use one book on the parables, *Stories with Intent* remains the best, most comprehensive book on the parables of Jesus.

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Pate, C. Marvin. *Interpreting Revelation and Other Apocalyptic Literature. An Exegetical Handbook*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 2016. Pb. 239 pp. \$23.99.

Marvin Pate's contribution to Kregel's Handbooks for New Testament Exegesis series joins John D. Harvey on the Pauline literature and Herbert W. Bateman on the General Letters (David Turner's contribution on the Gospels and Acts is still in preparation). In many ways this exegetical guide is a companion to Richard Taylor's *Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature* (Kregel 2016), although the two books often cover the same material. Pate has written and edited several books on eschatology and Revelation including *Four Views of Revelation* (Zondervan, 1998), *Deliverance Now and Not Yet: The New Testament and the Great Tribulation* (with Douglas Kennard; Peter Lang, 2004); *Reading Revelation: Four Interpretive Approaches to the Apocalypse* (Kregel, 2009), and *The Writings of John* (Zondervan, 2010). Occasionally Pate refers the reader to these works for detailed arguments when the format of the Exegetical Handbook series limits his discussion of a topic.

In the *Four Views of Revelation* volume he edited in 1998, Pate identified as a "modified futurist" and progressive dispensationalist. In his section of the four views book, Pate embraced the already/not yet approach to eschatology made popular by George Ladd. In short, this is the idea some elements of prophecy concerning the kingdom are already fulfilled in the work of Jesus, such as the initiation of the new covenant and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Yet others aspects of prophecies are not yet fulfilled, primarily establishment of a kingdom after the coming of the Messiah.

In this book some 20 years later, Pate still uses the already/not yet rubric for understanding Jesus's eschatology in the Olivet Discourse and his interpretation of Revelation, but he does not identify with any form of dispensationalism in this book. He is fair to "classic dispensationalism" in the Scofield tradition, but prefers an eclectic approach (p. 147). In general he expresses solidly conservative views and certainly expects a real return of Christ in the future, but he does not engage in any of the strange applications of Revelation associated with older forms of dispensationalism.

The first three chapters of this handbook defines apocalyptic and offers an overview of the development of the genre from the Old Testament through the Second Temple Period. He begins with the 1979 SBL defini-

tion of apocalyptic. This is more or less the standard definition in scholarship today, but John Collins revisited this definition in 2009 and offered additional nuances of the statement (the essay appears as the first chapter of his *Apocalypse, Prophecy, and Pseudepigraphy*, Eerdmans, 2015). As most scholars who study apocalyptic observe, this literature often blends several genres in a given book. Pate correctly observes the particular apocalyptic found in Daniel and Revelation are mixed genres: Daniel has court-tales (Dan 1-6) and apocalyptic visions (Dan 7-12); Revelation has letters, throne room visions, and apocalyptic.

Pate surveys the development of apocalyptic beginning in the Old Testament (Isaiah 24-27; 55-56, Joel 2-3, Ezekiel 38-39, Daniel and Zechariah). Since he considers Isaiah a unified book from the eighth century prophet, the “little apocalypse” in Isaiah 24-27 is indeed an early development. Most scholars of Isaiah today consider those chapters to be one of the later additions to the book. Other than Revelation, the main New Testament example of apocalyptic is Jesus’s Olivet Discourse. Pate does a remarkable job illustrating the parallels between the Olivet Discourse and the opening of the seven seals in Revelation 6. Although this is often suggested, few have worked out the detailed parallelism quite like Pate does.

The third chapter of this handbook sketches what Pate calls the “function of apocalyptic.” The general themes of Israel’s history are based on the blessing and cursing found in the Law (especially Deuteronomy). Because Israel failed to keep the covenant, they fell under the curse of the Law and were eventually exiled from their land. But the covenant also promised a restoration to the land in the future. Pate then demonstrates how this “sin, exile, restoration” pattern resonates throughout both biblical and non-biblical apocalyptic literature. This include the messianic woes, a time of great tribulation prior to the arrival of the kingdom. In fact, this hope of future restoration often drives the apocalyptic reimagining of history in 1 Enoch, 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra.

One of the most fascinating sections of his book is Pate’s use of the Arch of Titus as a model for the book of Revelation. He suggests much of the structure of Revelation can be explained as an *ekphrasis*. *Ekphrasis* is a literary description of a piece of art, drawing the picture in the mind of a reader using words. The image of the Great Whore of Babylon in Revelation 17 is a clear example of this literary style. Pate has an extended

discussion of the art on the Arch of Titus which he then relates to Revelation 4-19. As far as I know, this has not been suggested before and it is quite intriguing. Since Revelation has at least one other example of this style, it is at least possible John modeled at least some of his imagery on a Roman Triumph and certainly the images of Titus as the conqueror of Judea would resonate with the themes of the book. One possible problem with the suggestion (and it is only a suggestion in this book) is whether the specific images Pate refers to were known well enough to people living in Ephesus about twenty years later. With the Great Whore, the image of Dea Roma was known in imperial cult sites and on coinage. Were there replicas of the Arch of Titus placed in imperial cult centers? Could images from the Arch be distributed elsewhere in the Empire so that readers would catch on to the allusion?

As with all of the volumes in this series, Pate devotes two chapters to preaching apocalyptic literature (ch. 7-8). With respect to application, Pate discusses four issues of “twenty-first century appropriation” of Revelation, the first three are responses to misuse of apocalyptic at the theological level. First, he discusses the long delay of the return of Christ, which he answers by appealing to the already/not yet method explained elsewhere in the book. The Revelation does argue for an imminent return, but that means “any time, not ‘immediate’” (p. 179).

Second, Pate addresses the formation of Israel as a nation in 1948. This date has long fascinated prophecy teachers who have made the unfortunate claim the new political entity Israel is the fulfillment of prophecy. Since Jesus says “this generation will not pass away” in the Olivet discourse (Matt 24:34), some claimed 1948 started the prophetic clock and a literal generation would pass before the Rapture or Second Coming (1981, 1988, etc.). Pate offers five alternatives for understanding “this generation.” He leans towards the view this “generation” refers to the last generation before Christ returns, whenever that is.

Third, Pate deals with the theological question of the status of Israel in the present age. Does the church “replace Israel” as God’s chosen people in God’s plan? Using the 144,000 in Revelation 7, Pate argues Israel has not been replaced as God’s people. This group represents the “Jewish remnant that already accepted Jesus as their Messiah in the first century” and the larger multitude are the Gentiles who have not yet accepted Jesus as Mes-

siah (the already/not yet hermeneutic).

Finally, Pate discusses the commendations to the seven churches and their application to contemporary church issues. This section is little more than a paragraph, which I find surprising since the letters to the seven churches are by far the most applicable and preachable section of the book of Revelation.

The section on preaching apocalyptic is missing two items I would have appreciated. First, I would like to hear Pate's advice on what NOT to preach in this literature. Preaching through Revelation 1-3 works well, and the throne visions in 4-5 lend themselves to a sermon. But is it possible to preach through Revelation 8-9 in a series of expositional sermons in a way that is faithful to the text and applicable to a modern congregation? Can a pastor preach the Great Whore of Babylon (Rev 17) in a way that "bridges the gap" between the Roman world of the late first century and modern American Christianity? My second criticism of this section of the book is the two texts Pate chose to model an expositional method for preaching apocalyptic: Romans 11:25-27 and 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7. At least one example sermon should have been drawn from Revelation (the topic of this book). In fact, one sermon from the Seven Churches and one from a later chapter would have been a more appropriate model given the title and themes of the book. At the end of the book I am left wondering, "How do I preach Revelation?"

The final chapter of the book is a list of exegetical tools for biblical interpretation and resources for apocalyptic literature. The first three pages are general tools (including a full page on textual criticism!). With the exception of his own work, there are few items on this list from the last 15 years. This list would benefit by reducing space devoted to general studies, expanding the apocalyptic section with recent important work, and annotating the entries.

Like the other volumes in this series, Pate's book is a useful overview of a very difficult genre to interpret. I find many of the charts difficult to navigate, perhaps the information would have been better communicated without forcing it into a rigid box format. 1-2 Thessalonians are on the front cover of the book, but really only appear as one of the two examples of preaching apocalyptic. Aside from these criticisms, the first three chapters of this book are worthy reading for an introduction to apocalyptic

literature. Pate's discussion of Revelation 6 and the Olivet Discourse and the Arch of Titus are excellent and worthy of attention.

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Campbell, Douglas A. *Campbell's Paul: An Apostle's Journey*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2017. 219 pp.; Pb.; \$25.00

At slightly less than 200 pages of text, Campbell's new introduction to the life and thought of the Apostle Paul is written with the layperson in mind. There are no long discussions of the New Perspective on Paul nor does Campbell engage in highly technical language in the book. Only rarely does he engage the Greek text. The book uses endnotes (fourteen pages) making for a smooth reading experience. Campbell includes a number of personal insights which draw the ancient text forward to contemporary issues. For example, he concludes his first chapter on Corinth with a section entitled "the take-home from Corinth." Chapters conclude with a series of questions designed for group discussions or perhaps even short writing prompts for papers.

As he does in detail in *Framing Paul* (Eerdmans, 2014), Campbell tells the story of Paul's life based on the Epistles first, and then uses the book of Acts. Since there are so many questions surrounding the authorship and genre of Acts, many scholars consider the story of Paul in Acts to be a hagiography written to support the unity of the early church and highlight the successes of the Pauline mission. For example, Campbell suggests Paul's visit to Athens is intentionally modeled after Socrates, a wise man who was unjustly arrested and executed. Although Campbell thinks Acts is "99 percent accurate" (p. 5), he still argues a sound historical methodology should use the authentic letters of Paul to "frame" the contours of Paul's life before turning to the book of Acts.

Framing Paul's story with the Epistles rather than Acts results in two detailed periods in Paul's life. First, the events around the time of his conversion are clear from the epistles, especially Galatians, from A.D. 31-41. Second, the events of A.D. 49-52 are very detailed based on the Corinthian letters and Paul's anxious comments at the end of Romans concerning his

plans to return to Jerusalem with the collection. Acts is the only source for Paul's life after this time (his arrest in Jerusalem, house arrest in Caesarea, journey to Rome and house arrest in Rome). For the most part, this "last journey" (Acts 20-28) is the subject of the final chapter of the book.

But this book is more than the story of Paul's missionary journeys. Campbell suggests Paul makes a theological journey as well. Clearly his encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus changed his thinking considerably, but as he encountered new challenges as the apostle to the Gentiles Paul was forced to think and rethink how the Gospel challenges the culture of the first century. For example, Campbell has two chapters on the Corinthian church: "Culture Wars at Corinth" and "Navigating Sex and Gender."

Both of these chapters concern how the Gospel ought to change the way Corinthian Gentiles think about common cultural practices. Campbell offers a list of fourteen problems in the Corinthian church which more or less form the outline to 1 Corinthians. The problems boil down to a basic failure of Christians to relate to one another with kindness, beginning with the leaders of the church who were engaged in bitter competition with one another. What is more, the Corinthian church struggle with what Campbell calls "Christian intellectualism" as well as "sexual intellectualism" (100, 104). He discusses the difficult "silencing of women" passage in 1 Corinthians 14:33-36 by suggesting the Corinthian women were loosening their hair and acting like devotees of Dionysus (110). Paul does not intend to silence all women in this passage, only those who are behaving inappropriately in the congregation.

The second part of the book covers several theological topics. Campbell deals with "enemies" of Paul, the covenant vs. contract, the status of Israel, and eschatology. The title of the chapter on Paul's view of the future for Israel is entitled "God wins" and deals in part with the difficult text in Romans 11 that "all Israel will be saved." He points out Paul's argument is based on the Old Testament motif of the remnant; God never lets go of Israel.

What is more, God is a covenantal God who always faithful to his promises. Therefore, "all Israel will be saved" means just that. It is a kind of "Pauline universalism" based on the character of God. Campbell says "the covenant is unbreakable, and ultimately enwraps us all in the gra-

scious purpose of God that was established with us through his son before the foundation of the world” (169). The following few paragraphs unpack tentatively a sort of universalism, “I expect everyone to be raised in glory, although some more shamefacedly than others.” In an endnote, Campbell points out his view here is not far from C.S. Lewis in *The Great Divorce*. Intriguing, but I suspect this controversial conclusion will draw attention away from the rest of the book.

Campbell’s book is a pleasure to read. His presentation of the basic ideas of Paul’s thought are clear and he draws conclusions which will resonate with the contemporary reader. Perhaps the biggest drawback to the book is its brevity; some topics worthy of a chapter are dispatched in a few pages. This new introduction to Paul ought to serve well for both undergraduate and graduate level classes as well as any interested layperson who wants to understand the life and teaching of the Apostle Paul.

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Joy, Trevor and Spence Shelton, *The People of God: Empowering the Church to Make Disciples*. Nashville: B&H 2014.

This brief, 159 page book interacts with the idea of small groups and discipleship in the context of a local body of believers. It is written by Trevor Joy and Spence Shelton who discuss some of the discoveries they have had in their own journeys as they developed a church culture of discipleship.

This book is not revolutionary in its approach to discipleship. Rather, the feel is encouragement and refocus of where people are. Both Trevor and Spence spend time describing their method and their culture but the principles are nothing shocking or edgy. They both share where their churches are at the moment and some of the decisions they had to make as they built that kind of church culture.

I do appreciate the stories and their decisions of what they had to go through and what they had to stick to when they made some of the culture decisions. Of course, there are many moments I was wondering if their decisions would align with my situation, and the

answer I come to is the dependable “it depends” slogan. While they may disagree with my summation here, I find that they may be interacting on a large church model that needs a disseminating church leadership when many churches are much smaller and organized in a different way. So I struggled to agree with some of the “simplicity” they wrote about following a mission statement and strategy in every church situation.

However, this does not mean their principles and their desires is far off from a healthy culture. It is best for a local body of believers to be sharing and doing ministry in smaller spheres rather than depending on a pastor to lead the whole group only. Empowering a church body to do discipleship creates a strong church community that is never dependent on a single person or personality. It becomes more about the Body of believers with their various gifts. For that, I applaud the authors for sharing their insight.

I enjoyed the real examples and stories illustrating how these principles were lived out in real life. It is not just theory we are talking here. I also appreciate they admit that there are real questions to contemplate and discuss at the end of every chapter. Finally, they were clear with certain instructions of what churches should do and how to get started with some of their principles. I appreciate this because there are moments where it is hard to take the first step in the process and you need someone to give you a small push. The difficulty is how any instruction cannot predict or incorporate every situation and circumstance you are a part of.

I would recommend pastors or any lay leader to pick up this book and check out some of the principles here if you are looking at refocusing or initiating small group communities that are directed to do discipleship. This will be an encouragement to you and something to engage with as you take steps in your own context.

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Following the lead of the original *Grace Journal of Theology*, the present Journal is intended to stimulate constructive thought, awareness, devotion and practice in matters of ministry, biblical, theological and dispensational studies. The Journal will publish articles and reviews of merit with preference of acceptance given to credentialed and experienced writers. Articles are to be well researched, documented and relevant to the objectives of the Journal. Publication decisions will be made based on the consensus of the editorial committee. A full article will be between 4000 and 6000 words including footnotes. Longer articles may also be considered. A “short note” on a text or topic will be between 1000 and 2000 words. Book reviews should be about 1000 words. Several books are available for review; contact the editor for more information.

GUIDELINES FOR MANUSCRIPT SUBMISSION

- All articles are to be in English and submitted by email attachment. Please use Word or convert your file to .doc or .rtf format. Do not submit articles in .pdf format.
- All submissions ought to be double spaced and using Times New Roman, 12 point. For Greek and Hebrew, use a Unicode font (Times, for example). Transliteration of Greek or Hebrew is acceptable (use www.transliterate.com).
- Use footnotes rather than endnotes
- For other questions of style, consult the SBL Handbook of Style. The guide is available at the SBL site: http://www.sbl-site.org/assets/pdfs/SBLHSrevised2_09.pdf
- Include a cover page with author’s name, article title and a brief abstract of the article (less than 250 words).
- Email articles to the editor: plong@gbcol.edu.

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